# CITY OF METTER REGULAR MEETING MONDAY, JUNE 10, 2024 5:30 P.M.

A regular meeting of the city council was held on Monday, June 10, 2024, at 5:30 p.m. in the council chambers at City Hall.

Attending the meeting were the following officials:

Mayor Edwin O. Boyd
Councilwoman Victoria Gaitten
Councilman Gregg Stewart
Councilman James McKie
Councilwoman Rashida Taylor
City Manager Carter Crawford
City Clerk Angie Conner
Public Works Director Cliff Hendrix
Police Chief Robert Shore
Director of Economic Development Heidi Jeffers
Planning Director Teresa Concannon
Fire Chief Jason Douglas

Councilwoman Kilcrease was not present for the meeting. Councilwoman Taylor arrived during the first order of business under New Business.

Attending the meeting were the following guests:

Juan Taylor – Metter Fire Department Tim Spencer

## **CALL TO ORDER AND WELCOME**

Mayor Boyd called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone.

#### PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Councilwoman Gaitten led the Pledge of Allegiance.

#### **INVOCATION**

City Manager Carter Crawford gave the invocation.

#### APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Councilman McKie made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Councilwoman Gaitten seconded the motion, and the vote was unanimous.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Councilman McKie made a motion to approve the following minutes:

- a) Public Hearing, Monday, May 13, 2024, 5:15 p.m.
- b) Regular Meeting, Monday, May 13, 2024, 5:30 p.m.

Councilman Stewart seconded the motion, and the vote was unanimous.

### **PRESENTATIONS**

There were no presentations.

#### **OLD BUSINESS**

No old business.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

Councilwoman Taylor entered the meeting at this time.

## **Resolution Adopting the FY 2025 Budgets**

Councilwoman Gaitten made a motion to approve a Resolution to adopt the Fiscal Year 2025 Budgets for each fund of the City of Metter, Georgia, appropriating the amounts shown in each budget as expenditures/expenses, adopting the several items of revenue anticipations, and prohibiting expenditures or expenses from exceeding the actual fund available. Councilman Stewart seconded the motion. Mayor Boyd called for any discussion.

Councilwoman Gaitten wanted to make sure the salaries are where they are supposed to be for the fire department and police department. Are they starting at \$19.25 per hour and not an average salary? Mr. Crawford said that the starting salary is based on 40 hours. He said that he finally got in touch with Bryan at the county and he said that their starting salary for law enforcement is \$19.00 per hour. So, what we need to do is pass the budget and when the year end surplus of this year comes in then we can adjust the budget. When he originally talked to me back in March, he did not think the commissioners would go for that. Councilwoman Gaitten asked they would go for paying fire? They have nothing to do with the city though. So, are our city police officers at the \$19.25 per hour? Mr. Crawford said that if the budget is passed, they will be. What you normally do is an annual basis for police and fire because they are different from everybody else. Councilman Stewart said that when we discussed this, I thought they were based on 42 hours. Mr. Crawford said yes, the Sheriff's deputies are based on 42.75 hours. What this will do is bring up police starting salary to \$19.24 per hour based on 42 hours. The firefighters will be based on 53 hours which will be \$15.25 per hour. What that means is a total increase in cost of \$52,931. We will have a surplus again this year so we will be able to pull those funds out of the surplus. By comparison in cities our size in the State of Georgia, the average fire starting salary is \$32,389 and the average police officer starting salary is \$38,870. So, what this will do, it will bring our fire fighters and police officers up to a salary equal to \$42,024.13. What we can do on this is they are a grade 7, move them up to a grade 8 then it will mess up other things so what we can do is since they are a grade 7, we can move it down to a grade 7 step C that will give you \$42,024.13.

Councilman McKie asked what about everybody else? Since this is a starting pay for new hires, what about everybody else in the police department. Mr. Crawford said this will bring them all up. It will cost around \$2,000 per individual. You have fourteen individuals at \$2,024.96 which equals \$28,349 for four. In fire you have nine. We increased retirement for existing but new hires will have a year before they can join the plan.

Councilman McKie asked what are we doing for the other city employees? Mr. Crawford said they will get a 5% increase (2% COLA and 3% merit). The minimum starting pay will be \$14.00 per hour. This is what was budgeted.

