

MINUTES

A Regular Meeting of Walterboro City Council was held at City Hall on Tuesday, December 8, 2015 at 6:15 P.M., with Mayor Pro-Tem Tom Lohr presiding.

PRESENT WERE: Mayor Pro-Tem Lohr, Council Members: Jimmy Syfrett, Paul Siegel, Bobby Bonds, James Broderick and Judy Bridge. City Manager Jeff Molinari, City Clerk Betty Hudson, and City Attorney George Cone were also present. Mayor Young was recovering from surgery he had on December 7 and was unable to attend the meeting. There were approximately 16 persons present in the audience.

There being a quorum present, Mayor Pro-Tem Lohr called the meeting to order. Council Member Syfrett gave the invocation and Council Member Bonds led the Pledge of Allegiance to our flag.

PUBLIC INPUT ON AGENDA ITEMS:

There were no public comments or questions on agenda items.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES:

There were no minutes before Council.

PRESENTATION:

Mayor Pro-Tem Lohr then asked the City Manager to introduce the presenter for the first item under Presentation.

1. 2014-2015 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report - Baird & Company, CPAs, LLC - Mr. Rep E. Whiddon

Mr. Molinari then presented Mr. Rep Whiddon of Baird & Company, CPAs. He stated that Mr. Whiddon was here to review with Council the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the 2014-2015 Fiscal Year. Mr. Molinari also recognized Amy Risher, Finance Director, and her staff for all their hard work in assisting with the audit.

Mr. Whiddon thanked the City for selecting his firm to do the audit and thanked City Manager Molinari, Amy Risher and her staff, who were very helpful during the audit.

Copies of the "City of Walterboro Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2015" were distributed to Council at the beginning of the meeting. Mr. Whiddon then reviewed key portions of the audit report with Council.

He told Council that everybody we have dealt with this year is taking a pretty big hit to their fund balance or to net assets because of the booking of the net pension liability. In the past what you booked was the amount that you paid annually for those expenses, but now, accounting principles require that you book that liability and it was booked on these statements. That is one of the big things you will see in this report.

Mr. Whiddon reminded Council that the City has received a Certificate of Excellent in Financial Reporting for a number of years and this is a pretty good honor. There are not many municipalities or local governments in the state that have this designation, but you do and that is an honor to your management and staff.

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Mr. Whiddon further briefed Council on the CAFR Report for the City of Walterboro. He said that the City received an "unmodified opinion," and that is the best opinion that you can get. It's the opinion that you want.

He briefly reviewed the financial statements with Council and pointed out that police and fire and public works are your larger expenditures. Your bigger general revenues are taxes, which you would expect. He pointed out that the City has generated some good cash and revenue in the water and sewer fund, but you are using it to fund part of your general fund. I just needed you to be aware of that.

Mr. Whiddon stated that the City has about \$850,000 in cash, also \$21 million in capital assets (which is to be expected), and you have non current liabilities of around \$4.5 million primarily due to revenue bonds payable. He stated that the City has a net position of \$17.7 million at the end of the period.

Mr. Whiddon told Council there were some items in the report that you need to take note of. Primarily, please note the City's long term obligations. The big item there is the net pension liability.

In conclusion, Mr. Whiddon stated that there were no internal control issues that turned up, no major weaknesses or material weaknesses identified and no items of non-conformance were found during the audit process.

2. Colleton Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse & KEYS Coalition County-Wide Survey Project Regarding Substance Use Disorders - Mr. Ronald Rickenbaker, Director

Mr. Ronald Rickenbaker of the Colleton Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse appeared before Council. He passed out information regarding a countywide survey they are currently doing. He explained that this is a needs assessment project, and part of the project is actually getting community input and finding out from the community what their thoughts are about substance use disorders.

He stated that he had also received support for this program from Colleton County Council and had presented it to Edisto Beach Town Council. The center of all of this is county and local governments because you represent so many people. We are trying to get information from a wide perspective throughout the county and we decided to do it through a survey. The theme is "Talk to Us About Substance Abuse." We have devised the survey so that it will be simple and easy to fill out and turn in. He noted that he would leave printed copies of the survey with the City Clerk for anyone to pickup and fill out. The survey is also available online at www.colletonkeys.org or www.lowcountry.crossroads.org.

