

The following minutes were taken at the regular meeting of the Mayor and the Board of Aldermen at 6pm on October 15, 2024, at the Town Hall in Abita Springs, Louisiana. Mayor Curtis called the meeting to order.

MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS: Mayor Curtis invited Fire District #8 Chief Brandon Stein, to talk about the construction of the new fire house.

ROLL CALL: Council Members Boudreaux, Contois, Patterson, Saussy and Templet were present. Mr. Patterson moved to accept the September 17, 2024, meeting minutes, seconded by Ms. Contois. All were in favor.

NEW BUSINESS: Mayor Curtis opened "New Business" relative to the termination of the Town Marshal. The Mayor invited Attorney Adam Davis to present the information in lieu of Town Attorney Edward Deano who could not be present. Mr. Davis addressed the distinction between an appointed and elected chief law enforcement officer. He clarified that the Mayor has the sole supervisory administrative authority over the appointed Marshal with the Marshal's responsibility and authority being limited to law enforcement decisions. Mr. Davis went on to enumerate the Marshal's choice to disregard verbal and written instructions/directives from his administrative boss, the Mayor. He explained how the Marshal engaged in activities that reflected poor judgement, compromised the integrity of investigations, and put the Town at risk. It was noted that much of the presented information was largely uncontested by the Marshal. Mr. Davis introduced Andrew Capitelli and Paige Stein from the law firm of Milling Benson Woodward L.L.P. to present the results of their investigation. Mr. Capitelli reported that Mr. Bonnet displayed a disregard for administrative requests amounting to insubordination. He reviewed the firm's findings including, but not limited to, removal of town property, failure to follow direction and complete assigned tasks, non-compliance with Town policies, and misuse of administrative process. Ms. Paige Stein addressed the investigative process reporting that eight interviews had been conducted including one with the Marshal and his attorney. Ms. Stein concluded by stating that ultimately a determination was made; she then turned the discussion back over to Mr. Capitelli to report on the firm's conclusions. Mr. Capitelli added that multiple issues were conclusively established through documentation and Marshal Bonnet's own testimony. Mr. Capitelli stated that even though eight people had been interviewed he needed nothing more than the Marshal's own words to recommend his termination. He then reviewed the list of the Marshal's repeated refusals to comply with the administrative direction of the Mayor. Mr. Capitelli concluded by saying that these were not small violations, that they are serious, established, documented violations fully supporting termination. He remarked that he represents several parish and state entities, and he is not aware of any that would tolerate this level of insubordination by an employee. Mr. Capitelli asked if action is not taken at this point, when will it be taken, what will be allowed, what will reign him in. Will it take a massive lawsuit against the Town? He added "this isn't hearsay, this isn't second hand, this isn't us making assumptions, this is his own testimony. Mr. Patterson made a motion to go into EXECUTIVE SESSION RELATIVE TO PERSONNEL MATTERS REGARDING THE REMOVAL OF THE NON-ELECTED TOWN MARSHAL. Mr. Bonnet's personal counsel, Eric Hessler, objected to the Board going into Executive Session and then waived this right to a private discussion. Mr. Hessler proceeded to summarize his personal background. Mr. Hessler accused two of the eight witnesses of bias and directed listener's attention to the content of the proposed resolution to terminate Mr. Bonnet. Mr. Hessler's comments were largely focused on the actions of a newly hired deputy, spending little time defending Mr. Bonnet's unrelated acts of insubordination. Mr. Hessler explained the marshal's duties asserting that Mr. Bonnet did what he was supposed to do and added "if he's wrong so be it." He persisted in focusing on the deputy's

actions. The Board asked questions, also many of which related to the newly hired deputy. Mr. Hessler responded with his opinion from Mr. Bonnet's point of view. Mr. Davis followed Mr. Hessler and redirected attention to the matter at hand, that being whether the Board should approve the Mayor's request to terminate Marshal Bonnet. He asked that the best interest of the Town be the guide in making that determination and suggested that personal feelings regarding the Marshal should not influence that decision. The RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN OF ABITA SPRINGS BOARD OF ALDERMEN TO APPROVE THE DECISION OF THE MAYOR TO TERMINATE THE EMPLOYMENT OF THE TOWN MARSHAL was read aloud by Mr. Patterson. Mr. Templet made a motion to adopt the resolution, seconded by Mr. Patterson. The Mayor called for public comment. Mr. Templet made a statement related to the strong positive feelings he has for both the Marshal and the Mayor. He noted that the issue between the Mayor and the Marshal has been going on for many months. When he was approached by the Mayor, the Mayor told him of his intentions. He said he asked at that time that the Mayor reconsider and give the Marshal time to make necessary adjustments. The Mayor agreed. Mr. Templet closed by saying that he couldn't in good conscience let this continue, that you can't have someone who refuses to obey; we have to have people that are following the rules. Mr. Saussy then spoke claiming that the Mayor took inappropriate actions early on and that he fully expected things to come back for discussion. He asserted that the Mayor failed to adequately communicate with the Board. He alleged if the law had been followed the entire matter could have been resolved. Ms. Contois stated that she has asked several unanswered questions. Among them were questions, about the town's hiring practices, including background check procedures, specific questions regarding vetting of new law enforcement officers, and questions regarding the town's intended goals for staffing and procedures for our law enforcement agency. She said "I feel that it would be detrimental to our citizens to take this drastic action, which may result in yet another lawsuit ...". Mr. Patterson commented that the Board is the legislative body, and the Mayor is the Chief Executive Officer of the Town. He reminded everyone that a third-party investigator concluded that the Marshal should be terminated. The Mayor called for public comment. Most attendees expressed support for Marshal Bonnet and disapproved of the Mayor's effort to terminate. The opposing view was simply that it should be clear, that when an employee by his own admission, refuses to follow basic directives from his boss, absent legal or ethical conflicts, that their employment would no longer remain tenable. The question was called and the vote to adopt was as follows: Yeas: 2 Aldermen Patterson and Templet, Nays: 3 Aldermen Boudreaux, Contois, and Saussy, Abstain: 0, Absent: 0. The motion to adopt failed.

OLD BUSINESS: There was no Old Business to discuss.

Mr. Patterson moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Saussy. All were in favor.

MEETING ADJOURNED

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED THIS 15TH DAY OF OCTOBER 2024.

Janet Dufrene, Town Clerk

Honorable Daniel J. Curtis, Mayor