

The regular meeting of the Hammond Common Council of the City of Hammond, Lake County, Indiana was held on April 27, 2020 in the Hammond City Council Chambers.

Council President Dave Woerpel presided.

Council Coordinator Carmen Balboa facilitated.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE was recited by all.  
Invocation by Councilwoman Alexander

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Alexander, Spitale, Venecz, Kalwinski, Tyler, Emerson, Rakos, Woerpel

ABSENT: Torres

TOTAL: 8

MAYOR'S ADDRESS

Mayor McDermott- We had our Coronavirus Task Force meeting today on Zoom and streamed it live on Facebook, had a big audience, and I know a lot of Council members participated in that. Since that time we've updated numbers from the Lake County Health Dept. about the City of Hammond, we have 237 positive cases, which is two (2) more than we had yesterday and four (4) more than the day before. Unfortunately, we've had ten (10) deaths in our city due to Coronavirus. Indiana has 81,000 Hoosiers tested; 813 deaths state wide; 15,000 positive Covid-19 cases, which is 18% of the people who take the test turn out positive. We only have a few employees that have tested positive. I think there's only two (2) employees that are out right now. We've tested a lot of employees and the tests have come back negative. But only two (2) employees are out right now. For our First Responders we're getting a 24 to 48 hour turn around from St. Margaret Hammond, which is excellent. When we first came into this we had a firefighter's wife who tested positive and we sent the firefighter in to get tested and it took eight (8) days before we got the results back, which was a nightmare. So, testing for first responders is going a lot better. I'm not sure about testing for non-first responders. Public Works is on time picking up garbage and Recycling is picking up on time. City Hall is still closed to the public, we only have skeleton crews working City Hall. I only have one person working in my office besides my Chief of Staff, and we're working in shifts. The Council Office is manned with their employee. There's a couple employees down in each office, for the most part there is a little or more than a dozen people working in City Hall. Last Council meeting Councilman Tyler brought up a great point and I went and talked to my Controller and I got back with Councilman Tyler and Councilman Torres, and I agreed with what their assessment was. Initially when we got in this situation I froze all Gaming Money through Executive Order. However, I didn't think about Councilman Torres and Councilman Tyler whose Districts saved money from the 2019 budget. The argument was it's not fair to penalize the Districts that saved money. I didn't anticipate that when we made our Executive Order. I agreed at the last Council Meeting that 2019 money, it's not fair to freeze that. Since then I have instructed my Controller and Chief of Staff that 2019 money is not a part of the Executive Order. The problem with our budget is that the fact that our Casino is closed. Problem No.2 is that our Property Tax draw will be two (2) months later than normal, presumably much smaller percentage of people paying which will impact our budget. Problem No. 3 is all the miscellaneous revenue that we anticipated being in the budget, dog tags, the Sportsplex, the

*Prepared by  
Robert J. Golec  
Hammond City Clerk*

MAYOR'S ADDRESS cont.

Mayor McDermott cont- Shepard Center, and Civic Center, all that is gone. As far as the City of Hammond budget is concerned, it's a catastrophe, but we're no different than corporate America, we're no different than State Governments across the states right now. We're making no income, nothing but expenses, and that's concerning, which is why we froze 2020 Gaming Revenue. If anybody has any questions I'm here to answer them.

Councilman Emerson- I was curious regarding crime in our City, especially Domestic Violence, do we have any data?

Mayor McDermott- I wish I was better organized. I get updates from the Hammond Police Department every month, as far as crime stats. We usually post them. If there is something to brag about or we post them if there is something to worry about. Violent crime is down across the board. Things that would anticipate domestic violence calls have gone up. Larceny has gone up. Big box stores are our biggest problem, when it comes to larceny, it's stealing, if someone gets picked up for shoplifting that counts against our City. That has spiked as well and that's understandable. Violent crime has went down. We had two sorta normal weeks in March. Violent crimes have been non-existent in the month of April, for the most part. The crime stats look great, and that's something we can be proud of. The budget is something we need to worry about. But I will get my latest stats and forward them to all nine (9) council people.

Councilwoman Alexander- Yes, Mayor, if you could get us that update to let us know where we are with the budget since the shutdown that would be great to know. Since the last Council Meeting our number was 60, and now we're up to 231. Is there something that we can continue to do to encourage our residents. I know that when I go out I don't see a lot of people wearing protective gear. That number jumped high from 2 weeks ago. And to continue to encourage our parents and students to get their work done with the E-Learning.

