

Regular Meeting Minutes

The meeting of the Pocomoke City Mayor and Council was held in Council Chambers on Monday, December 5, 2022. The meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm.

Present: Mayor Susan Marshall Harrison
First Vice President: Esther Troast
Council Members: R. Scott Holland, Diane Downing,
Daniel J. Tarr and Todd J. Nock
City Manager: Jeremy Mason-Not Present
City Attorney: Andrew Illuminati
City Clerk: Michelle Beckett-El Soloh

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

Closed Session Summary

A Closed Session was held on Monday, November 21, 2022 at 5:30 p.m. The Closed Session was voted to be held unanimously by the Council under the provisions of **Sec. 3-305, (b) (I)** **"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 were the job descriptions of the Events Coordinator and the City Manager. Each Councilmember was present (Councilmember Tarr via Zoom), Susan Marshall Harrison- Mayor, Jeremy Mason-City Manager, Andrew Illuminati-City Attorney and Michelle Beckett-El Soloh, City Clerk, Karah Burton-Lacey, Events Coordinator.

Approval of Minutes from Meeting of November 7, 2022:

Motion to approve minutes for November 7, 2022 as written (Troast, Downing passed)

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

Review and Approval Current Bill List:

Motion to approve the bill list (Nock, Holland passed)

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

James Jones Proposal to Council Regarding the Stephen Long School

Rev. James Jones, Mr. Marvin Jones and Mrs. Brendal Jones, wife of Marvin Jones, both spoke regarding the history of Mr. Stephen H. Long and the school that was named after him. Lisa Challenger, with Bay to Beaches Historical Society, all participated in the presentation to the Mayor and Council.

--Born in Pocomoke City, MD. At an early age, Long, went to live with an uncle in Boston, Massachusetts.

--1893, Long, earned with honors a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Lincoln University in Pennsylvania.

--May 12, 1914, Professor Long was appointed "Supervisor of Colored Schools" in Worcester County, MD.

--In 1915, Professor long, a champion of Civil Rights and a champion of Human Rights, appeared before the Maryland Assembly and was successful in petitioning funds to be allocated for a supervisor for designed "Colored Schools" according to a law passed by the Assembly in 1910.

--The late Professor Stephen Handy Long was the developer of Education for the African Americans in Worcester County, MD, at a time when these students only went to the 7th grade

--Long made the option for these students to attend school through the 10th grade by personally securing books from Boston, MA, as there were no books for 9th and 10th grades

--September 14,1937 – a school was named for Long on the site we are proposing tonight for the placement of the sign

--This school was destroyed by fire, January 8,1956

--A new school was built on the same site

--1971 the Neighborhood Council of Pocomoke City, drafted a proposal to request the name of Pocomoke Middle School be changed to “Stephen Handy Long Middle School”. An African American Supervisor of Instruction in the Worcester County Board of Education, opposed the proposal.

--September 13, 1921-Professor Stephen Handy Long was murdered in the streets of Pocomoke City, MD

Tonight, we seek your support in preserving this important Historical contribution to our community.

Councilmember Nock said that the Mayor and Council are in favor of the commemoration of the school. For a long time, it wasn't known if the land belonged to the city or the county. It was determined that the land belonged to the county. The county is better able to financially handle the requests of the presenters but the city is willing to work together with the county. The Mayor and Council agreed to work together with the county and support the project. The presenters requested that Public Works help to form a mound of dirt and decorative bricks where flowers could be planted and a commemorative plaque can be placed. Graduates from the class, that are now in their 80's and 90's, have been contacted and want to attend a commemoration ceremony. There are some grant funds available. Councilmember Nock further said that a meeting must be had with the city manager as this is not a legislative issue. The city manager is the one in charge of the day-to-day operations for the city and Public Works. Councilmember Nock felt that it is important that the history of the school is preserved and that it would be helpful to create an ex officio position for a councilmember on their board. Councilmember Holland said approximately three years ago, the county promised to do some refurbishment to the basketball courts but it has not been done yet. Mr. Jones said that a letter of endorsement from the city to the county would help and he is requesting that.

Credit: Historical information about Stephen H. Long school researched and provided by Mrs. Brendal Jones.

Public Notice-Open Meetings Compliance Board Findings

In September, a complaint was filed with the Open Meetings Compliance Board. The complaint alleged four violations of the Open Meetings Act against the Mayor and City Council of Pocomoke City. The four allegations were:

1. A meeting of the Pocomoke City Council, in violation of the Open Meetings Act occurred between Monday, September 12, 2022, and Monday, September 19, 2022.
2. The initial agenda for the September 19, meeting of the Mayor and City Council of Pocomoke City was deficient for failing to contain a known agenda item.
3. The Mayor and City Council of Pocomoke City failed to recognize an ordinance, introduced by a member of the public, and hold a second reading on said ordinance.

4. The Mayor of Pocomoke City improperly issued a warning to a speaker during public comment threatening removal from the meeting for improper comments.

