



APPROVED MINUTES
Cochran City Council
Tuesday, September 10, 2024
Regular Meeting @ 7:00

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

I. Call to Order

Mayor Billy Yeomans called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

II. Invocation

Councilman Keith Anderson delivered the invocation.

III. Pledge of Allegiance

Councilman Andrew Lemmon led the Pledge of Allegiance.

IV. Attendance

Council Members Present:

Mayor Billy Yeomans

Keith Anderson (District 1, Post 1)

Gary Ates (District 1, Post 2)

Carla Coley (District 2, Post 1)

Lonnie Tedders (District 2, Post 2)

Andrew Lemmon (District 3, Post 1)

Shane Savant (District 3, Post 2)

City Staff Present:

Richard Newbern, City Manager

Candace Summerall, City Clerk *entered meeting at 7:08 PM*

Jim Elliott, City Attorney

V. Adopt Agenda/Minutes

Mayor Yeomans asked if there were any additions or changes to the agenda.

Councilmember Carla Coley made a motion to add a discussion about when the city observes Halloween to the agenda as item #10. Councilmember Shane Savant seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Councilmember Shane Savant made a motion to add a discussion about water and waste sewage billing for the Recreation Department as item #11. Councilmember Gary Ates seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Councilmember Andrew Lemmon made a motion to accept the amended agenda. Councilmember Shane Savant seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

The council reviewed and approved the minutes from the following meetings:

- Regular Session on August 13, 2024
- Work Session on August 13, 2024
- Special Called Meeting on September 3, 2024

Councilmember Shane Savant made a motion to approve all sets of minutes. Councilmember Andrew Lemmon seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

VI. Agenda Items

1. Employee of the Quarter - Police Department

Mat Leopard, Police Command, introduced Officer Nick Davis and thanked him for his hard work. Officer Nick Davis was awarded a certificate of appreciation.

2. Proclamation for "Georgia Reads Day"

Mayor Billy Yeomans Announces Proclamation for Georgia Reads Day declaring that September 30th 2024 would be observed for this recognition.

3. Consider a permanent name for Ash Street Park

City manager announced the requirement for the city park located off Ash Street to have an official decision by the end of the month. Mayor proposed two names for the council to consider and directed members to call city clerk by end of day Friday with their vote of Cochran City Park or Earl Arnold Community Park. Mayor proposed that a plaque honoring land giver, Earl Arnold should be present with either name chosen.

4. Consider postponing the October 8 Council Meeting to October 10

City Manager Richard Newbern explained that the Georgia DCA Conference for 2024 CDBG Award is from October 7-10. He requested moving the regular council meeting from October 8 to October 10.

Councilmember Gary Ates made a motion to change the meeting date to October 10. Councilmember Andrew Lemmon seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

5. Consider extending liquor license expiration dates

Mayor Yeomans introduced the item to consider extending for six months the expiration date of two liquor licenses due to expire on January 30, 2025.

Todd Stanich, representing Mr. Patel, addressed the council requesting the extension. He cited difficulties with sewage connections and other issues that have delayed the project.

Councilmember Carla Coley asked about the specific delays. Mr. Stanich mentioned sewage issues and potentially needing to install a septic tank instead of connecting to city sewage.

City Manager Richard Newbern clarified that the property is zoned B-2 and located in the city, which requires connection to public sewer.

The council agreed to discuss further details in executive session due to potential litigation.

6. Consider amending Water and Sewer Ordinance

City Manager Richard Newbern presented a proposal to amend the ordinance to require residences and businesses within 750 linear feet of city water/sewer services to connect, rather than the current 500 feet for water and 200 feet for sewer.

Councilmember Carla Coley brought up Senate Bill 121, which prohibits municipalities from requiring farms or residences with at least 1 acre to connect to public water/sewer. She suggested measuring from the right-of-way instead of buildings for consistency with state law.

The council agreed to table the item to refine the language and bring it back at the next meeting.