Mayor McDermott- I want to thank the Lake County Health Department, I'm not sure of the Dr.'s name, put together a great website with the help of Commissioner Repay, and the City of Hammond, and Councilman Dave Hamm, helped us a lot. Councilwoman was on me earlier saying, "Mayor, you're giving us Indiana numbers and we know the Lake County numbers, but can you break them down by zip code? Can you tell me how many people live in Hammond?" And I appreciate Councilwoman Katrina bringing that up, and I couldn't answer her question, and I hate when I get asked a question by the Council and I can't answer. I started leaning on Commissioner Repay and Councilman Hamm, and they started leaning on the Health Department. Not only did they give county-wide numbers, but they broke them down by zip code, and they did that. And since that time we could literally click on and see how many positive cases are in the City of Hammond. We've been tracking it since the Councilwoman asked me that, and right now we're still slowly going up, but it seems like right now, and hopefully it doesn't continue to go up. Obviously we can't let our guard down right now. 231 positive cases is you know unfortunate, and that's something we all have to consider when we're out shopping. There's 231 people that live in the city that are positive, that we know of, now that goes back to Councilwoman's earlier point that even when we do relax and we could actually come out and go outside and show up to work like we used to, we're still gonna have to wear masks in public. We're still gonna have to socially distance. We're still gonna wash our hands 5 to 10 times a day. We're still gonna have to stay home if

MAYOR'S ADDRESS cont.

Mayor McDermott cont. - we're a little sick. We're probably gonna be doing fever checks in City Hall. We're gonna have more hand sanitizer locations. We're probably not gonna shake hands anymore until we find a vaccine, you know. So just because it's possible on Friday, Governor Holcomb lifts this shelter in place, presumably the following Monday City Hall would be open. Just because that's the case, doesn't mean we can let our guard down, like the Councilwoman said.

Councilwoman Alexander- So, when that happens, if he lifts the Order, is there something that we can put in place for our residents to make a mandate or an Ordinance or something that can require them to have those specific things on?

Mayor McDermott- Yes, you could create a City Ordinance and we can make it just during the Covid-19 crisis. That if you're in public, you must wear a mask. Absolutely the Council has that power. I would support an Ordinance that was created like (lost audio) crisis. If the Council in their wisdom thought that was a good idea that would be something that I totally support and you can make it, and talk to Attorney Berger, just make it last during the crisis, you know, figure out some type of wording in terms of arc, but that's something the Council could do. We do not have something like that on the books and it's something that I would support as well.

Council President Woerpel- Mayor, there's this one question I saw on our live feed here and someone wanted to know if someone had a permit to pay for, like for the Police Department, how would they ?

Mayor McDermott- The Police Department front desk's still open, Council Woerpel, for a lot of reasons. One of the reasons is if you get your car towed, which still can happen. We're not towing as frequently, but if your car is towed you need to get, you know, a clearance form from the P.D. before you can get your car back. So the P.D. is still open. The front door is open. You walk in, there's an officer right there. Social distancing is taking place, but you still go to the Police Department like normal business.

Council President Woerpel- It was just a question I saw on Facebook.

Mayor McDermott- And another thing I wanna talk to the Council about is this... the question of the day has been what are we gonna do if Governor Holcomb lifts his stay at home, you know, and I would like the Council to chew on this because I think it's possible the governor will lift it on Friday. I think it's possible he's been hinting that he's gonna relax the stay at home restrictions on Friday and I just got a notice in the mail today about Horseshoe Casino employees being laid off, you know they covered their checks for a while, but there's over 2000 employees at the Horseshoe Casino that are jobless and that does not count the tourism industry, the hotel industry, the restaurant industry. There could be 10,000 people in our city that are unemployed right now and there's no income coming in and they're scared. I'm being pressured to ... you know, "Mayor, if Governor Holcomb" .... I'm hearing this a lot, you know, "If Governor Holcomb lifts that order, you're gonna keep Hammond shut down right?" And I say, "Why? He's the governor." And, "If you leave Hammond open all these people from Illinois are going to come over and get us sick." And the thing is, I'm having trouble with this, and I would like you guys input because I'm having trouble telling the 10,000 people that have no income right now, no. Even though the Governor lifted the stay at home, I think you guys should stay at home. I'm having trouble

MAYOR'S ADDRESS cont.

Mayor McDermott cont- with that one and I wanna know what you guys think because this could be on our plate on Friday and I'm inclined to follow the Governor's lead. I believe in the chain of command, he's the Governor of the State of Indiana, if the Governor thinks it's wise to open our State, are we gonna stand in the way and try to keep it shut down? And that's the question of the day. And I'm having trouble justifying to 10,000 people that are out of work why they need to stay at home another week. And that goes back to Councilwoman Katrina's points earlier, just because the Stay at Home is lifted, doesn't mean we can go start shaking hands, hugging and you know, crying on top of each other. There's gonna be masks in public, but you know I don't think it's right to have City Hall closed and I don't really think it's right for me to tell people stay at home, even if, you know, besides the fact that the governor thinks we should be free. So I'm interested in your opinion on that. Thank you guys. I'm sorry for talking so long.

