

**City Of Vidor
Vidor City Council
Special Called Meeting
September 01, 2023**

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mayor Misty Songe
Councilmember Mercedes Lee
Councilmember Michael Thompson
Councilmember Nicole McGowan
Councilmember Jessica Barker
Councilmember Gary Herrera (Hold-over)
Councilmember Kathryn Weldon

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Administrative Personnel: Katrina Jones, Finance Director; Chris Leavins, City Attorney; Rod Carroll, Police Chief.

A. OPENING, PRESENTATIONS, AND CITIZENS COMMENTS

A -1. Call to order and the establishment of a Quorum

A full quorum was present, and the Special Called Meeting of the Vidor City Council began at 6:00 p.m., Mayor Songe presiding.

A -2. Invocation and Pledge to the United States Flag and the State of Texas Flag

Chris Leavins City Attorney gave the Invocation and led the Pledge to the United States Flag and the State of Texas Flag.

A -3. Citizen Comments

There were XXX citizen comments.

Jerry Crumley

Mayor, Council, and everyone in attendance tonight – thank you for coming. I'll start off by saying that a healthy work environment must be all-inclusive. Everyone agrees with that. All persons, regardless of their characteristics, must be welcomed into the organization and treated fairly with dignity and respect. Characteristics protected by law are gender, race, sexuality, disability and religion. Poor leadership will lead to poor morale, production will suffer and good, quality candid people will leave their positions they thrive in due to mistreatment and mistrust. Openly stating that City Hall does not need diversity is cancerous. Just because a person is in charge of your organization does not make them a leader at all. Ineffective leadership make poor decisions. Poor decisions (inaudible) the person in charge of this place only made them boastful in an attempt to inflate their ego, but they're still ineffective. I ask that the Council fully investigate the allegations and look at all the facts levelled against the current City Manager and upon completion of your investigation, that this Council, without bias and your own pre-determined agenda, to conclude that the current City Manager should be removed from this position immediately. This decision will not be a blemish on our city or on the Council, but on the person. A more positive step moving forward with the city government, ask yourselves this also – what would you do if this happened to you? Would you come forward and be heard?

Ashley Thibodeaux

Thank you for taking the time to listen to our stories with an open mind. Our intention is not to instruct Council on what to do. We simply want the coercion and division that is going on in our workspace to be acknowledged, addressed, and resolved. Compassion and second chances are vital in transformative leadership. Herein lies my disappointment. A critical decision was made because a private investigation was not conducted as anticipated. An optimal solution cannot be made without an investigation. In November 2021, I was put in a position by Robbie Hood that challenged my integrity. Through the years, I have witnessed bizarre, aggressive, inconsistent behavior – to say the least. It is in my opinion that my leader, Mr. Hood, is divisive, (inaudible) and dishonest. I believe in rehabilitation, grace and giving second chances. Everyone makes mistakes. The exact definition of a mistake is an error in action, calculation, opinion, or judgment caused by poor reasoning, carelessness, insufficient knowledge. However, strategic manipulation for selfish benefit and egoic pursuit are not mistakes. Mr. Hood does not belong in the (inaudible) construct. Thank you for hearing us and thank you for your time and consideration.

Heather Watson

When Council refused to launch an investigation into Robbie Hood, detailing a history of unstable, abusive behavior and misuse of city funds, they sent a clear and concise message that they do not care about the safety and well-being of the employees that serve the city of Vidor. It makes my heart break because I really, truly love what I do. I enjoy assisting staff, but I cannot work for an establishment that condones behavior detailed in the statements we submitted.. After his suspension, I heard about experiences far worse than mine and realized we cannot continue to allow him to work here. Some do not want to speak or even share their experiences and you need to understand this is because we are gambling with our livelihood, our retirement or possibly our ability to work in government ever again. Some of you have a personal vested interest in him staying here, to the point where you would not even entertain an investigation. I even heard that someone wanted to dig up our past mistakes to discredit our statements. That should let everyone know that there is validity to our recollections. Nobody is perfect by any means, but after every story I have listened to regarding the actions of City Manager Robbie Hood, I cannot believe there is a possibility for improvement. I want you to know that I have no reason to lie to you and if you attack our character after coming forward, it says everything about yours.

