

The regular meeting of the Hammond Common Council of the City of Hammond, Lake County, Indiana was held on February 26, 2024 in the Hammond City Council Chambers and was available to be viewed at gohammond on Facebook, gohammond.tv live and per Zoom.

Council President Scott Rakos presided.

City Clerk Robert J. Golec facilitated.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE was recited by all.
Invocation by Councilwoman Alexander.

ROLL CALL

PHYSICALLY PRESENT: Alexander, Spitale, Venecz, Kalwinski, Salinas, Emerson, Woerpel, Rakos

ELECTRONICALLY PRESENT PER ZOOM: Tyler

ABSENT: None

TOTAL: 9

MAYOR'S ADDRESS

Mayor McDermott - Nice to see you. Thanks to the Council. It's good to see you all again. This is my address for February 26, 2024. Before I get started I want to recognize a gentleman in the audience. He's the former Mayor of the City of Hobart. He's now here attending his first Hammond City Council meeting on behalf of his new company. Thank you, Mayor Brian Snedecor. Welcome to Hammond City Hall. I know he doesn't miss what I'm about to talk about, but we started negotiations with the Hammond F.O.P. representatives this week. We had, I think, it was a good first session to get caught up. We haven't talked for a few years, formally. So, I know it's no secret to any members of the Council, the F.O.P. is having trouble keeping officers because the market has changed for police officers. There's not enough police officers in the ranks to fill the holes that are created and the only answer for cities like us is to try to compete for our officers and that is a fact of life. You know, we're seeing officers leave the Hammond ranks and go to other departments and that's unheard of and when you look at the pay gaps that's developed between the City of Hammond's contract and what other cities and towns that are nonunion are offering. It's something that we have to address. So, it was a good first meeting. We started early with the F.O.P. because it's gonna be long. It's gonna be hard and it's the most expensive department we have. It affects every person in this room. It affects us financially, obviously affects us because these officers are in charge of keeping our city safe, so. We did start F.O.P. negotiations. I'm sure soon I'll be starting with Fire, Teamsters, Operating Engineers. This is the year of contracts. So, I'll keep you up to date if you want to talk, I will talk to you off the record. Obviously, during negotiations we want to try to keep what we talk about internal until it becomes necessary to involve you all. But if you do have questions, obviously, I'm willing to answer. We held 219 Day at the Hammond Civic Center. I think it's our 6th or 7th annual. Over 2,000 people attended. This year's theme was the wild, wild, Midwest. We have great entertainment. It was a Bluegrass group called The Bourbon Aristocracy and we also had Tim Gleason and The Whiskey Disco Band. We had a mechanical bull. We had a lot of great food. A lot of great drinks. Great time. So, thank you to the Council Members that supported us and showed up. We appreciate it. Sportsplex has been doing really well. It seems like Park Department's been doing outstanding recently. The Sportsplex is doing so well it's starting to have an impact on our neighborhoods. I know Councilman Woerpel has been on me and talking to me about

*Prepared by
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Hammond City Clerk*

MAYOR'S ADDRESS cont.

