



COLUMBIA CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES THURSDAY, MAY 7, 2020

The Columbia City Council conducted a virtual meeting on Thursday, May 7, 2020 using video conferencing technology. The Honorable Mayor Stephen K. Benjamin called the meeting to order at 12:16 p.m. and the following members of Council were present: The Honorable Sam Davis, The Honorable Tameika Isaac Devine, The Honorable Howard E. Duvall, Jr., The Honorable Mayor Pro-Tempore Edward H. McDowell, Jr., The Honorable Daniel J. Rickenmann, and The Honorable William Brennan. Also present were Ms. Teresa Wilson, City Manager and Ms. Erika D. Moore Hammond, City Clerk. This meeting was advertised in accordance with the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act.

INVOCATION

The Honorable Mayor Pro Tem Edward H. McDowell, Jr. offered the invocation.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Upon a motion made by Mr. Duvall and seconded by Mr. Davis, Council voted unanimously to adopt the agenda as outlined.

EMERGENCY ORDINANCE

1. Ordinance No.: 2020-044 An Emergency Ordinance extending the temporary suspension of operating procedures of City Council Meetings and City Boards and Commissions Meetings - *Approved*

Upon a motion made by Ms. Devine and seconded by Mr. Duvall, Council voted unanimously to approve Ordinance No.: 2020-044 An Emergency Ordinance extending the temporary suspension of operating procedures of City Council Meetings and City Boards and Commissions Meetings.

RESOLUTION

2. Resolution No.: 2020-059 City of Columbia Policy Statement on Social Distancing - *Approved*



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Mayor Benjamin said this resolution is setting a clear statement on behalf of the City and our leaders. We are dealing with a generational threat as it relates to the pandemic. We have not seen a deceleration of cases in the Midlands. We are trying to find ways to make it clear to our citizens that we are sympathetic to the challenges our businesses are facing. Many of our businesses will be faced with the prospects of opening even when it may not feel totally comfortable. We remain committed to the idea to set the stage for people to safely reenter society, shop safely, and engage in commerce safely. This statement says that we support continuing to social distancing. As we reenter society we need to do it responsibly and doing so by giving our businesses some guidance. We have a task force working on guidelines for business reopenings and to provide advice to Council. Some of the recommendations that have come out of AccelerateSC have been helpful. I asked for a written version that we can share broadly. This particular resolution is underscoring how important it is to continue to engage in social distancing until we see a true deceleration of cases.

Councilor Devine said there is no clear direction in opening up and easing back into society. There is still a threat and we need to continue following the guidelines. This Council has continued to be a leader in addressing this unprecedented situation we are all in. At least this resolution makes it clear that although businesses will be opening up, this does not mean that you go back to normal. In the absence of some type of guidance, people are making decisions that are putting themselves and others in harm's way. I commend the businesses that have implemented safeguards to make sure that their customers, staff, and everyone else are safe. We need to constantly monitor the situation and implement policies to give support as we transition.

Councilor Rickenmann said the COMET received \$15 million to help combat this and they need to make sure they have the same type of guidelines. This needs to be equal for everyone. These guidelines will help to open businesses safely. We have received positive reports from all of our staff. Both chiefs have done an incredible job. I think we are on the right track.

Councilor Davis said hopefully through this resolution we are going to separate ourselves locally in terms of stepping forward to do what we can to clear up some of the confusion and misunderstanding over the guidelines. I hope the business groups continue to be supportive and help us with any form of guidance that can make our intentions clearer and show we are supportive on what they need to do to open back up.



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Mayor Benjamin said for years we have done great work with businesses through NexLevel and Fast Trak. This is going to encourage a seismic shift in the way businesses operate. We need to make sure that we continue to be there with ideas and access to technology that businesses will need to move forward in this new era. Our officers and fire marshals have been working diligently. They have been giving warnings and as of yet no businesses have been fined. Protecting public health and being pro-business are not mutually exclusive.

Upon a motion made by Mayor Benjamin and seconded by Ms. Devine, Council voted unanimously to approve Resolution No.: 2020-059 City of Columbia Policy Statement on Social Distancing.

CITY COUNCIL DISCUSSION / ACTION

3. COVID-19 Update - The Honorable Mayor Stephen K. Benjamin – *Received as information. No action was taken.*

Mayor Benjamin said we are all engaged in providing for the community that we want to protect. I want to thank all of you for the work that we do. We have always had positive tension to see all sides of an issue in our diverse community. The violence that continues to rage across the country and community is something that should never be tolerated. Especially when it cost a child its life full of promise. I am thankful for the leadership of our Police Department and others as they investigate. I know they will bring the perpetrators of this crime to justice. It is the responsibility of our entire community to continue to keep the community safe. We need to continue to advocate for the vulnerable.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comments were received at this time.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Upon a motion made by Mr. Duvall and seconded by Mr. McDowell, Council voted unanimously to enter into **Executive Session** at 12:46 p.m. for the discussion of **Item 4**.

4. Receipt of legal advice related to matters covered by attorney-client privilege pursuant to S.C. Code §30-4-70(a)(2)

Legal advice pertaining to COVID-19 and City Operations



We Are Columbia

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Council adjourned the Executive Session at 1:15 p.m and Councilor Devine was not present.

Mayor Benjamin said we have been thoughtful and judicious in how we appropriated the funds for our Small Business Stabilization Fund and other projects. We held on to \$100,000 for a portion to be used to complement with other existing testing capacities we have through our present relationship with Precision Genetics. We want to make sure we help support businesses as they transition back into doing business. The proposal is for each small business to be allowed to test up to ten employees. We give our staff the flexibility to work out exactly how we do it. We want to strongly encourage people to social distance while recognizing that a negative test does not indicate immunity. We need to give priority to structure this in a way that might allow reimbursement from the federal government if in fact the fourth bill passes in Congress or under the existing CARES Act.

Upon a motion by Mayor Benjamin and seconded by Mr. Duvall, Council voted unanimously to approve the use of a portion of the \$100,000 withheld from the Small Business Stabilization Program to be used to provide assistance for COVID-19 testing for small businesses to be allowed to test up to ten employees.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon a motion made by Mr. McDowell and seconded by Mr. Duvall, Council voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 1:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

Erika D. Moore, CMC
City Clerk