Councilman Spitale- I was just wondering, will there be security guards at each entrance of City Hall when it opens?

Mayor McDermott- Absolutely, Councilman Spitale. There is a team effort going on and what the post shelter in place looks like in city hall and we probably would have controlled exit, only one entrance, and at that entrance there will be temperature checks, obviously... we do have security guards at city hall. We'd be sort of like the old days when we first took over Council, Mark, when we walked in they had a security guard that gave you a metal detector test and all that it's not gonna be like that, but we'll check the temperature and maybe ask you a couple of questions before you come in and if there's too many people in city hall, you may have to wait outside like you do at groceries store, but there's a team that's putting these recommendations together right now.

Councilman Spitale- Will there be questions asked, like on a form before they come in? Like if they have had a fever in the last 14 days or out of the Country lately, anything like that?

Mayor McDermott- I'm presuming, I'm not attending these meetings, there's a whole task force talking about these issues and I don't wanna speak for them, but I don't know if that's part of it or not. We have a thermometer that measures human temperatures. Now the ones we got initially were for industrial use, you know, but we have ones that are accurate. If you shoot someone's forehead it will tell you within a couple tenths of a degree what their temperature is, so, but like I said Councilman, people are going to be wearing masks in City Hall, I mean, so, yeah.

Councilman Emerson- Mayor, I wouldn't wanna be you right now because I know that Ohio extended their closing date today, Illinois has, and I don't know what Michigan did, but someone told me they did too, and that makes us, if we open it up just a little, that makes people want to come over here. On the other hand, Illinois people come over here for gas all the time, so I, with all the restrictions you talked about, it's a tough call. You know, in my heart I don't think we should, but I know people wanna get back to work if they're out of work. So I mean it's... boy I'm not being very helpful but it's a tough spot.

Mayor McDermott- I had a friend of mine call me up earlier. We're having this conversation, and she works for government, and I'll leave it at that, not for Hammond by the way, okay, and she said, "Are you really thinking

MAYOR'S ADDRESS cont.

Mayor McDermott cont- about opening City Hall on Monday? I said, "Well, if the Governor opens the State, you're asking if I'm gonna keep City Hall shut down?" She said, "Yeah, that's what I'm asking you." I said, "What do you think?" And she said, "Yeah, I think you're crazy if you're gonna open City Hall." I said, "Well, you're getting a paycheck right now, aren't you?" And she said, "Yeah". And I said, "Well, it's a lot different for you than it is for 10,000 Hammond residents that no paycheck right now." They don't know how they're gonna pay for dinner and that's the thing that's tough. If Governor Holcomb says, "Okay, everybody go to work" and Mayor McDermott and the Council says "No stay in your house". We're talking to 10,000 people that have no income, to keep not making money, and I'm having trouble with this. And there's 2000 people at Horseshoe Casino, they're losing their jobs right now. They're not getting paid, that's 2000 that we know of, so that's the thing, Councilman Emerson, and it's a rough issue.

Councilman Emerson- Well, I was gonna compliment all the kids for staying out of, like, Edison Park and Riverside Park too. So is that in your gradual open up?

Mayor McDermott- We had this conversation today in regards to parks, specifically park facilities, you know like basketball, no way, you know anything with contact, baseball unfortunately, no basketball, volleyball, no skateboard park, probably not, because the kids get all close to each other in the skateboard park, but like you know riding your bikes still okay. We still have to enforce the social distancing. Like the soccer fields that the kids love to go to, we gotta keep on policing it unfortunately.

Councilman Tyler- I just have one question. I got a lot of questions about where people can get tested and I know in our task force meetings we talked about only if they have symptoms they should reach out to their general health care providers and figure out a pathway to get tested there. Outside of that, I know that I know that the Midwest Health Clinic is testing in Munster, can you talk about that?

Mayor McDermott- I agree with you, Councilman, until more tests become available, and if you're not showing symptoms and you're not a first responder, it's gonna be hard to get a test. And I know that Merrillville High School is testing for the general public and I know that in Gary, St. Timothy's is testing. I don't think there's anything closer to St. Timothy's, and then you know we still have St Margaret's will test you. But I'll be honest with you, Councilman, for a regular member of the public to get tested, unless you get real sick, I still think it's hard. And right now our ambulance pickups are way down because of what we call a doorstep triage where they literally have a firefighter will come up to your window ask you two questions and basically unless you're showing severe breathing problems or like a severe fever and you're worried about your life, they're trying not to take you to the hospital. Because once you get to the hospital, they're just gonna turn you around and send you back home unless you're needing to go on a ventilator right now. If your fever is extremely high, like 103 or higher you're going to the hospital. I talked to St. Margaret's this morning they're at 60 % full and 40 % vacancy right now, so they're doing a good job of policing their hospital. I wish I could answer that better, Councilman, but I think if you're not showing symptoms it's hard to get tested.