Mayor McDermott cont. - parking issues on Ontario, on the old church parking lot on 167th. Unfortunately, when we do really well with buildings like the Sportsplex, it has an effect on our neighbors around it. I don't have to tell Councilman Kalwinski any differently, when we have the Fest up in the North we have problems it flowing into the neighborhoods. This is happening. So, we're happy that on February 17th and 18th the Sportsplex hosted a company named Level 12. It's a company out of Tennessee. They had ninety six volleyball teams. Twenty four different clubs from all over the Midwest at the Sportsplex. I've never seen that place more packed. I've never seen ... they had a problem, so to speak, where one wave started late and everything is clockwork. But if one wave starts late and the other gets the on time, and you also had soccer going full steam on the other side, so we really had two loads of girls that were getting ready to play volleyball in the building at one time and a full soccer side. It's awesome to see that as Mayor, because you see thousands of people, all the restaurants are packed, but then I'm driving through the neighborhoods and I'm talking to the Council people, and I'm getting angry phone calls so we need to do better. Also, by the way, last weekend, volleyball, they had a, as big as we thought it was, the weekend before they had a eighty four team tournament, this weekend from twenty one different clubs from Michigan, Wisconsin, Southern Illinois and Southern Indiana for a one day event. Soccer is operating at a high capacity, sixty six teams are participating in our league play and youth, high school, and mens division. So, we got great things happening in the Park Department. So, congratulations to everybody working so hard over there. I attended AIM. I know that some of you all went to AIM as well. I went to the legislative dinner. Sat with ... I met with, basically, the entire Northwest Indiana Delegation. Of course, I met with our local Rep.'s, Representative Jackson, Senator Dernulc, I had dinner with him. Phil Taillon helped me out a lot with that. Also attended Indiana Casino host cities meeting which was interesting. Talking about trends in the Gaming industry. Sat through a briefing from Ed Feigenbaum. If you ever get a chance to go through a briefing about the casino gaming industry for Ed Feigenbaum, you should do it. I know Clerk Golec was around to see a lot of that when it went down, but he went through the whole history of how gaming evolved from a concept in the 1980's all the way to where we are today. It was fascinating. So it was great or me to hear it, even though I knew a lot of it, it was great to hear how things progressed to where we are today. I learned a couple things about Indiana's Gaming Industry, \$2.36 billion dollars brought in last year, which is solid. The scary thing is, because I know we all watch our gaming reports and we know that, obviously, we've been trending downward, interesting, so you keep in mind Indiana has a \$2.36 billion casino industry, the video gaming terminals, the slot machines you see in the laundry mats and the restaurants in Illinois, have a billion dollars coming in a year. Our entire casino industry is \$2.3 billion, Illinois' gaming terminals, the slot machines that we see in Cal City, \$1 billion alone. Illinois makes more money off of the slot machines, they're called VGT's, Video Gaming Terminals, they make more money off of those than they do in traditional casinos in Illinois right now. Their VGT's are half of Indiana's market. So, when you go to Illinois and you see slot machines everywhere, that's what's going on right now. It's unfortunate. Sports wagering generated \$39 million last year, local cities and towns get none of that. 2023 total tax revenue for the State of Indiana, \$643 million from the gaming industry. Also met with Economic Development team regarding Gateway Station. Councilman Salinas, we were driving all around your district, taking a look at some buildings that probably shouldn't be there and we're wondering why they're still there. After everything that's gone on it seems like we're completely rebooting that whole area and then you have a couple scrap yards that are sort of sitting there. So I had a meeting with my staff about that and I want to talk to Councilman Al and see what he thinks about that as well. I know you guys, before you tonight, you have the appropriating the funds set forth in the 2024 CDBG, Home and ESG budgets. CDBG budget's about \$2.4 million; Home, \$855 thousand; ESG, \$177 thousand, so

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MAYOR'S ADDRESS cont.

Mayor McDermott cont. - this CDBG budget funded by the Federal Government is a little over \$3 million. Some highlights for you all to keep in mind, \$200 thousand of that budget is set aside for the basement back flow prevention program that we've been talking about, run through the Hammond Sanitary District; \$475 thousand is set aside for major demo, clearance projects, that unfortunately happens all too often; and we do have \$200 thousand set aside for infrastructure and facilities that are available to low income neighbors or low income residents. So, last but not least I want to send condolences to an employee, former Deputy Controller for me, Mona Campbell, who past away recently. Mona has been with the City of Hammond for twenty three years. She has four children, three daughters, one son. She is a good friend of all of ours and she also is a mother to Chris Campbell who is the Department Head for I.T. So, condolences to his family on their loss. So, sorry about the long report. I don't if you all have any questions.

Councilman Woerpel - Mayor, when you were talking about the Sportsplex, I got several calls this weekend last weekend and the weekend before, and I keep telling these people that the calls I'm getting the most about are good problems to have. Which is the Sportsplex and the hockey rinks since the Ninja Kids went in there. And I know that we, do we have an update on the extra parking lot by the ice rink or is that a ...

