



**City of Freeport**

**SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**

March 26, 2020, 9:00 AM  
Telephone Conference

Council Members Present: Mayor Russ Barley, Councilwoman Amanda Green, Councilwoman Elizabeth Brannon, Councilman Eddie Farris, Councilman William "Boots" McCormick, Councilwoman Elizabeth Haffner

Staff Members Present: City Attorney Clay Adkinson, Parks Director Charlie Simmons, Water Supervisor Larry Tuggle, Sewer Supervisor Robert Fawcett, Finance Officer Sara Bowers, Billing Manager Debbie Roberts, Interim City Clerk Lori Cox

**1. Meeting Called to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Mayor Russ Barley by telephone conference.

**2. Telephonic Meeting Policy**

Mayor Barley turned over the meeting to City Attorney Clay Adkinson to discuss the telephonic meeting policy.

Adkinson presented the following items for consideration and stated this policy will be utilized until in person meetings are acceptable.

- All agendas are published within forty-eight hours, preferably seventy-two hours in advance. The agenda should include detailed items that are to be considered or discussed but add-ons should not be allowed unless it is an emergency circumstance.
- Public comment should be taken at the outset of all agenda items and any member of the public wishing to speak, should identify themselves and provide their comment within the standard three-minute rule. The person wishing to speak may make comment on any item on the agenda. Public comment would be eliminated following motion and second from the Council.

- After public comment, non-city employees on the call should be muted by default by the Clerk to eliminate background noise. Council and staff were encouraged to mute themselves unless speaking to eliminate background noise.
- Adkinson noted that for today's agenda that it would be appropriate to ask for Public Comment at the outset of items 3, 4 & 5 and once again for item 6.

Moved by: Councilwoman Brannon

Seconded by: Councilman Farris

*Motion: To approve the telephonic meeting policy as presented.*

Ayes (5): Councilwoman Green, Councilwoman Brannon, Councilman Farris, Councilman McCormick, and Councilwoman Haffner

Carried (5 to 0)

**3. Public Comments - none.**

**4. March Water Disconnects**

Adkinson summarized March water disconnects were previously discussed during the March 17th, 2020 Emergency Meeting. Council's direction at that time was to address the subject once Billing Manager Debbie Roberts was able to get a concise number of disconnects to determine if the number was higher than normal. He presented the ballpark numbers that Roberts had given him; 200 disconnects, an increase of 80 persons over the prior month. Adkinson, earlier in the week after hearing the numbers, had advised Council and the Mayor by email to reserve action on disconnects until Council had the opportunity to consider it.

Adkinson asked the Council to consider the following:

- If anyone should be disconnected in the month of March
- To utilize the holiday policy; no disconnects done for one month and rolled over to the next month and adding an expressed provision, depending to the COVID-19 situation, to revisit at that time whether or not disconnects are appropriate. If shelter in place is extended or if other directives come from the state of Florida, then disconnects may be inappropriate.

Adkinson turned the subject over to Mayor Barley to call on council members to get their direction.

Councilwoman Green felt it best to hold off this month on disconnects and utilize the holiday policy and push it to the April date.

Councilwoman Brannon agreed with Councilwoman Green.

Councilman Farris was in agreement and felt it was not the time to disconnect water and to let them roll over.

Councilman McCormick was in agreement and also suggested to re-evaluate the issue again later.

Councilwoman Haffner agreed that no cut offs should be made this month.

Mayor Barley then informed the Council that he has had several phone calls about late payment fees and payment convenience fees. He asked for Council direction as to whether or not relief should be given to the matters.

Councilwoman Green did not have a problem holding late payments until the next billing cycle; however, the convenience fee is being charged to the City by the payment service provider. She inquired about what the convenience fee was.

Mayor Barley told her it depended on the amount of the bill.

Finance Officer Sara Bowers stated the fees are either \$2.75 for E - check or 2.95% for credit card.

Councilwoman Brannon did not have a problem with doing away with late payments for one month and addressing them next month. She did not see a way to abate convenience fees since the City gets charged for them. She also stated that payment by mail or drop box options are still available.

Councilman Farris agreed with both Councilwomen Green and Brannon.

Councilman McCormick had no problem with waiving the late fees but felt the convenience fee was not in the City's hands.

Councilwoman Haffner agreed to waive the late fee but felt the convenience fee is not a fee that the City charges and did not see a way to get around them.

Adkinson informed Council that the prevailing opinion, at the current time, from other cities is to abate late payments when suspending disconnects to the following month. Convenience fees; however, have not been suspended when other methods of payment are available. The City has a drop box at City Hall, payments can be made by mail, ACH can be used as opposed to using a credit card.

Moved by: Councilwoman Green

Seconded by: Councilman McCormick

*Motion: To suspend all March water disconnects and to revisit the issue in the month of April and to waive late payments on all of the accounts but to not waive the convenience fee.*

Ayes (5): Councilwoman Green, Councilwoman Brannon, Councilman Farris, Councilman McCormick, and Councilwoman Haffner

Carried (5 to 0)

**5. Temporarily Closing City Hall to the Public**

Adkinson summarized the temporary closing of City Hall to the public as a staff recommendation as a way to protect to the health and safety of employees. Staff requested ratification of City Hall closure that occurred yesterday under the Mayor's authority.

Moved by: Councilman Farris  
Seconded by: Councilwoman Brannon

*Motion: To ratify the temporary closure of City Hall and to approve until further order.*

Ayes (5): Councilwoman Green, Councilwoman Brannon, Councilman Farris, Councilman McCormick,  
and Councilwoman Haffner

Carried (5 to 0)

**6. Additional Actions Regarding COVID-19**

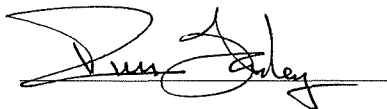
Councilwoman Green wanted to put out a public reminder to not flush toilet paper alternatives down the toilet as they cause great harm to our sewer system. Items of that nature should be put in the trash.

Mayor Barley asked for public comment, none was given.

Council Action: None.

**7. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned by Mayor Barley at 9:24 a.m.



Mayor



Interim City Clerk

