

CITY OF MOUNT HOLLY
MOUNT HOLLY CITY COUNCIL MEETING
MONDAY, November 13, 2023
COUNCIL CHAMBERS
7:00 PM

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Hough called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm. The following were present:

Mayor Bryan Hough	Danny Jackson, Interim City Manager
Mayor Pro Tem Phyllis Harris	Brian DuPont, Assistant City Manager
Councilman Ivory Craig	Brian Reagan, Police Chief
Councilman Jeff Meadows	Ryan Baker, Fire Chief
Councilman David Moore	Greg Beal, Planning Director
Councilwoman Christina Pawlish	Tony Walker, Streets and Solid Waste Director
Councilwoman Lauren Shoemaker	Jonathan Wilson, Director of Utilities
Marie M. Anders, City Attorney	Mark Jusko, Recreation Supervisor
Tara Douglas, City Clerk	Michelle Wood, Finance Director
	Alexis Hill, Interim HR Director

INVOCATION

Councilman Ivory Craig led the Council, staff and attendees in prayer.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Boy Scout Troop #59 led the Council and attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance

SET THE AGENDA

Mayor Hough stated that there will be a change to the agenda adding Consideration of the new City Manager position.

With no additional changes to the agenda, Mayor Hough entertained a motion to approve the corrected agenda as presented. Councilwoman Shoemaker made a motion to approve the corrected agenda as presented. Councilwoman Pawlish seconded the motion. All Council members present voted in favor. (Motion Carried)

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Call for public hearing to amend Section 7.1 Note 28 4-D to permit front roof slope mounted solar panels within 100 feet from the road, case # TA-23-14.

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2. Call for public hearing to consider rezoning the following parcels (Parcel #s 123804, 123794, 123793, 123790, 123789, 123785 & 123784, etc., etc) from Residential Downtown (RD) to Conditional Central Business (B-1)-rezoning case R-23-5.
3. Approval of an Ordinance creating 1-hour parking spaces on Central Avenue
4. Approval of a Resolution adopting the updated Code of Ordinance Book by American Legal
5. Approval of Minutes from the October 23, 2023 Council Meeting
6. Approval of Minutes from the October 23, 2023 Closed Session

Mayor Hough entertained a motion to approve the consent agenda as presented. Mayor Pro Tem Harris made a motion to approve the consent agenda. Councilwoman Shoemaker seconded the motion. All Council members present voted in favor. (Motion Carried)

CLOSED SESSION

1. Closed Session Pursuant to N.C.G.S 143-318.11 (a) (3 and 5)

Mayor Hough entertained a motion to go out of the regular meeting and enter into closed session pursuant to N.C.G.S 143-318.11 (a) (3 and 5). Councilwoman Pawlish made a motion to go out of the regular meeting and enter into closed session at 7:04 pm. Councilman Moore seconded the motion. All Council members present voted in favor. (Motion Carried)

Mayor Hough entertained a motion to come out of closed session and back into the regular meeting. Councilwoman Shoemaker made a motion to come out of closed session and back into the regular meeting at 8:00pm. Councilwoman Pawlish seconded the motion. All Council members present voted in favor. (Motion Carried)

NEW BUSINESS

1. Consideration and possible action for the City Manager position.

Mayor Hough stated that there have been over 55 applicants vetted for the position of City Manager. Mayor Hough thanked Councilman Craig and Councilwoman Shoemaker for their hard work along with staff and Centralina Regional Government for helping the City find a candidate. Mayor Hough stated that we come to an agreement on a candidate tonight. Mayor Hough stated that we have a contract that is unsigned. Mayor Hough asked the council if they had come to a decision on the position of the City Manager?

Mayor Hough entertained a motion to extend the offer of City Manager to Jonathan Blanton. Councilman Meadows made the motion to extend the offer of City Manager to Jonathan Blanton.

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Mayor Pro Tem Harris seconded the motion. All Council members present voted in favor.
(Motion Carried)

Mayor Hough stated that Jonathan Blanton would be begin as City Manager on January 2, 2023.