Mayor McDermott - Could I answer? First off, agree. It's a good problem to have. But the Ninja Kids and the ice rink is overflowing into the neighborhoods around Dowling Park, just like it's a good problem to have when the Sportsplex is so packed that it's overflowing into the neighborhoods, however, it's unacceptable that there's parking in the neighborhoods. Okay? So I'm not gonna go to the neighbors and say, "Hey, this is a good thing". It's not. I mean, and I know, Dave, you as a Councilman, you spoke to me multiple times about this and I took your concerns and amplified them to my staff and tomorrow morning we are going to get out there and pound some signs. Because this coming weekend at the Sportsplex is gonna be busy, and I'm being told it could be busier than the last two weeks. So, we need to get on this tomorrow. Just make sure you and I talk tomorrow morning and I have staff out there getting ready on the Ontario's and the church parking lots, get our towers ready and let people know you got to find a spot. You cannot park in the neighborhoods.

Councilman Woerpel - And just know that last Saturday, those two brand new lots were filled and they were literally parking down 167th and I'm glad I never did what I threatened with Barry, and that is gerrymander that into my district. But I still get the overflow of it though.

Mayor McDermott - Thank you, Councilman. It's not acceptable how that went down. It's full to capacity, however If you did park in the old Walmart Parking lot, you could park there. There's still space there. But, people were parking in the neighborhood instead. So, we'll get on it though. And I apologize that it happened.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Councilman Salinas, supported by Councilman Emerson, moved to approve the minutes of February 12, 2024 and place on file.

Councilman Salinas, supported by Councilman Emerson, moved to amend on page nine (9) under Salinas, regarding the tax abatement for the revitalization project on 24 Marble Street. It should read “ten” year tax abatement, rather than “then” year.

ROLL CALL VOTE (amendment)

AYES: Alexander, Spitale, Venecz, Kalwinski, Tyler, Salinas, Emerson, Woerpel, Rakos

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried 9/0/0 AMENDMENT ADOPTED

ROLL CALL VOTE (as amended)

AYES: Alexander, Spitale, Venecz, Kalwinski, Tyler, Salinas, Emerson, Woerpel, Rakos

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried 9/0/0 MINUTES APPROVED
(as amended)

APPROVAL OF CLAIMS

Councilwoman Venecz, supported by Councilman Spitale, moved to approve the claims from February 15, 2024 through February 21, 2024. Claim #1547 through #1951, inclusive. In the amount of \$4,867,793.62.

ROLL CALL VOTE (claims)

AYES: Alexander, Spitale, Venecz, Kalwinski, Tyler, Salinas, Emerson, Woerpel, Rakos

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried 9/0/0 CLAIMS APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARINGS

24-04 An Ordinance Appropriating the Proceeds of the Annual Action Plan and Dealing with Other Matters Pertaining to the Expenditure of Plan Proceeds for Program Year 2024

No one spoke.

COMMUNICATIONS

Councilman Salinas - I'd like to just extend a big thank you to the Hammond Graffiti Removal Program. Throughout the 2nd District we've experienced quite a bit of, a rash actually, of graffiti. Not just under the bridges but on garages and even on a church, unfortunately. But the Graffiti Removal Program comes out right away and they make sure that it's painted over and I just wanted to say thank you because there were several incidents this past month in the 2nd District. So, great job Hammond Graffiti Removal Program. Thank you.

Councilman Woerpel - In caucus we all received this handout about a water update going around. This has nothing to do with the City of Hammond. I know, in the past, this comes around about every five years and it's a company that, they're not trying to rob you, that I'm aware of unless they've changed in the last five years, but what they do is they come around and they offer to test your water lines for you. Then they're gonna come back and tell you they're full of lead and they're gonna try and sell you brand water lines. So, I know there was some concern earlier expressed that people were afraid that they were trying to get in and rob the house and the way I've seen this done before is they'll have the I.D.'s around their necks and I don't know, did you say they're representing themselves from the Hammond Water Department or no, they're just ...

Councilwoman Venecz - No, I believe there was some confusion.

Councilman Woerpel - Right.

Councilwoman Venecz - Because they seem to be targeting the elderly.

Councilman Woerpel - So if these people knock on your door, I don't think they're trying to get in your house. I wouldn't let them in anyways. But, I think they're just trying to sell you something and scare you into buying it. So, it's from a company called Quality Water Testing Inc. Just be on the lookout for it.