Councilwoman Taylor said that if we do \$19.24 divided by 42 hours that is not \$19.24 an hour, is it? Mr. Crawford said that it is 42 hours times \$19.24 per hour. Councilwoman Taylor said so there is no takeaway for the 2 hours? It is not prorated, because 42 hours is 2 hours overtime. Mr. Crawford said no, police go into overtime at 42.75 and fire is after 53 hours in a two-week cycle. Chief Douglas said it is 212 hours in a 28-day cycle. Mr. Crawford said that the Fair Labor Standards Act has a completely different way of doing overtime for police and fire.

Councilwoman Gaitten said so we were wanting the firefighters pay higher than \$15.25 per hour even if they work more hours. Mr. Crawford said that you have to understand that part of their time is non-paid because they have sleep time and those types of things. Councilwoman Gaitten said so what about those times that they are supposed to be sleeping but they are not because they are fighting a fire or at an accident or something like that? Mr. Crawford said, well do you want the firemen to go to forty-two and \$19.26 per hour? Councilwoman Gaitten said that she would like it higher than \$15.25 per hour. That is what we have been saying multiple times.

Mr. Crawford said that the city has always had parity which means on an annual salary of police and fire make the same thing. It has been that way for a long time; before my time. The average starting pay for a city our size is \$32,289. Mr. Crawford said that most cities do not have parity with their police officers, but we do, luckily. But you have to understand that non-productive time with fire because that is the way it is set up. The fireman annual pay will be \$42,024.13 just like a police officer would.

Councilwoman Gaitten asked Chief Douglas what are the shifts? Chief Douglas said 24/48. Councilwoman Gaitten asked but what time do they go in and what time do they leave? Chief Douglas said 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m. Councilwoman Taylor said which there could not be a fire during the day too. Councilwoman Gaitten said that a police officer does not work a full 24 hours. I know you are shaking your head at me, but I am trying to explain if

they are at work they should be getting paid. Mr. Crawford said but what you have to understand is the way this is set up by the Fair Labor Standards Act. Fire has unproductive time. If you want to pay them more per hour then that means they are going to make more a year than police officers. Councilwoman Gaitten said that she just feels like the time that they work they should get paid for.

Councilman Stewart said that he did not really understand either that is why I went to his office one day and he explained it. Councilwoman Gaitten said that she gets what he is saying, I am not dumb, I understand what he is saying. Councilman Stewart said he means he did not understand it. Councilwoman Gaitten said that she feels like if they are at work then they should be paid to be at work. Mr. Crawford said that they are being paid to be at work. Councilwoman Gaitten said that they are but because they work more hours their hourly pay is not--- Mr. Crawford said this is a national standard. Why do you want to be different than the national standard?

Mayor Boyd said that this is not just Metter. This is the way it is supposed to be done. Councilwoman Taylor said that she gets this is the national standard and she understands that it has always been that way but are there other cities that do it differently? Mr. Crawford said that not that he is aware of. They all follow the Fair Labor Standards Act.

Mayor Boyd said that the idea, I guess because I am not an expert on city employment practices, the fire folks are on call so to speak because you don't know when you are going to have a fire or an emergency and as part of their job is that they have to be close to the equipment to get to the fire on time. So, I am assuming that contrary to that when a policeman is on duty on his shift engaged the entire time, he is on his shift. Councilwoman Taylor said that now she does not know that.

Councilman Stewart said that he understands the mechanism of it but one thing I did not understand about this particular situation here the way they have it in the city is I know they have the general procedure that they go to which means the tasks that have to be done on a day to day but what is basically the breakdown of the general procedures and then on call verses downtime during a shift? In other words, what is the downtime verses the non-downtime? Is there an average in the city in this situation? Chief Douglas said no because it just depends on the month too. Like some months we are testing hydrants until 2:00 a.m. in the morning. It just depends. Each month we have different assignments. We schedule it out. Like one month we spend all of our time testing hoses. One month we will spend the whole-time testing hydrants. We have it set up for different things. Councilman Stewart said so when they are on duty, they are not working 24 hours a day. Chief Douglas said that it just depends on the calls. It is hard to say. Friday night they did not sleep at all. Councilwoman Taylor said so do you compensate when they do not get to sleep. Mr. Crawford said that it does not work like that.