PRESENTATIONS

1. Salary Study Presentation

Pam Overcash

Pam Overcash thanked the Council and staff for their support during this process. Pam Overcash commended the Council for their commitment to their employees in wanting to do what is right regarding the market study. Ms. Overcash stated that compensation plans are very complex and have a lot of moving parts and most things do not happen in isolation. Ms. Overcash stated that the market study rewarded longevity and that this is okay, but that we did not like how this turned out because this created some inequities and perceived inequities. Ms. Overcash stated that the City is moving towards a merit-based system and longevity will no longer be an issue anymore. Ms. Overcash reminded Council that the City still recognizes longevity in the form of the yearly bonus as well as within the North Carolina retirement system. Ms. Overcash stated the study criteria was applied consistently. Ms. Overcash stated that 56% of employees received the 3% COLA which meant that your salary is in the market range. Ms. Overcash reviewed some of the study implementation issues with Communication being the number one issue. Ms. Overcash stated that there was not enough communication and needed a more rigorous review process. Ms. Overcash stated that employee concerns included classifications, compression (when salaries are too close), inequities, and various errors. Ms. Overcash stated that her recommendations for the future are for the City to develop a compensation philosophy and a written pay plan. Ms. Overcash stated that a written pay plan will ensure that all departments throughout the City are following the exact same practices and it becomes policy. Ms. Overcash stated that she recommends conducting a comprehensive classification study and that a comprehensive classification study generally precedes a market study. Ms. Overcash stated that this is imperative that this be done and that the classification issues get corrected at that time. Ms. Overcash is recommending an increase in the number of grades. Ms. Overcash stated that the City has 78 total classification, 76 of which are compressed into 9 grades so there isn't a lot of room to move except that there is a lot of room between the grades. Ms. Overcash stated that the differences grow the higher up you go in the classification. Ms. Overcash stated that there is plenty of room to add new grades which will help solve the issues of the classification and compression. Ms. Overcash stated that her final recommendation would be to utilize tiers which is a clearly defined way for an employee to move through their grade. Ms. Overcash stated that

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this practice may not be applicable in all departments, but will be a great practice because the employees will know exactly what they need to do to move into the next tier. Ms. Overcash stated that these recommendations are the foundation for a strong compensation plan and believes that these recommendations have to be done first. Ms. Overcash stated that the City is growing and that things are changing, but that we have to have a strong intentional foundation before we start fixing things. Ms. Overcash stated that we want to be more intentional about how this situation and the concerns of the employees are addressed. Ms. Overcash stated that she is presenting the City Council with two options to choose from to begin to fix some of the items. Ms. Overcash finished the presentation and open the floor to Council for questions.

Mayor Hough entertained a motion to approve option #2 as presented by Pam Overcash. Councilman Craig made the motion to approve option #2 as presented by Pam Overcash. Councilman Meadows seconded the motion.

All Council members present voted in favor. (Motion Carried)

Mayor Hough stated that Council had been in Closed Session for an hour discussing this topic which included specific personnel. Mayor Hough stated that Council is very concerned about not being able to fix every problem tonight. Mayor Hough stated that option #2 would fix the most and have the most impact for the employees. Mayor Hough stated to the employees that this is a beginning and that the employees have been heard and will continue to be heard. Mayor Hough thanked the employees and stated that they are vital to the City. Councilman Craig thanked the First Responders.

2. Better City Presentation of Action Plan

Jason Godfrey and Meng Guo

Jason Godfrey presented an action plan and reviewed priorities. Mr. Godfrey discussed the role of economic development. Mr. Godfrey discussed the importance of the vision plan that is already in place. Mr. Godfrey reviewed the layers of interviewing that occurred with citizens, staff, small business, and county. Mr. Godfrey stated the economic development started with the request for jobs and has progressed into a complex ecosystem. Mr. Godfrey stated that the priorities are to build onto the strategic vision plan. Mr. Godfrey stated that another priority is the quality of the retail experience. Mr. Godfrey stressed the importance of consistent messaging. Mr. Godfrey stated that the City of Mount Holly is in the position of their growth to target specific industries.

