

MINUTES OF REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING

Caucus Room, Belize City Council

March 7th, 2025

10:00 a.m.

Present at the meeting were the following:

1. Mr. Bernard Wagner
2. Mr. Allan Pollard Jr.
3. Mr. Javier Castellanos
4. Ms. Kaya Cattouse
5. Mrs. Stephanie Hamilton
6. Mr. Eluide Miller
7. Mr. Evan Thompson
8. Mr. Edmund Kwan
9. Mr. Sherwin Garcia
10. Mr. Malcolm Nunez
11. Mr. Dorian Usher

Mayor
Deputy Mayor
Councillor
Councillor
Councillor
Councillor
Councillor
Councillor
Councillor
Councillor

Mr. Albert Vaughan
Ms. Carissa Casanova

City Administrator
Administrative Manager, Office of the
Mayor

Mayor Wagner called the meeting to order at 10:20 AM.

1.0 Belize National Prayer

1.1 Mayor Wagner led all present in reciting the National Prayer of Belize.

2.0 Welcome Remarks

2.1 Mayor Wagner welcomed all present and acknowledged that it had been exactly one year since the Council's election. He emphasized that such milestones provide a valuable opportunity for reflection. With one-third of their term now complete, this moment serves as both a checkpoint and a reminder of the journey ahead. It is a time to assess progress, refine goals, and remain committed to making a lasting impact.


Councillor Cattouse arrived at 10:22 AM.

2.2 Mayor Wagner encouraged each council member to reflect on their contributions over the past year. He highlighted the importance of recognizing accomplishments, addressing shortcomings, and using this opportunity to refocus and reenergize for the remaining term.

2.3 The Mayor explained that as a collective body, the Council has defined what effective city governance should be. Unlike past administrations, they have avoided major setbacks and demonstrated unity and a strong commitment to serving the residents of Belize City. He reminded the Councillors that they were elected not as individuals but as a team, entrusted with improving the lives of those they serve.

2.4 Mayor Wagner then acknowledged the significance of the upcoming General Elections, noting that the elections would reaffirm their work as a Council. He recalled that in past General Elections, the work of local authorities would often be scrutinized, however, that has not been the case in this instance, because they have remained steadfast in their work, and in driving meaningful change within Belize City.

2.5 Mayor Wagner reviewed the meeting's agenda, highlighted the selection of a new Deputy Mayor, and concluded by once again welcoming everyone to the meeting.



3.0 Ratification of the February 18th, 2025, Regular Meeting Minutes

3.1 (4.4) Change “Blue 21” to “Blue21”.

3.2 Adjust numbering on page 9.

3.3 Councillor Garcia moved to ratify the February 18th, 2025, Regular Council Meeting Minutes. Seconded by Councillor Kwan.

4.0 Matters Arising from the Minutes

4.1 Mayor Wagner noted that a utility truck was scheduled for modification to accommodate employee transportation.

4.2 The City Administrator reported that the modifications were not yet completed, as the required materials were still being procured.

4.3 Mayor Wagner observed that employees were still being transported in the box truck and inquired about alternative arrangements.

4.4 The City Administrator stated that repairs on the Works Department's assigned bus had been completed; however, during testing, an electrical issue caused the bus to catch fire. The Council is considering purchasing another bus, which has been inspected by the Assistant City Engineer. A report from the Vehicle Care Coordinator, who has been on medical leave, is pending to confirm the bus's condition.

4.5 Mayor Wagner voiced concern about employees being transported in the box truck and recommended chartering a bus in the interim. The City Administrator assured the Mayor and Councillors that the Works Manager and Assistant City Engineer had been directed to explore outsourcing a bus and that the matter of employee transportation would be addressed.

10:33 Deputy Mayor Pollard arrived.

4.6 (9.1) Councillor Cattouse requested an update on the petition for a speed bump to be placed near James Garbutt Primary School.



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4.7 The City Administrator reported that the Traffic Management Committee approved the installation of a speed bump. Additionally, a stop sign will be installed, and parking will be prohibited in the area. To expedite the process, he suggested approving the motion via round-robin before it is officially gazetted.

