MINUTES of CAUCUS MEETING

Belize City Hall
January 21, 2020

Present:

1. His Worship Bernard Wagner  Mayor
2. Mr. Oscar Arnold  Deputy Mayor
3. Mr. Allan Pollard Jr.  Councilor
4. Mr. Micah Goodin  Councilor
5. Mr. Javier Castellanos  Councilor
6. Ms. Delthruide Hylton  Councilor
7. Mr. Ryan Elijio  Councilor
8. Ms. Aisha Gentle  Councilor
9. Mr. Albert Vaughan  Councilor
10. Dr. Candice Pitts  Councilor

Mrs. Stephanie Lindo-Garbutt, City Administrator

Mr. Rafael Sosa, Manager, Office of the Mayor

Apologies:

Mr. Michael Norales. Councilor

Attendance by Invitation:

Ms. Rose Perez, Acting Finance Director
Ms. Sharlene Rudon, Director of Administration
Ms. Tamara Minto, Communications Manager

The meeting was called to order at 3:30 p.m. by Mayor Wagner after which he led his Councilors in reciting the Belize National Prayer.

Mayor Wagner started off by expressing Happy New Year wishes to his Councilors and their families.
Mayor Wagner stated that he was pleased with the success of the strategic planning workshop that was held in San Ignacio, Cayo on January 18, 2020.

1.0 Corrections to and Ratification of December 3, 2019 Minutes

1.1 Under 3.2, in the second sentence, replace the word “ordered” with the word “delivered”.

1.2 Under 5.2, the second sentence should read as follows: The City Administrator recommended that Mr. Salvador Awe replace Ms. Valerie Woods as the Deputy Chair.

1.3 Under 5.2, the last sentence should read as follows: The City Administrator recommended that Ms. Merilyn Young be appointed as a member of the Liquor Licensing Board.

1.4 Councilor Gentle moved that the minutes of the December 3, 2019 Caucus Meeting be accepted with amendments. Councilor Hylton seconded.

2.0 Matters Arising from Minutes

2.1 BCC’s In-House Attorney

2.1.1 The City Administrator shared that Mr. Richard Bradley had initially indicated his interest in working for the Belize City Council. The City Administrator further shared that Mr. Bradley took issue with the employment contract that was presented to him. The City Administrator stated that the employment contract that was presented to Mr. Bradley was a standard employment contract used by the Council.

2.1.2 The City Administrator informed that the Council will consult with external attorney with a view to formalizing a separation between the Council and Mr. Richard Bradley. The City Administrator stated that she believed that Mr. Bradley was overwhelmed with the volume of work at the Council.
2.1.3 Deputy Mayor Arnold stated that he had sat on the interview panel that had interviewed Mr. Richard Bradley. Deputy Mayor Arnold shared that during the interview, Mr. Bradley expressed his wish to retain clients that he had prior to coming onboard with the Council.

2.1.4 The City Administrator informed that Mr. Bradley had received two paychecks but did not cash either of them. Councilor Vaughan expressed his concern about Mr. Bradley being remunerated in the absence of an employment contract. The City Administrator informed that Mr. Bradley was provided with a letter of employment.

2.1.5 Councilor Castellanos asked if the decision to hire Mr. Richard Bradley was a policy decision or an administrative decision.

2.1.6 The City Administrator stated that Mr. Bradley’s demands were unrealistic, particularly as they related to office hours and the retention of his clients. The City Administrator stated that it proved difficult to reach Mr. Bradley at times. As a case in point, the City Administrator shared about the time when Apex Belize Limited was threatening to sue the Council and she was unable to reach Mr. Bradley.

2.1.7 Councilor Pollard Jr. stated that the Council needs to find an attorney who would be fully committed to the Council. Councilor Pollard Jr. advised against the Council acting hastily to separate from Mr. Bradley.

2.1.8 Councilor Vaughan stated that he wonders if the Council would be able to identify any attorney who would be available to work during regular working hours.