He noted that all of the information on the survey is given anonymously. We have no way of knowing who completed the survey. He asked for Council's support in getting these surveys done. He said, I would like for every City, county and law enforcement employee to take this survey. Once the results are analyzed and broken down, the second phase will be to come back and tell you what it says.

Mr. Rickenbaker stated that Colleton KEYS is a coalition that was developed by his organization several years ago to deal with substance use issues. Colleton KEYS will be hosting a conference in the Spring and we will be sharing the results to a greater community, but more especially we are going to ask people to give us some input into what they think might help.

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Council Member Syfrett asked what is the target date to have the surveys completed? Mr. Rickenbaker responded February 15, 2016. His goal was to have at least 1,000 surveys completed by February 15th. He said, that will help me decide how to move forward in 2017 in terms of programs and services.

Council Member Bonds asked what is the other drug beside heroin that we are seeing on the streets today? Mr. Rickenbaker answered that there is a new drug called rapata.

3. Association of Walterboro Homeowners - Ms. Mary Ann Burttt, President

Ms. Burttt thanked Council for the opportunity to bring an update on the Association and its Endangered Properties Fund. She said, I am also here to praise the many good things that are going on in our town and particularly with staff, police, and public works. All of them have been so responsive. The Police Chief has been so responsive to some of our worries.

She explained to Council that the Association of Homeowners was started a year ago in July, because we realized that collectively homeowners are the largest investors in our town. They are the larger stakeholders. So, when the City has problems, it affects our bottom line. In the first stage, we were very anxious to protect our natural, historic and cultural resources, and that's why we got involved in City politics to begin with. I think we have made real progress on that front. It became apparent, however, as we worked on various issues, including the big issue or heirs property and the revitalization of North Lemacks Street, that there were a number of historic buildings and homes in the town and county which were going to fall down from neglect. Some of you remember the DeTreville House on Jefferies, which we lost by neglect and the fact that there were dozens of heirs to that property who couldn't agree on anything.

Ms. Burttt then stated that her group has started the "Colleton County Endangered Properties Fund," but it's not part of the Homeowners Association. It is part of the Palmetto Trust for Historic Preservation in Columbia, SC, because they are a 501C3 organization. They do this in the state and have the experience. So, working with them, we have identified some 24 properties maybe more in the City and the county which are worthy of being saved, but are endangered by neglect. We have been working on several of them within the town, and I am happy to report tonight that we are seeing a renaissance in Walterboro. You can see it most vividly on Wichman Street as you come into town on Wichman Street from the airport. My family's farmhouse, which has been here since the late 1700s, is the first house you see on the left at Savage and Wichman Streets. Several houses in this area have been bought by individuals and they are rehabilitating them. There are at least a half dozen along Wichman Street and in other neighborhoods of the City. We are concerned about all the neighborhoods in the City, not just the historic ones.

Ms. Burttt reported on a house at the intersection of Haynes and Wichman Streets. This was bought by a young couple who are in the rehab business and they were disturbed by a drug party in their next door neighbors' garage apartment. He called the police and they were able to arrest the drug dealer. So, we are fortunate about that, but that brings the question of, are there no restrictions about background checks on rental property in this town. Can you rent your property to anyone you want without any concern for your neighbor's safety and the well-being of the neighborhood? Apparently, there are not. She stated that she has talked to several property owners and the most successful ones do comprehensive background checks. One of the property managers told me he does a complete face-to-face interview and you can tell whether someone is going to be a reliable client or not. But we don't have any requirements for that in the City. We require of course, that they have a business

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license, but I bet not everyone in the City who rents property in the City has a business license.

Another story is a house in Mayfield Terrace that a couple just purchased and is putting a lot of sweat-equity into it. They have realized that they are surrounded by rental property, and have questioned their decision to purchase. They have asked the question, who are the tenants going to be and will that effect our investment in the City of Walterboro. So, that's an issue the City must come to grips with. I understand some years ago, you tried to make restrictions on landlords, but City Hall was stormed by adamant folks. So, I am not asking for that tonight, but I think we could at least call upon our landlords to do volunteer background checks.

