



## Good Evening Citizens of Mason

Mayor Emmit Gooden called a meeting to address the statements that were made by Comptroller Mumpower during the February 18, 2022, Town Hall Meeting and in the March 3, 2022, letter that he circulated via his press release, Twitter, and U.S. mail. Now it is time for you all to hear the rest of the story.

The Citizens of Mason elected the Mayor and Alderman to lead this city. Prior to coming before this Community, the Comptroller requested a meeting with us, but would never say what the meeting was about, in other words he said there was no agenda. Your elected officials were completely blindsided by his demand that we the citizens of Mason relinquish its Charter.

For those of you who don't know what the Comptroller is: The Comptroller's Office is responsible for the audit of state and local governmental entities and participates in the general financial and administrative management and oversight of Tennessee state government. It was highly unusual for the Comptroller to meet with the citizens of a city without first meeting with the elected officials. Most of you are wondering why the Comptroller is requesting that Mason relinquish its Charter. It is not because he stated it in his March 3, 2022, letter. Let me address the reasons stated in the Comptroller's letter as to why Mason should relinquish its Charter and the rebuttal:

1. "For at least 20 years the town government has been poorly managed..."

**Rebuttal:** Mason was created by the Legislature on June 9, 2009. The city as a municipality has only been in existence for 13 years; When this administration under Mayor Gooden assumed leadership of this city in 2018, the 2014 and 2015 audits had not been approved by the Comptroller's office. This administration had to complete the 2016 audit and submitted it in 2019. Further, this administration completed the 2017 and 2018 audits in 2020. Therefore, this financial team is behind and is working to get caught up. The 2019 and 2020 audits were late. The Comptroller's office has not offered any assistance to the Town of Mason. Let it be known that the present financial team has completed 5 audits within 3 years!

2. "Audits have been late, budgets have not been approved, major infrastructure needs have been ignored, fraud has taken place..."

**Rebuttal:** When this Administration assumed leadership of this city the audits were behind, in the last three years the finance team has caught up with the audits and awaits the approval from the Comptroller office. It's very easy to say that major infrastructure needs have been ignored, but the Comptroller stated no specifics. Most funds for infrastructure improvements come from the taxes that are paid to the state and county and a portion of those taxes are returned to the City. Infrastructure projects have to be planned out years in advance. The Comptroller's job is to audit all government entities. He did not provide any specific proof of fraud. When there is fraud the Comptroller's Office, working in conjunction with the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, investigate those activities.

3. "Due to financial mismanagement The Town of Mason finds itself in a deep hole..."



**Rebuttal:** The Comptroller is of the opinion that the Town of Mason is in a deep hole, but what has he done to help? His only remedy is for Mason to surrender its Charter. Why should Mason surrender its Charter? Funds have been allocated to the counties and municipalities in West Tennessee to improve and expand its infrastructure. Funds have been appropriated that should and will flow directly to the Town of Mason. What the Comptroller did not tell the citizens of Mason is that there is a bill pending that would allow Municipalities to get a larger share of the sales tax revenue. The share will go up from a 5.5% share to 7%. Further, the Comptroller did mention that the state has prepared a water infrastructure investment plan to spend the funds that the state will receive from the American Rescue Plan: (1) Formula-Based Non-Competitive Grants (\$1 billion), (2) State-Initiative Strategic Projects (\$269 million) and (3) Competitive Grants based upon funds remaining from Strategies (1 and 2). For the most up to date information go to the ARP Water Infrastructure Investment Program website or TDEC ARP website. Also, there are funds available to hire consultants for planning purpose. If Mason surrenders its Charter all the funds will go straight to the County and Mason will be behind all the other unincorporated land in Tipton County. Mason will not have any say so in its future.

4. "The construction of the new Ford plant in West Tennessee offers hope for your community..."

**Rebuttal:** That's correct.

5. "But, I worry that if you remain an incorporated town these opportunities will be missed."