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Mr. Godfrey discussed the potential at the North Gateway. Mr. Godfrey stated that there is a growing potential for development. Mr. Godfrey stated that a sense of community is missing at the North Gateway. Mr. Godfrey stated there are some creative options that are being discussed currently and that they will be back to Council with more information. Mr. Godfrey discussed the study that includes a retail and grocery leakage analysis. Mr. Godfrey stated that the next thing would be a project design concept to present to developers. Mr. Godfrey stated that they are working on getting funding for this. Mr. Godfrey discussed the timeline. Mr. Godfrey discussed the industrial park and stated that there are some challenges currently with this that they are happy to discuss this offline.

Mr. Godfrey stated that the Riverfront is the euphemism for the Sewer Plant repurposing. Mr. Godfrey stated that this would have a longer lead time since it has to be decommissioned. Mr. Godfrey stated that it is good to get a jump on the planning to get ahead of the game. Mr. Godfrey stated the importance of the City driving the development plan.

Mr. Godfrey stated that some of the other initiatives are the Community Coffee in order to build those relationships with the community. Mr. Godfrey stated that they have completed the RFI process. Mr. Godfrey stated that they have developed a project map that is given to developers which is more speculative in nature. Mr. Godfrey stated that they are very excited about the opportunities that are coming to Mount Holly.

Mayor Hough thanked Mr. Godfrey and the team for the great work that they are doing.

3. Audit Presentation

Beau Hildebran from Martin Starnes

Michelle Wood introduced Beau Hildebran from Martin Starnes. Mr. Hildebran presented the Audit Highlights with data as of June 30, 2023. Mr. Hildebran stated that the report had been approved by the LGC. Mr. Hildebran thanked Michelle Wood and the staff for being so helpful and cooperative. Mr. Hildebran stated that they gave an unmodified opinion of the financial statement which means that the audit was accurate as reported. Mr. Hildebran stated that there were no audit findings. Mr. Hildebran stated that the top three (3) expenditures were public safety, general government,

Councilman Meadows asked about the red ratio indicator with the Water and Sewer. Michelle Wood confirmed that the assets are coming to the end of their life and that the ratio will go back to green once the plant is decommissioned and comes off of the book.

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4. Hager Strategic Solutions presents end of year report

Bre Hager Wilhelm

Mike Hager stated that the City of Mount Holly tasked them to represent the City at the 2023 General Assembly. Mr. Hager stated they developed three goals for the City which were to find budget items in the state budget, defend the City with any bad legislation, and to develop a relationship between the City and the legislators. Mr. Hager stated that Mr. DuPont has been phenomenal to work with. Mr. Hager discussed the money available from the state to help with the decommissioning. Mr. Hager stated that they were able to stop some bad legislation regarding developers. Mr. Hager stated that they have built some great relationships with legislators. Bre Hager Wilhelm spoke on the upcoming items for 2024. Ms. Wilhelm stated that they will continue to develop those strategic plans to keep those harmful legislations from coming back. Ms. Wilhelm stated that they are planning on legislators visiting Mount Holly.

Councilman Meadows recommended that staff look at extending the contract time of Hager Strategic Solutions to 24 or 36 months. Mayor Hough thanked the team.

5. Presentation on RFP for Veterans Park

Greg Beal

Mr. Beal presented a first draft of the downtown project. Mr. Beal stated that discussions have been had around setting the guidelines and next steps for this important project to include defining the project area. Mr. Beal stated that this document allows for a lot of creativity and flexibility. Mr. Beal stated that there will be a lot of visuals to assist in selling the concept. Mr. Beal stated that he is open to any questions.