2.1.9 Mayor Wagner stated that he would meet with Mr. Bradley. Deputy Mayor Arnold stated that he could join Mayor Wagner when he meets with Mr. Bradley given the fact that he, Deputy Mayor Arnold, had sat on the interview panel.

2.2 Road Marking Applicator – The City Administrator reported that Teichroeb & Sons Limited will pilot the road marking of the crosswalk located in front of Holy Redeemer School.
2.3 **Thermoplastic Paints** – The City Administrator stated that she has requested of the Traffic Manager that he confirms if the balance of Thermoplastic paints that were ordered have been delivered.

2.4 **City Planner Study Leave** – The City Administrator informed that the City Planner proceeded on a six-month study leave (with pay) on **January 13, 2020**. The City Administrator shared that the City Planner is prepared to sign a one-year bond at a cost of $23,000. The City Administrator informed that Mrs. Ana Maria Espat, Building Unit Manager, has agreed to hold over in the City Planner’s absence.

2.5 **Apex Belize Limited** – The City Administrator informed that Apex Belize Ltd. has retained the services of Mr. Bradley, Attorney-at-Law. The City Administrator shared that Mr. Bradley attempted to bring up an appeal from Apex Belize Ltd. that dates back to 2018. The City Administrator further shared that Apex Belize Ltd. has signed a consent order with the Municipal Court, thereby, negating its appeal.

2.6 **Little Boar House** – The City Administrator reported that the owners of the Little Boar House are awaiting a response from the Council in respect of their outstanding lease payments.

2.7 **RSV Ltd. Contract** – The City Administrator stated that there was no update in respect of the proposed media contract from RSV Ltd.

2.8 **Belize Breaking News (BBN) Contract** – The City Administrator reported that the Council has received a revised contract from Belize Breaking News (BBN) at a cost of $2500/mth. The City Administrator opined that $2500/mth is too high given the PR Department’s budget. The City Administrator recommended that the Council considers signing contract with BBN down the road. The City Administrator stated that the Council would still proceed with the signing of a commitment with BBN.

2.8.1 Councilor Pitts expressed her support for the Council to enter into contract with BBN. Councilor Pitts shared that she follows BBN and that it is an effective news source.

2.8.2 Mayor Wagner stated that BBN has an extensive reach and a sizable following.
2.8.3 Deputy Mayor Arnold expressed his concern about the Mayor of Belize City Facebook Page not gaining a lot of traction.

2.8.4 Councilor Pollard Jr. stated that in order for the Mayor of Belize City Facebook Page to gain more traction, the PR Department needs to boost its postings. Councilor Pollard Jr. stated that it costs to optimize Social Media. The City Administrator stated that the PR Department’s budget has a line item for the boosting of Social Media posts. The City Administrator further shared that the Council has reimbursed the Communications Manager whenever she paid for the boosting of the Council’s Social Media posts.

2.8.5 Councilor Pitts recommended that the Council cuts down on video production packages with Dreamlight Studio in order to set aside more funds for the boosting of Social Media posts.

2.8.6 Councilor Pollard Jr. recommended that Councilor Goodin be tasked with ensuring that the Council gets value for money vis-à-vis the contract with BBN.

2.8.7 Councilor Goodin recommended that BBN aid the Council’s PR Department with developing the Council’s PR strategy.

2.8.8 Mayor Wagner moved a motion for the approval of a one-year contract with Belize Breaking News (BBN) at the cost of $2500/mth. All Councilors present voted in favor. **MOTION PASSED**

3.0 **City Administrator’s Update**

3.1 The City Administrator reported that, at the Council’s weekly Managers’ Meeting held on January 20, 2020, the Council’s Managers were informed of the six (6) priority items that were decided on at the Strategic Planning Workshop held on January 18, 2020 in San Ignacio, Cayo.
3.2 The City Administrator stated that Managers and their respective Departments were assigned to the six priority areas as follows:

