

Minutes
Forsyth City Council Meeting
September 16, 2019
Aldermen Hall @ 6:00pm

Call to Order

Mayor Wilson called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Wilson led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Invocation & Roll Call

Mr. Lawrence gave the invocation. Present for the meeting was Mayor Wilson, Councilmembers John Howard, Chris Hewett, Melvin Lawrence, Mike Dodd, Julius Stroud, and Greg Goolsby. Also present was City Attorney, Bobby Melton; City Manager, Janice Hall; City Clerk, Regina Ivie.

Approval of the Agenda

Mayor Wilson stated the accounts payables total needed to be amended to 248,060.89.

Mr. Hewett offered a motion to approve the agenda with the amended accounts payables total. Seconded by Mr. Lawrence; the motion carried unanimously.

Approval of the Minutes from the September 3, 2019 Work Session & Council Meeting

Mr. Howard offered a motion to approve the minutes of the September 3rd Work Session & Council Meeting. Seconded by Mr. Hewett; the motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Street Closure request – Life Chain on October 6, 2019

Mr. Hewett offered a motion to approve the street closure request for Life Chain on October 6, 2019. Seconded by Mr. Lawrence; the motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Street Closure request – Jonah’s on Johnston on September 28, 2019

Mr. Stroud offered a motion to approve the street closure request for Jonah’s on Johnston on September 28, 2019. Seconded by Mr. Dodd; the motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Accounts Payables Invoices \$248,060.89

Mr. Hewett offered a motion to approve the accounts payables invoices as stated with the amended total. Seconded by Mr. Howard; the motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Requisitions Greater than \$5,000

Altec Industries, Inc - \$6,782.25

Mr. Stroud offered a motion to approve the requisition listed. Seconded by Mr. Hewett; the motion carried unanimously.

City Manager’s Report

Ms. Hall provided the following report:

- Technical Assistance requests to Regional Commission for:
 - Annexation project – scheduling a meeting with Regional Commission
 - Alternative methods to limit access to city cemeteries and to write rules, regulations and/or information
 - Historical Society for funding/grant writing for renovation of benches

- Middle Ga Fence has marked the area for the dog park; please go by this week and let me know if you agree with the location and size; we will run water for human/animal water fountains; we will pour concrete for unleash area and possible sidewalk connection
Mr. Stroud asked what ground covering is to be used at the park? Ms. Hall stated no changes to grass currently. Mr. Stroud further stated artificial grass might provide for easier cleanup.
- 2019 Annual Middle Georgia Regional Commission meeting will be held on Thursday, October 10 at 5:00 pm at the Anderson Conference Center; need to RSVP no later than October 2
- Kickoff meeting with Department of Community Affairs for CDBG project is on 10/22 at 11:00 am; we are eligible for a CDBG each year due to being a Plan 1st Community and will start working on project area for application for next year which is usually due April 1
- Facilities Manager, Brian Padgett, started today; will be evaluating all city facilities for repairs to be made; first on list is mulch in playground at Kynette Park; people are dropping cigarettes in the mulch areas and they are starting fires; looking into purchasing cigarette butt containers for parks and around square; amended budget for salary but will need to amend again to include fuel, tools, equipment needed.
Mr. Stroud asked that we look at shelter for the playground equipment.
- Housing Authority through Mr. Melton has requested several projects most of which either are already underway; the list of potential blighted properties has been submitted to code enforcement; other areas of concern are either already being worked on or need further discussion
- TSW held public input booth at Farmers Market on Friday. They have provided me with a draft copy of the Parks Master Plan; will add input received on Friday and then send an updated draft; at that time we will schedule for them to return and present their plan to council
- ClarkNexsen sent RFP for demolition and asbestos removal of building on new city hall site to me and this was posted on Friday; bids due by 10/15 @3pm with a bid opening at that time. Site tour on 9/30 at 3:00; received 6 requests for documents today.
- Audit proposals due 9/20; 2018 audit review is scheduled for 10/7 council meeting.
- As approved and directed at the August 19 work session, Mike Leverett/John Hewett are still working on the Distributed Generation policy (which covers solar and other alternative forms of power) and review of electric rates; should have this for 1st meeting in October
- POW/MIA Chair of Honor dedication will be Friday, September 20 at 10:30 am in the Welcome Center
- Splashpad will close for the season at 8:00 pm on Sunday September 29.
- Chamber Member appreciation is 9/26 at 5:30 pm at Chamber; RSVP required so please let me or Kari at Chamber know if you plan to attend.
- Need to schedule a called meeting to approve the final draft of SPLOST bond; need to call for 9/26 if possible; should only take a few minutes.
Called meeting scheduled for Wednesday, September 25, 2019 at 5:00 p.m.
- I will provide information to Mr. Melton to advertise for a public hearing for the street name change authorized at the last council meeting.

City Attorney Report

Mr. Melton had no further business to report.

Mayor's Report

Mayor Wilson reviewed two letters from evacuees complimenting the City on the hospitality they received during their stay in Forsyth.

Statement below regarding newspaper articles by Mayor Wilson is verbatim.