Katrina Jones

Mayor and Council, the first concern is the question that I am hearing. I hear over and over, “Why didn’t HR come forward before now?” The question I should be hearing is, “Why was HR put in this position in the first place?” Why would anyone in leadership ever believe it was okay to put their HR Department into this position? What can we do better to improve the situation so that it never happens again? My second and main concern is how the situation was handled. When the issue came to light, Council listened to what happened, and they came back with a reasonable response. The City Manager was put on a paid administrative leave, pending an investigation. This happens every single day – with police officers, with public officials, with administrators. It doesn’t mean that someone is guilty. It means we have a situation, and we need to do some fact gathering so that we can get to the truth. It’s standard procedure. The employees were fine and under the impression that an unbiased attorney or investigator with extensive HR experience would be interviewing Robbie and the employees – that Robbie and the employees would have an opportunity for their voice to be heard. That is what an investigation is for – to discover the facts and get to the truth. Then all the facts could be presented to Council, and they could make an informed decision, most likely with a professional recommendation on what is needed. What is needed could be reeducation. What is needed could be termination. We don’t know. A professional opinion could be given to you, saying, “This is what we see and everybody needs to go in and make some adjustments.” The next action by Council wasn’t a response to the situation. It was a reaction to the situation. A reaction is emotional. When that happened

and Council ended the investigation and decided on probation with no further information. When that happened, another reaction happened – the employees reacted. Then you had a chain reaction that occurred. I'm not saying this was the Council's intention at all. What I'm saying is that the perception to a point is that Council doesn't believe you. And not only do they not believe there is a huge problem here, but they also don't even care enough to conduct this investigation. That's the mention that got heard, whether it was meant that way or not. Even in a minor court case – something simple – a person has the opportunity to be heard in an open court by an impartial person. Even if it doesn't work out, they're okay with it because they had a chance to say their story, to say their piece. This process is called due process. Due process is the legal requirement that legal matters or issues may be resolved according to certain principles and rules so that all individuals are treated fairly. Like I said, I've seen people come in and tell the story and may get no one in their favor, but they're okay with it because it was fair and they were treated fairly. When voices are silenced, this is what happens. Employees feel like the only aspect they have is to go public to have their voices heard. Now we are all having to deal with the fallout of this situation. I am extremely disheartened for the city, for all of the employees, and for everyone (inaudible).

Susan Rushing

I am Susan Rushing. I am the Code Enforcement Officer for the city. I've been here for nine years, and I've never been treated like this in my life. I have to put up with this every day. He points his finger in my face, kicks me out of meetings. I can't put up with it anymore. I hope ya'll take the time to read our statements and really pay attention.

Amanda Flannigan

My husband has also filed a formal complaint. He's not into public speaking. He doesn't care to be up here. You guys can address that in the back, but until then, I wanted to start by saying that on your website, you list or it is has listed the qualifications for City Manager, the last paragraph being the most important, I believe. "As a constant public servant and a recognized leader in the community, the City Manager should demonstrate the highest personal and professional integrity and promote and adhere to proven ethical standards. I'm here on my husband's behalf, who is your Streets and Drainage supervisor. I'm here to shed some light on the issues before you from my personal perspective. I live this daily. I'm here to first, speak to who Percy is as a man. Many on this Council don't know him and that's unusual in and of itself. Percy's known to almost everyone here in this town. So since you don't know him, I think it's important that you do because it speaks to the validity of his complaint. That seems to be the common denominator here, is the lack of being believed. The lack of importance of listening to your employees. In your defense, you're just now getting wind of a lot of what's been going on. Having lived his entire life in this town, he's in love with the people in it. I am Wife #3, but I can assure you he's married to this place. Some background on him that speaks to his character – he's a huge community activist. He was awarded the Community Builder award for those efforts. It's the highest honor bestowed on a non-Mason. He's done countless benefits for those in need, taking nothing, but hugs in return. He was a Vidor Volunteer Firefighter for many years, working his way up to Captain. He drove for Ray's and Herrera's wrecker services for years. He's brought back thousands of dollars for our youth from BBQ competitions, but most importantly – he's viewed as one of the good guys in this town. Just ask. Just ask and many will agree with my assessment of him. I say all of that to say this – who a man proves himself to be matters. Watching him be conflicted in his want to serve, but not knowing that, in order to do so, he was asked to go against everything he believed. It wasn't easy to witness. I, on the other hand, tend to be outspoken. I call spades, spades. I call out wrongdoings, so I know why I don't work in this arena. Politics are dirty. People are sometimes in back pockets. I'm not oblivious, but this is my issue now. When you turn a blind eye to it while having authority over it, you now have my undivided attention, and I will ensure that all efforts to right the wrongs are applied. I trust, given all the new information, that you, as Council, will do the right thing by the employees and by the citizens that you serve. My personal experience with Robbie Hood is that he's two-faced. He speaks of (inaudible) as a team and then bashes any on that said team, my husband included. He said this to me and others that he has control over. Some of you seated up there and in this room as Chamber of Commerce members have not been

