

**TOWN OF HERTFORD
SPECIAL CALL MEETING
PUBLIC DISCUSSION-PUBLIC HEARING/VOTE
TUESDAY, JUNE 1, 2021 6:00PM
HERTFORD COMMUNITY CENTER(in person and on Zoom)**

The Town Council of Hertford held its Public Discussion Public Hearing/Vote on Tuesday June 1, 2021 at 6:00pm.

COUNCILORS PRESENT

Mayor Earnell Brown

Mayor Pro Tem Ashley Hodges

Councilman Frank Norman

Councilman Jerry Mimlitsch

Councilman Quentin Jackson (left prior to adjournment)

STAFF PRESENT

Town Manager Pam Hurdle, Clerk Olga Simpson

A quorum was present

Mayor Brown called the meeting to order. Councilman Jerry Mimlitsch gave the invocation which was followed by the pledge of allegiance.

CITIZENS CONCERNS (Proposed Dissolution of the Hertford Police Department)

~Matthew Cyr – (Supported) thanked Mayor Pro Tem Hodges for explaining the financial state of the budget. He believed it was a good idea to disband the Police Department and contract with the Sheriff. The Town can save money and get better protection without having to raise taxes. The model has been working in Lakewood, CA for 67 years.

-Martha Borders – A transcript of her concerns are attached to the minutes.

-Murielle Harmon (Undecided) questioned if the county was on board, and whether there was a \$350,000 contract. She also wanted to know what made the difference between the \$550,000 and the \$350,000.

-Tim Brinn (Supported) – feels the Sheriff's deputies are more familiar with the residents than Hertford's police. He compared the years of service of each. Two of the Hertford officers have already been hired by the Sheriff's Department. Currently there are only two sworn officers with the Police Department. It is expensive to train and certify new personnel.

-Sarah Winslow (Supported) – Strongly supports law enforcement and feels the Town can no longer adequately support a police force. The budget has been the highest, there is excessive turnover and the infrastructure is in dire straits.

-Paul Hazen – No longer wished to comment.

-Jack Brooks (Opposed) He is a former law enforcement officer from the Eastern Shore of Virginia. He does not think Council has enough information to make a decision. He feels the Town can be policed by five officers and if you give them adequate salaries, good benefits, and raises, they will stay. He also suggested making them sign a two-year contract.

-Councilman Frank Norman –(Opposed) He did not receive the documentation in advance. He thought the Police Department was the most fiscally responsible department in the Town. Chief left because he did not feel he had the support of the Council. It was wrong for citizens to have to pay for law enforcement services that they were already paying for with their taxes.

COUNCIL CONCERNS

-Councilman Mimplitsch - Commented on the type of coverage that can be expected. He said coverage will be strictly for the Town unless there is an emergency or major incident occurs in the County.

-Mayor Brown – The decision to disband the police department was extremely difficult and she was concerned about the loss of jobs. No one has lost their job. There will be equal or better law enforcement service with a contract that provides dedicated service.

-Mayor Pro Tem Hodges – Gave a financial history of the police department and despite Council's huge investment in the department, it has had a high turnover, although some of the turnover was attributed to weeding out some bad apples. The police department was crippled by overhead expenses which was not their fault. He further explained the difference between the \$550,00 and the \$350,000.

-Councilman Jackson – He did not agree with the information provided by Mayor Pro Tem Hodges. He did not believe that he and Councilman Norman had received sufficient information. He felt other departments like Public Works had turnover. Pay raises had been given despite the budget crisis. He questioned why give Allison Platt the money she is being paid if the Town is financially strapped. He thought they should hold the vote since some members of Council had charges pending with the Hertford Police Department.

-Councilman Norman – He reiterated that he did not get the information ahead of time and since the attorney was not there he could not ask if what they were trying to do was legal.

-Mayor Pro Tem Hodges – He said the intent was to share the information ahead of time and get it to the attorney also so he could be here. However, he did not get the contract until today. He said they were working on the budget. The Town will get more by contracting. Council can elect to keep the police department and pay more for less

coverage or go into a contract and buy dedicated support with the sheriff's office at a lower cost. He was asking Council to move forward, not with the contract, but simply to say "Council has made a decision to retire the police department, move forward with the contract agreement with the sheriff's department and that contract will be discussed and ratified in a future meeting. This would not bind Council. They are not committed to retiring the police department until Council ratifies a contract.

