

MINUTES OF REGULAR TELEPHONE/VIDEO CONFERENCE MEETING

April 14, 2020

MONTGOMERY CITY COUNCIL

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Sara Countryman declared a quorum was present on the Zoom Teleconference Meeting and called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m.

Present: Sara Countryman Mayor
John Champagne, Jr. City Council Place # 2
T.J. Wilkerson City Council Place # 3
Rebecca Huss City Council Place # 4
Tom Cronin City Council Place # 5

Absent: Vacant City Council Place #1

Also Present: Richard Tramm City Administrator
Susan Hensley City Secretary
Alan Petrov City Attorney

INVOCATION

T.J. Wilkerson gave the Invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO FLAGS

VISITOR/CITIZENS FORUM:

Any citizen with business not scheduled on the agenda may speak to the City Council. Prior to speaking, each speaker must be recognized by the Mayor. Council may not discuss or take any action on an item, but may place the issue on a future agenda. The number of speakers along with the time allowed per speaker may be limited.

- State or type your name at the time of making your comment.
- Limit comment to a maximum of three minutes.

Mayor Countryman announced that no comments were received for the Visitor/Citizens Forum. Mayor Countryman said she would like to recognize and thank Mr. Mike Muckleroy, Director of Public Works, for taking a proactive approach during the storms last week. Mayor Countryman advised Mr. Muckleroy went out and checked the City on his own and found that we had a drainage ditch that was backed up, so he cleaned out the ditch and removed the debris. Mayor Countryman said Mr. Muckleroy was the ideal person for this position and his efforts are appreciated.

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Matters related to the approval of minutes of the March 10, 2020, Public Hearings and Regular Meeting and March 23, 2020, Special Emergency Meeting.
2. Consideration and possible action regarding authorizing the Mayor to execute an Agreement to Accept Donation of Real Property and Donation Deed on behalf of the City granting property to TxDOT for a right-hand turn lane at the southeast corner of the intersection of SH 105 and FM 149.

Rebecca Huss stated that she found it ironic that action is being taken by TxDOT in the middle of a crisis and they have time to accept some free property.

John Champagne moved to accept the Consent Agenda as presented. T.J. Wilkerson seconded the motion, the motion carried unanimously. (4-0)

CONSIDERATION AND POSSIBLE ACTION:

3. City Administrator to update the City Council on items related to the COVID-19 Disaster Declaration.

Mr. Tramm presented an update to City Council stating that there were no action recommendations at this time but he wanted to give City Council an update on some of the measures that have taken place at City Hall so City Departments are able to function at this time.

Mr. Tramm said at City Hall they were initially providing hand sanitizer before we limited City Hall to no general public access, which is where we are at this time. Mr. Tramm said the City is conducting primary business via telephone, email and drop box if necessary, and regular mail. Mr. Tramm said the public entry to City Hall has been closed and if there is a specific need for a contractor or public access, it is on an appointment basis. Mr. Tramm said they have expanded the

use of teleconference for meetings, such as this meeting, Planning and Zoning Commission, and they are starting to use it for collaborative work efforts with multiple departments.

Mr. Tramm advised the City has begun the application process, which has been received by FEMA for any of the expenses the City might go through that might ultimately become reimbursable by FEMA.

Mr. Tramm stated all City employees have been provided with face masks for their use, either within City Hall or out in the community. Mr. Tramm said initially temporary paper masks were distributed, and some have used their own cloth masks that were provided. Mr. Tramm said yesterday the Montgomery Quilt Company supplied masks for everyone at City Hall, at no charge to the City. Mr. Tramm said later this week they are planning, via teleconference, the final CDBG Hearing on the MLK/Baja Project, which will be a staff and consultant-led item.

Mr. Tramm advised Public Works has been split into single-person crews to avoid staff being in the same truck. Mr. Tramm said when multiple crew members are needed at one location they will arrive in separate vehicles. Mr. Tramm stated the Police Department has loaned one of their vehicles to Public Works so they can have the single man crews. Mr. Tramm said where time has been reduced in some areas of Public Works, they are using that time to catch up on maintenance items. Mr. Tramm said when maintenance is deferred too long it results in other problems. Mr. Tramm said Public Works was able to reclaim a large area of sidewalk along SH 105, which had been overgrown. Mr. Tramm said if they had to install that length of concrete, it would have been a significant cost. Mr. Tramm advised daily city park checks are being done, and noted the park equipment, as per the County Order, has been closed off where children would have climbed on it, while the open spaces at the parks remain open to the public.

