

MINUTES OF REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING

Caucus Room, Belize City Council

10:00 a.m.

August 29th, 2023

Present at the meeting were the following:

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| 1. Mr. Bernard Wagner | Mayor |
| 2. Mr. Allan Pollard Jr. | Deputy Mayor |
| 3. Ms. Natasha Pipersburgh | Councillor |
| 4. Ms. Kaya Cattouse | Councillor |
| 5. Mr. Michael Novelo | Councillor |
| 6. Mr. Edmund Kwan | Councillor |
| 7. Mr. Javier Castellanos | Councillor |
| 8. Mrs. Stephanie Hamilton | Councillor |
| 9. Mr. Albert Vaughan | Councillor |

Absent with Reason:

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| 10. Ms. Deannie Requena | Councillor |
| 11. Mr. Micah Goodin | Councillor |

Mrs. Stephanie Lindo-Garbutt	City Administrator
Ms. Carissa Casanova	Admin. Manager, Office of the Mayor
Mr. Eluide Miller	Office Manager, Office of the Mayor



Mayor Wagner commenced the meeting at 10:15 AM.

Mayor Wagner explained that a representative from the Order of Distinguished Services would be present to observe the Council meeting. He continued by thanking those present for making the effort to attend. Mayor Wagner also explained that as they forge ahead as a Council, it is important to note that there are roughly only about 6 months left in their term. He added that it has been a great journey despite the challenges that have been faced. Mayor Wagner then indicated that Councillor Vaughan would be leading the group in prayer.

Prior to leading the recitation of the National Prayer, Councillor Vaughan shared the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi with those present.

1.0 Belize National Prayer

Councillor Albert Vaughan led all who were present in reciting the National Prayer of Belize.

2.0 Welcome Remarks

2.1 Mayor Wagner began his welcome remarks by noting that the last Council meeting was held in June. He added that there are so many things happening around us in our society, but that the Councillors should never lose sight of the fact that they have a job to do.

2.2 Mayor Wagner continued by stating that in 2021, voters of the City gave the present Administration a clear mandate to serve within a set timeframe, and they are to serve the people with all their knowledge, strength, and wisdom.

2.3 Mayor Wagner further encouraged the Councillors to press forward and stated that they cannot stop the job halfway. He expressed that as the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and Councillors they must find the grit within themselves to complete the job.

2.4 Mayor Wagner advised that at the end of the day, residents will judge the Council on whether or not they are able to accomplish what they have been tasked to do. He further added that the world is full of distractions, but the work must be completed on behalf of the people.

2.5 Mayor Wagner concluded his opening remarks by sharing that there are many good things happening across the city as it relates to infrastructure, and the Council's social mandate. He explained that the Council has done a good job of building a family-oriented community, and reminded those present of their duty to complete the mandate which was given to them by the people in 2021.

3.0 Ratification of the June 13th, 2023, Regular Meeting Minutes

3.1 Correction to attendance, Councillor Cattouse was not present at the last Council meeting.

3.2 Councillor Kwan moved for the June 13th, 2023, regular meeting minutes to be ratified. Seconded by Councillor Hamilton. All present agreed to have the meeting minutes accepted as presented.

4.0 Matters Arising from the Minutes

4.1 The City Administrator advised the Council that Mr. Moody (Chief Engineer) from the Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Housing was to provide the Council with a formal correspondence relating to their intentions within the area of the Cemetery. The City Administrator further advised that while they have not provided anything specific to the Cemetery, a letter has been received which asks that the Council adopt certain portions of the highways and main arteries in the city. The Ministry has expressed that the section of the highway from Hattieville to Orange Street is last on their list and indicated that their priority is the section of the George Price Highway between Hattieville and Belmopan. The City Administrator further explained that they are looking at a two (2) to three (3) year window.

4.2 Councillor Vaughan advised that the Council must look at the letter carefully, as this proposal will put a heavier burden on the Council. In particular the stretch of Chetumal boulevard.

4.3 Councillor Vaughan added that he supports that MIDH wants to hand over these sections to the Council, but that it should come with additional subvention. He further advised that the Works Manager should provide a cost estimate. He further expressed that he believes the initiative to be a good one, because streets that belong to the City are finally being handed over, however it will come at a cost.

- 4.4 The City Administrator advised that MIDH is keeping Chetumal St. and handing over Central American Blvd. to the Council.
- 4.5 Deputy Mayor Pollard agreed that it would be expensive to routinely conduct maintenance on the roads.
- 4.6 Mayor Wagner then agreed that the Works Manager should conduct an estimate of what it would cost the Council to maintain the sections of road being turned over to the Council per year.
- 4.7 The City Administrator then explained that the Council is in the process of approaching a certified engineer to discuss the position of technical manager in the building unit. Thereafter, the Council will be writing to the Ministry to request their appointment.
- 4.8 The City Administrator provided an update on the structure at the foot of the Swing Bridge. The structure was given a lease which has been relinquished to the Belize Tourism Board (BTB). A discussion was held with Director Carballo, who was advised that a formal letter requesting the same should be sent to the Council.
- 4.9 The City Administrator then provided an update on the Derelict Vehicles Campaign. She shared that 50 derelicts were identified in the Pickstock Constituency, and 31 have been removed thus far. The operation started by removing vehicle shells and the remaining vehicles are in decent condition, so those will be relocated once the storage facility is sorted out.
- 4.10 The City Administrator was asked if she had met with BTB as they were willing to pay for the removal of 300 vehicles and move on from Pickstock to the Lake Independence Constituency.
- 4.11 The City Administrator indicated that she has not scheduled a meeting with the minister, but discussed it with the board chairman and Mr. Carballo, however they were not aware of the arrangement.
- 4.12 The City Administrator was advised that the meeting with the minister is important because there is a disconnect as the director seems to be unaware of the initiative.
- 4.13 Councillor Hamilton indicated that the decision to support the Derelict Vehicle Initiative was made at the board level, therefore Mr. Carballo would not have been involved.