Councilman Meadows stated that he would like to make sure that staff does more explaining around the purchase as well as following the statutes. Councilman Meadows stated that the end goal is to end up with a park that we control. Councilman Meadows stated that the rezoning was an excellent idea to move forward with. Councilman Meadows stated that he did not see any information regarding the possible development of the 3-acres.

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6. Consideration to approve placement of a digital downtown gateway monument sign at 613 S Main Street, parcel # 124515. *Greg Beal*

Mr. Beal stated that the Mount Holly TDA was looking for ways to spend funds. Mr. Beal stated that the money has to be tied to specific goal. Mr. Beal stated that the TDA and the Gaston County Tourism Department has stated that the goal is to possibly fund 50/50 of the costs. Mr. Beal is seeking direction and approval for moving toward the digital downtown signs.

Councilman Craig made a motion to approve placement of a digital downtown gateway monument sign at 613 S. Main Street, parcel # 124515. Councilman Moore seconded the motion. All Council members present voted in favor. (Motion Carried)

7. Dutchman's Creek Bridge Update *Scott Betz from KCA*

Mr. Betz from KCA presented an update on Dutchman's Creek Bridge project. Mr. Betz gave a general overview of the project. Mr. Betz gave some general metrics of the structure which is 803 feet of trail which includes a 10-foot-wide greenway trail. Mr. Betz discussed the project steps to date. Mr. Betz reviewed steps forward to include letting of the project in July of 2024. Mr. Betz stated that construction should take about 5 months for the boardwalk, bridge and the remainder of the trail with construction wrapping up in April 2025. Mr. Betz opened the floor for questions.

Councilman Meadows asked about the base of the bridge as a possible kayak launch. Mr. Beal stated that this would be a potential possibility. Mr. Beal stated that there would be discussions needed with Duke Energy. Councilman Meadows stated that he would like to see the staff move towards this kayak launch.

PUBLIC HEARING

1. Public hearing to consider rezoning the following parcels (Parcel #s 124095, 307978, & 307979) from R-8-SF & R-8-MF to Office and Institutional (O-I)-rezoning case # R-23-4. *Paul Lowe*

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Mr. Lowe stated that the Planning Commission made the recommendation at their last meeting. Mr. Lowe stated the staff recommends the rezoning as well.

Mayor Hough entertained a motion to go out of the regular meeting and into the public hearing. Councilwoman Shoemaker made a motion to go out of the regular meeting and into the public hearing. Mayor Pro Tem Harris seconded the motion. All Council members present voted in favor. (Motion Carried)

With no one signed up to speak, Mayor Hough entertained a motion to go out of the public hearing and back into the regular meeting. Mayor Pro Tem Harris made a motion to go out of the public hearing and back into the regular meeting. Councilwoman Pawlish seconded the motion. All Council members present voted in favor. (Motion Carried)

Mayor Hough entertained a motion to approve the rezoning the following parcels (Parcel #s 124095, 307978, & 307979) from R-8-SF & R-8-MF to Office and Institutional (O-I)-rezoning case # R-23-4. Councilwoman Shoemaker made the motion to approve the rezoning the following parcels (Parcel #s 124095, 307978, & 307979) from R-8-SF & R-8-MF to Office and Institutional (O-I)-rezoning case # R-23-4. Councilman Meadows seconded the motion.

All Council members present voted in favor. (Motion Carried)

2. Public hearing to amend Section 5.2.5 of the Manual for Downtown Development to update the required height of awnings from ten feet to the standard for such improvements that are laid out in the State building code, case # TA-23-13. ***Paul Lowe***

Mr. Lowe reviewed the recommendations. Mr. Lowe stated that the Planning Commission has reviewed and recommended the changes. Mr. Lowe stated that staff recommends that changes.

Mayor Hough entertained a motion to go out of the regular meeting and into the public hearing. Councilwoman Pawlish made a motion to go out of the regular meeting and into the public hearing. Mayor Pro Tem Harris seconded the motion. All Council members present voted in favor. (Motion Carried)

With no one signed up to speak, Mayor Hough entertained a motion to go out of the public hearing and back into the regular meeting. Councilman Meadows made a motion to go out of the public hearing and back into the regular meeting. Mayor Pro Tem Harris seconded the motion.