4.8 Mayor Wagner acknowledged challenges faced in the Council's efforts to address property tax arrears. He emphasized that payment of property taxes should not be treated as optional. As per legislation, property ownership entails the obligation to pay property taxes.

4.9 Mayor Wagner commended the National Government's initiative to encourage new land ownership and explained that it is imperative to educate individuals on the accompanying responsibilities. Lack of compliance significantly impacts the City Council's financial stability, particularly in cases where accounts are statute-barred.


4.10 Mayor Wagner further advised that Magistrate McKenzie has provided a comprehensive outline of how the law addresses delinquency in property taxes.

4.11 The outlined procedure includes 7-8 steps, beginning with the preparation of case files, by the Valuation Department when payments become overdue. If the tax is not paid promptly, the account is deemed delinquent. Subsequently, a statement is issued and submitted to the court. A summons is then issued, requiring the individual to appear in court to address the matter. Payment plans may be arranged at this stage. Mayor Wagner emphasized that delays of three to five years are unacceptable, as delinquent accounts should be addressed immediately upon non-payment. Non-compliance results in the matter being referred to the court.

4.12 Councillor Cattouse highlighted the need for the acquisition of abandoned properties within the city.

4.13 The Mayor explained that a list of 40 such properties were previously identified and submitted to the Ministry of Natural Resources, for the Council to acquire with the intention of repurposing them, but these plans have stalled. The Mayor affirmed that this is an issue requiring active pursuit.

4.14 In response to inquiries from Councillor Miller regarding contested property matters in the court system, it was clarified that if compliance is not achieved, the process of distressing the property will be initiated. There is no immediate necessity to sell distressed properties, but the process must be refined and executed efficiently.



5.0 Announcements by the Mayor

5.1 Mayor Wagner advised that updates regarding the boardwalk project included plans for a visit by GCOM and Blue 21 in early May. They have expressed interest in meeting with the Prime Minister and Minister of Tourism during their stay.

5.3 The City Administrator expressed concern about ensuring that public consultations are carried out.

5.4 Mayor Wagner explained that there are provisions to engage with the residents and businesses in the area since the project is expected to transform the landscape along the Southern Foreshore. He emphasized that securing support from the National Government and all other stakeholders is essential to move this initiative forward.

5.5 Mayor Wagner announced that he would lead a delegation, including representatives from the CEMO and MIS departments, as well as Councillors Hamilton and Castellanos, on a trip to Taiwan for the Smart Cities Summit & Expo.


5.6 The Mayor advised that he was scheduled to participate in discussions regarding unplanned urbanization. The Mayor shared his intent to reference the Belama Phase 5 area, as well as the area situated behind The Hub. He highlighted that residents in these areas have been advocating for street and infrastructure development despite the absence of proper urban planning.

5.7 Mayor Wagner further explained that approaches to addressing this issue, sustainably, would be explored during international forums to identify potential solutions. Meanwhile, the CEMO Liaison Officer and IT Manager will focus on gaining insights relevant to their respective fields.

5.8 Mayor Wagner concluded by announcing that March 10th would mark the 30th Anniversary of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF). He shared that as Chairperson of the CLGF, he had the opportunity to record a commemorative video, which will be published on the Council's platforms to acknowledge this milestone.

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

6.1 No matters were tabled.


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7.0 Motions by Mayor & Councillors

7.1 No matters were tabled.

8.0 New Business

8.1 Mayor Wagner informed the Council that the selection of a Deputy Mayor occurs annually in March and, accordingly, opened the floor for nominations. Councillor Castellanos nominated Councillor Eluide Miller, with Councillor Usher seconding the nomination. In the absence of any other nominations, Councillor Miller was unanimously elected to the position of Deputy Mayor.

8.2 Deputy Mayor Miller expressed his gratitude and reflected on his journey at the Council, which began with an internship, from which he transitioned to the role of Procurement Officer in the Finance Department, then as the Mayor's Aide, and has now culminated in his appointment as the Deputy Mayor. He acknowledged the people and experiences that have shaped his career over the past five years and thanked the residents of the City, as he wouldn't be in this position without their support.