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- 4.14 Councillor Castellanos updated the Council on the Handyman workshop. He indicated that although there were differences of opinion in how best to execute the initiative, they were nonetheless able to get it done. He indicated that this demonstrates that people will not wait on the Council if it takes too long to carry out an initiative. He further explained that the certificate issued to the participants was approved by the Ministry. He thanked Mayor Wagner and the Councillors for supporting projects which benefit the people.
- 4.15 The City Administrator explained that the initiative was not deliberately delayed, but rather, proper information on the execution was lacking. The City Administrator further added that the Local Economic Development Unit actively pursued the initiative to get it done.
- 4.16 Mayor Wagner noted that it was a collective effort and commended the Council and the Administrative team in order to carry out the initiative. He further added that a lesson is learned each time a new initiative is carried out, and that a road map has already been established if the initiative is to continue in the coming year.
- 4.15 The City Administrator then advised the Council that the proposed locations for the placement of the statue of Mahatma Gandhi have not been able to garner the support of the area representative and an alternative solution has been issued to The National Institute of Culture and History (NICH).
- 4.16 Councillor Vaughan referred to the mayor's previous statement about lessons being learned when implementing initiatives, and requested that Minister Musa place his objection to the placement of the statue in writing.
- 4.17 Councillor Vaughan further added that Belize City Council is the only entity with the authority to approve the use of public space. He added that the Indian Community is requesting to place their National Hero in Rock Park and further advised that the request be placed in writing.
- 4.18 The City Administrator explained that the alternative location was for the statue to be placed at the Mahatma Gandhi Resource Center in Orange Walk Town.
- 4.19 Mayor Wagner advised that this decision needs to come from the Foreign Ministry as this is a Geopolitical Issue. He further added that as a City, the Council is not able to make the final decision.

4.20 Councillor Pipersburgh indicated that she was the one who liaised with the Minister and advised that she was also not in support of the placement of the statue. She further explained that as a Council they should ensure that this process is standardized as this will not be the last request of this nature. Each community will have someone that they would like to honor in some form, and there needs to be an established process in place.

4.21 Councillor Vaughan reminded the deputy mayor that a bust was erected through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs when the Mexican President visited, and in this instance The Ministry of Foreign Affairs seems to be shirking its responsibility.

4.22 The City Administrator committed to writing to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Minister Musa. She advised that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is under the impression that the necessary approvals have been given as they contacted the Council to confirm the details of the inauguration.

4.23 The City Administrator further added that the Embassy of India seems to be skipping all the steps that needed to be taken and expect the Council to be fine with a location of their choosing. This decision is one that should have been brought to caucus.

4.24 The Council was advised that the statue is already in the city.

4.25 The City Administrator asked to approach the Chief of Staff and ask for their intervention so it can be discussed at the cabinet level.

4.25 Councillor Pipersburgh suggested that the Embassy purchase a property, build a park, and erect the statue there.

4.26 Councillor Kwan then added that there is a park in Panama dedicated to Confucious similar to what Councillor Pipersburgh described.

5.0 Announcements by the Mayor

5.1 Mayor Wagner thanked National Celebrations Commission (NCC) for the launch of the theme for this year's September Celebrations and notified the Council that the Flag Raising Ceremony will be held on Friday, September 1st at 6:00 am at the flag monument.

5.1 Mayor Wagner then announced that the Council is continuing to work along with the area representatives to establish the type of infrastructure they wish to see in their areas.

5.2 Mayor Wagner added that significant physical infrastructure work is being carried out, and commended the efforts and work that is being put into the projects.

5.3 Mayor Wagner noted that an abandoned properties forum was held which was well received. He explained that he met with the Deputy Prime Minister, who indicated his support, but requested that it be done in phases. The first of which would be to identify a batch of properties (20-30) to be acquired from the government would then be turned into parks and playgrounds.

5.4 Mayor Wagner further advised that the Valuation Manager is working to identify the first 20-30 lots across the city. The deputy Prime Minister will then take it to Cabinet following the necessary procedures.

5.5 Mayor Wagner then commented on the most recent Community Festival and stated that the Freetown community came out to support, and it turned out to be a really successful event.

5.6 Mayor Wagner acknowledged the participation of the Freetown Committee as well as the work of the Council's PR Department. He further added that all vendors were sold out.

5.7 Mayor Wagner then advised that he had a meeting with the new NEMO Coordinator, Mr. Mendez, who is a humble person. The Mayor further expressed that he now anticipates a better coordinated effort and relationship between NEMO and CEMO.

5.8 The Mayor then continued by informing the Council that he was able to join the Prime Minister in South Korea, and on behalf of the city, entered into a Sister City Relationship with Busan. Mayor Wagner explained that Busan is a large city that is comparable to Los Angeles. He advised that Busan is hoping to host the World Expo and is hoping for Belize City's support in this endeavor.

5.9 The Mayor then acknowledged the Belize City Council Dragons InterOffice Basketball team and advised that the season starts on Friday. The Council's game starts at 9 PM, and Mayor Wagner informed those present that the Council has not lost an interoffice tournament since 2018.

5.10 Mayor Wagner commended the Programs Department for the Summer Programs, and thanked the Council and Administrative team who got the program off the ground. The Mayor explained that all the various activities which took place, transformed the summer into an active one.



5.11 Mayor ended his announcements by explaining that the Council is now looking forward to the Pickstek Community Festival which will be held at the Civic. He explained that the last scheduled date was in conflict with the Volleyball championships and noted that people from across the city enjoy getting together to have inclusive, family-friendly events.