**Rebuttal:** The only way that Mason will miss the opportunities that are coming to West Tennessee because of the Ford plant is to surrender its Charter. If Mason surrenders its Charter all the funds will go straight to the County and Mason will be behind all the other unincorporated land in Tipton County. Mason will not have any say so in its future. If Mason surrenders its Charter, it will not have a seat at the table, it will be on the "menu."

6. "New jobs, infrastructure improvements, and economic investments are made in places with a tract record of government."

**Rebuttal:** That's true the Comptroller or his predecessor knew that Ford was coming to West Tennessee for more than 5 years and they also knew what the financial condition Mason was in during this same period. What assistance did he or any government official offer Mason? Recently, the Comptroller met with an elected representative from Tipton County, however, no one from Mason was invited or at the meeting. Again, if you're not at the meeting you're on the menu. Non-competitive grants are being solicited from counties and municipalities that will be used for infrastructure improvements, in some cases repaying outstanding debts and for planning purposes.

7. "...government is not working in Mason, and the closing of the prison has made things even worse..."

**Rebuttal:** Core Civic is the owner of the property and will continue to pay city and county taxes until the title of the property changes. Most, if not all, of the employees lived outside of Mason.

8. "People and companies will not invest their money in a poorly run town."

**Rebuttal:** The Comptroller has known during the courtship of Ford that Mason was behind on its audits and did nothing but criticize and try to turn the citizens against their elected officials. The Comptroller and his office helped a European-American Town called Jellico in East Tennessee who had worst financial issues than Mason.



Why didn't the Comptroller ask for their Charter? What is the Comptroller saying that companies will not invest in poorly-run African-American towns, but they will invest in poorly-run European-American towns?

9. "Mason currently has the highest municipal property tax rate in Tipton County."

**Rebuttal:** When this administration took over the management of the Town of Mason had a deficit over \$600,000. Mason increased its property taxes because of the deficit it inherited. The last property tax increase was in Fiscal Year 2018, when the tax increase went from 1.2135 to 1.4635. In comparison Covington (1.2413), Munford (1.16950), Brighton (.86380) and Atoka (.9786). It is not fair to compare the tax rates of each City unless you compare what services each citizen is receiving from their City.

10. "I asked your Mayor how these taxes help you? Other than the town's 26 paid employees, it is difficult for the Mayor to identify any benefit to the citizens from the town's existence as an incorporated municipality. This is unfair to you and your neighbors."

**Rebuttal:** First of all 7 of the 26 employees included the 6 Aldermen and the Mayor that's costing Mason only \$1,100 per month. When was the last time someone called the police, and their call went unanswered? When was the last time a building or any structure in Mason or anywhere in this part of Tipton County burned to the ground because there were not firemen and trucks dispatched? Mason's entire City personnel budget is under \$25,000 monthly. The City is very frugal when it comes to spending money on personnel. That's not to say this is the way we like to run this government on a shoestring budget, but we have paid our workers less to meet our financial obligations.

11. "There is a long line of people who believe in your community and are ready to assist. Opportunity awaits if the Mason community can be viewed separately from its poor government by relinquishing its Charter."

**Rebuttal:** Why haven't the Comptroller meet with the elected officials of this Town to discuss with them, "this long line of people who believe in Mason and are ready to help?" Is the Comptroller saying he will not help Mason unless or until it surrenders its Charter? What kind of public official barterers with citizens resources until he gets his way? The Comptroller wants his comrades to run Mason instead of the people the citizens of Mason elected? The Comptroller was not elected by the citizens of this state but was appointed by the legislature. So, he wants to install unelected people who will be loyal to him and not to the citizens of Mason to administer the affairs of Mason.

What kind of public servant will hold up public and private resources in exchange for surrendering of a Charter? This kind of conduct is not fitting of a public official. The citizens demand that the Comptroller utilize his office to assist the majority African-American town of Mason in the same way help was provided for the majority European-American town of Jellico.

**Emmit D. Gooden, Mayor  
Town of Mason, TN  
March 10, 2022**