Councilman Stewart said that he thinks what a lot of people have a hard time understanding is how the formula works and do not understand what the end result is. That is where the disconnect is.

Councilwoman Taylor said or is it fair when I go to an emergency room the doctor is not up 24 hours. He sleeps, I get it. They wait until the rooms fill up and then wake him up. He does not charge me any less because he took a nap. My feet are still the same because he went to sleep. I mean it is the same thing and I want to pay him for his expertise and his time whether he went to sleep or not. That is kind of my point. Councilman Stewart said that you are probably paying the hospital and they are paying him based on his contract. Councilwoman Taylor said that they contract with the doctor's office, and they are contracted out. The emergency room associates, and the hospital get paid too. I would get two bills and if I get radiology then that is the third one. So, I mean because they have downtime or whatever, I still pay him, and he does not get less of a pay because he went to sleep. Councilwoman Gaitten said that she does not get less of a pay if she is on Facebook for an hour at work. If they are not sleeping, it is not fair to not get paid if they are staying up the entire night working. It is not fair to say just because.

Mr. Crawford said if you notice one thing in the Fair Labor Standards Act, the way it is set up is a 28-day cycle instead of a 30-day cycle. Councilman McKie said that you get jipped on overtime too. Mr. Crawford said that he has questions about that just like you do.

Councilman McKie said so they are paid for 24 hours at \$15.25 per hour regardless of whether they are running one hundred calls or zero calls. But the argument here is that they are only getting \$15.25 per hour compared to \$19.24 per hour which is what the police officers would be getting. However, the annual salaries are going to be the same because the firefighters work more hours throughout the year. Mr. Crawford said yes, they give them more hours throughout the year. Councilwoman Gaitten said so the firefighters work more hours. Councilwoman Taylor said they work more hours but are paid the same. Chief Douglas said that we do work more per year. 53 hours is the average per week. That way they do not get a high/low check. It averages out. Councilman McKie said so fire is getting 53 hours a week compared to 42 or 43 per week for police officers. The firefighters are working 10 more hours a week. Councilwoman Gaitten said that means they are away from their families 10 more hours a week. Mr. Crawford said now, I explained the levelization on that too because some weeks you don't. Chief Douglas said that instead of doing low/high we just did an average. That way they get a steady check instead of 48 hours one week and seventy-two the next. Councilwoman Taylor said that now that is just the hours on the time sheet that is not the hours that they are actually there. Chief Douglas said that is the hours that they are there. If they walk in the building, we have to pay them. Councilman Stewart said whether you have a call or not. Chief Douglas said yes, if they are there, they are covered under workers comp and they have to clock in.

Mr. Crawford said just like the Chief says they rotate 24/48 and sometimes in a pay cycle will be shorter. So, that is why we level them all out, so they get that much each pay period instead of less here and more here. Chief Douglas said that it comes out to the same amount. It just makes it easier budget-wise. Also, they know what their check will be every single week.

Councilwoman Taylor asked did we add any additional employees to this budget? Mr. Crawford said only one, the code enforcement/building inspector. Councilwoman Taylor

said so we have no other new employees? Mr. Crawford said no. Councilwoman Gaitten said not on this budget. Mr. Crawford said that Chief is applying for a COP'S grant which we hope we get and that will give us two more police officers, sometime during the year. Councilwoman Taylor said so we do not have a new employee at the public works building? They do not have a secretary over there. Mr. Crawford said that one has just been hired and it was budgeted in this year's budget. Councilwoman Taylor said yes, but that is what I just asked did we have any new employees? Mr. Crawford said I thought you were talking about this budget here and in this budget, we only have one new employee. In our current budget she was hired on but that was funded in this current year's budget. Councilwoman Taylor said so we on semantics now. So, the person was hired under last year's budget but up until--- When was the person hired? Mr. Crawford said I do not know when she was hired, in the last week or two. I do not know exactly when she came onboard, but the point is it was budgeted, and it was listed as an employee in this current year's budget. Councilwoman Taylor said I get it. So, my question is from July 1 of last year all up until June 1 even though it was budgeted it was not filled. Mr. Crawford said no, it was not filled. Councilwoman Taylor said so that was not common knowledge to us that y'all were filling that position.