6.0 General Updates from the City Administrator

6.1 The City Administrator began by first explaining that it makes a difference when relevant numbers are used to quantify the impact of the work that the Council has done.

6.1 The City Administrator then stated that the Council continued to pursue employee engagement through Shelter Management training (new employees at the Enforcement Department being trained).

6.2 The City Administrator also informed the Council that a member of staff has been chosen to represent the Council in Taiwan this October at a workshop focusing on Data Gathering. The City Administrator then clarified that Stacey Cayetano, the Council's GIS Specialist, was specifically requested.

6.3 The City Administrator then explained that staff socials have made a difference in boosting employee morale. There has been more comradery among the staff, and even residents now look forward to the staff socials.

6.4 The City Administrator then notified the Council that Health Checkups and Workout sessions have been taking place. She advised that the workout sessions start at 5:15 pm. The sessions alternate between the roof at City Hall and walks around the City.

6.5 The City Administrator then mentioned that Adult Swim Class had taken place during the summer for Council Staff with varying degrees of completion.

6.6 Councillor Cattouse mentioned that the Sanitation Department's football team remained undefeated in the staff social games. The City Administrator agreed and added that the workout sessions are hosted by the Programs and LED Managers, though it seems to have waned; however, some staff members are continuing with the workouts on their own.

6.7 The City Administrator then acknowledged that the Inter-Office Basketball season opens this week, and the Council is looking for a 5peat.

- 6.9 The City Administrator notified the Council that the Property Tax compliance rate is at 68.44% only five (5) months into the fiscal year. She acknowledged that collections for the months of July and August don't stock up well against the previous months but explained that this is due the Council's slow season.
- 6.10 The City Administrator then shared that the Council collected one million dollars more than it did at this time last year. She explained that when property taxes are collected at the start of the year, the compliance rate tends to be higher. During the Summer months, residents are thinking about back to school, and other expenses.
- 6.11 The City Administrator shared that collection for Trade License is at 89% compliance, but noted that the figure was skewed, due to outstanding businesses that need to be closed, and newly approved businesses that have not paid as yet.
- 6.12 Collection rates for liquor license fees are at 98% compliance, and traffic is performing at 96% of what was estimated.
- 6.13 The City Administrator then updated the Council on the ongoing park rehabilitation at the Memorial Park. She explained that eight (8) booths have been rehabilitated, and that BTB turned over the booths to the Council early last year.
- 6.14 The City Administrator further explained that the Council started the rehabilitation just before Hurricane Lisa but had gotten sidetracked in the aftermath of the storm. Nonetheless, the rehabilitation efforts started again this year, and the existing structures were turned into single booths. When the Council received the booths there were no service entrances, however all the booths now have them, and have had the doors replaced and walls sealed as they were not weather-ready.
- 6.15 The City Administrator then notified the Council that the application for the booths have been reviewed and most have applicants assigned to them.
- 6.16 Councillor Vaughan expressed his hopes that the booths are available for the "small" man, and that the booths are leased at a minimal rate so that the vendors can move in.
- 6.17 The City Administrator advised Councillor Vaughan that the same rates at Digi Park are being applied to Memorial Park and added that the vendor mix was interesting.
- 6.18 The City Administrator also advised that the Pergola's at the Memorial Park are being renovated, however the repairs are more extensive than anticipated because they have rotted over time. The City Administrator explained that the pergolas were initially installed in 2016 and were not maintained.

- 6.19 The City Administrator notified the Council that the installation of new grills along the park's perimeter were also being completed and should be finished by the end of August.
- 6.20 Following the completion of the repairs above, the City Administrator advised that the remaining repairs would be the roof and gazebo renovations, which will be addressed after the September Celebrations. The City Administrator further advised that the roof is not critical for the September Celebrations because some replacements were done, and the stage will only be used for the 20th night and 21st morning.
- 6.21 The City Administrator then informed the Council that one booth is under construction at Digi Park, and that the police booth will be replaced. The police department has committed to reoccupying the booth once it has been replaced.
- 6.22 Wooden benches are being installed and Digi Park, and lighting is to be installed on the pier, however this will not be done before September.
- 6.23 Moving on to Dolphin Park, the City Administrator advised that a playset and vendor booth have been installed. She noted that the Council has partnered with Minister Musa on the initiative, who included a sign being handpainted by local artist, Chelsea Johnson.
- 6.24 In regard to the Belize City Accelerator Program, the City Administrator notified the Council that two cohorts were being facilitated at the same time.
- 6.25 The City Administrator then acknowledged that the Council's Infrastructure plans for the year was ambitious. She explained that initially a list of 90 streets were identified, however, that list has now grown to 130. The City Administrator noted that sixty-eight (68) streets have been completed, with 13 in progress, and 8 scheduled to begin in late September.
- 6.26 The mayor recommended that a breakfast with the media be held and that they be taken on a walkthrough of the streets that have been rehabilitated. He explained that the Council is really pushing, and the City Administrator agreed.
- 6.27 The City Administrator then notified the Council that Bi-weekly highlights, and Ads are being run, on the morning shows, and shared her observation that sometimes the Council is unable to hit home with how much work has been done. In an effort to combat this, they have found that recaps hit home, but are difficult to do. She added that they have been trying to come up with a way to make it more relatable to residents.