Councilman Jackson moved to suspend the rules based on the time for this agenda item. Eight minutes per Council member is not enough time. He has questions and wanted time to have them answered and the answers on the record. Councilman Norman seconded the motion. In the discussion on the motion, Mayor Pro Tem Hodges opposed the motion saying all presentations and reference information were provided to all Council members. Questions had been answered in the Town hall meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to hear citizens' concerns. Councilman Jackson opposed being given a week to review the information and make a decision. He complained about the use of the attorney without that being voted on by the whole Council. The motion failed by a vote of 3 against and 2 for. The voice vote was as follows:

Councilman Mimlitsch	nay
Councilman Norman	yay
Councilman Jackson	yay
Mayor Pro Tem Hodges	nay
Mayor Brown	nay

Councilman Jackson made a motion to adjourn and Councilman Norman seconded it. The voice vote was as follows:

Councilman Mimlitsch	nay
Councilman Norman	yay
Councilman Jackson	yay
Mayor Pro Tem Hodges	nay
Mayor Brown	nay

Councilman Jackson left the meeting saying he received a text message that he had tested positive for COVID.

Mayor Brown restated Mayor Pro Tem Hodges earlier motion to retire the police department contingent upon, but not committed to until the contract is ratified by the Governing Board. Council Mimlitsch seconded the motion. The motion passed 3 -2. The voice vote was as follows:

Councilman Mimlitsch	yay
Councilman Norman	nay
Councilman Jackson	nay *
Mayor Pro Tem Hodges	yay
Mayor Brown	yay

*The Mayor stated that Councilman Jackson asked to record his vote as "no" even though he was not excused.

Since Officer Polumbo is the next highest ranking officer, Mayor Pro Tem Hodges made a motion to designate him as the Interim Police Chief. Councilman Mimlitsch seconded the motion. The voice vote was as follows:

Councilman Mimlitsch	yay
Councilman Norman	nay
Councilman Jackson	nay (in absentia)
Mayor Pro Tem Hodges	yay
Mayor Brown	yay

There was discussion on the proper procedure on someone leaving the meeting midstream and how his vote should be recorded. Council agreed to deem Councilman Jackson excused from the meeting and to record all his votes as "no."

Councilman Mimlitsch made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Mayor Pro Tem Hodges seconded it. The motion passed 4-1. The voice vote was as follows:

Councilman Mimlitsch	yay
Councilman Norman	yay
Councilman Jackson	nay (in absentia)
Mayor Pro Tem Hodges	yay
Mayor Brown	yay

Meeting adjourned 8:31pm

Martha Borders: Transcript

Thank you Hertford Town Council for allowing me to speak regarding the Hertford Police Department.

Last year when Mayor Pro Tem Hodges first raised the idea of consolidating the Hertford police into the Perquimans County Sheriff Department, my immediate reaction was surprise. Curiosity got the better of me and I began my own research. And some of the conclusions I reached are a bit disturbing. Small rural towns and counties all over our country can be a target for an organization to move in and virtually take over regarding town govt. and police. They put their people in place by vote, money, intimidation or any combination that works. Once an organization is in control of these communities, they become a hub for illegal activity. And it is not limited to drugs.

Usually these towns or counties are located in poor rural areas where the voting population isn't very attentive. Does that ring a bell? Just this morning I read an article in The New York Times about Guernsey, Wyoming. The police were continually thwarted by town council regarding drug investigations until they either left or were fired by council. The police couldn't do the job they were hired to do. No council should have that kind of control.

Our local Hertford Town govt. is set up so two or three council members can have a strong influence over our Hertford Police Chief. If there is a three person council quorum it only take two votes to fire the Chief. If it is a five person council quorum it takes three votes. See the problem? This situation could easily lead to abuse of power both in the police department and on council. I am not comfortable with the present arrangement. Citizens are afraid to come forward with information in such an environment. They could be retaliated against causing fear and distrust in our town. This antiquated thinking of leaving control with a few council members is ripe for corruption. Lets instead move into the 21 century and be open to an educated and researched option.

We have an opportunity to move our policing to the county and from what has been indicated, we can save money while maintaining reliable protection for the citizens of Hertford. The county Sheriff is elected every four years and answers to all the voters including Hertford residents. He can't be fired because Hertford town council or the county commissioners aren't happy with how he does his job. The Sheriff answers to the people while the Hertford Police Chief answers to Town Council.

The Sheriff can conduct his own investigations without Town Council looking over his shoulders. I doubt if the Sheriff would take kindly to any council member trying to tell him his job. Though there are several on council that desire that control and also claim they know more about the law. There is much less possibility for corruption if our police are free to do an honest, well trained, dedicated job to uphold the law.

Change is part of life and Hertford is ripe to break free from power centered among a few and instead allow the citizens to have a vote in who is our Sheriff. As town residents we also pay county taxes that help fund the Perquimans County Sheriff Department. Let's hope that is taken in to consideration. While I do not know the final numbers needed to balance the budget, if it makes financial sense to switch to county policing, let's do it.