



MINUTES

**Cochran City Council
Tuesday, June 11, 2024**

Regular Scheduled Meeting @ 7:00PM

City Auditorium, 102 N Second Street, Cochran, GA 31014

City Council

City Staff

Billy Yeomans, Mayor	Richard Newbern, City Manager
Keith Anderson, Council Member <i>(District 1, Post 1)</i>	Candace Summerall, City Clerk
Gary Ates, Council Member <i>(District 1, Post 2)</i>	Jim Elliott, City Attorney
Carla Coley, Council Member <i>(District 2 Post 1)</i>	
Lonnie Tedders, Council Member <i>(District 2, Post 2)</i>	
Andrew Lemmon, Council Member <i>(District 3, Post 1)</i>	
Shane Savant, Council Member <i>(District 3, Post 2)</i>	

I. Call to Order by Mayor Pro Tem Carla Coley 7:01 PM

II. Invocation led by Keith Anderson

III. Pledge of Allegiance led by Lonnie Tedders

IV. Attendance

Mayor/Council Members Present: Mayor Billy Yeomans (arrival at 8:11 PM), Keith Anderson, Gary Ates, Carla Coley, Andrew Lemmon, Lonnie Tedders, Shane Savant

Council Members Absent: N/A

City Staff Present: Richard Newbern, Candace Summerall, Jim Elliott

City Staff Absent: N/A

V. Adopt Agenda/Minutes

1. Approve minutes for Regular Meeting May 14, 2024 - APPROVED

- Motion by Council Member Keith Anderson, seconded by Council Member Gary Ates 5/0

2. Approve Minutes for Special Called Meeting May 21, 2024 – APPROVED

- Motion by Council Member Keith Anderson, seconded by Council Member Gary Ates 5/0

3. Adopt Agenda for Public Hearing June 4, 2024 – ADOPTED

- -Motion by Council Member Lonnie Tedders, seconded by Council Member Keith Anderson 5/0

4. Approve Minutes for Public Hearing June 4, 2024 – APPROVED

- Motion by Council Member Keith Anderson, seconded by Council Member Lonnie Tedders 5/0

VI. Agenda Items

1. Employee of Spring Quarter - Bonnie Raffield from Administration department recognized by City Clerk Candace Summerall

2. Public Hearing on the FY 2024/25 Budget

PUBLIC HEARING BEGINS 7:08 pm

- Comment from Melissa Barker, President/CEO of Chamber of Commerce, requesting budget increase from \$22,500 to \$32,500 to be more in line with other organizations' funding levels. Stated the Chamber's money is restricted for tourism use only.

PUBLIC HEARING CLOSED AT 7:12 pm

3. Consider adopting ordinance for the FY 2024/25 Budget -

- Discussion by City Manager Richard Newbern on proposed 11.06% salary increase for firefighters (\$38,179), public works (\$69,830), and administration (\$40,392) totaling \$148,401 in addition to 3.5% cost of living adjustment
- The 11.06% increase was proposed to bring the salaries of these departments in line with the adjustment given to the police department in February 2022.
- Council member Gary Ates expressed concern about increasing just one department instead of doing it equally
- Motion by Council Member Shane Savant, seconded by Council Member Lonnie Tedders, to increase only firefighters' salaries by 11.06% this year (\$40,000 total impact) due to budget constraints
- Commitment by Council to consider increases for other departments like public works next year

- **City Manager Richard Newbern:**
 - Presented a comprehensive overview of the proposed FY 2024/25 budget.
 - Highlighted the general fund amounting to \$4,535,490, and the allocation for various departments including water, sewer, gas, and solid waste.
 - Emphasized the inclusion of a 3.5% cost of living increase for all city employees, effective July 1, 2024.
 - Proposed additional salary adjustments for the fire department, public works, and administrative staff to align with market rates.
- **Council Member Shane Savant:**
 - Expressed concerns about the significant 11.06% increase proposed for all departments.
 - Suggested a phased approach to salary adjustments for other departments to mitigate budget impact.
 - Recommended prioritizing the fire department's increase this year and revisiting public works and administrative salaries in subsequent years.
- **Council Member Gary Ates:**
 - Did not support the phased approach suggested by Savant.
 - Emphasized the need for equitable salary adjustments across all departments during this fiscal year
 - Discussed the extensive responsibilities of the public works department and the need for competitive salaries to maintain a skilled workforce.
- **Council Member Carla Coley:**
 - Voiced concerns about the financial sustainability of the proposed increases.

- Questioned the potential long-term budget implications if no increase is made at all. Supported the 11.06% increase for firefighters.
- **Council Member Keith Anderson:**
 - Did not support the phased approach suggested by Savant.
 - Emphasized the need for equitable salary adjustments across all departments during this fiscal year.
- **Fire Chief Brock Wilcher:**
 - Provided input on the critical role of firefighters and the importance of competitive salaries to retain staff.
 - Highlighted the emergency response duties and life-saving services provided by the fire department, justifying the need for the proposed salary adjustments.