Councilwoman Venecz - And to piggyback on that, if you have a question about your water service. If you think that perhaps there is lead in your pipes or if you need some type of repair, a meter, or whatever, contact the Water Department, the City of Hammond Water Department, and they will come out and they will check things out for you. But don't just take the word of a company who's soliciting door to door to ... and in this particular case it seems as if they were targeting the elderly. Sometimes the elderly are lonely, they want somebody to talk to, "yeah, come on in". Don't do that. Please don't do that. If you have any questions, contact the Water Department.

Councilman Woerpel - One last thing, the times I've seen this thing going around, I actually knew somebody that bought it. The showed me that they literally took out his pipe water line and they put in a rubber hose, from the street to the house. In other cases I've seen it's, you know, buy these solar panels and you pay us cash and then you can get reimbursed from the government. That don't happen either as far as I'm aware. So, that's why I brought it up. It was a Communication, Mr. President.

Council President Rakos - Just a reminder, again, March 16th, HC3 will be having their St. Patrick's Day parade starting at Hessville Park on Kennedy, going straight down Kennedy to 161st. If you'd like to be in the parade, HC3 is still taking applications to be in the parade, up until March 1st. Contact HC3 through their website or their Facebook page.

*Prepared by
Robert J. Golec
Hammond City Clerk*

COMMUNICATIONS cont.

Councilman Tyler - I just want to congratulate the Ophelia Steen Center and their staff for putting on an amazing event on Saturday night. They used to do a Black & White ball every single year and then Covid slowed it down and they've adjusted. Initially it was a masquerade ball, so it's the first time they threw their biggest fund raiser, I think, in the past four or five years. So, I just want to commend their staff for an amazing event that was well attended and I'm looking forward to having that back on our calendars for the future too. Thank you.

Council President Rakos - I believe two of our Council people got awards that night as well. Is that correct?

Councilwoman Alexander - Correct.

Council President Rakos - Congratulations to Councilwoman Alexander and Councilman Tyler.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Capital Improvement Board - Councilman Emerson - Met on February 21st, 2024. It was a Wednesday. We voted on two things. One was \$170,575 for construction engineering services with Christopher Burke Engineering for the Dowling Park Overflow Improvements in the 5th District. Number two, \$160,155 for design engineering with the First Group Engineering for the Marquette Greenway for 150th to White Oak in the 2nd District. That's all we voted on.

Capital Improvement Board - Councilman Woerpel - Just what you said about the waterline from Dowling Park Pond over to Kentucky Avenue, I believe. That's one of the reasons why Tapper wasn't done when we did Mahoney Drive. Was, this projects been around for a couple of years and I guess we found a new way to fund it or something. It's got a ... Army Corp., I believe. But it has nothing to do with the new spot. That's why Tapper wasn't done as part of that project around Dowling Park.

Council as a Whole Committee - Councilman Spitale - Brought out 24-04.

Community and Crime Watch Committee - Councilwoman Venecz - Upcoming meetings:

Edison Community Watch; Wednesday, March 6; 6:30 p.m.; Edison School

Harrison Park Crime Watch; VFW on Hohman; March 5; 6 p.m.

Hessville Crime Watch; March 21; 6 p.m.; Jean Shepherd Center

Irving Community Watch; 9: 30a.m.; Friday, March 1; Irving School Art Room

S. Hohman Avenue Neighborhood Watch; April 11; Trinity Lutheran Church; No time scheduled yet

Whiting-Robertsdale Crime Watch; Thur., March 14; 6:30 p.m.; Calumet College

I just want to reiterate this is the kind of information that you find out at crime watch meetings. So, you and your family will not fall victim to some of these scams and people going door to door. It's important that we remain vigilant and make sure that we protect our families and our property.

ORDINANCE 3RD READING - FINAL PASSAGE

24-04 An Ordinance Appropriating the Proceeds of the Annual Action Plan and Dealing with Other Matters Pertaining to the Expenditure of Plan Proceeds for Program Year 2024

Councilman Spitale, supported by Councilwoman Venecz, moved for final passage.