7. Consider awarding bid for Municipal Building floor repair

Public Works Director Willie Barrow presented the sole bid received from Darrell Brown for \$38,500 to repair the floor in the East Dykes wing.

Councilmember Shane Savant expressed concern about consistently receiving only one bid for projects.

Councilmember Carla Coley suggested considering a full renovation of the back portion of the building in the near future rather than piecemeal repairs.

Councilmember Gary Ates made a motion to accept the bid. Councilmember Andrew Lemmon seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

8. Consider appointment to Library Board

Mayor Yeomans nominated Tyler Sapp to serve a 4-year term on the Library Board from July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2028.

Councilmember Shane Savant made a motion to appoint Tyler Sapp. Councilmember Andrew Lemmon seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

9. Discussion on proposed clearance of delinquent ad valorem taxes

City Clerk Candace Summerall presented a plan to waive outstanding property taxes for owners who purchased property with pre-existing tax liability. She sought Council input on this proposal before proceeding.

Summerall explained that the proposal would apply to tax debts from years prior to 2023 for properties purchased in 2022 or earlier.

Councilmember Shane Savant requested written parameters for how these decisions would be made to ensure consistency and avoid potential legal issues.

Councilmember Carla Coley emphasized the importance of consistency in applying the policy.

After discussion, the Council agreed to approve the tax write-off plan, contingent on the issuance of a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) by the City Clerk. The SOP will outline the specific criteria and process for determining eligibility and implementing the policy.

10. Discussion on Halloween observance date

Councilmember Carla Coley raised concerns about the decision to observe Halloween on November 2 rather than October 31. She suggested the city should observe Halloween on October 31 unless it falls on a Wednesday or Sunday.

City Clerk Candace Summerall explained the police chief made the decision based on staffing and safety considerations.

11. Recreation Department water/waste sewage billing

Councilmember Shane Savant questioned the decision to start billing the Recreation Department for water and waste services.

City Clerk Candace Summerall explained that during a recent audit, she discovered the Recreation Department had not been paying for utilities for many years, resulting in an outstanding bill of almost \$5,000. She proposed starting to bill them at the government rate, consistent with other subsidized entities like the library.

Councilmember Savant expressed concerns about changing the long-standing arrangement without full Council input and in the middle of a budget year. He suggested waiting until the start of the next fiscal year to implement the change.

Councilmember Carla Coley agreed that the timing should align with the Recreation Department's fiscal year for proper budgeting.

After discussion, the Council agreed to implement the billing for the Recreation Department starting at the beginning of the Recreation Department's next fiscal year. This decision allows the Recreation Department time to adjust their budget accordingly.

VII. City Manager Discussion/Items/Updates

City Manager Richard Newbern provided updates on:

- Upcoming presentation at the City Planning Institute meeting in Dublin on October 4
- Progress on the roof, windows, and doors program
- Upcoming GMA District 9 meeting on September 24
- Training on House Bill 581 in Tifton on October 1
- Work on recently awarded CDBG grant

City Clerk Candace Summerall provided additional updates:

- Waste Management check for limb truck issue has not yet been received by the family
- Municode contract signed for updating ordinances online, allowing for more recent updates before codification
- Applications for the Christmas parade will be available on Friday, September 13th, parade Dec 6th.
- Thanked council for approving the change in insurance brokers, which has benefited city employees
- Reminded council members about the House Bill 581 training on October 1 and invited them to attend
- Completed mandated clerk hours

VIII. Council Discussion Items

Mayor Billy Yeomans:

