

CITY OF PINEVILLE, LOUISIANA
PUBLIC HEARING & COUNCIL MEETING
MAYOR AND COUNCIL
January 14, 2025 – 6:00 P.M.
MINUTES

Mayor Joe Bishop and the Council of the City of Pineville, Louisiana, met in regular session on Tuesday, January 14, 2025, beginning at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the City Hall, 910 Main Street, Pineville, Louisiana

1. Mayor Bishop called the meeting to order.
2. Councilman Martin gave the invocation.
3. Mayor Bishop led the Pledge of Allegiance.
4. Roll Call Present: District 1 Councilman Randy O’Neal
 District 2 Councilman Kevin Dorn
 District 3 Councilwoman Christy Frederic
 District 4 Councilman Tom Bouchie
 District 5 Councilman Nathan Martin
 Absent: None

5. Mayor Bishop explained that anyone with public comment for any item on the agenda will need to raise their hand, at that time, to be recognized and come to the podium.

-- Mayor Bishop took the liberty to introduce and invite Mr. Thomas David III to the podium for comments. Mr. David is a candidate for Rapides Parish Clerk of Court in the special election that will be held in March.

6. A motion was made by Councilman Dorn and seconded by Councilman O’Neal to accept the minutes of the December 10, 2024, regular meeting as published. There was no Council discussion. On vote, the motion carried unanimously.

7. A motion was made by Councilwoman Frederic and seconded by Councilman Bouchie to accept the financial report as read by Finance Director Mr. David Humphries. Mr. Humphries reported sales tax was up over 10% for the month of December year-over-year. In response to a question, he stated this includes internet sales tax collection, which was also up. No other comment was heard. On vote, the motion carried unanimously.

8. Mayor Bishop recognized Pineville Police Officers Meagan Thompson and Braxton Cripps for their recent graduation from the Alexandria Regional Police Academy. Police Chief Roy Foye congratulated the officers and presented their badges to family members for the “pin-on” ceremony.

9. ZONING COMMISSION REPORT: Zoning Commissioner, Mr. Tom David, stated that it is the Zoning Commission’s recommendation to approve a petition of rezoning for 206, 212, 216, 220, 224 and 230 Dillon Street, owned by Inner-city Revitalization Corp., from C-3 Commercial to R-2 Residential for the purpose of the construction of new homes. Mr. David explained this is an administrative clean-up from a matter that was discussed in November’s meeting regarding the property at 230 Dillon Street. At that time the Zoning Commission discovered the zoning for these addresses was incorrect. No further comment was heard.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Frederic and seconded by Councilman O’Neal to accept the recommendation as stated. There was no Council discussion. On vote, the motion carried unanimously. Roll call was as follows:

Yea:	Councilpersons O’Neal, Dorn, Frederic, Bouchie, Martin
Nay:	None
Abstain:	None
Absent:	None

10. PUBLIC HEARING was held for the adoption of an ordinance to amend and modify the Code of Ordinances, Chapter 6, Article I, Section 6-11, Subparagraph (b), relative to sterilization of animals. Mr. Michael Henderson of 200 Hudson Street spoke as an advocate for animals and urged the Council to adopt these ordinances with thought and care. No further comment was heard.

A motion was made by Councilman Dorn and seconded by Councilwoman Frederic to adopt an ordinance to amend and modify the Code of Code of Ordinances, Chapter 6, Article I, Section 6-11, Subparagraph (b), relative to the sterilization of animals. There was no Council discussion. On vote, the motion carried unanimously. Roll call was as follows:

Yea:	Councilpersons O'Neal, Dorn, Frederic, Bouchie, Martin
Nay:	None
Abstain:	None
Absent:	None

11. PUBLIC HEARING was held for the adoption of an ordinance to amend and modify the Code of Ordinances, Chapter 6, Article I, Section 6-14, relative to current rabies tags. There was no public comment.

A motion was made by Councilman Bouchie and seconded by Councilwoman Frederic to adopt an ordinance to amend and modify the Code of Code of Ordinances, Chapter 6, Article I, Section 6-14, relative to current rabies tags. There was no Council discussion. On vote, the motion carried unanimously. Roll call was as follows:

Yea:	Councilpersons O'Neal, Dorn, Frederic, Bouchie, Martin
Nay:	None
Abstain:	None
Absent:	None

12. PUBLIC HEARING was held for the adoption of an ordinance to amend and modify the Code of Ordinances, Chapter 6, Article II, Section 6-37, relative to the impoundment of dogs. There was no public comment.