8.3 Deputy Mayor Miller expressed his excitement about progressing the Council's work and working collaboratively with each Council member. He also emphasized his appreciation for the professional relationship with the City Administrator and assured the outgoing Deputy Mayor that he would continue to work closely with him.

8.4 Councillor Pollard offered his congratulations to Deputy Mayor Miller and extended his support for the new Deputy Mayor's success. He reflected on his four years of service as the Deputy Mayor, highlighting the valuable relationships and experiences he gained during that time. He encouraged the Council to embrace new leadership and stressed the importance of staying focused on the work at hand. Councillor Pollard emphasized the value of staying busy and avoiding internal conflicts, reminding everyone that the work they do speaks for itself.

8.5 Councillor Pollard further explained that it is natural for others to want to step up and gain experience and emphasized that it is a healthy transition for the progress of the Council; opportunities for youth to rise and take on leadership roles must be embraced. He thanked the team for their support and stated that it was an honor to serve in the capacity of Deputy Mayor, and is looking forward to the work that the Council will continue to do under Mayor Wagner's leadership.

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8.6 Councillor Pollard emphasized the importance of being responsive to the City and expressed his pride in the position the Council now holds. He reflected on the incredible journey thus far and encouraged everyone to remain ambitious and strive for even greater achievements. He further remarked that the negative perceptions others may try to impose upon them do not hold, as their work speaks for itself. The progress made, from what was to what is now, is starkly different.

8.7 Councillor Pollard reiterated his commitment to continue serving and offering advice as needed.

8.8 Councillor Castellanos also extended his support to Deputy Mayor Miller, as did Councillor Kwan, who noted the unanimous approval received by Deputy Mayor Miller.

8.9 Councillor Thompson echoed the congratulations, affirming Deputy Mayor Miller's suitability for the position and expressing appreciation for Councillor Pollard's mentorship. He expressed his anticipation for the collaborative work the Council will undertake moving forward.

8.10 Councillor Cattouse congratulated Deputy Mayor Miller, commending his accessibility and acknowledging the positive direction the Council is headed. She also commended Councillor Pollard for being an exemplary role model and thanked various Council members for their efforts in engaging with the community. She stressed the council's unity, emphasizing that it is stronger than ever before.

8.11 Councillor Nunez joined in congratulating Deputy Mayor Miller, reflecting on the importance of dedication and hard work. He also expressed his gratitude to Councillor Pollard for his long service. He conveyed excitement regarding the presence of younger members on the Council, including himself and Deputy Mayor Miller, and their potential to shape the future of Belize City.

8.12 Councillor Usher extended his congratulations to Deputy Mayor Miller, expressing confidence in his ability to excel in the role.



8.13 The City Administrator expressed gratitude for the privilege to stand alongside Deputy Mayor Miller, acknowledging him as a good Councillor. He noted that the day's proceedings went smoothly, and noted the unanimous support received by Deputy Mayor Miller. He emphasized that more importantly, everyone supported the Mayor.

8.14 Mayor Wagner explained that while Deputy Mayor Miller was working in the Finance Department, he was recommended by the late City Administrator, Stephanie Lindo, to serve as his Aide. She had advised that he was performing exceptionally in the Finance Department and would serve well as his Aide.

8.15 Mayor Wagner explained that Councillor Pollard, similarly, rose through the system to become the Deputy Mayor. He recalled a trip to Taiwan with Councillor Pollard in 2018, after which he made a post that Councillor Pollard would be a force to be reckoned with.

8.16 Mayor Wagner further explained that Councillor Pollard and Deputy Mayor Miller mirror each other and are the future of the People's United Party in Belize City. He stated that they remind him of the younger versions of Dean Barrow, Derek Aikman, Mark Espat, and Hon. Cordel Hyde. He urged the Councillors to encourage and support them as they plan long-term and re-imagine the future.