Mr. Crawford said wait a minute, you are legislators. You do not get into the day-to-day operations. Now, it is up to this department head, who has the funding, to hire an employee going through the personnel director. I do not okay hiring employees. I hire department heads. They hire all of their employees. They are in charge of disciplinary actions to their employees because I have to be the appeals officer if they discipline one of their employees. I discipline only the department heads. Councilwoman Taylor said I get it but when we talk about the budgets, we did not talk about a new hire. Mr. Crawford said I do not understand what you are trying to say. I mean the police chief can budget for a police officer and it may be six months before he is hired. What is the point here? I do not understand it. Councilwoman Gaitten said I think what she is probably trying to say is just council being aware of a position being hired for.

Mr. Crawford said let me tell y'all this, as long as I enjoyed working for y'all I will, but I am a contract employee, and I am severing my contract because I am not going to get my heartbeat out of shape because of y'all wanting control of everything. If you want to control everything then go down there to the county and see the most dysfunctional county form of government that you want to see. Now, I am for good government, and I have always been for good government. I have taught college level for good government, but I am not going to sit here. I am going to terminate my contract as of tonight and y'all figure it out since y'all know so damn much. I enjoyed working for all y'all. I did but I am not going to sit here and have the city manager position undermined by legislators that cannot stay out of operations. No city manager is going to put up with that. I will get the city attorney to draw up a severance list contract. Good night.

As Mr. Crawford was leaving, he said I enjoyed working for all y'all. I really did. Y'all are great folks, every one of you.

Mayor Boyd said when it comes to the question at hand about the pay for the firemen verses law enforcement, I think we can see that they are set up entirely differently. There is a reason for it, and it is universally accepted as that is the way to do it. If not, it is up to y'all to decide what y'all want to do. This is true that this is the way that it has been done. I think we will be okay if we okay it. If you need more time to study it or if you do not want to continue with funding as it is we will have to operate under a continuing budget and go back to the drawing board. We will have to decide for ourselves as to what we want to do and then have a public hearing and then adopt a budget at a later time. So, it is up to y'all to decide how y'all want to proceed.

Councilman McKie said I feel like now with Carter leaving we will also have a budgetary question of what it is going to cost to fund a new city manager. I do not know if we should approve this as it is. We do not know what the future is going to hold.

Councilman Stewart said but is that going to interrupt any of the pay increases that any of the employees have? Councilman McKie said that we can approve that on an item-by-item basis can we not? Mayor Boyd said that we will be continuing under the existing budget. Councilman Stewart said so that would not be fair to them either.

Mayor Boyd said that the budget can be amended. If we pass a budget now, we can go back and change it if we so desire. Budgets are a guesstimate of what we are trying to do in the future. They can be amended.

Mayor Boyd said that we have a motion on the floor, and we are in the middle of discussion, do y'all want to vote on this budget as it is and then feel free to work on it some more later? How do you want to proceed? Councilwoman Gaitten said that she thinks that is probably for the best. We do not want to hold up their pay raises. Councilman Stewart and Councilwoman Taylor agreed.

Mayor Boyd called for the vote. The vote was unanimous to approve a resolution to adopt the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget for each fund of the City of Metter, Georgia, appropriating the amounts shown in each budget as expenditures/expenses, adopting the several items of revenue anticipations, and prohibiting expenditures or expenses from exceeding the actual fund available.

#### **Water/Sewer and Sanitation Rates**

Councilwoman Taylor made a motion to approve new water/sewer and sanitation rate increases to take effect August 1, 2024. Councilwoman Gaitten seconded the motion. The information containing the new rate increases was included in the agenda packet. Councilman McKie questioned the street light fees. It is listed in red, but it is already \$5.00. Mr. Hendrix said that is a typo. Street light fees are not going up nor are the sanitation rates for garbage pickup. Mayor Boyd said so on an average bill what is this going to come up to? Mr. Hendrix said the council wanted to go up 25cents per thousand gallons. Probably seventy-five cents to a couple of dollars. Probably about three to four dollars when you add

the sewer increase. After no further comments, Mayor Boyd called for the vote. The motion was unanimously approved.

