

**MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
WINNSBORO TOWN COUNCIL
MARCH 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 March 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 6:16 p.m.

2. INVOCATION

Council Member Bartell Prather led the invocation.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman made a motion, seconded by Council Member Burroughs and Council Member Bartell Prather, to approve the Finance Committee minutes of February 21, 2023, and the Regular Meeting minutes of February 21, 2023. ***The motion carried 5-0.***

5. SPECIAL REPORTS/PRESENTATIONS

A. Proclamation Honoring Johnnie Ruth McCroery for 100th Birthday. Council moved out in front of the building where Mrs. McCroery was sitting in a vehicle. Mayor McMeekin then read the Proclamation aloud, and each Council Member spoke with Mrs. McCroery congratulating her on this huge milestone.

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

➤ Charles Connell – Utility Billing

- Sylvia Harrison – Thanking the Town
- Susanna Sharpe – Utility Billing

7. PUBLIC HEARINGS

None.

8. ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

None.

9. MANAGER'S REPORT

A. Ongoing Projects

- AMI: Mr. Taylor stated staff has met with AMI on a regular basis over the last couple of weeks, including meeting with them earlier today before the Council meeting. Unfortunately, they are still hitting some of the same issues. The hope was that the meters would be installed by now, but an attempt is being made to try to hold them to April 1 to start putting in the water and gas meters. This will begin in Sandcreek and then come to the older part of Town. Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman questioned if this is because of the supply issues and the labor shortages. Mr. Taylor stated this has been a very frustrating situation for everyone involved, and the meters cannot be installed quick enough. Council Member Miller inquired what is in the contract, and Mr. Taylor did not get a chance to look at this prior to the meeting. Mr. Clauson stated the contract had not been signed with Ferguson and was still up in the air. He then inquired if three months would be reasonable, and the company stated they want to get in and out before that. Mr. Taylor stated the electric meters will still be an issue. In trying to learn from other's experiences, some towns, such as Bamberg, have had a particular issue with the electric meters. When these meters are placed in older houses with substandard service, the meters are giving problems. When these are installed, it must be assured that it is being hooked to a service that can accept and integrate. For this reason, it will not be as quick and easy to implement as was thought initially. Mr. Taylor asked for Mr. Medlin to further speak to this. Per Mr. Medlin, normally when there is a loose connection or a bad connection inside the meter, once it gets up to 130 degrees Celsius or 266 degrees Fahrenheit, it will cut the power off to the house as a safety feature. Every year, the department runs into a few of these problems. Probably 99% of the Town's houses are going to accept the meter; however, there will be some that will not accept the meter

until the homeowner or landlord does some repairs. Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman inquired if this will be an additional expense to the homeowner, and Mr. Medlin stated this is correct. The homeowner owns the meter bases and everything inside the house. The Town is responsible for the connection and the meter itself. Mr. Taylor inquired of the rough cost estimate, and Mr. Medlin stated a bad meter base would probably cost around \$50 plus the electrician's charge. Mr. Taylor stated there has been an idea to keep additional meter bases on hand to sell at cost. Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman stated this is supposed to be put in place to help the customer, and he is now hearing this for the first time. When this was presented to Council, this was not discussed, and he feels Council should have been made aware of this. Mr. Medlin stated Mr. Clauson was at a meeting at Myrtle Beach when this was discussed, and then some research was done. The Electric Department normally sees these type of problems five or six times a year throughout the system. Mrs. Belton questioned if it is a certain temperature that will cause this to happen, and Mr. Medlin stated this is not what he is saying. There would be a bad connection inside the meter base at the customer's connection. Once it gets up to 130 degrees Celsius or 266 degrees Fahrenheit, it will cause the meter to automatically cut off. This is something on the customer's side that has caused damage to the Town's meter. It is nothing the Town did, but instead, it is something the customer's equipment has done to the Town's meter. Mrs. Belton further inquired if this is something the customers need to be made aware of, such as a certain specification the meter base needs for it not to cause harm, because the Town does not want people without power. Per Mr. Medlin, the contractor will be inspecting the meter bases. If they see a problem, they will then make the customer aware that there is an issue. The electric meters will probably not be put in until the problem is taken care of. Mrs. Belton inquired if there is something the Electric Department could do with this process, and Mr. Medlin stated they are not allowed to touch the customer's equipment and not allowed to go into the house. They are responsible for the meter that goes into the side and the connection at the top, and this is as far as they go. Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman stated he feels there should be some re-negotiation with the company since this was not initially told to the Town. Mr. Taylor inquired how many homes this may involve and the process. Mr. Medlin stated about five or six hot meters are done per year. Also, a meter could be good today and bad next year. It is normal wear and tear and normal use. He further asked how many have electricians come in to tighten plugs, look at wires, etc.