- 6.28 The City Administrator then updated those present on the upcoming initiatives of the the Belize City Council, namely: National Flag Day- Official Ceremony, Patriotic Colors Day for Staff, the Fire Engine Parade, Living Legends Concert, J'ouvert, Carnival, 10th Day Ceremony and Parade, the Council's 10th Bram, National Service Day (Ceremony location needs to be verified. Works on Pickstock St. are mostly completed), Independence Day, Uniform Parade with a Belize City Council Float, the 21st Bash after the parade.
- 6.29 The City Administrator Advised that the in-house events committee is looking at working with the elderly for National Service Day and doing something more active rather than planting trees.
- 6.30 The Council was advised that the entertainment line up for the Council events have been announced. She added that the Council is planning to market Belize City as the place to be on the weekend of the 8-10th of September.
- 6.31 The City Administrator then mentioned that the Belize City Marathon was also an event that was scheduled to take place on the last Sunday of September.
- 6.32 The Council was advised that this year's Mural in commemoration of Belize's Independence will be completed and unveiled. The City Administrator noted that the Council is working with artist Gilvano Swasey.
- 6.33 The City Administrator explained that the Pickstock Community Festival is scheduled for October 7th however, the Council will be in touch with them regarding the date given that it is a long weekend. The event will be hosted on the Civic Center grounds.
- 6.34 The City Administrator advised the Council that the Anniversary of the Super Sale in the downtown area is approaching. The PR team and LED Manager have been tasked with gathering data on how many visitors go to each booth, and what they make in sales. She expressed that the Super Sale has proven to be the best social program in putting people to work and noted that the Mayor has tasked the team to put the figures together.
- 6.35 The City Administrator explained that the pantry program is good to subsidize for a time, but putting people to work is the best social program when fathers and mothers are working and putting their salaries into their families. This is what the Council has been doing with BCAP, Community Festivals, and Super Sales.

6.36 Data collection from the business will be carried out at the end of the events, the City Administrator explained that she has already spoken to the PR Department about the same.

6.37 Councillor Castellanos shared the experience of one vendor at a recent festival and the growth that they have gone through.

6.38 The City Administrator advised that because the Super Sale has been successful, the Council is at a point where it should consider capping the number of businesses that can participate as they have literally run out of space. After King Street is usually a dead zone, regardless of what type of attraction is placed there. The Council has never had an incident in 5 years; one contributing factor might be limitation of alcohol at the event.

6.39 The City Administrator then reviewed the strategic initiatives being undertaken by the Council. These include:

New Uniforms- for Administrative, Field, and Operational Support support staff. The Council has not been able to provide new uniforms for staff in the last 5 years. And it is already time for new uniforms for field support staff.

6.40 Councillor Pipersburgh asked if municipal court staff would be included in the uniform distribution. The City Administrator confirmed the same.

6.41 The City Administrator stated that the order for the uniforms have been placed and a down payment has been made, it is estimated that the uniforms are 40 days out.

6.42 Councillor Cattouse asked what the cost of the uniforms will be. The City Administrator explained that the total cost for the uniforms is about \$130,000.00, with each employee receiving four (4) sets of uniforms each (410 employees).

6.48 The City Administrator advised that the Completion and Handing Over of Pump Station are imminent. She explained that the Mayor toured the facility a few weeks ago; it is impressive and will eventually be handed over to the City. She acknowledged that it will also be costly to maintain but has the potential to generate revenue if managed properly.

6.49 In addition to the initiatives mentioned previously, the City Administrator advised that Electric taxis are being purchased to complement the ebuses being provided for the E-mobility project, the Garbage Compactors are scheduled to be delivered in November, and the Council is in discussions for the purchase of a new backhoe.

6.50 The Council is also purchasing 10 Fitness Nooks to be retrofitted at parks throughout the city.

6.51 Other Council events for the calendar year will include the Garifuna Settlement Day- host activity at City Hall, Tree Lighting Dec. 1st.

6.52 The City Administrator concluded her presentation by discussing the Back-to-School Initiative. She explained that the handing over ceremony was the following day, and that Councillors would receive tickets to distribute. The City Administrator added that bags had been distributed to staff; each department received a memo requesting that employees in need submitted their names to receive bags for both primary and high schoolers. All employees were given an opportunity to participate in the program.

7. Notices

7.1 No matters were tabled.

8. Questions

8.1 No matters were tabled.

9. Petitions

9.1 Councillor Vaughan explained that there is a night club in the St. Martin's area that has been operating beyond its liquor license, and that someone was shot in the area over the weekend.

9.2 Councillor Vaughan then recommended that the nightclub's license be taken away, and that they only be issued a general publican's license. He stated that the club seem to be enjoying special treatment as they get extensions and have been operating up until the wee hours of the morning with loud music. He reiterated that someone was shot in the area of the club, which is located at the intersection of two local gangs. He petitioned the Council to guide the Liquor Licensing Board on the matter.

9.3 Councillor Novelo advised the Council that Mr. Paul Esquilliano has worked at the Council for over thirty-four (34) years, and petitioned the body recognize his contributions to the organization by presenting him with a plaque and a small ceremony. Councillor Novelo explained that he would be engaging with the manager so an event can be held with the staff of the cemetery department.

9.4 Councillor Hamilton asked if there was a system in place for recognizing employees who have worked at the Council for several years and advised that if there isn't then there should be.

9.5 The City Administrator advised that the Council had publicly recognized long serving employees and added that Mr. Esquiliano was one of those persons. Additionally, it is usually left up to the Department to plan a social or event at the time of the employee's separation from the Council, if support from the Council is requested, it is given.

9.6 Deputy Pollard advised the Council that a Mr. Bhojwani is constructing a home in Bella Vista, and requested his assistance to see if the Council could continue with the works to the street on which the home is being built. He would like the street paved up to his home which is the end of the street on a dead end.

9.7 Deputy Pollard stated that he advised Mr. Bhojwani that the matter would have to be brought to caucus and added that the resident wants the remaining section leading to his house, to be uniformed with the Chip & Seal that is already there.