### **Candler County Public Building Authority**

Councilman McKie made a motion to approve the request to use the Candler County Public Building Authority as the source of issuing revenue bonds to fund the construction of the new city fire station. Councilwoman Gaitten seconded the motion. Mayor Boyd called for discussion.

Councilwoman Taylor stated that she would be abstaining from voting since she is on the Candler County Public Building Authority.

Councilwoman Gaitten asked if we have sent them anything on this like a letter or anything? Mayor Boyd said that he thinks Mr. Crawford has been dealing with them. Councilman McKie said there was a copy of a letter in his box. Councilwoman Gaitten said she has not checked her box yet. Councilman Stewart said that he saw some correspondence.

After no further comments, Mayor Boyd called for the vote. The vote was three in favor and one abstaining. Councilwoman Gaitten, Councilman McKie, and Councilman Stewart voted in favor of the motion. Councilwoman Taylor abstained from voting. The motion carried.

## **2024 SPLOST Fund Bank Account**

Councilman McKie made a motion to approve a resolution authorizing the Mayor and City Clerk to open a City of Metter 2024 SPLOST Fund Bank Account. Councilwoman Taylor seconded the motion, and the vote was unanimous. The motion was amended from the agenda to delete the city manager and add the mayor.

#### RaceTrac - Water and Sewer Extension - South Side of I-16

Councilwoman Taylor made a motion to approve the low bid from Sikes Brothers, Inc. in the amount of \$438,239.40 for the water and sewer extension on the South side of I-16 for the new RaceTrac. Councilwoman Gaitten seconded the motion. Funding for this project will come out of the water and sewer budget. Mr. Hendrix provided council with a schedule for the RaceTrac project. The tentative start date is September. The biggest hold up has been getting GDOT permits. I think they have about got all that worked out. Councilwoman Gaitten thanked Mr. Hendrix for sending out the project information. She asked, so do we know for a fact that they are coming? Is there any hesitation? Mr. Hendrix said the council has the same information that I do. They own the property so I do not know why they would spend a million dollars and not come. After no further comments, Mayor Boyd called for the vote. The vote was unanimous to approve the low bid from Sikes Brothers, Inc.

### **Public Hearing Date Set**

Councilman McKie made a motion to set a Public Hearing date for July 8, 2024, 5:00 p.m. to hear public comments on the following:

- 1. A request submitted by Jaqueline Ziranda Diaz for a Conditional Use Permit to allow a mini beauty salon to operate at 1095 West Hiawatha Street.
- 2. A variance request submitted by Vickey Baxter to allow for a side yard setback reduction at 610 Carolyn Street.

Councilwoman Taylor seconded the motion. Councilman McKie asked staff to verify that Ms. Baxter wants a variance and not a conditional use. She checked variance and then filled out the part for a variance and a conditional use. Mr. Hendrix said that Ms. Baxter is applying for a variance. Councilman McKie said that since she filled out both, I think we need to solidify that. Councilwoman Taylor said that she is glad to see one of our high school students getting a job. That is great.

After no further comments, Mayor Boyd called for the vote. The vote was unanimous to set the Public Hearing date for July 8, 2024, 5:00 p.m.

### <u>Lavender & Associates – Bid Phase IV Streetscape Project</u>

Councilman McKie made a motion to approve a bid in the amount of \$1,891,940.00 from Lavender & Associates for the construction of the Phase IV Streetscape Project (Downtown Park). Funding for this project will be from the INODIC Park Restoration Grant. Councilwoman Taylor seconded the motion. Councilwoman Gaitten said that she is excited to get started. Mayor Boyd said that Lavender & Associates is a first-class group. Mr. Hendrix said that they did Phase I and Phase II of the streetscape project. Councilwoman Gaitten said that is good. Councilman Stewart said that he has seen their work for 30 years or longer and they do good work. After no further comments, Mayor Boyd called for the vote. The vote was unanimous to approve the bid from Lavender & Associates.

### **Lavender & Associates – Bid for Drainage Improvements at the Depot**

Councilman McKie made a motion to approve a bid in the amount of \$72,580.00 from Lavender & Associates for drainage improvements at the Depot. This will be funded out of SPLOST funds. Councilman Stewart seconded the motion. Mayor Boyd called for discussion. Mr. Hendrix said that this is drainage work at the depot where that fence is that we have been planning for years. We figured it would be a good time to tie all this in with the park renovation. This is the same contractor, and they can do it all at one time. Mayor Boyd said that has been a real bug-a-boo over there. This is fantastic. Mayor Boyd said he is thinking about how to get fiber into the park. After no further comments Mayor Boyd called for the vote. The motion was unanimously approved.