Everyone neglects their electrical system after it is installed. Mrs. Belton inquired if the meter is damaged, who will be responsible for this. Mr. Medlin stated this is a discussion that is needed. The residential meters will cost about \$30 or \$35 a piece. If a customer's system damages the meter, who will be responsible. There is also a discussion needed on what to do if a customer opts out. Mayor McMeekin stated the wheel is not being reinvented, and some research needs to be done to see how these things have been handled in other towns. Mr. Medlin stated some of these problems came up about ten years ago in Orangeburg and some rules and regulations were written. Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman stated again that the pros and cons should have been given at the beginning. Mr. Medlin stated these types of issues will be with any meter system out there, and it is there to keep damage from being done to the house.

- Code Enforcement – Per Mr. Clauson, staff is still plugging away on a number of the properties. Concerning Zion Hill, some of the properties are actually being rehabbed. The County grant is still not to the point of bidding out yet. Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman inquired if it is too late for an identified homeowner to submit paperwork to be included. Mr. Clauson stated if they were on the original list, they could probably get it through.
- Comprehensive Plan – This is in the works with the COG.
- Utilities – Nothing new to report.
- Ordinance Review and Update – Everyone should be aware that Blythewood is getting a huge new economic development project. The benefit from that will spread far and wide in the Midlands, and the Town needs to get itself positioned to take advantage of this growth. This will involve looking at a lot of the Town's zoning ordinances and possibly looking at historic preservation ordinances. Sometimes things are lost that the Town may want to keep, and the zoning needs to encourage other wanted things. These things to encourage growth will be brought to Council in the near future.
- Redevelopment Efforts – Mr. Taylor stated conversations are continuing with landowners. One building the Town thought it had secured interest in through the tax sale was redeemed. Therefore, the Town no longer has interest in that building, but it will be pushing forward for that building to be rehabbed or secured. It is not in an

acceptable condition at the present time. He is happy to report, in association with Fortune Springs Park, that the Town received \$420,000 in grant money to redo a lot of the drainage and hardscape structures in the Park. This was brought to Council some time back and is part of federal money that was handed down. This will hopefully go a long way to improve Fortune Springs Park and revitalizing that area. Mayor McMeekin also inquired concerning the grant with Friendship Park. Mr. Clauson will check into this.

- Fairfield Joint Water and Sewer Service – Mr. Taylor stated the Commission is trying to get all housekeeping type issues and insurance done so that the members/commission are protected in moving forward with decisions that need to be made. The insurance issue has been resolved, so there can be a comfort level moving forward with some of the other decisions that need to be made. Hopefully, there will be more substantive meetings coming shortly. Mayor McMeekin stated the Director's and Officer's Insurance can be scaled up also to protect the County as the project goes forward. Once the building process is begun, the County needs to be covered. The things that are being finalized right now are things that should have already been done, and this is laying the ground work to go forward. There have been a lot of turnovers in Council Members and a lot of stumbling starts, but the Commission is functioning as it should again. Mayor McMeekin feels confident that it will soon be showing some concrete evidence of moving forward. With the announcement in Blythewood, it is imperative that the Joint Water and Sewer Commission move forward carefully. Hopefully, the SCIIP Grant will be received to run the line to the industrial site, because the Town can process a little more effluent. The whole Commission should be on the same page going forward. There was a comment that the Town was holding up some of the progress, and some of the things the Town was invited to came late in the year. Mayor McMeekin stated he will never blindly go into any contract that would potentially hurt the County or the Town without digging into it diligently, thinking it through carefully and analyzing costs. If this is thought through properly, it will be a win/win situation, and this is how he wishes to proceed. Mr. Taylor agrees and believes we are to the point of picking up conversations with past vendors and also reaching out to establish a good working relationship with the Department of Commerce, which is critical. Commerce supported the County before there was money to build the sewer plant, and Commerce was a good partner in helping to develop industrial sites here and helping to get the needed infrastructure to make the sites

viable. This relationship has been picked up and dusted off. Mayor McMeekin stated he serves on the COG which has a little influence over this project also. There are 50 members on the COG and 12 members on the Executive Committee, and he serves on the Executive Committee. He is confident there will be two more members serving with the COG soon, and they will both be welcomed additions.

Mayor McMeekin gave Mr. Taylor a point of privilege, and Mr. Taylor stated the audit was not listed on the agenda, but he wanted to bring Council up to speed. The audit was presented on the same night that Council and Administration were handed the audit report to review with no time to digest it. Once it was reviewed, there were questions. Mr. Taylor has contacted the auditor with the questions, and there will be an adjusted audit issued. The auditor initially presented to Council that there was a \$900,000 deficit. Mrs. Belton stated, after the amended audit, it should be just a little over \$100,000 or close to \$200,000 in the red. There were some errors made in the books, and the auditor will amend the audit and resubmit. Mayor McMeekin inquired if that would give a modified opinion, and Mrs. Belton agreed. Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman stated that sounds better.

