

**MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
WINNSBORO TOWN COUNCIL
FEBRUARY 7, 2023**

Present: Mayor John McMeekin; Mayor Pro-Tem Demetrius Chatman; Danny Miller, Janice Bartell-Prather, Jae Burroughs, Council Members; Jason Taylor, Town Manager; Chris Clauson and Kathy Belton, Assistant Town Managers; Scott Elliott, Town Attorney; Patti Davis, Town Clerk.

The Winnsboro Town Council met in regular session on February 7, 2023, at the Winnsboro Women's Club Building. In accordance with the South Carolina Code of Laws, 1976, Section 30-4-80 (e), as amended, the following persons and/or organizations have been notified of the time, date and location of this meeting: The Independent Voice of Blythewood and Fairfield, The Country Chronicle and four hundred ninety-two other individuals.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor McMeekin called the Regular Meeting to order at 6:15 p.m.

2. INVOCATION

Council Member Burroughs led the invocation.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman made a motion, seconded by Council Member Bartell Prather, to approve the agenda. ***The original motion carried 5-0.***

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman made a motion, seconded by Council Member Bartell Prather, to approve the Regular Meeting minutes of January 17, 2023, the Finance Committee minutes of January 17, 2023, the Special Meeting minutes of January 23, 2023, the Special Meeting minutes of January 24, 2023, and the Special Meeting minutes of January 26, 2023. ***The motion carried 5-0.***

5. SPECIAL REPORTS/PRESENTATIONS

None.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT (3 MINUTES): THE TOTAL TIME ALLOCATED TO THIS PUBLIC COMMENT SEGMENT IS 30 MINUTES.

Mayor McMeekin stated he is glad everyone is here. This is the citizens' chance to talk with Council, and every Council Member will listen because this is important. Each person will have three minutes to speak. When a person is speaking, please do not talk among yourselves so everyone can hear. Questions will be submitted, but they cannot actually be answered during the meeting.

The questions will, however, be compiled, and Council will look at these later on. Mayor McMeekin urged everyone to stay for the remainder of the meeting. Also, Council can be addressed at large without singling anyone out. Feel free to say something even if your neighbor says it also. The following individuals signed to speak:

- James Lawhorne - Utilities
- Betty Crouch - Utilities
- Gail Floyd - Utilities
- Miriam Trezevant - Utilities
- Rachel Moore – Utilities and Web Page

7. PUBLIC HEARINGS

A. An Ordinance Granting Consent to Application for Franchise for Cable and Video Service and Setting Franchise Fee. Mayor McMeekin opened the public hearing at 6:36 p.m. No one signed to speak, so Mayor McMeekin closed the public hearing at 6:36 p.m.

8. ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

A. Second and Final Reading Ordinance No. 72: An Ordinance Granting Consent to Application for Franchise for Cable and Video Service and Setting Franchise Fee. Motion made by Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman, seconded by Council Member Miller, to approve Second and Final Reading of Ordinance No. 72. ***The motion carried 5-0.***

9. MANAGER'S REPORT

A. Ongoing Projects

- AMI: Mr. Taylor stated this is something that has been worked on since the previous Council over the last two years, and this represents the ultimate solution to the meter reading problem. He acknowledged this process is very frustrating for the Town and the customers. The water meters have been installed in Blythewood, and now all the water meters are available. All the transmission towers and support infrastructure has been installed. Staff will begin installing the water meters within the next two weeks, per the contractor. The hope was to send a crew out to install a water meter, electric meter and gas meter all at the same time. Presently, we are unable to get the electric meters, so we will go ahead and start installing the water meters. The gas meters did just come in, so staff will at least be able to do gas and water at the same time, which

will take care of sewer also. Water is the most difficult to read because this is the one that is in the ground and has to be located. Hopefully, this will get us back on track to get accurate readings and get bills out on time. Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman asked for Mr. Taylor to elaborate that this will put everyone on the same schedule of 30-31 days every month, and Mr. Taylor agreed. The situation has not been efficient or accurate, and the billing must get back on time. This hurts the Town tremendously in addition to not being fair to the customers. When a bill is not sent out every month, the Town is losing out on anywhere from \$40 to \$80 dollars per customer by billing for two months as opposed to individual months. AMI is the ultimate solution, but we still have to bridge some time to figure out how meters will be efficiently read before all the AMI goes in. Mr. Taylor reported that a host of things have been looked at. This is the real world consequence of the labor shortages and the supply disruptions that everyone has been facing, and that is what has caused all this frustration. Labor continues to be a problem, and the Town typically should have six people reading meters with now being down to two. Six people were recently interviewed, and the salary has been raised from \$17 for entry level to \$22, but it is still tough. One must have a driver's license, and it must be people the Town can trust. Interviews are occurring and two individuals have been hired with the hope to hire a total of four more. The Town has also reached out to a private contractor, because in talking with other utilities, they stated they had almost given up on manual read systems as they were also having staffing problems. They reached out to private companies to contract for meter readers. The Town has met with one such company that was recommended by Dominion, and we are awaiting a proposal. Initially, when the Town contracted with the AMI system, it was looked at for the option of customers being able to go to a website and view the usage. This feature was not opted for initially, but Mr. Taylor feels this is something we will do in the future. This will allow the customers to visualize their usage on an hourly/minute basis. Mr. Taylor also informed the citizens that there are sign-up sheets in the back of the room for anyone who would like to make an appointment to come in and speak with he and Mrs. Belton. They will then discuss all options that may be available to assist the citizens. Mayor McMeekin stated the Town has had the equalization plan for years, but the information has not gotten out effectively. We need to get this word out so people will not have anxiety every month over what their bill will be. Every Christmas we would have these problems of getting behind reading meters with it getting worse and worse every year, and now,

