

CITY OF CLEWISTON
Special Commission Meeting
September 12, 2023

The Clewiston City Commission held a Special Meeting in the City Hall Commission Chambers Tuesday, September 12, 2023. The meeting was called to order at 5:05 p.m. by Mayor Pittman. The audience joined in reciting the Lord's Prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commissioners Present: Mayor James Pittman, Vice Mayor Greg Thompson, Commissioner Barbara Edmonds, Commissioner Mali Gardner and Commissioner Hillary Hyslope.

Personnel Present: City Manager Randy Martin, Finance Director Shari Howell, Police Chief Thomas Lewis, Community Development Director/Fire Chief Travis Reese and IT Administrator Justin Lucas. City Attorney Dylan Brandenburg attended via telephone.

Visitors Present: Charles Leano

Additions/Deletions/Changes and Approval of the Agenda – There were no additions, deletions or changes to the agenda.

Public Comments – There were no public comments.

PUBLIC HEARING

- 1. Resolution No. 2023-077** – Resolution No. 2023-077 adopts a new non-ad valorem assessment for fire services within the City of Clewiston.

Mayor Pittman opened the public hearing and read Resolution No. 2023-077 by title.

Manager Martin asked Fire Chief Reese to provide an overview of the steps taken up to this date regarding the proposed fire assessment. Fire Chief Reese reported that in November of 2020, the City declared the intent to begin the process to fund fire service with non-ad valorem collections through an assessment. The Commission adopted the first steps to initiate the transition. He explained that the City had always paid this service through ad valorem taxes and it was felt that the alternative non-ad valorem assessment would be more fair and equitable to the citizens. Mayor Pittman referenced a section from the required report that indicates a special assessment as a line item on property owner tax bills of \$116.00 annually. Manager Martin added that the \$116.00 is for readiness and a demand fee which is based on the overhead associated with call volume and type of calls over a period of time. Commissioner Gardner asked about the LaBelle (west side) fee portion being equal to the Clewiston (east side). Chief Reese explained that LaBelle covers Montura Ranches, Pioneer and Felda with Montura Ranches being the largest of those areas. He stated that if this resolution is adopted, as recommended, the east and west sides will be collected utilizing the same funding method.

Commissioner Gardner commented on the millage rate that passed on a 3/2 vote at the Tentative Budget Hearing on September 7, 2023 and explained that she did not support it because she felt the intent was that the millage rate would go down because of the assessment. She expressed that she supports the fire assessment but did not agree that the City is not reducing the millage rate based upon the record revenue received into this budget. She feels the rolled-back rate would have been the right thing to do. She cannot support the full millage rate considering that we are adding the fire assessment. She stated that other communities are 3-4 mills and ours is starting at 6.5314. Commissioner Hyslope noted that other surrounding communities have many more assessments than Clewiston.

Mr. Charles Leano came forward and stated that as a property owner in the City of Clewiston, his taxes have increased 270% or higher from last year to this year. His salary as a teacher is not enough to afford the taxes here.

Vice Mayor Thompson expressed his concern that approving the assessment will result in the “haves” will pay less and the “have-nots” will pay more than what they are currently paying. Manager Martin noted that some property owners are not currently paying anything under the current funding plan.

Mayor Pittman closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Hyslope made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Edmonds, to approve Resolution No. 2023-077. Vote 4 yeas, 1 nay (Vice Mayor Thompson voted nay.)

- 2. Resolution No. 2023-078** – Resolution No. 2023-078 adopts the agreement between Hendry County Property Appraiser and City of Clewiston.

Mayor Pittman read Resolution No. 2023-078 by title.

Commissioner Hyslope made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Edmonds, to approve Resolution No. 2023-078. Vote 5 yeas, 0 nays

Adjournment

Commissioner Gardner made a motion, seconded by Vice Mayor Thompson, to adjourn the meeting at 5:48 p.m. Vote 5 yeas, 0 nays

James Pittman, Mayor

Mary K. Combass, City Clerk