### Closed Session – Personnel

Councilman McKie made a motion to go into closed session at 6:07 p.m. to discuss personnel. Councilwoman Gaitten seconded the motion, and the vote was unanimous.

No votes were taken during the closed session.

## **Open Session**

Councilwoman Gaitten made a motion to reopen the meeting at 6:30 p.m. Councilman McKie seconded the motion, and the vote was unanimous.

#### **DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS**

The agenda packets contained written reports provided by each department head for the mayor and council to review.

Chief Shore reported that he turned in a grant application today for two new police officers. We should know the result in September or October. We have a new Sergeant that will start next Monday. Then we have an officer that will start on August 1.

Mayor Boyd said that he is so glad to see the Fire Chief with us tonight. He has had quite an adventurous last few weeks. He had a visit to the hospital over in Vidalia and scared everybody to death. We are so thankful.

Chief Douglas said that the fire department did work the food bank. We were blown away at how many people showed up. We all got burnt and were give slap out. They were around the track and lined up all the way past Growers and Durden Pecan. Councilwoman Taylor said that she saw them out there in pictures on Facebook. Councilwoman Gaitten said that is some tiring work. I have done it a couple of times. Chief Douglas said it was kind of like the vet clinic, just unbelievable. It was like a 2 hour wait.

Councilman McKie asked when is the back-to-school event? Chief Shore responded that it is the last Saturday in July.

Mr. Hendrix reported that the splash pad is open. Mayor Boyd asked if all the connections in the alley were fixed? Mr. Hendrix said that they have got to come back and put down asphalt and then should be done. Mayor Boyd said he hates it for them but that was quite an ordeal. They had to do it twice. Mr. Hendrix said three times in some places at no additional cost to the city.

Mayor Boyd reported that we have some progress on the mushroom folks. They are going to be operating inside the Georgia Grown building first.

Mayor Boyd asked about animal control. Chief Shore said that department is good, just has too many animals. Councilwoman Gaitten asked are you guys working on a new volunteer

policy for this? Chief Shore said we have already done that. Councilwoman Gaitten said she just saw it on something recently. She said that she happened to be downtown the other day and there was a little kitten stuck under the street and the fire department and David Baird were very polite in making sure that the kitten got out. They saved the day. They are heroes.

Chief Shore announced that he has been elected as the 6<sup>th</sup> District Representative for the Chief's Association. The council congratulated Chief Shore. Mayor Boyd said that is fantastic.

Mrs. Conner reported that Kaylee Rhodes had her baby over the weekend. The council were excited for her. Kaylee and the baby are at home and doing good. Councilwoman Gaitten said she read some where that she has a computer set up to work at home but please tell her to enjoy that time instead of worrying about work. Mrs. Conner assured the council that Kaylee was told that. Councilwoman Gaitten said that is time she will not get back, so she needs to enjoy it. Councilwoman Taylor said this is her first baby, she just does not know until she gets there.

Mrs. Conner reminded the elected officials of the deadline to complete their Personal Disclosure Report is June 30<sup>th</sup>.

### **CITY MANAGER'S REPORT**

No report.

#### **MAYOR'S REPORT**

Mayor Boyd mentioned the GMA Convention. He said this is a time to learn. They have great classes. There are a lot of people there from all over the state and a lot of council have their families there on vacation. There is also a lot of serious stuff going on too. They have a lot of good information in the vendor area. You can really pick up a lot of information from them. It is a really good convention and a very good place to network.

Mayor Boyd informed the council of a groundbreaking coming up on Wednesday morning at 10:00 a.m. at the Lillian Street school for the memorial park. That is an effort that has some momentum behind it. All the council are invited to participate.

Councilman McKie reminded everyone about the planning and zoning training in Vidalia next Thursday.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

After no further discussion, Councilman McKie made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:38 p.m. Councilman Stewart seconded the motion, and the vote was unanimous.

\_\_\_\_

Angie Conner, City Clerk