9.8 Deputy Pollard added that the resident is willing to pay for the work to be done, if the Council considers offsetting the cost of the work against his property taxes. By Mr. Bhojwani's estimate the remaining area to be paved on the street is 90'x20', and it would cost approximately, \$7,200.00 to complete.

9.9 Councillor Vaughan requested that the area representative be consulted on the matter first.

10. Presentation of Reports from Councillors

10.1 Councillor Hamilton reported that the Planning Department would be making six (6) submissions in the meeting.

10.3 Councillor Hamilton also advised that the Council made a contribution to the Queen of the Bay, Belize City Committee, in support of the contestant representing Belize City.

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- 10.4 Councillor Pipersburgh reported that she was able to meet with purple shirts from RF&G Insurance in regard to adopting Jane Usher Park.
- 10.5 Councillor Pipersburgh also added that she was personally able to provide 50 packed school bags through Life Skill Multipurpose Belize in the Yarborough area. She added that the kids who received the bags, very much appreciated the supplies.
- 10.7 In addition to the school bags, Councillor Pipersburgh advised that seventy-five (75) children were also able to receive school shoes and tennis shoes.
- 10.8 Councillor Pipersburgh also reported that a haircut drive would be hosted at the Caribbean Shores office, from 10 am – 4 pm, and another is being hosted in the Lake Independence Community behind the complex building also from 10 am - 4 pm on Friday and Saturday, respectively.
- 10.9 Councillor Castellanos reported that booth 49 became available at the Michael Finnegan Market, and that the Market committee met and discussed the applications for the booth. He further advised that two persons applied for the booth, one of which is Ms. Indira Rivero of Indira's Spices. Booth cleared out by current occupant. Hope to be taken over by Septemeber.
- 10.11 Deputy Mayor Pollard advised that he had nothing to report at that time.
- 10.12 Councillor Vaughan offered his condolences to the Director of Administration, Ms. Rudon, whose mother was buried last week, and to Councillor Requena who is experiencing a difficult time.
- 10.13 Councillor Vaughn noted that the Belize City Council plays a major role in the Nation Celebrations Committee and added that the Mayor represents the Association of Mayors. Councillor Vaughan further expressed that he is looking forward to the Council's continued participation.
- 10.14 Councillor Vaughan also commended the team responsible for organizing the night festival in the Freetown Community. He explained that the team worked very hard, and that residents are still talking about the festival and asking for it to happen again.
- 10.15 Councillor Vaughn then requested street works assistance for 4th Street, particularly the section on the left.
- 10.16 Councillor Vaughan then thanked Mayor Wagner for providing the Councilors 20 pantry bags per month.

10.17 Councillor Vaughan then requested continuity with training and special constable certification for newly hired enforcement officers.

10.19 Councillor Vaughan then informed the Council that the municipal court is still down a magistrate.

10.20 The Council's security contract is almost up, but the contract will not be renewed before the end of the term. Those present were advised that an addendum to the current contract might be needed.

10.21 Councillor Vaughan also discussed the old Traffic booth on Johnson St and asked that it be disposed of.

10.22 Lastly, Councillor Vaughan reported that he was able to get three children in school last week by providing desks and chairs to the school as the principal of the school said they didn't have space and they also didn't have chairs. Councillor Vaughan noted that the children live in Belama.

10.23 Councillor Cattouse reported that the Belize City half marathon is coming up, as it usually takes place on the last Sunday in September. She requested support from the Council to assist in the event.

10.24 Councillor Cattouse also reported that she has been utilizing her social assistance to assist residents with getting their kids back to school.

10.25 Councillor Cattouse thanked the Mayor and Staff for providing school bags to those in need as they all have been approached by residents for back-to-school supplies.

10.26 Councillor Novelo advised that the Cemetery Department has staff members who have left or are leaving the Council. These include Eric Alvarez, Kenneth Gibson, and Paul Esquilliano. As a result, the department is struggling to keep up with the maintenance during the rainy season.

10.27 Councillor Novelo then requested replacements for those leaving and advised that he would be more integral in the recruitment of persons assigned to the cemetery. He added that he would try to ensure that the selection process is fair but added that recommendations from Councillors are always welcome.

10.28 Councillor Novelo was advised that if these positions were not factored in as a cost the department will likely be exceeding their budget. The Council would surely look to filling the post held by Mr. Esquilliano and revisit the other positions during the budget process.

10.29 Councillor Vaughan then stated that as per policy, if the Council is going to enforce that individuals will retire at the age of 55 then exceptions should not be made for others. He explained that some good people were sent home at age 55, and he cannot support and asked the Council not to support allowing others to stay past that age.

10.30 Councillor Hamilton explained that contracts could be offered to those who were over the age of 55.

10.31 Deputy Mayor Pollard stated that exceptions can't be made for one (1) person; it takes away from the entire exercise that was conducted.

10.32 Mayor Wagner explained that sometimes the circumstance of an individual deserves a deeper look, sometimes they don't have anywhere else to go, and you can give them an extra year. Mayor Wagner continued by stating that individuals were returned so as not to keep building gratuity costs.

10.33 Councillor Vaughan expressed that this is a serious concern for him, and added that he understands the cost effects on the Council, but it sets a bad precedent and he has to answer to his people.

10.34 Councillor Novelo expressed his agreement with the sentiments shared by Deputy Mayor Pollard and Councillor Vaughan.

10.35 Councillor Kwan thanked the Council for their support with the Belize City Accelerator Program, and reported that cohorts 5&6 will be hosted in Septemeber, he invited Mayor Wagner and Deputy Mayor Pollard to join in a show of unity.

11.0 Request for leave to move the adjournment of the Council on definite matter of urgent public importance.

11.1 No matters were tabled.

12.0 Motions by Councillors

12.1 Mayor Wagner Introduced a Motion for the Belize City Council to adopt the Responsibility and full jurisdiction of the Central American Boulevard, as well as portions of the George Price and Phillip Goldson Highways, as proposed by the Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Housing.