Councilwoman Alexander- Is there anything we are doing for the senior homes and the assisted living facilities with testing or anything like that or if we've seen numbers coming from those entities that we wouldn't normally see.

MAYOR'S ADDRESS cont.

Mayor McDermott - We're on a conference call twice a week, as you know, you're also on the calls, Hammond Housing Authority, Golden Manor, Silver Birch, the Renaissance we've been in communication with them from the beginning of this out break and we got the Lake County Health Department involved as well. I know the Fire Department has really been involved as well... probably the most vulnerable places, the ones we just mentioned in our city, are those identity housing. You know, long-term care facilities, and we're very concerned. We've been communicating a lot. I know that the Lake County Health Department has been working with them as well. I know there's been a couple of positives, but knock on wood, seems like we're weathering the storm thus far. God knows, I hope it continues that way. Those in the beginning scared the heck out of me. One more thing, at 7 p.m. there's a parade that's leaving from the Hammond Police Department that's going to St. Margaret's to thank the health care workers. I'm gonna leave here in a few minutes and head that way. I know the Council was invited as well and if you guys want to participate, we're driving our cars over to thank our health care workers. Maybe you guys can catch it on the way home. So, thank you very much.

READING OF THE MINUTES

Councilman Rakos, supported by Councilman Spitale, moved to accept the minutes of April 13, 2020 and place on file. AYES: ALL

Council President Woepel- We all received in our packets a letter from Laurie Czulno that we could add to the minutes under Public Expression if anybody would like to make that motion. I can read it, it's a brief one. It says, "Dear members of the Hammond Common Council, I had the opportunity to view the April 13<sup>th</sup> meeting which was conducted on Zoom. While, all in all, I felt the video conference was a success. I was disappointed that no Agenda was available online prior to meeting. The last agenda available was on March 23<sup>rd</sup>. Additionally, I would suggest an agenda that includes the Zoom meeting numbers so the public would be better prepared for the meeting. Thank you in advance."

Councilwoman Venecz, supported by Councilman Spitale, moved to have the letter added to the minutes. AYES: ALL

APPROVAL OF CLAIMS

Councilman Rakos, supported by Councilwoman Venecz, moved to approve the claims from April 8, 2020 through April 22, 2020. Claim #1904 through Claim #2135, inclusive.

ROLL CALL VOTE (claims)

AYES: Alexander, Spitale, Venecz, Kalwinski, Tyler, Emerson, Rakos, Woerpel

NAYS: None

ABSENT: Torres

Motion carried

8/0/1

CLAIMS APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARINGS

None

COMMUNICATIONS

None

COMMITTEE REPORTS

None

ORDINANCE 3<sup>rd</sup> READING - FINAL PASSAGE

20-07            An Ordinance to Appropriate Monies into the 2020 Gaming Fund

Councilman Tyler, supported by Councilman Spitale, moved for passage.

ROLL CALL (passage)

AYES: Alexander, Spitale, Venecz, Kalwinski, Tyler, Emerson, Rakos, Woerpel

NAYS: None

ABSENT: Torres

Motion carried

8/0/1

ORDINANCE NO. 9466 PASSED

INTRODUCTION OF ORDINANCES

None

RESOLUTIONS

None

NEW AND UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

Council President Woerpel- Just real briefly we did have a public hearing where the public was invited to. We gave them, I think it was 10 days to respond to the public hearing. As far as I can tell, and from what I've been told, there was no responses to that public hearing. None were put in.

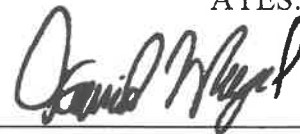
Mayor McDermott- Last meeting Councilman Kalwinski came up with the idea that we should wait until... if we're having a public hearing on Zoom we should wait one more meeting. And I read a lawsuit that is occurring in another part of the state right now, and it's issue is that the Council and the Mayor were pushing a project and they had a public hearing and they didn't wait, like you guys are doing, and they got sued for it. I think it's a good practice that we're doing right now having a public hearing and then approving it the next meeting. It will keep us out of litigation, in my opinion, so I wanted to thank Councilman Mark.

PUBLIC EXPRESSION

None

Councilman Spitale, supported by Councilwoman Alexander, moved to adjourn.

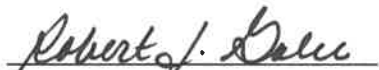
AYES: ALL



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Dave Woerpel, President  
Hammond Common Council

ATTEST:



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Robert J. Golec, City Clerk .

Time: 6:36 p.m.

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