Last week, the Open Meetings Compliance Board issued an opinion as to the four allegations. As to the first allegation, the Board was unable to determine whether a violation occurred as there was not any evidence to support the assertion. As to the third and fourth allegation, the Board found no violation. As to the second allegation, the Board found that the Council violated § 3-302.1 (a) of the General Provisions Article by failing to include a known item of business on the initial agenda of the September 19, 2022, meeting, though the item was included on the amended agenda that was published less than 24 hours before the meeting.

This statement serves as an announcement of the violation and a summary of the opinion pursuant to General Provisions Article, §3-211.

In order to avoid a miscommunication regarding future agenda items, before this opinion was even handed down, the Mayor and Council drafted, developed and implemented a new system for setting the agenda. The city prides itself on making sure the public is fully informed of what actions are being considered by the Mayor and Council.

Councilmember Nock summarized the new steps that the Mayor, Council and City Manager will take, effective immediately, to set and publish all agendas.

Introduce Resolution No. 473, Declare 209 Laurel Street as Surplus Property, 1st Reading

The City Attorney, Andrew Illuminati, read:

Ordinance No. 473
Declare 209 Laurel Street Surplus Property
Pocomoke City, Maryland

Introduce Resolution No. 474, Contract with Amber Ridge II, LLC, 1st Reading

The City Attorney, Andrew Illuminati, read:

Ordinance No. 474
Enter Into a Contract with Amber Ridge II, LLC
For Purchase of 209 Laurel Street
Pocomoke City, Maryland

Mike Sullivan was present and represented Amber Ridge, II, LLC. The City Attorney and Mr. Sullivan were former law school classmates. Mr. Sullivan stated that after development lots and homes would be offered for sale. The company intends to revitalize the area. They are expecting a timeline of approximately three and a half months after financing approval.

Comments from Council

Councilmember Troast complimented Mike Shannon and Karah Burton-Lacey on a great job and successful Christmas parade.

Councilmember Holland thanked everyone for coming out to the city Christmas tree lighting. Watch for events coming up. The Christmas Lights contest will also be taking place. He also thanked the Volunteer Fire Department for doing a great job with the controlled burns. He said he couldn't believe the amount of trash in the street after the parade and thanked Public Works for the fast clean up that they do every year.

Councilmember Nock also thanked everyone for coming out to the Old-Fashioned Christmas. He thanked Pohanka and Cedric Armwood for providing the convertibles that the Mayor and Council rode

in. The city will be looking at the dilapidated properties in town to try and get Pocomoke City back to the city we all knew. The Council saw to making sure certain debts were paid off to the State during the last fiscal year and the Council will do the same this year with certain projects.

Councilmember Downing also thanked everyone who came out and supported the Christmas parade.

Councilmember Tarr wished everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year and looks forward to seeing everyone next year.

Comments from the Mayor

She echoed the Council's sentiments and announced that Councilmember Nock has been appointed as a member of Comptroller Elect, Brooke Lierman's transition team. He is the first elected official from Pocomoke City to be appointed to a transition team. Also, the City Manager, Jeremy Mason is not able to be here for a good reason. His daughter is being inducted into the National Honor Society. He wrote a letter of thanks for Mike Shannon, Karah Burton-Lacey, Pete Mariner, David Strauss, Chandler Sterling, Dan Brandewie, Rebecca Mason, the Worcester County Sheriff's Office, MD State Police, Pocomoke City Police Department, officers from Snow Hill, Berlin, Princess Anne, Crisfield and Ocean City, Public Works and several others for their help with assisting with traffic and several other duties at the 50th annual Christmas parade.

Comments from City Manager

Not Present-Mayor read letter written by City Manager.

Comments from Chief of Police

Chief Hancock said the food provided from Mission Barbeque during the Christmas Parade was excellent. The Police Department will be giving away \$3,500.00 of toys to needy families in the community. He has a recording of Patrolman Rachael Northam and Patrolman Ray Fitchett doing a Delmarva Life segment. If anyone would like a copy, let Chief Hancock know. Lt. Damien McGlotten did a segment on Channel 47 about opioids and Lt. Ian Castañeda also did a segment on scams. The current scam is robbers who case stores and then follow shoppers back to their residence and rob them. There will be more information posted about this on the police Facebook page. Currently, the department is fully staffed after one new certified officer is sworn in in the next two weeks. The department has done a good job with attending the Boys & Girls Club meetings every two weeks. Mrs. Lori Becker was telling Chief about a kid who rode his bike to the meetings and has had several flat tires. He repaired them and kept using the bike to go to meetings. That individual was presented with a new bicycle purchased by the police department. The Mayor & Council thanked Mrs. Lori Becker for all the work she has done to organize the Girls & Boys Club.

Comments from Audience

Rev. James Jones said he would be attending a ceremony on December 14, 2022 for the boy in Salisbury who went back into a burning apartment to save his sister. Anyone wishing to attend would be appreciated. Presentations of proclamations and awards will be presented to him.

Motion to adjourn meeting (Nock, Troast passed)

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

Approved: *K. Michelle Beckett-El Soloh/City Clerk*