12.2 Based on previous discussions, Mayor Wagner explained that it would be more prudent to conduct a cost analysis rather than continue with the motion but added that its approval would a long way in the City progressing and moving forward.

12.3 Mayor Wagner therefore, recommended that the matter be deferred until cost analysis is completed and received.

12.4 Deputy Mayor Pollard expressed his support for the motion's deferral.

12.5 Councillor Kwan also expressed his support for the deferral. He added that the Council has conducted repairs to these areas before because the City Council gets blamed for not addressing the issues as they arise. Councillor Kwan also stated that the Ministry should provide some kind of assistance to help the Council maintain these areas.

12.6 Councillor Vaughan shared the sentiments of Councillor Kwan and noted that the stop light at the corner of Vernon St. and CA Blvd., which is managed by the Ministry, is still not operational.

12.7 It was noted that an update had been requested update from City Engineer just this week and that the specifications for the stop light are being shared with FT Williams as they were able to repair the stop light in Belmopan. FT Williams is to conduct an assessment to see if they will be able to make the repairs.

12.8 It was also noted that overlap between the Council and the ministry has caused confusion in the past, especially when it comes to maintaining these areas. Councillor Vaughan noted the potential for revenues as well with the Street Reserves.

12.9 Those present were advised that clarity needs to be sought from the ministry on exactly what portions of the roads and highways are being handed over.

Councillor Castellanos asked to be excused from the meeting at 12:46 PM.

12.10 Mayor Wagner introduced a Motion for the Belize City Council to Adopt a New Pay Scale and Job Classification effective April 1st, 2024, as recommended by the compensation survey report conducted.

12.11 Mayor Wagner explained that discussions started in 2019 with Christian Workers' Union (CWU) to update the Collective Bargaining Agreement. The Salient Group was asked to conduct a survey of salaries and the structure of the current payscales so that they are relevant to our time. The Salient Group enlisted the help of seven (7) other companies, from a cross section of industries including other local governments, and statutory bodies, to gauge the competitiveness of the Council's compensation.

12.12 Out of the survey a new compensation package was developed, because when compared to the market, the rates on the current payscale a way below market rates. In this regard, the Council has found it difficult to attract or retain talent as the pay scales are very low. This exercise puts the Council on par with the lower-skilled workers.

12.13 The Mayor explained that on the new payscale, people who do similar work are grouped together, and that the minimum proposed salary for staff is \$5.50 an hour. The Council wants to be the employer of choice and ensures that it remains competitive. The current payscales are not equitably distributed across the organization.

12.14 Mayor Wagner continued to explain that the team came up with the proposed classification and compensation packages, which introduced 11 job categories based on the new payscales.

12.15 To provide context, the Mayor shared the breakdown of the effects the newly proposed payscale would have on staff in various departments. He explained that the annual salary for employees in the Sanitation was at 1.782 million dollars, and the new annual salary would be 1.9 million dollars, he added that these figures represented one of the the largest changes at 12%.

12.16 Wagner then shared the percent increase in salaries for various departments with those present. He noted that the Parks, CEMO, HR, and the PR Departments were grouped together however, on the current paysclae, the salaries were still not comparative with the current market value for those positions.

12.17 More importantly, Mayor Wagner explained that of all the Council's departments, 85% of all staff would be positively impacted by the salary increase. He noted that at the municipal court every single employee would be impacted.

12.18 Mayor Wagner also added that on average, employees would see an 8% increase in their salaries. He explained that when he met with the CBA committee, they wanted to not only look at the CBA but also look at how to build a better environment for the staff along with CWU in terms of providing educational opportunities and feeling like part of a community.

12.19 Mayor Wagner advised that this takes the annual cost of salaries from 7.2 million dollars to 7.8 million. He explained that the change would need to be budgeted for, and that the Council would have seen about a 5-6% regardless.

12.20 Mayor Wagner opened to floor for debate regarding the motion.

12.21 Various Councilors expressed that the updating of the pay scale is long overdue and has created a misconception that the Council and Union are at odds. There is a perception that the Council supports just Council matters with its own agendas, while the CWU looks out for the best interest of the employees, however the Council is doing the same.

12.22 There is a need to ensure that the city is getting value for money when it comes to labor and safeguard the mandate the Council. The Council is offering the employees more than what they are asking for as it wants to ensure employees are in a better position.

12.23 Councillor Hamilton remarked that by looking at the report, it seems effective as it has covered all areas of compensation. Councillor Hamilton then offered her support for the motion.

12.24 Mayor Wagner moved for the Council to adopt new pay scale to be implemented in new fiscal year.

12.25 Councillor Cattouse seconded the motion, and the Council unanimously voted in favor of the new pay scale.

12.26 Mayor Wagner then explained that as a part of the Council's push to become a smart city, E-buses have been procured. When they are in the City, the Council wants to ensure that they are running on streets which are in decent conditions. He advised that the team has been looking at the number of bus stops along the entire route and wishes to continue to build on the ecosystem.

12.27 Mayor Wagner added that the Council wants to invest in assets that would generate some sort of return and revenue back to the city. He explained that the Parking lot project should be coming on board soon, and that turnstiles are being installed at the restrooms at Digi Park to collect the revenue at that location.

12.28 Mayor Wagner then mentioned that the minister has commended the Council on the e-bus initiative and advised that it could be used to build tourism. In addition to the buses, Etaxis will make up a critical part of the push toward a smart city.

12.29 Mayor Wagner maintained that the Council is not here to drive taxis out of business and advised that the pricing will be a bit higher than taxis, so we don't undersell them at any given time.