The third story relates to the cottages in the North Lemacks Street neighborhood. There are five of them. The locals have called this the Tuskegee barracks. I have searched the library's microfiche film, attended Tuskegee Airmen's meetings and talked to everyone I can. I have even tried to get money out of Boeing for further research to prove that those are the barracks. They are now slum housing, and I think the City would do a great service to the neighborhood, the town and the history of the Tuskegee Airmen, if it would rehab those five cottages. They were built during the war. I have taken a number of people through them and I think if we could rehab them and make them affordable housing, it would be a great thing for the City.

Ms. Burttt stated that her last story is about the Fraser House at 1217 Wichman Street, which was built in 1856. It has been vacant and derelict for years. Peden McLeod was the one who called and found a trust in Columbia and said you've got to help us with this house. As you come into Walterboro on Padgett Loop from Charleston and you turn left onto Wichman, this house is on the right and what you see is a huge oak tree that was split in the ice storm a while back, unkept grounds of several acres, and a house with vines crawling all over it. So, we have been working for a year and a half now with the homeowner who lives in Florida. She has been delinquent in taxes year after year, after year. We have finally gotten a call from her and been able to talk directly to her. We are trying through the trust to work out an agreement with her to help her sell the property to responsible people, and turn what was once a wonderful important house in Walterboro back into that same house again. If we are depending upon historic resources for people to come and visit in Walterboro, we have to protect them. So, wish me luck with that.

In concluding, Ms. Burttt stated that sometimes we don't really appreciate our own resources. She felt it was time for us to turn around the media's image of Walterboro from a crime-infested City into a beautiful little City that is a wonderful place to live and retire.

She said that the Homeowners Association is working on two big projects for the coming year - solar energy for Walterboro and the concept of retirement in place. As we grow older, we find that more and more people don't want to go to nursing homes or live with their children. They want to stay where they are. So, Walterboro is ideally suited for that concept, because so much is walkable.

Ms. Burttt also mentioned all the good work Michelle Strickland is doing with the tourism program in Walterboro.

OLD BUSINESS:

There were no items under Old Business for discussion.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Consideration of the 2016-2017 Budget Calendar

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Mayor Pro-Tem Lohr stated that when Council starts the budget hearings, they are probably not the most interesting things, but they are open meetings. There have been a few times where some adjustments were made, but I think we are obligated to post those changes as well.

A motion was then made by Council Member Bridge to approve the budget calendar for 2016-2017 as presented. Council Member Broderick seconded the motion. All members voted in favor of the motion, except Mayor Young was absent and did not vote. The motion carried.

2. Request for Street Closing for Martin Luther King Jr. Day Parade, January 17, 2016

Mr. Lohr then gave the parade route in detail. He stated that the route is the same one used in the past several years.

A motion was made by Council Member Siegel to approve and accept the parade procession permit request of Mr. Herman Bright for the Martin Luther King Parade to be held on January 17, 2016. Council Member Bonds seconded the motion that passed with all members voting in favor, except Mayor Young was absent and did not vote.

3. Consideration of Cancelling the December 22, 2015 Regular City Council Meeting

Council Member Syfrett made a motion to cancel the December 22, 2015 Regular City Council Meeting. Council Member Broderick seconded the motion that passed with all members voting in favor, except Mayor Young was absent and did not vote.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

There were no Committee Reports given.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT & EXECUTIVE SESSION:

There was no City Manager's Report or Executive Session before Council.

Mayor Pro-Tem Lohr then entertained a motion to adjourn. He thanked everyone for coming and wished all a Merry Christmas.

There being no further business to consider, a motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Council Member Bonds, seconded by Council Member Syfrett and passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:06 P.M. Notice of this meeting was distributed to all local media and posted on the City's website and the City Hall bulletin board at least twenty-four hours prior to meeting time.

Respectfully,

Betty J. Hudson
City Clerk

APPROVED: January 12, 2016