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All Council members present voted in favor. (Motion Carried)

Mayor Hough entertained a motion to amend Section 5.2.5 of the Manual for Downtown Development to update the required height of awnings from ten feet to the standard for such improvements that are laid out in the State building code, case # TA-23-13. Mayor Pro Tem Harris made a motion to amend Section 5.2.5 of the Manual for Downtown Development to update the required height of awnings from ten feet to the standard for such improvements that are laid out in the State building code, case # TA-23-13. Councilwoman Pawlish seconded the motion.

All Council members present voted in favor. (Motion Carried)

3. Public hearing to amend Note # 12 of Section 7.1 of the Zoning Ordinance to update the setbacks for Churches, synagogues and other associated activities that are located in residential zoning districts-while also specifying the needed setbacks for institutional uses that are provided for in Note # 12, case # TA-23-12. ***Paul Lowe***

Mr. Lowe reviewed the recommendation and stated that the Planning Commission has reviewed and recommended the changes. Mr. Lowe stated that staff recommends that changes.

Mayor Hough entertained a motion to go out of the regular meeting and into the public hearing. Councilwoman Pawlish made a motion to go out of the regular meeting and into the public hearing. Councilwoman Shoemaker seconded the motion.

All Council members present voted in favor. (Motion Carried)

With no one signed up to speak, Mayor Hough entertained a motion to go out of the public hearing and back into the regular meeting. Councilwoman Pawlish made a motion to go out of the public hearing and back into the regular meeting. Councilman Meadows seconded the motion.

All Council members present voted in favor. (Motion Carried)

Mayor Hough entertained a motion to amend Note # 12 of Section 7.1 of the Zoning Ordinance to update the setbacks for Churches, synagogues and other associated activities that are located in residential zoning districts-while also specifying the needed setbacks for institutional uses that are provided for in Note # 12, case # TA-23-12.

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Councilwoman Pawlish made a motion to amend Note # 12 of Section 7.1 of the Zoning Ordinance to update the setbacks for Churches, synagogues and other associated activities that are located in residential zoning districts-while also specifying the needed setbacks for institutional uses that are provided for in Note # 12, case # TA-23-12. Councilman Meadows seconded the motion. All Council members present voted in favor. (Motion Carried)

PUBLIC COMMENT – Three (3) Minute Limit

Gloria Mack spoke during public comment. Gloria Mack stated that she lives at 986 Old Hwy 27 in Mount Holly. Gloria Mack stated that she is appealing for the upcoming vacant City Council seat for the remaining 2-year term. Gloria Mack stated that she received 19% of the votes cast and that she would proudly serve as the first black woman on the Mount Holly City Council.

CLOSED SESSION

1. Closed Session Pursuant to N.C.G.S 143-318.11 (a) (3 and 5)

Mayor Hough entertained a motion to go out of the regular meeting and enter into closed session pursuant to N.C.G.S 143-318.11 (a) (3 and 5). Councilwoman Pawlish made a motion to go out of the regular meeting and enter into closed session at 9:22 pm. Councilman Moore seconded the motion. All Council members present voted in favor. (Motion Carried)

Mayor Hough entertained a motion to come out of closed session and back into the regular meeting. Councilman Craig made a motion to come out of closed session and back into the regular meeting at 9:42 pm. Councilwoman Pawlish seconded the motion. All Council members present voted in favor. (Motion Carried)

ADJOURN

With no additional items for discussion, Mayor Hough entertained a motion to adjourn. Councilwoman Pawlish made a motion to adjourn the November 13, 2023 Council Meeting. Mayor Pro Tem Harris seconded the motion.

All Council Members present voted in favor.

(Motion Carried)

The meeting adjourned 9:43 pm.