12.30 The Mayor also advised that Council will be hiring drivers and providing a cashless service. He explained that he is asking for the Council's support in procuring four (4) electric taxis. E-Volution Limited is the company offering the best package to the Council, though several were considered including Caribbean Motors, and King Motors. E-Volution limited however, is offering an attractive payment schedule, and also has plans to install charging stations country-wide.

12.31 Mayor Wagner further explained that the vehicles can go 236 miles on a single charge, that the council will own the vehicles, and will hire employees.

12.32 The Council has been meeting with Mi driva, an app that would potentially be assisting with the management of the driver/car as well. Cameras would be installed in the cabs, and the team is also considering airport runs on weekends, offering a premium service while pushing green technology.

12.33 Mayor Wagner moved for a motion for the Belize City Council to procure four electric vehicles to be utilized as e-taxis as a part of the Council's e-mobility pilot project.

12.34 The motion was seconded by Councillor Kwan.

12.35 Deputy Mayor Pollard noted that he was not familiar with the brand of vehicles, and observed that they were not being procured from a dealer per se, so as far as maintenance, and in terms of having spare parts readily available, he has reservations.

12.36 Deputy Mayor Pollard further noted that the pricing and flexible payment structure were impressive. Deputy Pollard also expressed that he is not aware of the downtime that would be needed when the vehicles are in for repairs.

12.37 Deputy Pollard was reassured that E-Volution has partnered with Westrac to conduct the servicing of the vehicles and has committed to having parts in stock and in country. Additionally, the authorized dealer and sales manager for the vehicles visited China to meet with the manufacturer.

12.38 The Council was advised that there would be a tactical and strategic rolling out of the taxis as it is not the goal to have the taxi associations feel threatened by the initiative.

12.39 In reality, the Council is carrying out a test from which taxi operators could learn and eventually invest in their own EVs so that they see greater returns. The Council was again assured that quotations were received from at least 4 vendors regionally and locally, but ultimately, the payment and terms offered by E-Volution Ltd. were very attractive.

12.40 Councillor Vaughan advised that the Council has to ensure that it is not only a good investment but a sound investment that can be backed in all areas. He expressed his concern about the drivers considering the culture of people who drive. He expressed that the Council needs to ensure that responsible people are employed by the Council to be drivers.

12.41 Councillor Vaughan added that the bus and taxi associations will be very concerned. He recommended informing them of the Council's plans and added that if they are told what is being planned, they may support it.

12.42 Councillor Vaughan expressed his support nonetheless and commended the Mayor on bringing new and innovative things to the Council. He shared his desire that when they leave the Council, it is left as a better place, with raised standards and a good structure in place.

12.43 Councillor Kwan shared that his full support of the initiative and noted that the price is good, and that the brand seems to be popular in China and of good quality.

12.44 Councillor Kwan expressed his belief that the taxi drivers should be given an option to own the vehicle after a period of time, a BCAP of sorts, where the driver will pay the Council to eventually own the vehicle. He also expressed the belief that if the vehicle is down for any long period of time, the driver should not get paid for those days.

12.45 Councillor Novelo expressed that the Council is promoting a cleaner and smarter City, but inquired about the possibility of private investors approaching E-Volution or to Council to participate in the initiative and be a part of the Smart City being built.

12.46 Mayor Wagner explained that the initiative is about bringing everybody together and expanding. He advised that if a potential investor wants to buy-in to etaxis that person may feel more comfortable if someone ventures into the operations first and are able to get the required data to see how it fares.

12. 47 Mayor Wagner further advised that the City is taking the first step to gather the data, and he is sure that E-Volution would welcome and allow other people to get similar packages. He explained that the Council wants all current taxi drivers to be driving etaxis. However, for the initial phase, relevant information gathering will inform the potential for scaling up.

12.48 The City Administrator advised that E-Volution Auto is using the Council as their launchpad into the market and is planning on building its dealership and showroom on the George Price Highway.

12.49 Councillor Hamilton offered her support and stated that these types of projects help in sustainability and conservation efforts. She further added that she was able to research the brand, and its lowest rating is a 4 star. Councillor Hamilton also stated that the Belize Tourism Board has an electric car and they have had no issues with Westrac in terms of servicing.

12.51 The Council was advised that options for partnering with BTB for advertising on the taxis are also being considered.

12.52 The Council voted unanimously in support of the motion.

12. 53 Mayor Wagner then introduced a motion for the procurement of a backhoe from Benny's Enterprise Limited through an offset of the supplier's trade license and property tax fees, for a period of two years, with a 20% discount being applied to the property taxes for early payment.

12.54 The motion was seconded by Councillor Hamilton.

12.55 Councillor Vaughn explained that it is vital for the organization to procure the backhoe, especially given the hurricane season. He again shared concerns about the drivers of the Council's equipment, and stated that drivers should see to it that items are taken care of so that they last longer.

12.56 He further added that the operators should ensure that the machinery is being handled with proper care, and that the Council should find a way to have employees learn to be responsible for the equipment. He stressed that the funds being used to procure these items are taxpayer dollars. Employees need to show more love and care for equipment and ensure that they are serviced on time through an established routine.

12.57 Councillor Novelo shared that he was in support of Councillor Vaughan's sentiments. He added that the recent purchase of the grader was a good deal, and asked what the comparison of the price from Benny's and the company that is was used to procure the grader. He added his sentiments that it hurts to see the equipment being mishandled by employees.

12.58 Councillor Novelo further explained that preventative maintenance is being done at other entities, who also constantly train their drivers and instill in them the importance of the equipment to the company. He added that the new payment structure might help the Council to attract better drivers.

12.60 Mayor Wagner requested insight from the City Administrator and inquired about the Council's in-house maintenance structure.