Priority Item #1: Waiving of Trade License for First-Time Entrepreneurs (Valuation Manager/Department)

Priority Item #2: Establishment of Belize City Fund to provide microfinancing for small business and start-up businesses (LED Manager/Department)

Priority Item #3: Urban Gardening (Programs Manager/Department)

Priority Item #4: Consult with Residents Before Preparing and Presenting Annual Budgets (Revenue Manager/Department, Communications Manager/PR Department)

Priority Item #5: Enhance and Restore Iconic Belize City Venues as Top Tourist Destinations (Communications Manager/PR Department)

Priority Item #6: Establishment of Employment Agency (HR/Administration)

3.3 Councilor Pitts asked about the extent to which Councilors would be involved in the execution of the six priority areas.

3.4 Mayor Wagner stated that the relevant managers would have to ensure that the six priority areas are achieved. Mayor Wagner stated that the managers will be required to provide progress reports at the next Caucus Meeting. The City Administrator stated that she impressed upon the managers the importance of achieving the six priority areas.
4.0 Presentation of Proposed Budget for FY 2020-2021 – Ms. Rose Perez, Acting Finance Director

4.1 The City Administrator stated that in preparing the budget for Financial Year 2020-2021, managers were told to be realistic with their projections.

4.2 The City Administrator shared that the Traffic Department has improved its revenue collections while the Cemetery Department’s revenue collections have seen a marginal increase.

4.3 Mayor Wagner asked the Acting Finance Director why the budget reflected an increase in property tax collections. The Acting Finance Director stated that the reason for the increase was property owners coming to the Council to pay their tax arrears in order to avoid having their properties auctioned off. It was also noted that there would be property reassessments conducted on properties that have carried out expansions and remodeling.

4.4 Mayor Wagner stated that the Council continues to operate on a shortfall.

4.5 Mayor Wagner moved a motion for the approval of the proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2020-2021. All Councilors present voted in favor. MOTION PASSED

5.0 Standardization of Staff Allowances – Ms. Sharlene Rudon, Director of Administration/Ms. Monique Yearwood, Human Resources Manager

5.1 The City Administrator stated that, previously, allowances were given to managers and senior employees haphazardly.

5.2 The Director of Administration stated that the City Administrator had tasked the HR Department with carrying out an exercise to standardize staff allowances.

5.3 Mayor Wagner remarked that any increase in allowances should be done across the aboard.
5.4 Mayor Wagner suggested that Councilors do a further review of proposed changes to staff allowances and vote on the proposed changes at the February Caucus.

5.5 Councilor Goodin asked why the Sanitation employees were not included in the table of proposed changes. The Director of Administration stated that it was an oversight.

N.B. Deputy Mayor Arnold requested an excuse at 5:10 p.m.

6.0 Presentation of PR Department’s Annual Plan – Ms. Tamara Minto, Communications Manager

6.1 The Communications Manager stated that the PR Department needs to control/dictate the Council’s “message”.

6.2 The Communications Manager shared that the Council will launch a radio/TV show on February 4, 2020 on Vibes Media starting at 8:00 p.m. The Communications Manager stated that Councilors Vaughan and Goodin will co-host the talk show and that Mayor Wagner will be the show’s first featured guest. Councilor Vaughan stated that Councilors will be featured on the show.

6.3 The Communications Manager shared that Social Media will be incorporated into the talk show. The Communications Manager stated that the age group 25 – 34 visits the Council’s FB Page the most. The Communications Manager shared that the PR Department will create a blog that will feature Downtown businesses. The Communications Manager informed that the blog will be launched in the first week of February 2020.

6.4 The Communications Manager shared that the next Downtown Super Sale is scheduled for February 1, 2020. The Communications Manager shared the suggestion for the Council to raffle a vehicle.