- Addressed comments made on social media about city governance, specifically referencing a Facebook post by Councilmember Shane Savant
- Clarified misunderstandings about public comments at meetings, stating that citizens have always been allowed to speak, with the time limit recently changed from four to three minutes
- Expressed frustration with inaccurate social media posts about city operations and his role as mayor
- Responded to criticisms about his position, emphasizing that he does not take a salary for his role as mayor
- Stated that he has donated \$81,500 to the city over his 81 months as mayor by not accepting a salary or COVID bonus
- Addressed a comment suggesting the city doesn't need a mayor, agreeing that the current structure could potentially be changed to a city council with a chairperson
- Clarified that Chris Coley is not the official spokesman for the city of Cochran, despite his active presence on social media sharing city information
- Expressed his motivation for serving as mayor, stating he does the job because he loves the city and its people

Councilmember Keith Anderson (District 1, Post 1):

- No specific items discussed

Councilmember Gary Ates (District 1, Post 2):

- No specific items discussed

Councilmember Carla Coley (District 2, Post 1):

- Discussed Suicide Awareness and Prevention Month, sharing local statistics on youth suicide attempts from the Georgia Student Health Survey
- Reported that out of 1,101 Bleckley County students surveyed:
 - 45 students reported attempting suicide on one to two occasions
 - 16 students reported attempting suicide on three to five occasions
 - 16 students reported attempting suicide on five or more occasions
- Emphasized the importance of addressing mental health issues and removing the stigma surrounding them
- Discussed the concept of integrity, defining it as how we speak, live, and treat others
- Cited biblical references regarding integrity and truthful communication
- Addressed concerns about her integrity being questioned at a previous meeting
- Clarified that she had received consultation from the city attorney and did not have a conflict of interest regarding the rezoning matter
- Requested that council members extend courtesies to each other and avoid personal attacks during meetings
- Mentioned having 52 pages of case law discussing free speech rights for council members, offering to share this information with other council members

Councilmember Lonnie Tedders (District 2, Post 2):

- No specific items discussed

Councilmember Andrew Lemmon (District 3, Post 1):

Upon returning from executive session, Council Addressed Agenda Item #5 Councilmember Gary Ates made a motion to extend the liquor licenses for both stores by six months. Councilmember Andrew Lemmon seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

XI. Adjournment

Councilmember Andrew Lemmon made a motion to adjourn. Councilmember Gary Ates seconded. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned. 9:50 PM.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "Candace Summerall".

Candace Summerall, City Clerk

- No specific items discussed

Councilmember Shane Savant (District 3, Post 2):

- Thanked school administrators and law enforcement officers for their swift response and extra work following a recent tragic shooting at a school in Georgia
- Expressed confidence in the safety protocols in place at local schools
- Requested more detailed Public Works reports, specifically asking for information about where work was done to be included on the front page
- Suggested this would help council understand the work being done and allow the Public Works department to showcase their efforts
- Referred to a previous one-on-one meeting with the City Manager and requested follow-up on items discussed
- Addressed comments made during the previous week's tax meeting, particularly the mayor's statement about adjourning the meeting if personal attacks continued
- Clarified that his questions to the City Manager were business-related and not personal attacks
- Emphasized the importance of the City Manager reporting to the City Council and the need for council members to ask questions
- Requested timely follow-up from the City Manager on council inquiries
- Referenced previous discussions about performance appraisals and the importance of addressing concerns throughout the year
- Suggested that when council members ask questions or "dig in," it should be viewed as a coaching session for the City Manager

IX. Public Comments

1. Don Davis, 154 Jefferson Street:

- Expressed disappointment in how recent property tax issues were communicated
- Requested a full explanation of what happened and plans to prevent future issues

2. Mickey Harbin, 196 9th Street:

- Expressed concern about the discord and unprofessionalism displayed during the meeting
- Urged council members to find ways to work together more effectively

X. Executive Session

The council entered executive session to discuss potential litigation. Councilmember Gary Ates made a motion to enter executive session. Councilmember Shane Savant seconded. The motion passed unanimously. At 9:19 PM

9:25 PM following 5-minute recess.

9:47 PM Councilmember Gary Ates made a motion to exit executive session. Councilmember Lonnie Tedders seconded. The motion passed unanimously.