12.61 The City Administrator advised that the Council is unable to do routine maintenance on the heavy equipment. She explained that the Sanitation Department works 18 hours a day and leans on the Works Department for their equipment as well.

12.62 The City Administrator further explained that when it comes to operators being more careful, further direction is required at the policy level. She described an incident in which repairs cost between \$7,000-\$9,000 and added that operators can't afford to pay the Council back for the damages sustained.

12.63 The City Administrator also explained that at present, the windshield for one of the backhoes needs to be replaced. It is being reported that the windshield was improperly installed, however someone had to sign off on installation. The City Administrator further explained that other employees are held responsible when they damage Council property, but noted that these costs hurt the Council, and is out of reach for employees to pay back for the damages.

12.64 Councillor Novelo advised that there is a section of the labor law which states that employees cannot be charged for damages.

12.65 Councillor Kwan explained that when something does not belong to someone they don't take care of it, and suggested that employees be placed on suspension when their equipment is down for repairs due to their negligence.

12.66 Councillor Kwan further suggested that the Council procure two backhoes instead of one. He also added that perhaps the teams should not work on weekends, or that the Council pays Overtime for a mechanic to do repairs.

12.67 Councillor Kwan was advised that it is necessary for the Council to work on the weekends.

12.68 Deputy Mayor Pollard expressed his support by stating that an extra backhoe is very much needed at this time. He added that one reason for the Council's infrastructure success has been its commitment to expanding the heavy equipment fleet.

12.69 The Deputy Mayor noted that keeping up with the growing demands of the City is needed. He also added that it is very important that the equipment be serviced, and explained that it is not what you buy, but how you maintain it.

12.70 The Deputy Mayor then said that the Council's machinery operates double the time of construction companies' so it's servicing also needs to be doubled. The lifespan of the equipment is already being cut in half. Deputy Pollard added that the payment arrangement is better, given the urgency.

12.71 The Council was advised that at present, both of the Council's backhoes are down for repairs.

12.72 Councillor Vaughan explained that the Councilors, Mayor and Deputy Mayor, as a body, set the Council's policy. Since a new machine is being brought in, policies should be in place to terminate people who are not performing to the expected standards.

12.73 The Council voted unanimously in support of the motion.

13.0 Submissions from the Building Unit – Ms. Carla Patnett, City Planner

13.1 A proposal from the Ministry of Infrastructure and Housing for the Belize City Council to adopt and take responsibility and jurisdiction of portions of roadways within Belize City limits as follows: Central American Blvd as well as portions of George Price and Philip Goldson Highways. Specifically, the George Price Highway from the Faber's Rd. Roundabout to the intersection with Central American Blvd. Central American Blvd. with the intersection with the George Price Highway to the Flag Roundabout, intersection of Princess Margaret Drive, Freetown Rd. and Philip Goldson Highway. and the Philip Goldson Highway from the Flag Roundabout to the Roundabout intersection with Chetumal St. **MOTION DEFERRED.**

13.2 A request submitted by Ms. Chandra Nandwani of Morrison & Associates for approval to construct a balcony on the 1st and 2nd floors that will be elevated over the public sidewalk, and measuring 12" x 8" along the entire length of the structure erected at parcel 577 on Orange Street. **MOTION APPROVED.**

13.3 A request submitted by the Belize Tourism Board for approval of a five (5) year lease agreement with the Belize City Council for the community shed measuring 20'-0" x 14'-10" erected for commercial use at the foot of the Swing Bridge. **MOTION APPROVED.** The Council approved a five (5) year lease as requested with offset against proven investment and under the condition that the waterhead be installed under the lease agreement and any further need to remove the structure would be at no expense to the Council.

13.4 A request submitted by Mr. Kim Taylor for approval to lease a portion of the public reserve on Mahogany Street to operate his bathroom business. **MOTION APPROVED.** The Council approved a three (3) year lease at the standard rate for double booths on the Mahogany Street Reserve.

13.5 A request submitted by Mr. Dhiraj Nandwani on behalf of the Home Park Area which is inclusive of Henry C. Fairweather Street, St. Luke Street, St. John Street, and St. Edwards Street. Mr. Nandwani is seeking approval from the Council to upgrade Henry C. Fairweather Street, fix the sea wall, install a police booth, and pedestrianize Henry C. Fairweather Street by installing concrete bollards. The street will remain as a linear park area for the general public and at the same time to serve as a family friendly zone for both the public and the residents. The residents are proposing to fund the project at a reasonable cost on behalf of the city at a reasonable cost and request offsetting of property taxes, trade licenses, and any other instruments that can agreed on. **MOTION DENIED.**

13.6 A request submitted by Mr. Ronald Hyde to construct a Pier and Café & Bar measuring 50'-0" x 30'-0" on the buffer across from Block 16 Parcel 58, Seashore Drive in Belize City. **MOTION DEFERRED.** The Council is recommending that this request go to public consultation by the customer before being brought back for approval.

14.0 Other Matters

14.1 Councilor Novelo shared that when the Council had the event in Lake-I, a couple employees of Ranger Security were concerned that they'd be out of a job come September 1st, 2023. Councilor Novelo is suggesting that, for the city residents who work for the company, maybe the council should bite the bullet and extend their contract.

14.2 Mayor Wagner noted that the Council is extending the contract for Ranger until the end of March 2022 in line with the Council's policy to not approve any contract that goes well beyond its term. As such, the newly elected Council will have the opportunity to deliberate on this matter following the upcoming municipal elections in March of 2024.

15.0 Adjournment

15.1 Councilor Pipersburgh moved for the meeting to be adjourned. Seconded by Councilor Kwan. The meeting was adjourned at 3:10 p.m.


BERNARD WAGNER
MAYOR


STEPHANIE LINDO-GARBUTT
CITY ADMINISTRATOR