Mr. Tramm said the Court dates for April and May 2020 have been reassigned until later in the summer because of the restrictions of gathering in groups. Mr. Tramm said the Court is making greater efforts to work with the public by telephone, email, and through the onsite drop box. Mr. Tramm said one of the companies used for collections is lowering some of their fees during this time to allow increased payments for the customer.

Mr. Tramm said the Police Department probably has the most difficult job finding the balance between public safety and public health, and they are continuing to do patrol with officers using their discretion on when to initiate a traffic stop. Mr. Tramm said they are working to take reports

by phone, when possible and appropriate, avoiding contact with the public unless it is necessary. Mr. Tramm said the Police Department is beginning to limit their responses to accidents to ones with potential or actual injuries and advising for the exchange of information with non-injury accidents.

Mr. Tramm said he wanted to advise that since the early March City Council Meeting the State Comptroller's Office determined the City of Montgomery should not have been paid certain sales tax late last summer. Mr. Tramm said those funds are being taken out of the March and April payments. Mr. Tramm advised he had a discussion with the bookkeeper today and they will be transferring that money that was previously set aside in TexPool back into the operating fund account in place of that amount. Mr. Tramm said the March 2020 sales tax payment was entirely zeroed out and the April payment will be approximately \$2,700. Mr. Tramm said when they receive the April payment the City will be caught up. John Champagne asked about the other amount and whether it was about the same. Mr. Tramm said the total was approximately \$370,000 to \$380,000 range, so \$217,000 would have been the March sales tax payment, so the balance of that, which was above the \$217,000 carried over into what will be the April payment. Mr. Tramm said there will be no deduction in May and beyond. Mr. Tramm said since they put those sales tax funds in TexPool they will put that money back into the City's main operating account, so it will look to us as if we received that money normally because we did not go out and spend the money the City received in error.

Rebecca Huss said thank goodness the City never spent that money and never counted it as our funds because this is the wrong month to have zero in sales tax dollars. Rebecca Huss said it was very nice to have been so prudent with those funds and to have had it as a payable to somebody else all this time. Mr. Tramm said they will also get a couple thousand dollars in interest for the funds being in TexPool. Mayor Countryman said they held the funds for about seven months. Rebecca Huss said in the past they spent the money they received and when the error was corrected, the City did not have the gap in the budget to be able to move the sales tax they were withholding.

John Champagne asked Mr. Tramm what his anticipation of shortfall of revenue would be due to lack of sales, which he understood would be a guess. Mr. Tramm said all he could give would be a guess but said he would not be surprised if May's 2020 compared to May 2019, which would reflect the April business, is down by as much as 50-70%. John Champagne asked which category of economic activity is the City's source of revenue sales tax. Mr. Tramm said the City's single largest sales taxpayers include the grocery stores, hardware stores, a couple of the larger restaurants, but

when you get past those top ones, telecommunications and networking do reflect a fairly sizable amount of the tax revenue we receive. Mr. Tramm said some elements might buffer the City, for instance, it has been observed by several there is a lot of people at the floral and garden shops because the people are at home and working. Mr. Tramm said McCoy's does have a decent amount of business while people are not going into the store. Mr. Tramm said it will be interesting to see how the month of April turns out to be. Rebecca Huss said she was not as worried about the short-term, but she thought the next fiscal year it is going to be painful for the City where everyone is home and investing in themselves.

John Champagne asked Mr. Tramm if all the staff is being utilized the way they have been when operations were running normally. Mr. Tramm said there have been some changes in how they are operating, but by and large City Hall staff is working on the things they have been working on, it is just being done differently. Mr. Tramm said in the utility office the one-on-one direct contact is not there, but they are getting the phone calls and people are paying online, dropping payments off, so the communication is simpler, it is just in a different method. John Champagne said he would assume all Department Heads are looking at their activity and the necessity of being fully manned is being evaluated, because the hard conversation is depending on how much longer this lasts, and every business that he interacts with, furloughing, layoffs, he thinks we need to be mindful that our revenue is going to be affected and we need to be as smart as we can be in the utilization of our personnel. Mr. Tramm said that was high on his mind, and said they certainly have the reserves to get through at least six months and probably more of normal operation, but they should not be relying on the reserves. Mr. Tramm said if in the long run revenue is a permanent shortfall, they will have to find ways to adapt and make that work. Rebecca Huss said since the City has grown, the City topline has grown a lot, but the personnel has not followed, for the most part, so every investment in a person they have made has been justified by the productivity and activity they have transferred from third party activity to do it inhouse. Rebecca Huss stated it has been that we are taking an expense that we already have and now have the capability of doing that function inhouse. John Champagne said there is always a downside to doing that, which is obvious, because a third-party individual that is not being utilized, you just stop using them and noted the City's largest expenditure is personnel. John Champagne said he was not saying that anything needed to be done, what he was saying is the Department Heads and the City Administrator, he was sure, are evaluating the necessity of being at full throttle with personnel. Rebecca Huss said the underlying infrastructure for Public Works is the same size with the same amount of stuff running through the system, and if you look at what was on Facebook, there is more maintenance and more activity rather than less. John Champagne stated he would leave that micromanagement up to the people