Budget Details:

- **General Fund:**
 - Total: \$4,535,490
 - Allocation includes 3.5% cost of living increase for all city employees, excluding department heads.
 - **Water and Sewer Fund:**
 - Total: \$2,415,800
 - **Gas Fund:**
 - Total: \$773,900
 - **Solid Waste Fund:**
 - Total: \$974,700
 - **Salary Adjustments:**
 - Proposed 3.5% cost of living increase across the board.
 - Specific additional adjustments for the fire department to make their salaries competitive with market rates.
 - Discussion on public works and administrative salary adjustments to be revisited next year.
-
- Council Member Shane Savant made a motion to approve the budget with the proposed 11.06% increase for firefighters' salaries and the 3.5% cost of living increase for all employees.
 - The council discussed and agreed to revisit the public works and administrative salary adjustments in the next fiscal year to ensure financial sustainability.
 - The motion included an amendment to reduce the general fund total to \$4,575,490 to accommodate the firefighter salary increase and associated benefits costs.

Vote:

- The motion to adopt the FY 2024/25 budget with modifications was put to a vote by Shane Savant
- The motion was seconded by Council Member Lonnie Tedders.
- The council voted in favor of adopting the budget with the specified amendments:
 - **In Favor:** Council Members Lonnie Tedders, Andrew Lemmon, and Shane Savant.
 - **Opposed:** Keith Anderson, Gary Ates
- Motion Passes 3/2

4. City Clerk/Oath & Bond - Ordinance requiring oath and bond for City Clerk REPEALED as antiquated based on advice from City Attorney Jim Elliott and that the insurance covers the bond requirement

- Motion made by Lonnie Tedders to repeal ordinance that requires city clerk to take an oath/bond, Seconded by Shane Savant 5/0
- Moved to July Regular Session

5. Consider designating Candace Summerall, City Clerk, to exercise powers/duties of City Manager during temporary absence or physical or mental disability.

- Motion by Council Member Shane Savant, seconded by Council Member Keith Anderson 6/0

6. Consider adopting plat on reconfigured property at Fire Department site –

- Reconfigures property owned by City, Bleckley County, and Grey Rentals LLC
- Allows 10 Feet of space behind Fire Department
- Adoption of the plat will convey the south corner parcel at First Street and State Bank Lane from the county to the city.

- Motion by Council Member Lonnie Tedders, seconded by Council Member Ates, after Fire Chief confirmation of the property lines between the city, county, and private owner 6/0

7. Consider awarding \$98,554.16 contract to Deep South Construction to renovate Police Department rooms - APPROVED

- **City Manager Richard Newbern:**
 - Introduced the item by explaining the need for renovations in the rear area of the Police Department.

- Highlighted that the renovation project includes upgrading the men's and women's bathrooms, gym, training room, and a multi-purpose room.
- Stressed the importance of these renovations to improve the working conditions and facilities for the police officers.
- **Proposal Details:**
 - The proposal from Deep South Construction amounts to \$98,554.16.
 - The renovation includes significant improvements to the bathrooms, gym area, and training facilities to enhance functionality and provide a better environment for the officers.
- **Police Chief Jeff Trawick:**
 - Emphasized the current substandard conditions of the existing facilities.
 - Explained that the bathrooms are outdated, and the gym and training room are inadequate for the needs of the department.
 - Mentioned the importance of having a proper training room for staff development and a clean-up area for officers after duty.
- **Mike Ware, Deep South Construction:**
 - Described the scope of work, which includes the renovation of bathrooms to modern standards, the addition of new locker rooms, and upgrades to the gym area.
 - Highlighted the donation of labor and materials for the development of a staff training and education room.
 - Ensured the council of the high quality and timely completion of the project.
- **Council Member Lonnie Tedders:**
 - Expressed support for the renovation, acknowledging the poor conditions of the current facilities.
 - Asked for clarification on the bid process and the selection of Deep South Construction.
- **City Attorney Jim Elliott:**
 - Clarified the legal aspects of the bidding process.
 - Explained that while the standard procedure is to obtain multiple bids for projects exceeding \$6,000, the council has the authority to waive this requirement under special circumstances.
- **Council Member Shane Savant:**
 - Voiced concerns about adhering to the city's ordinance requiring competitive sealed bids for projects over \$6,001.

- Acknowledged the urgency and necessity of the renovation but stressed the importance of following legal procedures to avoid setting a precedent for future projects.
- **Council Member Carla Coley:**
 - Agreed with Savant on the importance of following the ordinance.
- **Motion by Council Member Gary Ates:**
 - Made a motion to approve the contract with Deep South Construction for \$98,554.16 and to waive the competitive sealed bid requirement for this project due to the special circumstances and substantial cost savings provided by the contractor.