excluded in the bashings, I can assure you. You would be appalled, actually. It's why I take issue with people knowing Percy for so long and then sending threatening undertones to backdown in this situation, let alone not coming to him to ask if he had anything to add. Robbie speaks down about people – women mostly included – and why they shouldn't work for my husband's department, one of which was a hard worker with a great disposition who worked for Streets and Drainage previously and wanted to switch departments. She wanted to return to increase pay. Robbie stated in front of me that he didn't want her there because there are some places that women just don't need to be and this is one of them. I spoke out and said, "I beg to differ because (inaudible) work circles around may of the men that were here and did so for years, getting along just fine in this man's world." His other reason were who she dated. You're opening yourselves up for lawsuits, guys. Literally, it's baffling to me. Knowing she would seek (inaudible) elsewhere for money, we lost a good asset to our community. Percy was instructed not to speak to Council members, not even so much as updates to their wards, being told, "You don't talk to them. I'll handle that." He was also always troubled by the fact that Robbie didn't care to work with Robert Viator, County Commissioner Pct. 4. Percy, of all people, knows how important it is for all entities to work together. He's worked his whole life to build those relationships so that that can take place, but he was stifled. Robbie wanted to know "what that SOB wanted" any time he was in this vicinity, whether it be this building, anywhere - on a job site or otherwise – wanted to know what they talked about. You are now faced with upsetting one man and his livelihood who obviously misused his position of power or to mess with the livelihoods of many by the decisions you make going forward. Either way, Percy will be fine. I'm sorry. If you don't see my husband's worry by now, I can't help you. Robbie would praise the job that my husband did then it would get back to him that he would tell all the ways that Percy's department fell short, Percy's spirit becoming more crushed each time. You see my husband is a people pleaser who wants to go over and beyond in his role – whatever it may be. Percy doesn't need this job. He is set with lifetime medical and retirement. I'm set in my own right, but appreciate the insurance that you guys provide. So he continued to make a way because he wants to serve and loves this town. He enjoys the people he works with. They are good people. Most of you in this room are good people, but misguided perhaps. His crew loves and wants their jobs. They like working for Percy and they respect him. That's been made known. They told me they appreciate his ability to work while dealing with all of Robbie's BS. They are all fast figuring out that sometimes, it's just not worth it. There's always another job. Percy didn't get out of the hospital good before Robbie was blowing up my phone with this or that city business. Understand that Robbie stated he runs this town, but he doesn't need this town. He will use it as a steppingstone for something bigger. His arrogance precedes him. Pride cometh before the fall is my understanding. Thanks for listening and I hope you listen with an open mind.

Atasha Quebedeaux

I'm not here tonight to support one side or the other, but I am here because, as I've spoken to many of you, the city came to business a few years ago and said something was broken. You asked us to fix it. I'm sitting here asking you to do the same. I said this privately, but I wanted to make sure to say it publicly as well – I feel, as a business owner and a friend to almost everyone involved on both sides, that this would not be happening if procedures were in place. I've been told (inaudible) procedures are being looked over and that we won't be in this position again. As someone who sells homes in this area, as someone who is a vital volunteer in this area who has worked with Robbie as well as some of the people making these statements here tonight, again – I take no sides. I believe that there are times that you have to keep things private. I understand why things were kept private. I also understand that the rumor mill went wild and some of the things that were said tonight were from that rumor mill and that bothers me. So what I'm asking tonight is please fix it.

Ronnie Herrera

Over the years I've heard councilmembers (inaudible) reject public input in making their decisions to support or oppose various things posed by city staff through the city manager. Councilmembers have claimed that they have an obligation to act on behalf of the best interests of the entire city. One of the most important jobs that Council has is to bring us the best City Manager we can afford. Robbie came from Pinehurst in 2020 and

the then-Mayor stated that Robbie had done an outstanding job and they were very pleased. He also stated that the employee morale was better than they ever had it. Vidor ISD Superintendent Killgo said Mr. Hood brings experience as a City Manager from Pinehurst as he has demonstrated excellent leadership in that position. Robbie has been in municipal government for 25 years. He is a valuable liaison between the City of Vidor and Vidor Chamber of Commerce and was instrumental in making the City of Vidor a part of the Music Friendly Community program. Robbie has knowledge, dedication, integrity and great work ethic. He is helpful, attentive, and passionate. Robbie cares about growth and he cares about the City of Vidor's appearance. He just celebrated three years as City Manager in June. The city's population has increased 2% since he's been here. The City of Pinehurst's population has gone down 6% since he left. I am in no way saying this man is perfect, but what I am saying is this man is perfect for this job, without a doubt. Letting the City Manager go would be unethical. It would reflect poorly on the Council and the city. As a tax paying citizen and member of this community, I would strongly encourage Council to consider keeping Robbie as our City Manager and continue whatever punishment you think he ought to have. Nobody is perfect. Everybody deserves a second chance and for life to continue. It's ridiculous. We don't need it. We have enough problems. We don't need any bad publicity. We have suffered long enough, and we don't need to suffer anymore. I trust that you will make the best decision that you can. I trust that you will pray about it and reach to God that he will help you make the wise decisions that should be made.