A motion was made by Councilman Dorn and seconded by Councilwoman Frederic to adopt an ordinance to amend and modify the Code of Code of Ordinances, Chapter 6, Article II, Section 6-37, relative to the impoundment of dogs. There was no Council discussion. On vote, the motion carried unanimously. Roll call was as follows:

Yea:	Councilpersons O'Neal, Dorn, Frederic, Bouchie, Martin
Nay:	None
Abstain:	None
Absent:	None

13. PUBLIC HEARING was held for the adoption of an ordinance to amend and modify the Code of Ordinances, to repeal and replace Chapter 6, Article III, Section 6-53, relative to felines or cats in public places. There was no public comment.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Frederic and seconded by Councilman Bouchie to adopt an ordinance to amend and modify the Code of Code of Ordinances, to repeal and replace Chapter 6, Article III, Section 6-53, relative to felines or cats in public places. There was no Council discussion. On vote, the motion carried unanimously. Roll call was as follows:

Yea:	Councilpersons O'Neal, Dorn, Frederic, Bouchie, Martin
Nay:	None
Abstain:	None
Absent:	None

14. A motion was made by Councilman O'Neal and seconded by Councilman Bouchie to introduce, accept for publication, and refer to zoning a petition of rezoning for 102 Ray Street, owned by Craig N. Jenkins, from C-1 Commercial to C-2 Commercial for the purpose of relocating an auto repair shop. There was no public comment nor Council discussion. On vote, the motion carried unanimously.

15. A motion was made by Councilwoman Frederic and seconded by Councilman Martin to introduce and accept for publication an ordinance to amend and modify the Code of Ordinances, Chapter 2, Article I, Section 2-1, relative to regular meetings of the Mayor and City Council date, time, place. Mayor Bishop explained this proposal is to move the Council meetings from 6pm to 5pm, to allow for citizens getting off work at 4 or 4:30 to come by and attend Council Meetings. Councilwoman Frederic interjected this is an attempt to improve attendance and participation, even if a citizen does not have a problem for the Council. This is something to try and see if it works. Mr. Brett Dupuy of 121 Beverly Loop expressed issue with the move because he doesn't get off work until 5. This is problem for him and "some of us that like to come to the meeting." No further comment was heard. On vote, the motion carried unanimously.

16. A motion was made by Councilwoman Frederic and seconded by Councilman Dorn to introduce and accept for publication an ordinance to amend and modify the Code of Ordinances, Chapter 2, Article II, Section 2-51, Subparagraph (b) relative to meetings of the Zoning Commission. Mayor Bishop explained this is proposing to move the Zoning Commission Meetings from 5:30pm to 4:30pm. No further comment was heard. On vote, the motion carried unanimously.

17. A motion was made by Councilman Bouchie and seconded by Councilman Dorn to approve a resolution authorizing the Mayor to submit a Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Community Water Enrichment Fund application for Water Well Repairs/Renovations. Mayor Bishop explained this is a grant from the State that Pan American Engineers will apply for to do work on water wells. No further comment was heard. On vote, the motion carried unanimously.

18. A motion was made by Councilman Dorn and seconded by Councilman Martin to approve a resolution authorizing the Mayor to submit a Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Local Government Assistance Program application for Commercial Zero-Turn Mowers for Public Right-of-Way Maintenance. This will help us to maintain our City right-of-ways and DOTD right-of-ways, which include Hwy 165 and Hwy 167. Councilman Dorn stated that if we didn't cut (State right-of-ways), we would only get two cuts a year, so you can imagine how it would look. This action will help with the cost we incur by cutting those right-of-ways; so this is a positive to keep our "Gateway" looking good. No further comment was heard. On vote, the motion carried unanimously.

19. A motion was made by Councilman Bouchie and seconded by Councilwoman Frederic to approve a resolution authorizing the Mayor to enter into a Cooperative Endeavor Agreement with the State of Louisiana, Office of Facility Planning and Control, for the Cedar Lake Pump Station Reconstruction Project. Mayor Bishop explained this is just to be able to change the name on the applications from the former Mayor. In response to a question, City Engineer Mr. David, explained the project is probably about 95 percent complete and we are pumping now. No further comment was heard. On vote, the motion carried unanimously.

20. A motion was made by Councilman Martin and seconded by Councilman O'Neal to approve a resolution declaring the following items in the Public Works Department as surplus for the purpose of selling, donating, auctioning, or disposing of as necessary.