6.5 Mayor Wagner moved a motion for the approval of the launch of the BCC Talk Show on February 4, 2020. All Councilors present voted in favor. MOTION PASSED
7.0 Mayor's Announcements/Matters/Updates

7.1 Compensation for Cecil Jenkins and Shana Whyte – Mayor Wagner moved a motion for the ratification of the round-robin votes to approve compensation to former Council employees, Cecil Jenkins ($10,000) and Shana Whyte ($5000). All Councilors present voted in favor. MOTION PASSED

7.2 Purchase of Compactor Truck – Mayor Wagner moved a motion for the ratification of the round-robin votes to approve the purchase of a compactor truck for the Sanitation Department. All Councilors present voted in favor. MOTION PASSED

7.3 Bill of Quantities for Ring Road Park – Mayor Wagner moved a motion for the Bill of Quantities ($285,365) with a 10% contingency for Ring Road Park. All Councilors present voted in favor. MOTION PASSED

7.4 Dismantling and Relocation of Fort George Tourism Zone Gateway – Mayor Wagner shared that he has secured funding, in the amount of $50,435, from the owners of Ocean Ferry for the dismantling and relocation of the Fort Street Tourism Zone Gateway. Mayor Wagner moved a motion for the dismantling and relocation of the Fort Street Tourism Zone Gateway. All Councilors present voted in favor. MOTION PASSED

7.5 Proposal for Mingle & Baywatch Neighborhood Buffalo Grill (former Pier 1 site)

7.5.1 Mayor Wagner stated that the proposed restaurant would add to the aesthetics of the area.

7.5.2 Councilor Vaughan asked about the physical condition of the former Pier 1 structure. The City Administrator shared that the structure is inspected weekly and will require substantial repairs.
7.5.3 It was agreed that the proposal would be deferred to the March 2020 Caucus Meeting.

N.B. Councilor Goodin requested an excuse at 5:58 p.m.

8.0 **Street Works Put Out Tender/Update on Street Works & Maintenance** – Councilor Albert Vaughan

8.1 Councilor Vaughan provided a list of twenty-three (23) streets (chip & seal), that have been put out to tender. Councilor Vaughan also provided an update on street rehabilitation carried out by the Works Department. Councilor Vaughan informed that no works are currently being carried out in the Freetown, Fort George and Queen’s Square Constituencies.

8.2 Councilor Elijio recommended that contractors employ residents in the various Constituencies.

8.3 Mayor Wagner moved a motion for the approval of the list of streets put out to tender. All Councilors presented voted in favor. **MOTION PASSED**

9.0 **Submissions to Building Unit** – Councilor Ryan Elijio

- Request from Mr. Jesus Echeverria to erect an overhanging roof at the Michael Finnegan Market (DEFERRED)
- Request from Belize Bank Limited to erect an ATM sign on the reserve located at the Princess Casino – **MOTION PASSED**
- Request from Ms. Ana Vasquez to lease or occupy a piece of reserve on Faber’s Road to sell tacos – **DENIED**
- Request from Ms. Herlinda Tillett to occupy a piece of reserve, located at Regent Street West/Water Lane, to sell food – **DENIED**
10.0 Other Business

10.1 Mayor Wagner shared about an upcoming Men’s Church Conference and encouraged his male Councilors to attend.

10.2 Councilor Hylton asked about the completed appraisal for the Cemetery Manager which remains pending. Councilor Hylton stated that the City Engineer, who is the Director of the Cemetery Department, had not made himself available to complete the appraisal. The City Administrator stated that the City Engineer has been asked to use the new appraisal form that was developed for the Council’s Managers.

10.3 The City Administrator shared that, at the January 20, 2020 Managers’ Meeting, the Court Manager informed that the Magistrate Court plans to have all its courts placed together in one location. The City Administrator shared that the Council was not made aware of this plan by the Magistrate Court prior to putting renovation works to the old City Hall out to tender.

10.4 Mayor Wagner stated that the Council would have to enter into discussions with the Magistrate Court.

11.0 Adjournment

11.1 Councilor Castellanos moved for the meeting to be adjourned. Councilor Pitts seconded the motion.