

**Village of Salado
Salado Municipal Building
301 North Stagecoach Road
Salado, Texas
Minutes of Special Meeting of Board of Aldermen
March 23, 2020 at 6:00 p.m.**

The Board of Aldermen meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Mayor Skip Blancett.

Board Members Present: Mayor Skip Blancett, Mayor Pro-tem Frank Coachman, Aldermen Rodney Bell, Amber Preston Dankert (via telephone conference), John Cole, and Michael Coggin.

Staff Present: Village Administrator Don Ferguson

Discussion and Possible Action

Discuss and consider possible action to reschedule the date of the upcoming Village of Salado General Election to elect a mayor and two aldermen from May 2, 2020, to November 3, 2020, due to public health concerns relating to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. (*Village Administrator*)

Village Administrator Ferguson advised that Governor Abbott has issued a proclamation and the Texas Secretary of State has issued an advisory informing communities that they are allowed to move their May elections to the next uniform election date in November. He reported the Salado ISD Board is also meeting at this time to make a decision on postponing their election.

If Salado ISD postpones their election until November, Village Administrator Ferguson stated that the Village of Salado will need to conduct its own election and find its own election workers (if the currently approved list of judges/clerks no longer wish to serve). He said if the election were postponed until November the Village would contract with Bell County, with Village only incurring cost for a ballot production charge, with all equipment and staffing paid for by Bell County. He explained that moving to November would not allow more people to file for places on the ballot and certain reporting deadlines would adhere to the calendar for the November election. He noted that at 4:00 p.m. this afternoon, Bell County Commissioners Court Judge Blackburn issued a stay at home order to be in place through April 3rd, with the possibility to extend the order as conditions warrant. He spoke of growing concerns across the state and nation that people are not taking the COVID-19 threat seriously and of the need to avoid contact and gatherings. He said there are now 16 confirmed cases in Bell County, with the first cases at Fort Hood announced just this afternoon, and the numbers are expected to rise as more people are getting tested. He noted that Judge Blackburn's order to shelter in place is applicable to all communities in Bell County. He advised that for this meeting, capacity is now at the maximum of 10 persons, including the Board and members of the public.

Mayor Blancett entertained questions. Alderman Cole asked about candidate attendance at the upcoming candidate forum and Village Administrator Ferguson replied that it is not going to be considered an essential function and probably is not going to take place. He said there is likely to

be very limited campaigning activity. Alderman Cole asked when the number of cases might peak, and Village Administrator Ferguson said the state has indicated it could be 6 weeks from now or as long as 3 months, but hard to predict, as testing is just getting underway. Alderman Cole said his big concern is for those voters in high risk groups. In addition to 5 emails received by the Village, Alderman Dankert said that on Facebook, 26 people stated they want to keep the election in May, while 4 stated they would like to postpone.

Alderman Dankert asked if the current mayor and 2 board members up for election can assure they will stay in their current position, barring any medical emergency, if the election is postponed until November. For clarification, Village Administrator Ferguson restated Alderman Dankert's question. Mayor Blancett advised that Alderman Dankert may ask each individual for an answer. Mayor Pro-tem Coachman asked Alderman Dankert her reason for asking this question. Alderman Dankert said if no one is prepared to maintain their current status until November and there is going to be a change, that we owe it to the voters to go ahead and vote now. Mayor Pro-tem Coachman did not believe he owed an answer to the question. Alderman Coggin replied that he would be willing to expend another 6 months of time working as an alderman. Mayor Blancett said he has no intentions of backing away and was absolutely ready to spend another 6 months on the Board.

Alderman Coggin asked Village Administrator Ferguson if the Board could decide later in April to move the election, if there is still a "lock down" or if it is going to be real dangerous for our citizens to vote. Village Administrator Ferguson answered the Board has the right to cancel the election as it sees fit at a later date, if it can meet November deadlines. Alderman Coggin spoke of his understanding from discussions with the state that provisions allowing for special elections do not really apply in this case; however, he asked if action is delayed for another 3 or 4 weeks, would that delay give the Village ample opportunity to campaign with the state to have the election in June. Village Administrator Ferguson replied that the governor's office and the Secretary of State's office have both clearly told the Village that if the decision is made to move the election, it can only be moved to the next uniform date in November. Alderman Coggin asked if it is possible the state will grant us a special election later after they have seen the extenuating circumstances. Village Administrator Ferguson replied negatively. Alderman Coggin stated that on his Facebook page, he has received 10 comments favoring keeping the election in May, one "maybe" comment, and 4 text messages from individuals favoring keeping the election in May. He said some commented that they will "battle a blizzard" in order to vote. He said he has received no comments to date in favor of moving to November.