10. OLD BUSINESS

None.

11. NEW BUSINESS

- A.** Armory Use Request for Birthday Party. The Clerk reported the request is for a 60th birthday party on December 2, and Council had requested that birthday parties be placed on the agenda for approval. The applicant knows this function will be full price. Motion made by Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman, seconded by Council Member Burroughs, to approve the request to use the Armory. ***The motion carried 5-0.***

- B.** GatherGuard Insurance Requirement for all Armory Uses. Mr. Clauson stated this represents a policy through the Municipal Association in the coverage amount of \$1M. It gives the renter this coverage along with the Town. The premiums have been around \$130 with alcohol served at an event, so this is a very competitive rate. All renters of the Armory that have been presented with this option have not had an issue with it and have been excited. The Clerk stated it has been hard for people to find an alcohol policy, and \$130 is a great rate. The Clerk also distributed an

example of what the Town receives once the policy is purchased. The renter goes online, purchases the insurance and then the Town is sent an email with the policy attached. Both the renter and the Town are covered. Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman stated typically he has seen these policies be \$200 to \$300 for one day. Mr. Taylor stated it is cheap and convenient with the ease of use. Mayor McMeekin stated this is good news. Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman made a motion, seconded by Council Member Burroughs, to adopt the GatherGuard Insurance requirement for all Armory uses. Council Member Miller inquired who pays the \$130 and if this would add to the \$750, and the Clerk stated the applicant would pay this amount. Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman inquired if it is only for the alcohol policy, and the Clerk stated this would be for any event. If there is any damage, it would cover the renter and the Town. Mayor McMeekin stated the alcohol policy is usually more, and the Clerk stated the policy that was distributed is \$130 which includes alcohol coverage. Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman inquired when this would take effect and would the policy need to be changed. The Clerk stated the policy is being worked on now, but staff would like for this requirement to be immediate. Every renter that has been given the information likes the fact that they are covered also. Mayor McMeekin stating it is good that it protects not only the Town but the individual also since we do now live in a litigious world. Council Member Miller inquired how much the policy is without alcohol coverage. The Clerk has not had one without this coverage yet, but it would probably be around \$100 to \$110. Once someone completes the application to rent the Armory, a link is sent to them. They then go online to the GatherGuard site and complete the application stating what kind of event it will be, how many people will be expected, if alcohol insurance is needed, etc. This process takes about five minutes. They will then pay online, and they will automatically get a copy of the policy with the Town also being emailed a copy of the policy. Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman stated again that this is through the Municipal Association. Mayor McMeekin stated there used to be an independent agent in Town who would do these policies, and the Clerk stated this is not new and used to be named Tulip Insurance. She does not believe the Town every utilized this. Mayor McMeekin stated it would be a wise thing to do.

The motion carried 5-0.

- C. Request of Action – Request for Allocation of Funds to Allow Payment to TruCheck to Provide rerouting Services for the Town’s Meter reading Operations to Optimize Performance (\$13,353.60). Mayor McMeekin stated this came out of the Finance Committee, and Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman explained that this service will improve the route information for the meter readers. Currently, there may be one house read with the house next door on another route, and the customers do not understand this. TruCheck will

get the routes in line to get everything lined up with the 30-day billing. Dominion and City of Columbia also use this company, and this request enables the Town to pursue this avenue to start working with them. Mayor McMeekin stated this is something that the Town may or may not do, depending on further discussions with the company. It will be analyzed first so as to not bring someone in to create more problems than the Town already has. Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman stated this service would guarantee a 30-day cycle for the billing. Council Member Miller inquired if the accounts would be put into clusters. Mayor McMeekin agreed and instead of duplicating manpower with going in the same neighborhood twice, they would go in once, get it done and move on to the next one. This will be more time efficient in getting the process done. Mrs. Belton stated more discussion is needed to see how it will effect all aspects of the procedure. Everything involved with the process now is in the old order, and the first priority is trying to get billing caught up. If another kink is thrown in, billing could be delayed further. There is a lot going on, including trying to install a new AMI system to get immediate readings. Mr. Taylor stated any and all options are being looked at to improve the service being providing as far as the billing goes. This may or may not be something that is pursued, but again it is an option staff would like to be able to look at because we must figure out how to fix it. The books have grown organically and not rationally, and it is not an efficient system. Mayor McMeekin stated the recommendation from the Finance Committee is to grant the request to look into TruCheck to determine if it is a viable route to go and if it is suitable. Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman stated the request passed in the Finance Committee to give permission to have discussions with the company. If it is a good option, then it can go forward, and if it is not, it will not be done. Council Member Miller does not like voting to spend money without input. Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman stated Council has what was presented by the company, but further information will be sought. Council Member Miller thinks permission should be given to discuss with the company and then come back to Council for approval. Mr. Taylor stated it can be done this way, but this is very time sensitive and time will run out if we continue to be stuck in the same inefficient billing process. This may be something that could help fix it, but we must look and make sure it will not confuse the problem worse. Mayor McMeekin stated in order for time to not be an impediment, the Finance Committee could be granted the right to meet and approve it once it has been reviewed further. Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman stated it must be noted that the routes have not been redone in 20-30 years, so it is much needed. Mayor McMeekin stated it does need to be done, and staff just needs to be sure it is done in a way to not create more problems. Motion made by Mayor McMeekin to let Administration look into this proposal and then bring back to the Finance Committee for final