Vote:

- The motion was put to a vote and passed with the following results:
 - **In Favor:** Council Members, Gary Ates, Lonnie Tedders, Andrew Lemmon, and Shane Savant.
 - **Opposed:** Council Member Keith Anderson
 - **Motion Passes 4/1**

8. Consider amendment of city charter regarding Mid-State Energy Authority name change - APPROVED

- City Attorney Jim Elliott explained the legislative change allows Mid-State to enter contracts/borrow money without city liability
- Motion by Council Member Shane Savant, seconded by Council Member Gary Ates 5/0

9. Consider approving reservation form for City properties

- MOVED TO JULY SESSION
- Consensus to do further research on forms used by other cities

Mayor Billy Yeomans arrives at meeting 8:11 PM

10. Consider awarding bid to Scruggs Construction for GDOT LMIG road resurfacing of 0.61 miles (\$105,660.94) – APPROVED

- Bid came in at \$120,000 to resurface additional .08 miles of Peter St to Dykes St

- Motion by Council Member Shane Savant, seconded by Council Member Keith Anderson 6/0

11. Consider awarding bid to Scruggs Construction for LMIG LRA road resurfacing of 0.69 miles (\$126,000) - APPROVED

- Overage of \$7,038 to go to Honeysuckle St intersection
- Motion by Council Member Shane Savant, seconded by Council Member Andrew Lemmon 6/0

12. Consider request from Chamber/DDA to close Cherry St from 2nd to 3rd and 3rd St from Cherry to E. Dykes for Independence Day celebration on July 4th - APPROVED

- Discussion presented by Mickey Harbin, vice chair DDA
- Plan to set up inflatables, food trucks, allow picnics and do fireworks at 9pm shot from First Baptist parking lot
- Entered into hold harmless agreement with First Baptist Church for fireworks
- Motion by Council Member Carla Coley, seconded by Council Member Lonnie Tedders 6/0

VII. City Manager Discussion/Items/Updates

- City Manager Newbern reviewed FY 2024/25 budget highlights (see above)
- Provided update on property tax collections
- 95.03% collected over 2017-2023 period, \$335,786 balance remaining
- Tax sale scheduled for Sept 3 for remaining delinquencies after notification process
- Drafting public statement to clarify tax collection efforts and data loss
- In discussions with independent auditing firm to review tax records and procedures

VIII. Council Discussion/Items

- **Council Member Keith Anderson:**
 - Thanked District 1 citizens for attending recent meeting
 - Wished Happy Father's Day to all fathers
- **Council Member Gary Ates:**
 - Thanked District 1 citizens for attending recent meeting
 - Wished Happy Father's Day to all fathers

- **Council Member Carla Coley:**
 - Thanked City Clerk Candace Summerall for her work
 - Requested tax collection issue be separate agenda item for July for full discussion
 - Feels more transparency is needed beyond a statement about the issues
 - Wants City Manager to explain how tax situation happened beyond weather event
 - Asked City Attorney to explain differences between regular and forensic audits
 - Doesn't feel proposed public statement fully addresses citizen concerns or shows enough improvement
- **Council Member Lonnie Tedders:**
 - Wished Happy Father's Day
- **Council Member Andrew Lemmon:**
 - No comments
- **Council Member Shane Savant:**
 - Expressed being put in difficult position on approving police dept renovation without bid process
 - Concerned that Council isn't being kept informed by City Manager on items like tax collection audit discussions
 - Wants more verification that data loss was weather related before stating that to public
 - Concerned about records being stored in 3 unsecured off-site locations
 - Wished Happy Father's Day to single mothers doing both parental roles
- **Mayor Yeomans:**
 - Feels focus should be on fixing problems and gathering facts before assigning blame
 - Cautions against continuing without the facts on issues said publicly
 - Wants to be careful on what is said and how it's said

IX. Announcement of Upcoming Meetings/Events

1. Strategic Planning Session - Saturday, July 29, 2024 @ 8:30 AM
2. City Council Work Session - Tuesday, July 9, 2024 @ 6:00 PM
3. City Council Regular Meeting - Tuesday, July 9, 2024 @ 7:00 PM

X. Public Comments

- Andrea Carroll - paid 2018 taxes after receiving past due notice, but believes her mother paid it before passing. Requests a refund if records found. Suggests seasonal utility billing.
- Melissa Barker - invited Council to Chamber Bingo Night fundraiser and Caffeinated Connections. Thanked them for July 4th celebration approval.
- Mary Pitts - complained about loud late-night music from a neighbor's party. Requests enforcement of noise ordinance. Asked about dilapidated properties and park construction start date.

XI. Executive Session

- Motion by Council Member Gary Ates, seconded by Council Member Andrew Lemmon, to enter into Executive Session to discuss potential litigation
- EXECUTIVE SESSION BEGINS 9:31 pm
- EXECUTIVE SESSION ENDS 9:55 pm

City attorney advises Chamber of Commerce funds are not a government entity, they are a charity, states City paying funds outside of hotel/motel funds would be considered a charitable donation.

REGULAR SESSION ADJOURNED By Mayor Yeomans AT 9:56 pm.



Candace Summerall

City Clerk

(SEAL)

