

**MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 14, 2021
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE ALLIANCE CITY COUNCIL**

The meeting was called to order by President Garnes at 5:30 P.M. President Garnes Clerk Yost then read the notice of the Special Meeting and Councilman Mastroianni gave the invocation and led the meeting in the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL: Kris Bugara (remotely), Sheila Cherry (remotely), James Edwards (Remotely), Andrew Grove (remotely), Cindy King (remotely), Edward Lohnes (remotely) and Phillip Mastroianni (remotely).

President Garnes noted the reason for the meeting and noted the anticipated procedure for the meeting and the discussion. President Garnes stated that there is not usually public comment in a special meeting but that there is a resident president that is the victim of the vandalism that wishes to address the Council so if Council wants to allow her the floor there should be a motion to that affect.

Motion and second to allow public comment at this special meeting session of City Council. Roll Call Vote: Unanimous: **MOTION PASSED BY ACCLAMATION OF ALL MEMBERS.**

COUNCIL MEMBER AND ADMINISTRATION COMMENT:

Councilwoman Cherry expressed sick feelings and being upset over the vandalism incident at the residence on Mahoning and discussed her reason for calling the meeting was to show community unity in addressing this hatred. Stated she is drafting a resolution to present to Council at the next meeting to address social injustice. Stated that there was a vigil earlier today to pray about this incident and pray for help of showing unity in the community

Councilman Edwards expressed sorrow for what happened to the Ms. Johnson and her family. Expressed that this cannot go on in our community. Expressed that the culprit needs to be brought to justice.

Councilman Grove stated that racism has no place in our community and in society in general. Justice will be served and the individuals responsible for this act will be caught and brought to justice.

Councilwoman King expressed her sorrow to the Johnson and McMaster families that this happened. These are relatives and the family has lived in the house since the 1960's without any such incident in the past. We as a community have to come together and have to dispel this anger and hostility. We as a community have to come together and heal. Thanked the police department for their efforts and stated that we as a community need to watch out for our neighbors and pray that we can come together to stop this sort of thing.

Councilman Lohnes stated we need to come together in unity to condemn this action and he will support a resolution to that effect. Mr. Lohnes apologized to the victims for having to endure this horrible act. He expressed a desire that someday we wouldn't need meetings like this as such acts would be a thing of the past.

Councilman Mastroianni thanked Councilwoman Cherry for bringing this to light and asking for this special meeting to address this situation. Stated that this is a despicable act that is not welcome in the City of Alliance. Coming together as a Council in support of the victimized family demonstrates our unity in condemning this type of conduct.

Councilman Bugara apologized to the victim family for having to deal with this disgraceful ordeal and expressed a desire that the responsible parties be caught and brought to justice. Mayor Andreani stated that this horrible act needs to be condemned in the strongest terms, The overwhelming theme of tonight's meeting seems to be unity and that is what is needed to combat this. Stated that the Safety Service Director and Police Captain John Jenkins are present to answer any questions that they can noting that sometimes all questions cannot be addressed due to the ongoing criminal investigation.

President Garnes stated that in his experiences as Alliance City School Superintendent, the diversity of this community is one of its greatest strengths. The fact that someone would do this as a condemnation of our diversity is a sad day for our community. Stressed that if someone knows something they should say something so that justice can be served and we can begin healing. Anyone with information should contact the Police. Asked the Law Director if there is some way to increase penalties for such acts to send the message that this won't be tolerated.

Law Director Arnold stated that the enhancement for hate crimes or ethnic intimidation has already be enacted by City Council. Law Director went on to explain what happens when a crime is enhanced as a racially motivated crime and how it could be prosecuted. Also explained that this happened just outside of the City in Smith Township and would have to be charged by the Smith Township Police and prosecuted in Mahoning County.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Portia Johnson of 97 North Mahoning Avenue introduced herself and stated that she and her family were the victim of this act. She commended the Police Department and the Community for the outreach of support since it happened. She stated that she is leaving the graffiti up as a peaceful protest against such hatred. She stated that the natural response is to remove such things or cover it up as soon as possible but that silence does not address the problem. Stated that she cannot be silenced any longer and speaking up is the only way to address the problem. Ms. Johnson stated that the home was built in the late 1800's and has been in her family for generations. She went on to explain the effects on her family and especially her children. She stated that she comes from a proud family with strong ties to the Alliance Community and this act of hate must be addressed and we as a community must heal. Stated that some have stated that leaving the graffiti only invites more hate or sets her up to play the victim. Nothing could be further from the truth. Silence is a coverup and allows this type of conduct to continue. Hoping to set up educational programs directed at stopping this conduct.

DISCUSSION:

Councilwoman Cherry asked the Law Director to provide what code sections address ethnic intimidation. Law Director provided citation and stated she will send copies of the statutes later.

Councilman Mastroianni thanked Ms. Johnson for her words and her boldness in leaving the graffiti up so that the community can see first hand the ugliness that was done. Stated that silence is not the answer and he appreciates Ms. Johnson's approach to this situation.

Mayor Andreani stated that he did receive an email from Anthony Grimes who is a relative of Ms. Johnson and stated his outrage that such an act occurred. Mr. Grimes stated that the home has been in the family for more than 60 years and he has never seen anything like this before. Mr. Grimes thanked friends in the community for the support provided to his family and stated that Hate never wins.

Law Director Arnold asked for clarification in proceeding. It appears Ms. Cherry originally asked for a Resolution condemning racial violence but maybe a Proclamation would be more appropriate as it would be signed by all members of Council. The overwhelming theme tonight has been “unity” and a proclamation signed by all would certainly show that unity. Ms. Cherry stated that a Proclamation would be better.

Councilwoman Cherry thanked Captain Jenkins and the Alliance Police and Smith Township Police for their work on this case and support of this family.

Councilwoman King thanked Ms. Johnson for her statement and her silent protest at leaving the graffiti up as a reminder of what cannot be accepted. Ms. King further stated that the members of the community that have criticized Ms. Johnson’s actions as seeking to be victimized or seeking sympathy are unacceptable. Ms. Johnson is a victim in this and should have the community’s sympathy for what happened to her.

President Garnes stated that he wished all members of the community could experience this type of racial hatred so that they would understand what these victims are going through. Again he stated that the community needs to come together against this and if someone knows something they should say something. If individuals know something but are afraid to come forward due to fear of retaliation, they can make an anonymous statement even if it is to him and he will relay the information to the police

ADJOURNMENT: Noting no further business to come before this Council President Garnes adjourned the meeting at 6:06 PM.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS TAKEN:

NONE

**ARTHUR GARNES,
COUNCIL PRESIDENT**

**GERARD T. YOST
COUNCIL CLERK**