there is no confidence. The decision was made to start moving toward the AMI system, a \$4M investment. The Town's utilities belong to the citizens of Winnsboro. The money was used from the American Recovery Plan in order to bring us out of the Stone Age into the modern world and to try to restore the confidence that has been lost. This is the direction we will move. Again, Mr. Taylor asked for the citizens to not hesitate to sign up for an appointment tonight or call administration if needed. Everyone's situation is different, and each situation will be addressed in the hopes to create something that is appropriate to each individual's needs. Council Member Miller stated he is glad we are coming up with a strategy to help the folks that are behind. He would also like for Council to consider having a work session to work with administration to come up with more strategies to help this situation. Mayor McMeekin stated the Town has good employees, and we are not unsympathetic, we are empathetic. A large percentage of our community is on a fixed income, and it is our responsibility to try to alleviate or mitigate these terribly unpredictable bills. Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman stated the labor shortages hit the Town of Winnsboro just like it did other markets. The Town was fully staffed at one point, and now, it seems like people just do not want to work. He further agreed that the AMI system should help to alleviate these problems and make everything better. The Town has 11,000 meters which is impossible for one person to get all these readings. Mr. Taylor further stated even when the department was fully staffed, each reader had to read 300 meters per day every day just to keep up. If there is one glitch and the reading gets behind, it is very hard to catch back up. The City of Columbia or Richland County is 500 employees down from where they were last year, and it is not just meter readers. This includes water, sewer, police, all departments. Mayor McMeekin stated again that he apologizes for the system being as it is. We will do everything possible to move as quickly as possible to get this in. Eventually, it will be there, and it will be better and modern. It should have been done years ago.

- Code Enforcement –Five houses in the Cemetery Street area have been looked at, acquired and are now ready to take down. Titles are clean and clear. One is maybe the County's, but we will work with them to get this done.
- Comprehensive Plan – No new update at this time.

- Utilities – No new update at this time other than what has been stated.
- Ordinance Review and Update – No new update at this time.
- Redevelopment Efforts – Mr. Taylor stated meetings are being held with landowners with the primary focus being downtown to see if the Town can acquire some of the properties to assist and/or encourage private landowners to redevelop those buildings downtown to be viable for businesses to go in. The Town has the \$500,000 from the state, and staff is currently trying to come up with a strategy on what buildings should be targeted.

10. OLD BUSINESS

None.

11. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Fairfield County Disabilities and Special Needs Board – Request to Use the Old Armory March 24, 2023. The Clerk stated the Disabilities Board plans to host a community talent program. They are a 503(c)(3), and they are aware of the base rate. Motion made by Council Member Burroughs, seconded by Council Member Miller and Council Member Bartell Prather, to approve the request. ***The motion carried 5-0.***
- B. The Grieving Needs Foundation – Request to Use the Old Armory and Part of Fortune Springs Park April 1, 2023, 12 p.m. to 3 p.m. The Clerk stated the Grieving Needs Foundation plans to hold their annual Special Needs and Disabled Persons Easter Egg Hunt. They are also a 501(c)(3) and are aware of the base rate. Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman inquired if the Easter egg hunt will be held in the Armory, and the Clerk stated they are also requesting to use the upper part of the park for the hunt. Motion made by Council Member Bartell Prather, seconded by Council Member Burroughs, to approve the above request. ***The motion carried 5-0.***
- C. Request of Action – Water Treatment Plant and Gas, Water and Wastewater Department. Request to Approve Allocation of Funds to Allow Payment to 120Water for the Service Line Inventory Project in Support of the Town Being in Compliance with the EPA Lead and Copper Rules (First Year Contract of \$11,776.50 with Two Subsequent Years of \$10,276.50 with Discounted Rate of 15% with Membership to SCRWA). Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman stated this came before the Finance Committee to approve the audit for the water, and this is something that must be done in order to be

compliant by October 2024. It passed in the Finance Committee and is now brought to full Council for approval. Motion made by Council Member Burroughs, seconded by Council Member Bartell Prather, to approve the Request of Action as stated. Council Member Miller requested more information. Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman stated an audit must be performed to test the lead levels and pipes, which is a DHEC requirement, and must be done by October 2024. The company, 120Water, will do all the auditing. Once this work is done, the information will be presented to DHEC. ***The motion carried 5-0.***

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION: (The following statement is provided in compliance with the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act: Subsequent to Executive Session, Council may take action on matters discussed in Executive Session.)

At 6:58 p.m., it was moved by Council Member Miller, seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman, to enter into executive session for: (A) Employment Matter – Municipal Judge Applicant Selection Pursuant to S.C. Code §30-4-70 (a)(1). ***The motion carried 5-0.***

At 7:08 p.m., it was moved by Council Member Bartell Prather, seconded by Council Member Burroughs, to come out of executive session and return to regular session. ***The motion carried 5-0.***

Motion made by Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman, seconded by Council Member Burroughs, to reappoint Jonathan Goode as the Municipal Court Judge and to also act as the Chief Municipal Judge through September 2024, at which time the position will be up for reappointment. ***The motion carried 5-0.***

Motion made by Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman, seconded by Council Member Miller, to extend an offer of employment to Shirley Bates for the Municipal Court Judge vacancy assuming all background checks and other pre-employment investigations are satisfactorily received. ***The motion carried 5-0.***

13. ADJOURN

At 7:09 p.m., it was moved by Council Member Miller, seconded by Council Member Bartell Prather, to adjourn. ***The motion carried 5-0.***



PATTI L. DAVIS
TOWN CLERK



JOHN MCMEEKIN
MAYOR