

**Special City Commission Meeting**  
**Monday, July 27, 2020**  
**7:00 pm**

This Commission Meeting was conducted utilizing Communications Media Technology in accordance with the Governor's Executive Order. Some Elected Officials and Staff members were present in the Commission Chambers while others were present via the Zoom application to respect the social distancing guidelines.

ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT IN CHAMBERS:

Shirley Groover Bryant, Mayor  
Harold Smith, Commissioner, Ward 1

ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT ELECTRONICALLY:

Tambra Varnadore, Vice Mayor, Commissioner, Ward 2  
Tamara Cornwell, Commissioner-at-Large 2—(joined the meeting at 5:38 p.m.)  
Jonathan Davis, Commissioner-at-Large 1  
Brian Williams, Commissioner, Ward 3

STAFF PRESENT IN CHAMBERS:

Mark Barnebey, City Attorney  
Mohammed Rayan, Public Works Deputy Director  
Scott Tyler, Chief of Police

STAFF PRESENT ELECTRONICALLY:

Jeff Burton, CRA Director  
Jim Freeman, City Clerk  
Amber LaRowe, Assistant City Clerk  
Todd Williams, Information Technology (IT) Consultant

Mayor Bryant called the meeting to order at 5:33 p.m.

1. CITY COMMISSION AGENDA APPROVAL

**Motion:**        **Commissioner Varnadore moved, Commissioner Williams seconded, and the motion carried 4-0 to approve the July 27, 2020 Special Commission Agenda. Commissioner Cornwell was absent for the vote.**

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

No comments.

3. FISCAL YEAR 2021 PROPOSED AGGREGATE MILLAGE RATE AND DATES FOR TENTATIVE AND FINAL BUDGET HEARINGS

Mr. Freeman explained the process for tonight to include the proposed millage rate as well as scheduling the tentative and final hearing dates. He stated that the budget is the same millage as last year; \$5.9671 mills and allows for a balanced budget at this time.

Commissioner Varnadore expressed her concerns with the state of the Police Department. She is in favor of the discussion of a millage increase, even incrementally, so that the Commission and staff can evaluate a potential

salary increase for the Department. She reminded the Commission that whatever millage is established tonight can always be decreased but cannot be increased.

Commissioner Williams echoed Commissioner Varnadore's concerns regarding the Police Department. Discussion ensued regarding competing agencies and starting salaries.

Chief Tyler is concerned about the state of the Police Department if nothing is done.

Commissioner Varnadore stated that she is willing to consider a one-time retention payment that can be done outside of the union negotiation time frame.

Attorney Barnebey stated that any changes will be discussed the Bargaining Union before anything is finalized.

Commissioner Smith is not in favor of an increase in the millage. He is discouraged to hear the state of the Police Department and the inability to use the funds appropriately. He opined that if the new Police Department was to be constructed on the other parcel that is located in Ward 1 then there would be a savings of which could be used for salaries. He also stated that, in his opinion, the Police Department could make more money if it is constructed in Ward 1 because it will be in the CRA. This would allow for better pay for the officers and more equipment, in his opinion. He will not vote on an increase in millage because the issue with officers is perpetual and an increase will not solve the problem.

Commissioner Williams questioned Mr. Smith's statement regarding the construction of the Police Department in Ward 1 as opposed to the location off of 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue West; he reminded everyone that the current proposed site is in the CRA.

Commissioner Cornwell is concerned about how the increase will affect the residents and how it will work out due to the effects of COVID-19 on the economy. She opined this could cause a hardship on the residents and force them out of the City. She requested information on the salaries of those officers that have left the City and she also would like to be further educated on different police department salaries to include those agencies in Desoto County.

Chief Tyler stated that the officers who left and went to the Sheriff's Office are now making approximately \$10k more annually. He discussed the Florida Department Study that is completed every year regarding starting salaries for agencies in Florida and the data from 2019 shows that the Palmetto Police Department are the lowest paid in the Tampa Bay area. This makes it harder to recruit, especially when almost all agencies are hiring and the pool of law enforcement applicants is decreasing.

Mr. Freeman stated that if the millage increased by .1 there would be a \$58k increase to the General Fund and if increased by .25 there would be a \$146k increase to the General Fund.

Commissioner Smith wants a workshop meeting on the Police Department. He opined officers will be continuing to leave and encourages all officers to attend a workshop discussion. Raising the millage is not going to retain officers.

Commissioner Williams would like the Commission to consider an increase to the millage by .25 to allow for staff to show options for pay increase to officers' salary.

Commissioner Varnadore agrees with both Commissioner Williams and Commissioner Smith.

**Motion:** Commissioner Varnadore moved, Commissioner Williams seconded, and the motion failed 2-3 to approve a proposed aggregate millage rate of \$6.2171 for FY 2021 and to schedule the tentative budget hearing for September 15, 2020 at 5:30 p.m. or as soon thereafter as same can be heard in these Chambers and a final budget hearing on September 28, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. or as soon thereafter as same can be heard in these Chambers. Commissioners Cornwell, Davis, and Smith voted no.

This increase is just to allow for discussions in the coming weeks to become better educated on a proper millage. The Commission expects a large amount of information regarding the questions posed this evening.

Mayor Bryant wants to take money out of reserves to give to officers as one-time payment.

**Motion:** Commissioner Cornwell moved, Commissioner Smith seconded the motion to approve a proposed millage rate of \$5.9671 for FY 2021 and to schedule the tentative budget hearing for September 15, 2020 at 5:30 p.m. or as soon thereafter as same can be heard in these Chambers and a final budget hearing for September 28, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. or as soon thereafter as same can be heard in these Chambers.

Attorney Barnebey stated that there are restrictions on the ability to do a “bonus” per Statute. A one-time payment is an option. Staff will prepare other options if a millage increase is not an option.

Commissioner Varnadore expressed her disdain with the motion dying and the direction this Commission is taking.

**Motion on the floor carried 3-2. Commissioners Varnadore and Williams voted no.**

#### **COMMENTS:**

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##### 4. DEPARTMENT HEADS COMMENTS

**Attorney Barnebey**—will talk to the PBA regarding a proposal as soon as available and can speak to them in general terms if necessary.

##### 5. MAYORS REPORT

##### 6. COMMISSIONERS COMMENTS

**Commissioner Varnadore**—looks forward to hearing Commissioners Cornwell, Davis and Smith’s options on paying the officers at the Department.

**Commissioner Cornwell**—she stated that each Commissioner is entitled to their opinion and reminded the Commissioners of the respect that each person deserves here. She looks forward to what staff will prepare for the next discussion.

**Commissioner Davis**—stated that the \$5.9671 millage rate is technically a tax increase because the City is not going to the roll-back rate.

**Commissioner Smith**—looks forward to finding a solution for the Police Department and having a discussion at a workshop soon.

Commission Meeting

July 27, 2020

Page 4 of 4

Mayor Bryant stated that there are several items prepared to come forward on the August 3<sup>rd</sup> agendas; if the meeting is not completed, it will be continued to the next day at 5:30 p.m.

Mr. Freeman reminded the Commission of the August 5<sup>th</sup> Budget Workshop meeting at 5:30 p.m.

Mayor Bryant adjourned the meeting at 6:38 p.m.

MINUTES APPROVED: AUGUST 24, 2020

*JAMES R. FREEMAN*

JAMES R. FREEMAN  
CITY CLERK