8.17 The Mayor encouraged Councillors Usher, Thompson, Nunez, Garcia, Kwan, Castellanos, and Hamilton to be voices of reason and to work collaboratively with each other. He commended the manner in which Deputy Mayor Pollard has served and acknowledged that while challenges have arisen, they have now been overcome. Mayor Wagner expressed his confidence that Deputy Mayor Miller would perform admirably in this role.

8.18 The Mayor concluded by emphasizing unity, stating, "We are one team. Let's finish strong for the next two-thirds of the journey."

8.19 Councillor Thompson thanked the team for their ongoing support, offering his apologies for any recent disruptions and assuring that such occurrences would not become a regular issue. He congratulated the team on the smooth transition and highlighted the maturity demonstrated by both Deputy Mayor Miller and Councillor Pollard throughout this process.

8.20 Councillor Garcia expressed gratitude to Councillor Pollard for his dedicated service and thanked the Mayor for his leadership. He acknowledged Deputy Mayor Miller as a reliable person and encouraged him to continue his excellent work.



9.0 Submissions from the Building Unit

9.1 A request by Tessa Matus of M&M Engineering, on behalf of Chandra Gurnani, for the provision of a letter of no-objection, for the construction of a concrete four-storey commercial use structure, located at Parcel No. 1214 Coney Dr.

9.2 A request by Mr. Reynaldo Verde for the placement of a wooden structure or 20' metal container for the purpose of food vending, along with a restroom facility, at Parcel No. 46 Farmer's Market. MOTION APPROVED, pending consultation with the area representative.

9.3 A request by Ms. Ethel Thompson for the provision of a no-objection letter for the development of a portion of the street adjacent to Parcel No. 1786, September Drive. MOTION APPROVED, provided that the following be used in the prescribed order:

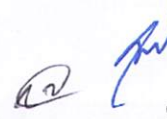
1. 8 loads of clay- 12 inches, considering 3.5 inches compaction
2. 3 loads of Hardcore – 6 inches
3. 4 loads of All-in 4 inches, considering 3.5 inches compaction

9.4 A request by RF&G for the Council to approve the removal of the current structure and redesign of the roundabout located on Princess Margaret Drive. This endeavor is being carried out in memory of colleagues who have passed away from the effects of cancer.

9.5 The Council noted that the Planning Department recommends that the existing sculpture remain in the center of the roundabout, and inquired about its significance. MOTION DEFERRED until the significance of the sculpture can be determined.

9.6 A request for Ms. DEANNIE REQUENA to enter into a lease agreement with the Council for the usage of Booth #8 at the Mahogany St. Market Place. The booth was previously issued to Ms. Laurel Willoughby but remains unoccupied.

9.7 After discussions, the Council determined that the motion would be deferred, and the City Administrator would advise Ms. Requena that while there are no objections to her occupation of the booth, the sale of alcohol in this area will not be allowed, as determined by the Belize District Liquor License Board. MOTION DEFERRED.



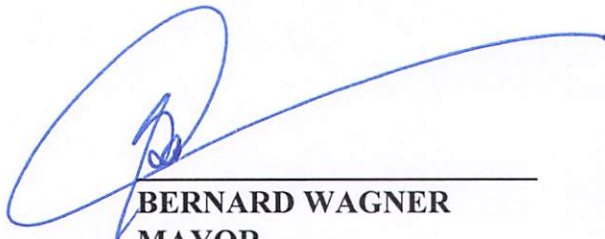
10.0 Other Business

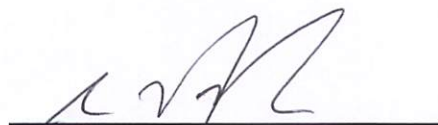
10.1 No Matters were tabled.

11.0 Adjournment

11.1 Mayor Wagner moved for the meeting to be adjourned. Seconded by Councillor Nunez.

The meeting concluded at 12:37 pm.



BERNARD WAGNER
MAYOR

ALBERT VAUGHAN
CITY ADMINISTRATOR