they have in charge, but he wanted to say, in a regular business when revenue is down, a corresponding reduction in expenses is always looked upon and the City is not exempt. Rebecca Huss said they aren't, although they can argue from a management perspective, not micromanaging, if you can take care of people you have a loyal workforce that works harder and more productively through the downside and the upside and you get more out of people through the cycle than you do from laying people off when times get tough because they don't care about your business at all. Rebecca Huss said if you take care of people, you will have your top guy in a ditch when something needs to be done on a side of town that nobody has driven to in a couple of days, because he knows that something has to be done, and he does it because he loves his job and town, not because it is a paycheck. John Champagne said that it is not unique to the City. Rebecca Huss said it was unique to employers that take care of their employees. John Champagne said all he was saying is, it is a rudimentary part of local business, and he was not proposing anything, he was just saying the Department Heads we have in place, Chief of Police, is something that they need to be aware of, and he is sure they are, he was just bringing it up. John Champagne said if this continues in terms of economic shutdown it is not going to get any better, it is going to get worse.

Mr. Tramm said each department is keenly aware of the difficulties of the situation and those things will be evaluated as they move forward and hopefully, this will be a small blip on the radar, but if it becomes a much larger one, they will deal with them. John Champagne said he had full confidence in our people, stating he felt we have the best people they have ever had in the City. John Champagne said he might disagree with the fact this is not a small blip, the lag time to get this thing up and going is going to be appreciable and this economic problem, in his estimation, is going to be much bigger than the viral problem. John Champagne said what has occurred with businesses in the City and the surrounding area he feels is going to be catastrophic, and said he hopes that he is wrong.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

The City Council reserves the right to discuss any of the items listed specifically under this heading or for any items listed above in executive closed session as permitted by law including if they meet the qualifications in Sections 551.071(consultation with attorney), 551.072 (deliberation regarding real property), 551.073 (deliberation regarding gifts), 551.074 (personnel matters), 551.076 (deliberation regarding security devices), and 551.087 (deliberation regarding economic development negotiations) of Chapter 551 of the Government Code of the State of Texas. (There are no items at this time.)

COUNCIL INQUIRY:

Pursuant to Texas Government Code Sect. 551.042 the Mayor and Council Members may inquire about a subject not specifically listed on this Agenda. Responses are limited to recitation of existing policy or a statement of specific factual information given in response to the inquiry. Any deliberation or decision shall be limited to a proposal to place on the agenda of a future meeting.

Mayor Countryman commented about moving forward from COVID-19 and what it looks like because no one has ever seen this before in this capacity. Mayor Countryman said she did not know what the future holds, but she wanted to make sure they have a plan in place to protect our small businesses and to be that resource for them. Mayor Countryman said she was assuming the Montgomery EDC Tourism Coordinator Freida Joyce is taking in all the grant opportunities in Federal and State to help the business owners. Mayor Countryman stated the Montgomery Area Chamber is doing a wonderful job, and if you know of anybody the Chamber can help, she has the information to share but said she also felt it was the City's responsibility to do that. Mayor Countryman said she wanted that information ready when our small businesses call in for help.

Mayor Countryman said from what she has seen, the City is still providing great service to the residents and our businesses and said she thought the City should take this blueprint forward, but also ask for feedback from the businesses and residents. Mayor Countryman noted to Mr. Tramm that she felt they needed to get that information out there so they can get feedback. Mayor Countryman said this virus is something she has been hearing that yes, we will get over the summer hump, but we could potentially see this again if there is another outbreak in the fall. Mayor Countryman said now that we have this blueprint, how do we get prepared for another outbreak. Mayor Countryman said this could be our new normal instead of going back to what normal was a month ago, so if we do come back to the new normal, we need a Plan A and Plan B.

Mayor Countryman said when Consolidated and Suddenlink was down, she was down for five days. Mayor Countryman said she works from home as well, and so strengthening our relationship with those communication and telecom companies, so the City has direct communication with them, instead of residents trying to communicate with them to get service back up and running. Mayor Countryman said she understood that it has taxed them with the schools and businesses all using the lines, but she felt that we need to strengthen our business relations, just like we do with Entergy, which has been extremely helpful. Mayor Countryman said she has been reaching out to quite a few people, and she

wants to make sure City Hall has the feedback. Mayor Countryman said the small businesses are the lifeline of our City, so if there are grants and help available let us be that resource to get them up and going. Mayor Countryman said we need our City to be stronger than the virus, while she knows the City took a hit, how are we going to get back on our feet in a quick manner and provide those services. Mayor Countryman said she wanted everyone to think and talk about it to see how they can forge relationships on all those levels of funding as well as continuity in services.