approval to proceed, seconded by Council Member Bartell Prather. ***The motion carried 5-0.***

- D.** Option and Purchase Agreement – 201 N. Congress Street, Winnsboro, SC. Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman stated this request also went before the Finance Committee and asked for Mr. Clauson to further explain. Per Mr. Clauson, this property, the old dry cleaners, is right next to Town Hall, and has not been in operation for 30 years. In going through the process with Code Enforcement, there was a discussion with the landowner who showed a willingness to sell the property. The Town is looking at the option in order to secure the property and get the environmental consultants in to review. There are revolving loan funds at the federal and state level, and the Town could get dollars to remediate any contaminants that may be there. This is an option the Town would have that is not usually afforded to most private individuals. If the property is secured, the Town would be able to move forward with the clean up and hopefully turn the property into something a lot more viable. Mayor McMeekin stated the out-of-pocket costs would be a max of \$500 if the Town does not buy the property. Once the remediation is known and the Town decides it does not want the property, it will be \$500. Per Mr. Clauson, the agreement would be approving the \$500 to put down in order to secure the property with a \$10,000 sales price. Mr. Taylor stated on the flip side of that, the Town would not want to spend a lot of time and work and not have the property under control where it could close on it should it want to. We would not want to do all this and then have it snatched out from under us and be sold to someone else. Mayor McMeekin stated the ultimate goal is to get the property off the rolls of dilapidated looking buildings. The goal is to hopefully clean up this property that will be attractive for the Town. Council Member Miller inquired what the suggested purpose for the property would be. Mr. Taylor stated as it sits now, it is nonproductive and an eyesore. It would be better for the property to be productive instead of an eyesore; however, the final determination for the property has not been explored. Some due diligence must be done first to determine what can be done with the property. Continuing to let the property sit there as a dilapidated eyesore and nonproductive is the only option that is not viable. Council Member Miller agrees it needs to be made into a better location but questioned what if the Town ends up inheriting a hazard. Mr. Taylor stated this is what an option is for, to allow the determination of whether it is a hazard that can be mitigated. As Mr. Clauson said, the Town has access to funds, that a private person would not, to clean up the site and get it productive again. Mayor McMeekin stated we do not want to get in something we cannot get out of, so it must be checked out very carefully. Then we can proceed if it is felt, with the grander scheme of getting the

entire Town fixed up, that the Town can take this property with governmental funds to get it clean, even if it is resold. Something could be put in that would be beneficial to the Town. Council Member Miller stated he just wants to be careful. Mr. Taylor stated this is the purpose of an option as opposed to an outright purchase. An option locks it in so the Town would have the option to purchase the property after the due diligence has been done to make sure it is something it wants to take on, but also the option locks it in to prevent a lot of work being done and then the property is snatched out from under us. Motion made by Council Member Burroughs, seconded by Mayor McMeekin, to approve the Option and Purchase Agreement as recommended by the Finance Committee. ***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.)

A. Receipt of Legal Advice – Discussion Concerning Fairfield County Trash Dispute Pursuant to S.C. Code §30-4-70 (a)(2).

At 7:21 p.m., it was moved by Council Member Burroughs, seconded by Council Member Bartell Prather, to exit regular session and enter into executive session to discuss Item A above. ***The motion carried 5-0.***

At 7:33, it was moved by Council Member Bartell Prather, seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Chatman, to exit executive session and return to regular session. ***The motion carried 5-0.***

All discussion in executive session was taken as information only.

13. ADJOURN

At 7:34 p.m., it was moved by Council Member Miller, seconded by Council Member Burroughs, to adjourn. ***The motion carried 5-0.***

PATTI L. DAVIS
TOWN CLERK

JOHN MCMEEKIN
MAYOR