Adam Dilley

I'm hearing all the stuff that (inaudible) said. I'm not saying that what he's done is right. We've all been accused of doing something. As you all know, we just had a wrecker ordinance opened up umpteen times. He has an open-door policy. Any time I call him, he answers, he makes time. When nobody would listen to us on Council, I wasn't on any terms talking to any of you. Mr. Hood talked to me. He might have talked behind my back or whatever, but at least he was a voice to me. I just ask for ya'll to make the right choice.

Charlie Atwood

I'm a lifelong resident of Vidor, Texas. I come to you with concern about what is going on with our City Manager and the accusations against him. Robbie Hood is unlike any City Manager we have ever had. Many have expressed how they can see his love and compassion for this town. They see his generosity and his help to push Vidor out of the stagnant environment so many other cities speak of about us and out town. When it was flooding, Robbie was out shoveling. When there are major issues going on, Robbie is there to help city employees and other branches of the government to figure it out. (inaudible regarding police department). When it's something that can be figured out right then, Robbie handles it so that the citizens are satisfied. We live in a world that believes our bosses should be nicer because I have feelings. So many on this Council – including myself – hold a manager or supervisor's role in a company. Not every employee is your friend. Not every employee feels that you're doing it right. (inaudible) We can't, as supervisors, let employees choose how we handle each and every situation. We have a job to do and every situation is handled differently. To my understanding, ya'll signed a 10 year contract extension for Robbie Hood that was known throughout the city to city employees, but this city decided to make a complaint for an eight month old issues. An employee who holds an administrative role in the HR Department made a complaint regarding an eight month old issue a week ago and was the only one. I think I would be more involved in finding out why now and what else this person was hiding or turning a blind eye to. I would have thought if all of these issues were true issues, then why wasn't the old complaint brought up to Council before this contract extended. Why didn't these folks storm this building and stand by their co-worker to guarantee this Council knew he was harsh and mistreated them. I know of folks who have used city owned equipment for personal gain and other city employees have helped others with situations while on company time and city property. I'm not going to drag anyone through the mud, but I've witnessed it. So before we call the fate of Robbie Hood, let's look at him and think about the things he's done for this city. Why did they feel compelled now or were they handed a fabricated situation to say about this man? I'll close by saying that I don't believe any city employee has ever been totally wronged, but many have reaped the benefits of leniency in wrong-doing.

B. COUNCIL REGULAR AGENDA

B -1. EXECUTIVE SESSION

- a. **Section 551.071 of the Texas Government Code – Consultation with Attorney, to seek or receive legal advice regarding pending or contemplated litigation, a settlement offer, or on a matter in which the duty of the attorney to the City under the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct of the State Bar of Texas clearly conflicts with the Texas Open Meetings Act; and**
- b. **Section 551.074 of the Texas Local Government Code - Personnel Matters, to deliberate the appointment, employment, evaluation, reassignment, duties, discipline, or dismissal of the City Manager, or to hear a complaint or charge against the City Manager.**

Mayor Songe convened the regular meeting to Executive Session at 8:36 p.m. to address matters referenced in B-1 of the agenda.

Mayor Songe reconvened the Regular Meeting at 10:18 p.m.


B -2. Consideration and possible action arising out of or related to Executive Session under B-1.a. and B-1.b., including the employment of the City Manager.

Councilmember Weldon made a motion to place City Manager Robbie Hood on paid administrative leave, pending an investigation by Sandy Howard from Germer Law Firm and report back to City Council and to appoint Rod Carroll to carry out the City Manager’s duties. Councilmember Thompson seconded the motion. Council voted unanimously via roll call vote. Motion carried.

B -3. Consideration of Adjournment.

A motion was made by Councilmember McGowan, seconded by Councilmember Thompson, for **Consideration of Adjournment**. The Council voted six (6) for and none (0) opposed. The motion carried, and the Special Called Meeting of the Vidor City Council adjourned at 10.19 p.m..

These minutes approved September 28th, 2024.



Misty Songe, Mayor

ATTEST:


Katrina Jones, Finance Director