Mr. Tramm advised he has noted what the Mayor has discussed, and he will be looking into some of those items. Mr. Tramm said he agreed the sooner the businesses are up and running will be a big help to the City's bottom line because that is how we get the bulk of our revenue through those taxes. Mr. Tramm said the services and products being available to the public is what a lot of the people will need. Mr. Tramm said there have been a couple of businesses that have contacted the City and we have been trying to put them in touch with the Chamber, SBA, and the banks that are involved with those directly. Mr. Tramm said if there are services the City can help provide directly, we will certainly make every effort to do that. Mayor Countryman asked if GrantWorks was making any additional programs available for business owners. Mr. Tramm said the City has not been notified of any yet, but he expects there will be something in the future and said he thought it might be a little early for them to have anything rolling out at this time. Mr. Tramm said they do have a conversation Thursday afternoon with GrantWorks and he will make a point to touch base with them on that information, so if they see or hear of something they will know to contact us because we would be interested. Rebecca Huss said if there is something the City can do in partnership with the businesses, even if we have to spend some money to help the businesses or there are grants available, that is something we can look at. Rebecca Huss said GrantWorks has already done all the demographic surveys, so hopefully, that would give us a benefit and ability to work more quickly. Mayor Countryman said a lot of the City's tax base comes from Kroger's, McCoy's, and those big corporations, but our downtown is crucial and critical to our livelihood. Mayor Countryman said she has seen what Tom Cronin has done with delivery with his business and those are the things they have to shift to try and be successful in conducting business differently, just like having a meeting via Zoom for business continuity in the City. Mayor Countryman said these are all things that are the new normal, and if there is a secondary or third outbreak, she asked what have we learned and what can we take forward, and how can we continue to thrive differently. Mayor Countryman said she wants to make sure that if a resident or business owner calls City Hall, they can get answers and be provided with information. Rebecca Huss said she would like to see the City be more aggressive with delivering services in reaching out to people via this type of platform

that they are interested in, and we can think of things and be more proactive in getting in touch with people and delivering services, whatever the new normal is. Rebecca asked what the City is doing, such as maybe a go-pro type of message with what is going on in the City, if they cannot come to City Hall. John Champagne said he was trying to understand exactly, other than communication and maybe somebody that must be taught how to get an SBA loan, what can the City do. Mayor Countryman said she would love to have the City Administrator be able to call the customer service manager at Suddenlink and Consolidated to report outages because services were down for days here and it was up to the residents, so a leader being able to have direct contact like they do with Entergy. Mayor Countryman said the City now has a lifeline with Entergy where things become a priority very quickly. John Champagne said that should be the standard operating procedure, that is nothing new. Rebecca Huss said there is also the questions of how someone wanted to get a deck on the back of their house, how does that work now with permitting, the City needs to deliver services to people in a way they find easier to deal with. John Champagne asked how the City would do that. Rebecca Huss said that is exactly the question, how do we reach the people. John Champagne said we have the greatest communication era of the history of mankind and you are going to try and think of a new way to do it. John Champagne said Mr. Tramm better be taking care of what he needs to take care of, and said he did not know who we are going to get to provide these services that are going to be individualized, but they have internet, phones and social media, so what and how else can we provide the information. Mayor Countryman said they did not have internet, and she was just asking us to build relationships with Consolidated and Suddenlink, so the City has a lifeline to get something done quicker than six days. Mayor Countryman said she knew that all telecommunications were overloaded. John Champagne said a lot of people were laid off so the response times on a lot of services are going to be delayed. Mayor Countryman said she was just saying if they could have that leadership position, that phone call would state the City is down and having issues, otherwise, it is up to the residents to call in and it was a nightmare. Mayor Countryman said for business continuity, it would help to have a relationship so when they need service, the City could call versus residents calling the tech support line. John Champagne said there is an individual effort that must be made, and he agrees with the Mayor if the City can do something that is great, but they cannot hold everyone's hand. John Champagne said what he does know is the City toilets better flush, the water better flow, the roads repaired, and the City better be protected.

ADJOURNMENT

Rebecca Huss moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:43 p.m. John Champagne seconded the motion, the motion carried unanimously. (4-0)

Submitted by:

Susan Hensley
Susan Hensley, City Secretary

Date Approved:

04/28/2020

Sara Countryman
Mayor Sara Countryman