Councilman Spitale - The ordinance is appropriating funds set forth on a (unclear) of 2024 for CDBG, Home, and ESG budget.

ROLL CALL VOTE (passage of 24-04)

AYES: Alexander, Spitale, Venecz, Kalwinski, Tyler, Salinas, Emerson, Woerpel, Rakos

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried 9/0/0 ORDINANCE NO. 9628 PASSED

INTRODUCTION OF ORDINANCES

24-05 To Appropriate Funds in the Hotel/Motel Innkeepers Tax Fund for the Hammond Park Department (\$16,128.81)

Councilwoman Venecz, supported by Councilman Salinas, moved the proposed ordinance to 1st and 2nd reading with a public hearing on March 11, 2024.

ROLL CALL VOTE (1st and 2nd of 24-05)

AYES: Alexander, Spitale, Venecz, Kalwinski, Tyler, Salinas, Emerson, Woerpel, Rakos

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried 9/0/0 MOTION CARRIED

24-06 To Appropriate Funds from the Operating Balance for the Hammond Park Department (\$446,000)

Councilwoman Venecz, supported by Councilman Salinas, moved the proposed ordinance to 1st and 2nd reading with a public hearing on March 11, 2024.

ROLL CALL VOTE (1st and 2nd of 24-06)

AYES: Alexander, Spitale, Venecz, Kalwinski, Tyler, Salinas, Emerson, Woerpel, Rakos

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried 9/0/0 MOTION CARRIED

*Prepared by
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Hammond City Clerk*

RESOLUTIONS

None

NEW AND UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Councilman Emerson - I had a lady call me up on Locust and, roughly, around Harrison and so I called the Water Department and they were over there very quickly, was on it in minutes, and it turned out it was either a water main or a buffalo box. So, kudos to the Water Department for acting fast and completing the job.

PUBLIC EXPRESSION

George Stoya - Last meeting a citizen raised an important issue concerning the problems with schools and their financing and made the observation that were she not already a citizen here in Hammond she would not come here. That should have been a dagger in your heart. That means Hammond may start hemorrhaging citizens. We've done all this gentrification in the city, and for what? If people are going to start leaving, the most important draw and asset of the City is the schools. It doesn't matter whose fault it is, but it's your problem now because you're gonna have to deal with the consequences. Wrote a letter about a month ago concerning the status of the City and this Fontanez lawsuit. The reason I wrote it is because you have a fiduciary duty to manage the assets of the City and its monies. I don't think you're scrutinizing that letter. No one's talked to me about it.

T.J. Gaertig - There's a forest on Parrish Avenue called Briar East Woods. It is a beautiful forest that is heavily used by the community. There's over two miles of trails going through there. The trails were carved out by residents using it. They are used extensively. The City is planning on demolishing this forest to build a bridge, Governors Parkway, to solve the train problem in Hessville. This solution is not the best solution to the problem of trains. An alternate solution of an underpass or overpass on Grand Avenue is a better solution. It's half the cost and doesn't demolish the forest.

Councilwoman Alexander, supported by Councilman Spitale, moved to adjourn.

AYES: ALL

2024 HAMMOND COMMON COUNCIL ATTENDANCE RECORD OF
ELECTRONIC AND PHYSICAL PRESENCE

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Katrina Alexander	8 P	12 P	26 P									
Dan Spitale	P	P	P									
Janet Vencz	E	P	P									
Mark Kalwinski	P	P	P									
Alfonso Salinas III	P	P	P									
Barry Tyler	P	P	P									
Bill Emerson	P	P	P									
Dave Woerpel	A	P	P									
Scott Rakos	P	P	P									
Initials	RJG	RJG	RJG									

E=ELECTRONIC
P=PHYSICALLY
PRESENT
A=ABSENT

If the member qualifies for an exemption from the "Consecutive - 50" requirements, draw a circle around the E for that meeting/ member



Scott Rakos, President
Hammond Common Council

ATTEST:



Robert J. Golec, City Clerk

Time: 6:45 p.m.
cb

Prepared by
Robert J. Golec
Hammond City Clerk