NOMENCLATURE (MODEL)	SERIAL NO/VIN.
1ea Mi-T-M Pressure Washer, Model HEG-2004-0E2G	SER# 15120436
1ea CASE Back Hoe, Model 580	SER# JJ30305569
1ea TYMCO 600 Street Sweeper, Model 4300 SBA 4X2	VIN# 1HTJTSTKN88H665633
1ea TYMCO 600 Street Sweeper, Model 4300 SBA 4X2	VIN# 1HTJTSTKN8FH624187
1ea New Holland Tractor, Model TN75A 2RM	VIN# HJE025351
1ea New Holland Tractor, Model TN75A 2RM	VIN# HJE025255
1ea Lazer Z eXmark Mower	VIN# LZX940EKC606Wo
1ea Lazer Z eXmark Mower	UNKNOWN
1ea New Holland Tractor, Model 16L	UNKNOWN
1ea John Deere Golf Cart, Model UTIL VEH XUV560E	VIN# 1M0560EBKKM020275

Mayor Bishop indicated we are planning to have a public auction in March, at Buhlow Lake. No further comment was heard. On vote, the motion carried unanimously.

21. PRESENTATION of the City of Pineville Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Financial Audit by Mr. Steven McKay of Rozier McKay & Willis. Mr. McKay explained an audit is not an inspection of every transaction. They identify risks and spend time investigating accordingly. This year, the audit spent a lot of time investigating expenditures surrounding the former Mayor and Chief of Staff, and the former employee they had consensual relations with, along with credit card transactions. He credited Finance Director Mr. Humphries and the Finance Committee, headed by Councilwoman Frederic, for their hard work in getting the City in a very strong fiscal position. The City brought in \$2.8M from utilities, which places the City in the position to continue investing in its infrastructure. The City spent \$7.5M on infrastructure, which is the highest he has seen. Although there was a significant number of projects, the City has one-year of expenditures in reserves, which is the gold standard for financial strength of governments. There were three findings with compliance issues. First, the former aforementioned employee received payments for services outside of City employment. These payments were made by checks written to various parties throughout the year in what appears to be an effort to circumvent a "related party issue." In addition, the frequency of use and price increased during the year and after the employee's tenure ended, the service was not utilized, which calls into question whether the service was needed at all. Also the City paid the former Mayor's son's band for several performances and no one in the accounting department was aware of the relationship. Second, the City does not have a process in place to obtain approval of credit card purchases before a purchase is made. The process should be the same as other purchases. During the year, because the processes were not in effect, an employee was able to incur charges indicative of waste and abuse; including insurances paid on behalf of a third party, online fees paid on behalf of individuals and entities not affiliated with the City, transactions without a clear business purpose, sales taxes paid and items delivered to the employee's home. In addition, the previous Mayor incurred several transactions without a clear business purpose. In total, \$25,524 in credit card transactions was identified by the audit team to not have a clear business purpose, involved multiple parties without any benefit to the City or for transactions forbidden by Louisiana Revised Statutes. Thirdly, the City began a project for Beacon Point Peach Park. Per the Legislative Auditor, all contracts for Public Works projects exceeding \$250K must be advertised for bid. The Legislative Auditor recommends all Public Works projects less than \$250K be administered through an RFP process or solicitation of at least three bids. The team found this project was not administered through a process and bids were not solicited. As a result, the City may have paid more for this project than if it had been bid out. Lastly, although not part of the report, near the end of 2024, the City received a Bond issue of \$10M. The money will be utilized for infrastructure projects and the utility system, but based upon the audit results, they are not sure whether the money needed to have been borrowed at all. We know this wasn't something covered in the current year, we know this is something that will need to be addressed in next year's audit. To address the findings discussed, first, "related parties" have to be identified. Each member of management and each elected official will receive a form to self-report all "related parties." This information will be given to the Finance Department. Additionally, each vendor is going to have to certify they are not a "related party" before receiving payment. If they are a "related party," the City will document the City's efforts to shop the service around. Next, credit card policies will be formally written down and include a credit card authorization form that will have to be filled out before the credit card is used. If the form is not utilized, the City will not pay for the transaction and it will be incumbent upon the employee to settle with the vendor for the unauthorized purchase. Lastly, the City will begin to solicit bids for similar projects in the future and the Council will be presented with a Resolution to establish that economic development projects over \$50K must be administered through an RFP process. Mr. McKay concluded with gratitude for the opportunity to serve the citizens of the City of Pineville and reiterated that overall the City is in a very strong fiscal position. In response to a question, Mr. McKay explained the audit will become a public record once the Legislative Auditor has completed their review and it will be available for viewing on their website. He also explained the findings of the credit card abuse has been turned over to the next level of authorities for investigation.

