

Regular Meeting Minutes

The meeting of the Pocomoke City Mayor and Council was held in Council Chambers on Monday, May 25, 2023. The meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm.

Present: Mayor Todd J. Nock
First Vice President: Esther Troast
Council Members: R. Scott Holland, Diane Downing
and Monda Marsh-Not Present
Interim City Manager: John Psota
City Attorney: Andrew Illuminati
City Clerk: Michelle Beckett-EI Soloh

Closed Session Summary

A Closed Session was held on Monday, June 5, 2023 at 6:30 p.m. Closed Session was voted to be held unanimously by the Council under the provisions of Sec. 3-305, (b) **(1)** ___ “To discuss the appointment, employment, assignment, promotion, discipline, demotion, compensation, removal, resignation or performance evaluation of appointees, employees, or officials over whom this public body has jurisdiction; any other personnel matter that affects one or more specific individuals”. The topic discussed was “Budget & Positions and Tax Rates FY 2024”. Each current Councilmember was present and the following: Todd J. Nock-Mayor, Michelle Beckett-EI Soloh-City Clerk and John Psota-Interim City Manager.

A Closed Session was held on Tuesday, June 13, 2023 at 6:30 p.m. Closed Session was voted to be held unanimously by the Council under the provisions of Sec. 3-305, (b) **(4)** ___ “To consider a matter that concerns the proposal for a business or industrial organization to locate, expand, or remain in the State”; **(7)** ___ “To consult with counsel to obtain legal advice”. The topics discussed was “Armory Building, Tax Abatements and Fees, Fines Schedule”. Each current Councilmember was present and the following: Todd J. Nock-Mayor, Michelle Beckett-EI Soloh-City Clerk and John Psota-Interim City Manager and Andrew Illuminati-City Attorney.

Pledge of Allegiance, Prayer by Councilmember Downing and Call to Order:

Public Hearing & Adopt Resolution No. 578, Tax Rates FY 2024

Mayor Nock read: **Resolution No. 578**
 Tax Rates FY 2024
 Pocomoke City, Maryland

Public Hearing opened. There were several citizen speakers as noted. All who spoke were not in favor of raising the non-owner property tax rate. Public Hearing closed.

Mark Thompson, 127 Market Street, Co-owner of Sublime Massage
Keri Foster, 102 Hampshire Terrace
John Haynie, 216 Walnut
Kelly Miller, 507 Market Street
Christy Kagan, 4 Winter Quarters Drive
George Tasker, 107 Payne Avenue

Mayor Nock said that there is a misunderstanding about increasing the nonowner-occupied tax rate. Everyone’s property value increased therefore, because the property values increased, even if the non-occupied property rate stays the same, the city will generate more money. A citizen responded

by saying she thinks what everyone is saying that the proposed lower tax rate due to the assessments means that even if the tax rate remains level, citizens will pay double. Mayor Nock said that the county's constant yield is already higher than the state's. Even if the constant yield remains the same, citizens will still pay more. In this moment, they are not discussing raising taxes, it's the tax assessments that went up. Mayor Nock also clarified that the city only considered raising nonowner-occupied tax and not owner-occupied tax.

Council Discussion

Councilmember Troast said that She realizes that the tax rate is basically the same rate as last year, the cost of running the city has increased and the city was simply trying to offset some of that expense. When the budget is publicized, in the near future, everyone will see that the city has cut the budget to the bare minimum of expenses. A tax increase would affect her personally too. If something would happen to her husband, she would probably have to sell her house. After listening to the general public, she is not opposed to reconsidering the nonowner-occupied tax rate increase. In the big scheme of things, that would only bring in about \$32,000 that wouldn't barely cover a part-time position. It's up to the rest of the Council if they agree with her or not. Some things were taken completely out of the budget and increases were only given to stay competitive in certain areas to maintain employee ratios. She has spent a lot of time reviewing and revising the budget. She takes that very seriously and thinks about it as a citizen. Eventually, taxes will have to be raised because operating expenses only go up and not down. The budget will be posted soon and you can see where the money is going. There are Police cars from 2006 still in operation and need to be replaced. The last time that any infrastructure was touched was 1937. We need to think about the condition of those pipes. Our in-house mechanic also saves us a lot of money. Street paving is also our expense.

Councilmember Holland said he hears a lot about concerns what the citizens want from Pocomoke. We can't want something and expect it not to be funded. Everything costs. Public safety and insurances all go up in cost. Councilmember Troast said that for the last three years and more, the auditor gives us good reports. The works hard at knowing how the money is spent and balancing the budget to pay for everything. Mayor Nock said things will take a while to get fixed. He asked the interim city manager and the city clerk to come up with a plan of what needs to be fixed in the city. He thanked everyone for coming and participating in the meeting. The last time taxes were raised was 2016. When he looked at the website, he saw what everyone else saw and it looked like taxes were being raised. Councilmember Downing said she has always thought that Pocomoke City's tax rate was astronomical and she will do what she can to minimize that. Councilmember Troast said that if Pocomoke got assistance from the county, things would be a lot better. She reiterated that the Council is always willing to hear people but the county needs to know the issues.

Motion to adopt Resolution No. 578, with the amendment that the nonowner-occupied rate remain the same at 1.1311% (Troast, Downing passed)

Acclamation: Troast-aye, Holland-aye, Downing-aye; none opposed, motion carried

Comments from Council

Councilmember Downing thanked the public for coming out and for their support of the Mayor & Council.

Councilmember Holland pointed out that last year was a hard fiscal year. Municipal government is supposed to have a 60-day reserve. We don't have that but it has been rising. He said if you see an officer, thank him or her for their service.

Comments from the Mayor

Mayor Nock said Pocomoke is not a rich town but if we can pull together, we can make things happen. We have talented people. There will be an influx from Wallops and we want to attract those people into our municipality. He thinks that this was a productive meeting and he is glad to see everyone come out.

Comments from Interim City Manager

None

Comments from Audience

Keri Ann Foster asked if there is anything else that can be done besides beautification? Mayor Nock said most events are based in the same two blocs of the city. We need to spread out and have events in different places in the city. That will help attract people from the highway traffic into attendance. He has asked the Council to start the committees again. That slowed down after COVID. Councilmember Holland said the more the community gets involved in events like the Christmas lights competition help with an interest in beautification. Code Enforcement is also helping with the beautification by making sure grass stays cut and houses maintained. Mayor Nock is looking forward to Cypress Roots opening and everyone has to help support its success.

Motion to adjourn meeting (Holland, Downing passed)

Acclamation: Troast-aye, Downing-aye, Holland-aye; none opposed, motion carried

Approved: K.M. Beckett-El Soloh
City Clerk