Mayor Wilson stated many of you like me may have been perplexed when you opened the local newspaper last week. There were three columns and one editorial geared towards our stance on solar and in particular a situation

regarding Castleberry Drugs across the street. I say I was perplexed I found out late Tuesday afternoon after apparently the articles were written along with Ms. Hall that they were going to be in the paper the next day. We found out because one of the reporters were sent over here to make pictures. He told Ms. Hall of downtown is all he was told. He used her office to make pictures of Castleberry. Which of course would have been fine if he would have told her the purpose; it's a public building he would have been welcome to do that. About 30 minutes after he left we got an email from the publisher telling us he wanted to be up front and explained what they were doing. I would suggest there was a lack of journalistic objectivity because we were never interviewed prior to any of those articles. There was a lack of journalistic curiosity because there was a lack of research done into the allegations. And a lack of integrity in that reporting. I have expressed that to the reporter that wrote those articles in a phone conversation when she called me last Thursday to ask me for my side, or our side or for an interview. The fake news movement in this country we see things get lobbed over the bowl sometime to get a response. Then the other side responds keeps this thing going for two or three weeks and tries to substantiate some relevance. People wanting to read the newspaper I guess. But, it didn't allow us an opportunity to respond I guess is what I want to say. One of the key tenants of the article related to Castleberry's and I think was even used in the headline or a subhead line was that we had withdrawn a permit that we had issued. I immediately called Ms. Hall. We discovered that the City has never issued a permit to that person or that entity for this purpose. As we all know there is a distributed generation agreement is what's required to tie into the grid with solar. When I talked to the reporter on Thursday she said that yea she had seen the permit, well I have seen a receipt for \$75 signed by someone with a last name of Parks. We don't have anybody, nor did we during that time period have anyone working for the City with the last name of Parks. That's why I suggest there was a lack of curiosity and researching this topic. What I would guess happened and I don't know so this is just a speculation maybe they got a building and electrical permit which would have been issued by the County building department whom we contract with to do building inspections in the City. That would be to allow them construct the solar. Which is certainly permissible to get a permit to construct something. But then the question becomes you need a distributed generation agreement to tie into our system. And that's something which we had a policy on. It didn't relate specifically to their case so we never said specifically that we were turning them down. What really shocked me is I didn't even know this was an issue. I never heard from the person in the article, never spoken to them, they've never come before City council. Then I asked the reporter why did this pop up? How did they... then she admitted she contacted them three years later for the story. That's where the story came from. And then there was an inflammatory headline you may have seen relating to our meeting our work session meeting which suggested we had renewed our dis-favorable policy towards solar. And the impetus for me calling that meeting was to see if we can get together and figure out how to come up with a distributed generation agreement for solar. And I think we all left there understanding that. So there was a clear disconnect in that. I would suggest that we as a council consider in an effort to convey transparency; and we are transparent we want to be open that we either live stream our meetings and allow people to see it live without having to wait and read about it and maybe not get it accurately. Either on our Facebook page or on our website because some people may not have Facebook. I throw that out to council as an option for us to have an unfiltered way of getting the information out. We've been offered an opportunity to respond. The publisher of the paper even offered an opportunity for me to write an unfiltered guest column. But my concern that is in so doing you perpetuate the story which just continues it for another two or three weeks; allows people to go to Facebook and comment on it and that kind of thing. And it takes a long time to answer allegations that were leveled at you in three different articles. A real lack of objectivity when you don't even ask the other party for a comment. I have never seen a reputable news article that didn't say they at least tried to get a comment from the other side, they weren't available or they didn't want to comment or whatever. I am sure that'll be the comment this week because there is a follow up piece and I am sure the comment will be I don't have a comment. I am fine with that after the way we were treated in last week's articles. That's what I have to say about that. I open it up for discussion if ya'll want to discuss. I think we could pretty easily live stream it using Facebook live or some other medium to do that. What are the thoughts of council about that proposal or about that in general?

Mr. Lawrence questioned Forsyth Cablenet recording the council meetings?

Ms. Hall stated the Forsyth Cablenet contact indicated someone would be here tonight to record the meeting.

Mr. Howard and Mr. Dodd stated that you couldn't hear the recordings by Forsyth Cablenet.

Mr. Stroud offered a motion to begin live streaming our City Council meetings on Facebook. Seconded by Mr. Hewett; the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Goolsby stated he received two calls about the article. He informed both callers that a work session had recently been held where a rate study is being done, and that the City is open to solar. Solar is only going to get more popular. A lot of things need to change for it to be affordable for everybody. He further stated he was perplexed about the article too considering what had been discussed at the work session.

Public Comments

Don Daniel stated he appreciates the City's efforts for transparency. He distributed an updated edition of the open records law reference guide to Mayor and Council and the Police Chief.

Executive Session

Mayor Wilson stated the need for executive session was to discuss pending litigation and personnel matters.

Mr. Dodd offered a motion to adjourn into executive session. Seconded by Mr. Stroud; the motion carried unanimously. Mayor and Council adjourned into executive session at 6:37 p.m.

Mayor Wilson called the meeting back into open session at 7:16 p.m.

Mr. Hewett reviewed the plans for GDOT regarding the commercial vehicle lane additions on 475 and 75. Utilities would have to be relocated. Tax digest would be greatly impacted.

Adjourned

There being no further business to discuss Mr. Stroud offered a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Mr. Lawrence; the motion carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:20 p.m.