A motion to accept the report was made by Councilwoman Frederic and seconded by Councilman Martin. On vote, the motion carried unanimously.

22. A motion was made by Councilwoman Frederic and seconded by Councilman Martin to introduce and accept for publication an ordinance to appropriate and pay funds to resolve claims filed by Brittany Poston Meshell. City Attorney Mark Vilar made the following statement: “Ms. Meshell filed an EEOC complaint against the City in May 2024, alleging, among other things, that she was discriminated against and constructively discharged from her position. My office and attorneys for RMI, have been involved in the EEOC process from the beginning. The EEOC process allows the parties to mediate the dispute in an effort to avoid entering full blown litigation. We recently conducted mediation with Ms. Meshell, and her attorneys, and reached a tentative resolution which requires the City to appropriate and pay Ms. Meshell \$188,500.00. In exchange for payment of this amount, Ms. Meshell will release all claims of any type against the City and its current and former employees. As City Attorney, and in conjunction with the attorneys for RMI, we recommend that the City agree to this settlement for a number of reasons: 1. Title VII is a Federal law and it states that the City is vicariously liable and therefore responsible for paying damages incurred as a result of the acts of its employees. Under Title VII, the employees themselves are not responsible. This particular Federal law is different than State law and other Federal laws. At the end of the day, Title VII requires that the City is responsible in this instance. 2. This payment to Ms. Meshell eliminates the City’s exposure and the out-of-pocket monetary costs of entering full blown litigation which would exceed this amount if brought to trial. 3. The amount of time City employees would be required to spend involved in the litigation process, from depositions to document production to court proceedings, would result in a significant lack of production, would drain City resources and would greatly impact those employee’s ability to provide City services. 4. This situation placed Statewide focus on the City for the wrong reasons and there is value in turning the page. In light of the above, I recommend moving forward with this ordinance. I recognize that the information provided is somewhat limited. At the appropriate point in the future, the City, as it has done in the past, will make available to the public additional information in accord with Public Record Law.” Additionally, Mr. Vilar explained that allowing this to go to litigation would negatively impact our bond rating and our ability to borrow money in the future...causing us to borrow at a higher interest rate. Mayor Bishop expressed the need to move the City forward from this claim and this step is necessary to do so. In response to a question from Mr. Eddie Lashney of 506 Main Street, Mr. Vilar explained that regarding the claims by Ms. Meshell, the City does not have the right, by law, to recoup monies lost from parties involved. He also explained that regarding the other transactions brought to light by the audit, being that it has been turned over (to authorities), will depend in part on those results and in part as to whether or not the items in question equate to an opportunity to do so and at this point it is way to early to tell. There were no further comments. On vote, the motion carried unanimously. Roll call was as follows:


Yea:	Councilpersons O’Neal, Dorn, Frederic, Bouchie, Martin
Nay:	None
Abstain:	None
Absent:	None

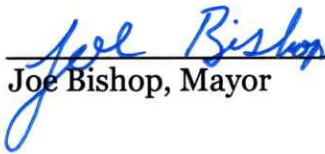
At this time Mayor Bishop opened the floor up for any other business to come before the Council.

- Mr. Cornelius White of 3638 10th Street, Alexandria, expressed appreciation to the Mayor and Council for allowing freedom of speech at the meetings.
- Ms. Debra Gunter of 101 Chaudoir Drive “Thanked” the Mayor for having the new TV screens showing the agenda as the meeting moved along.
- Councilman O’Neal appreciates the concern for the City shown by citizens at tonight’s meeting. He reiterated those on the dais work for the citizens and he challenged everyone to hold “us” accountable.

No further comments were heard.

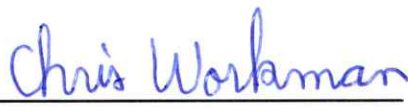
There being no further business to come before the Council, a motion to adjourn was made by Councilwoman Frederic and seconded by Councilman Bouchie at 6:55 p.m. There was no Council discussion and the meeting was adjourned. Councilman Dorn prayed the benediction.


Chris Workman, City Clerk


Joe Bishop, Mayor

CERTIFICATE

I, Chris Workman, Clerk for the City of Pineville, Louisiana, do hereby certify that the above and foregoing constitutes a true and correct record of the official action taken at a regular meeting of the Mayor and Council of the City of Pineville, Parish of Rapides, State of Louisiana, in legal session convened, on the 14th day of January, 2025.


Chris Workman, City Clerk