Village Administrator Ferguson understood the difficult position of the Board, which is in a public health emergency, and pointed out public health, safety, and welfare as the primary purpose of our government. He said the Board needs to balance carefully its message to the people, if it decides to move forward with a May election, as there is now an order issued as recently as this afternoon, telling people to stay in their homes. He said that by April 20th (beginning of early voting period), the county judge and governor may say the Village cannot hold an election on May 2nd. Mayor Pro-tem Coachman asked about the governor's moving of runoff elections, which Village Administrator Ferguson noted were moved as they have to occur before November. He stressed that the state very clearly stated that local elections would have to be postponed until the next uniform election date. Mayor Pro-tem Coachman's statement that runoff elections have already

been told to move by the governor was confirmed by Village Administrator Ferguson. Mayor Pro-tem Coachman asked what other municipalities are doing at this point. Village Administrator Ferguson replied that Belton is moving to November, and Harker Heights and Killeen are voting tonight or tomorrow night. He said other area cities are either looking at moving their elections or already hold November elections. Mayor Pro-tem Coachman asked about the ballot printing deadline and Village Administrator Ferguson replied the elections vendor needs an answer on proceeding with printing by tomorrow. Mayor Pro-tem Coachman asked if the Salado ISD postpones and the Village does not, would the total expense of ballot production be shared. Village Administrator Ferguson replied that the Village would incur the total expense of the election, including printing ballots, as well as paying election judges and staff to run the election.

At this time, Salado ISD Superintendent Michael Novotny entered the meeting and one person volunteered to leave the meeting temporarily to accommodate the 10-person maximum capacity limit.

Village Administrator Ferguson stated the approximate cost to the Village for a May election would be between \$3,000 and \$4,000. He said if the election is moved to November, the county would bear almost all costs, with the Village paying less than \$1,000. Responding to Mayor Pro-tem Coachman, Superintendent Novotny replied that the Salado ISD Board voted to move its election to November.

Alderman Bell asked if the county judge could supersede the Board and mandate that the Village move the election, if the Board decides to keep the election in May. Village Administrator Ferguson replied affirmatively. Alderman Bell asked if the governor could do the same, and Village Administrator Ferguson replied affirmatively. Village Administrator Ferguson noted that the mayor does have emergency powers, but would have to declare an emergency. He said more than likely the order would come from the county judge.

Hearing no further discussion, Mayor Blancett entertained a motion.

Mayor Pro-tem Coachman moved to postpone the election of May 2, 2020 to November 3, 2020. Alderman Cole seconded.

Mayor Pro-tem Coachman said based on phone calls working out problems across the state dealing with student activities, he felt we are looking at months, not weeks. He believed holding an election on May 2nd would be dangerous for the populace of our Village, especially in light of the county judge's newly issued order to shelter in place. He noted that Waco also ordered sheltering in place today. He felt that this is not going away any time soon and favored moving the election to November 3rd as a prudent move.

Alderman Coggin asked if he and Mayor Pro-tem Coachman should recuse themselves as they are viable candidates for mayor and if a conflict of interest exists. Village Administrator Ferguson advised that such determinations are left up to each individual.

Mayor Blancett called for a vote.

Motion to postpone the election of May 2, 2020 to November 3, 2020 failed on a 2-3 vote, with Aldermen Bell, Dankert, and Coggin voting against.

Adjournment

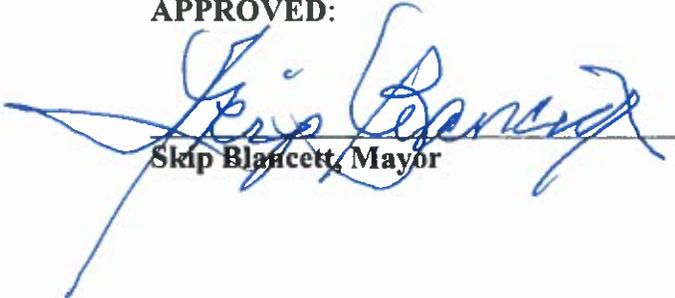
Alderman Bell moved to adjourn. Alderman Coggin seconded. Mayor Blancett called the meeting adjourned at 6:25 p.m.

Recorded by:

Don Ferguson

These minutes approved on the 2nd of April, 2020.

APPROVED:


Skip Blancett, Mayor

ATTEST:


Cara McPartland, City Secretary

