

STEVE WATKINS, MAYOR

NAOMI SHEPHERD, CITY CLERK



ALDERMAN:

JOE BROOKS, WARD 1

BRIDGETT M. PETERS, WARD 2

RONALD HOLLOWAY, WARD 3

STEVE NEELY, WARD 4

HARRY WHEAT III, AT-LARGE

Veto Message from the Mayor to the City of Quitman Board of Aldermen

Date Issued: March 29, 2023

Veto Message No. 003

RECEIVED

MAR 29 2023

REFERENCE: ISSUE NO. 2 VETO

CITY OF QUITMAN

**CONCERNING THE MOTION MADE BY ALDERMAN HARRY WHEAT
AND SECONDED BY ALDERMAN STEVE NEELY**

**IN RESPONSE TO THE QUITMAN TRAIN DEPOT LEASE AGREEMENT
BETWEEN THE CITY OF QUITMAN AND CLARKE COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

During the budget process for the current fiscal year, I discovered and notified the Board of Aldermen that the current Quitman Depot Lease Agreement, with an effective date of November 1, 1999, had expired some twenty years ago. I then advised the board that this expired lease agreement between the City of Quitman and the Clarke County Chamber of Commerce needed to be updated during this budget process with more realistic amounts for lease and utility payments to account for over twenty years of inflation. The board agreed and unanimously approved the 2023 Fiscal Year Budget incorporating the following changes for the Quitman Depot Lease: (1) an increase of the monthly lease payment from \$250.00 per month to \$450.00 per month, (2) an increase in the amount of a utility payment for water, gas, and electricity from \$60.00 dollars per month to \$100.00 per month, and (3) a decrease from a five year lease to a one year lease. This increase did nothing more than convert 1999 dollar amounts to present day dollar amounts to account for twenty-four years (24) of unaccounted for inflation.

Over the next few weeks, I incorporated the Board of Aldermen's requested changes in a new and revised lease agreement between the Clarke County Chamber of Commerce and the City of Quitman for the lease of an office room, board room, and private bathroom located inside the Quitman Train Depot. Any outdated language was also revised or removed while receiving City Attorney approval, multiple times, at several stages during the revision process. In late February 2023, at the City Attorney's suggestion, I met with the Clarke County Chamber of Commerce President, Mr. Greg Jackson, where we read and discussed the entire new lease agreement. Greg Jackson stated that he would present the new lease agreement to the Chamber of Commerce Board for approval at their next meeting on March 29, 2023 with a tentative effective date for the new lease starting April 1, 2023.

On Friday, March 17, 2023, the City Clerk prepared the board packets for the upcoming City of Quitman Board of Aldermen meeting scheduled for Tuesday, March 21, 2023. The City Clerk included a copy of both the outdated 1999 lease agreement and the new lease agreement including a copy of the March 21, 2023 agenda listing "Quitman Train Depot Lease Agreement" under new business. These board packets

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were then promptly taken to the City of Quitman Police Department for delivery to each board member and the City Attorney. While following the agenda at the regularly scheduled board meeting on March 21, 2023, I presented the new lease agreement to the City of Quitman Board of Aldermen for approval.

Immediately following my presentation while asking for a motion for approval of the new lease agreement between the Clarke County Chamber of Commerce and the City of Quitman, Alderman Harry Wheat asked for confirmation that Historic Clarke County owned the GM&O Boxcar adjacent to the Quitman Depot. I advised that I was present at the Clarke County Chamber of Commerce board meeting when the Chamber of Commerce acknowledged and accepted Historic Clarke County's claim of ownership of the GM&O boxcar and promptly scheduled the removal of Chamber property from the boxcar. I then said, "Yes, Historic Clarke County apparently owns the GM&O boxcar."

Alderman Harry Wheat then made the following motion: "I make a motion to charge Historic Clarke County \$225.00 a month for their boxcar sitting on the City of Quitman property and to charge the Clarke County Chamber of Commerce \$225.00 a month rent, leaving the utilities rent amount as is."

The following parenthetical expression is included for clarification: *(Alderman Wheat's motion reduced the Clarke County Chamber of Commerce monthly lease payment from the 1999 rate of \$250.00 to \$225.00, while leaving the utilities payment at the 1999 rate of \$60.00 per month. The new lease agreement prepared and presented to the Board of Aldermen, for approval, contained the new figures previously requested by the Board of Aldermen with a monthly lease payment of \$450.00 and a monthly utilities payment of \$100.00.)*

Alderman Steve Neely seconded the motion, and a roll call vote was taken as follows:

Ward 1 Alderman Joe Brooks	Voted	YES
Ward 2 Alderwoman Bridgett Peters	Voted	YES
Ward 4 Alderman Steve Neely	Voted	YES
Alderman At Large Harry Wheat	Voted	YES

(Alderman Ron Holloway was not present at the meeting)

During the discussion period surrounding this issue, Alderman Harry Wheat stated that the City of Quitman still gets \$450.00 per month rent with this arrangement by having the Clarke County Chamber of Commerce pay half and Historic Clarke County paying the other half.

ISSUE NO. 2 VETO

Therefore, I, Steve Watkins, Mayor of the City of Quitman, Mississippi operating under the authority and in accordance with Miss. Code Ann. § 21-3-15 *et seq.* do hereby VETO the above Order issued by the City of Quitman Board of Aldermen on March 21, 2023, concerning the \$225.00 per month reduction in lease payments and the \$40.00 per month reduction in utility payments, called for in the new Quitman Train Depot Lease Agreement, for the following reasons:

Establishing a new monthly lease payment of \$225.00 for the Clarke County Chamber of Commerce, which is \$25.00 per month lower than the lease payment established in November 1999, and \$225.00 per month lower than the amount, previously requested by the entire Board of

Aldermen, is not only a poor business practice, but is also, blatantly not fulfilling the obligation incumbent upon the Board of Aldermen to be good stewards of City of Quitman resources. This extreme reduction in the lease payment from the proposed \$450.00 per month to the below market value of \$225.00 per month and the reduction of the utilities payment from the proposed \$100.00 per month to \$60.00 per month VIOLATES SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES AND IS NOT IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CITY OF QUITMAN TAXPAYERS.

This VETO message was presented to the City Clerk for proper dissemination on Wednesday, March 29, 2023.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Watkins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Steve" and last name "Watkins" clearly legible.

Mayor Steve Watkins