



**REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING
Tuesday, March 19, 2024; 6:30 P.M.
Bennettsville Public Safety Complex**

Minutes

1. CALL TO ORDER Mayor Fowler
2. INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE Tyrone Davis
3. ROLL CALL
District 1-Wanda Weaver
District 2-Tyrone Davis
District 3-Allen Taylor
Mayor- Leith Fowler
District 4-Bill Jennings
District 5-Tryon Abraham
District 6-Gregory Scott
4. APPROVAL/CORRECTION OF MINUTES
 - A. Regular Council Meeting; Tuesday, February 20, 2024- Moved by Mr. Davis that the Regular Council Meeting minutes for Tuesday, February 20, 2024, be approved. Seconded by Mr. Jennings. Motion passed unanimously.

Mrs. Weaver made a motion to go into Executive Session and discuss Personnel issues.
Mr. Jennings stated, “ I will go in Executive Session this time, but I think we’ve got to stop it today. We’ve had 5 meetings and 4 Executive Sessions. Every meeting is an Executive Session. Mr. Abraham agreed.
5. PUBLIC REQUESTS/ PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS
 - A. Employees Anniversaries- Griffin Norris, Water & Sewer, 8 years; Steve Wilkes, Utility Billing, 11 years; De’Aron Smith, Police, 9 years; John Cartwright, Electric, 5 years; Jordan Smith, Water Treatment, 4 years; William Porter, Fire, 2 years; Dustin Bruce, Fire, 1 year

B. New Hires & Promotions

February New Hires

Earnest Floyd- Electric Foreman

February Promotions

Fredericka Miller-Public Works Director

Don Galloway-Asst. Public Works Director

March New Hires

Terry Bridges – Animal Control/Codes Enforcement Officer

Dennis Ridges – Sanitation Worker

Terry Brown – Part-Time Sanitation Worker

James Moore – Custodian for Tourism, Parks, and Recreation

Jennifer Dotson – Police SRO

Joshua Graham – Police Officer

Kalija Galloway – Electric Lineworker B

Taurence McDougald – Electric Lineworker B

March Promotions

Tammy King – HR Manager

Patricia Bethea – Accountant

Brantley Douglas – Gas Supervisor

William Porter – Fire Engineer

- C. Political (and other) signs with profanity and/or vulgar language discussion-Mr. Scott stated, “There were some disrespectful words placed on the sign on top of the building on Cheraw Street. Since this is my district, I feel I owe my constituents an explanation. When the city was informed of the rude language, we asked that the sign be removed, but the property owner covered up the portion that they thought were offensive. Then the city contacted our lawyer to be legally advised. We find that we didn’t have an ordinance in place to take care of this. So, we are still pursuing legal matters and avenues for things like this. In fact, that things are legal don’t mean that these things are right. You know, the laws change all the time. Its legal today may not be legal tomorrow.” He went on to say that the sign was not respectable at all for the community. There are three churches that are right in proximity of the sign. “Families and children going to church seeing this writing that was so disrespectful on the sign. The other thing is the area that the sign is located in is “The Soul of Bennettsville.” You have one church where Ms. Marian Edelman Wright lived and attended church. This lady sat with presidents and now it’s known national. St. Michael you had EJ Sawyer, the richest black man in Marlboro County. He was educated and was the first postmaster. He was known to have the first black newspaper in this area, and you defy that area with disrespectful words.” On Friday we had an event where a US Congressman, State and Budget Board members came to our city and saw this disrespectful sign. Lastly, he mentioned getting an ordinance that will keep these things from happening in the future.

6. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Yvette Douglas- Talked about District 3 and the representative being the city limits. She stated, "I went to the Voter Registration Office about the map and it's just a runaround about everything. "If he was the only one that has been adopted into the city, who would vote for him? And as far as I can see, it puts him in District 1. According to the map. These are things that can be cleared up quickly. I don't want to hear anything about giving his registration for voting because he has been getting away with doing things because he's the only one that has a PO Box. I'm not going to ask this board again to do what they're elected to do and do their job. This is a matter that can be cleared up easily. I shouldn't have to come here month after month after month with no answers. This is not fair to the public. You are elected to do a job and that job is being failed. Also, I want to know, when was he adopted into the city? Who sent it to the state? Who approved it? And was it placed on the map that we voted on? These are answers and if I don't get these answers, I'm going to sit down and I'm going to talk to talk to the Attorney General and I'm going to talk to a replica, someone with respect and do an interview, not no gossip column, no Steve Wilko, Maury Povich want to be TMZ knockoffs. That's paid for by someone else. That's has got to stop. Also, the chief, I want to have that assessment made public. It was paid for with public dollars and we have a right to know why we don't feel safe and why all our policemen are gone. Taking \$12,000 cut and pay to be somewhere else. That's ridiculous. If something happens on either side of town, we're in trouble. In the words of this chief, when he said, if you keep on digging long enough, you're going to find something. Well, I'm going to find something because I'm going to keep on digging and this post office box that is being mysteriously handled behind. It's going to be revealed today. This has got to stop. You all have got to do your job. It ain't popular and it don't feel good, but you have to be men and women of your word. You came to these churches, you sit in these people's living room, and you told them all these things you are going to do, and nothing has been done. Complacency is just as guilty. I don't have anything to hide. Anybody want to talk to me, got something to say to me, I'm with all the smoke!"

Mr. Taylor asked if he could respond to her? Mr. Davis then stated, "Did you say he could address her? Our policy has been that we couldn't address. Mr. Taylor stated, "I am being accused, I have a right to defend myself." Mr. Davis stated, "In the past, no member of the Council could address the body." Mr. Abraham then stated, "We have dealt been accused in the same way, but we had to follow procedure." Mr. Taylor then stated, "If will stay until we have the council comments, Non-Agenda Item, I will address it at that time." Mrs. Douglas then stated, "Oh no, I don't believe in addressing you, I don't trust anything coming out of your mouth. I want it address from the board." Pamela Best- Stated, "I've been coming here for three years. I have tried to start off on the right page with an Animal Control Officer. Doing my job, everybody in here knows what I do. I see a lot. I deal with a lot, and I have a lot put on me. I would love to meet with you, talk to you. I want nothing but to help you. I don't want to aggravate you. I don't want to come across any kind of way. I only want to assist you." (Looking at the Animal Control Officer, Terry Bridges) She went on saying she wanted to "Touch base on the article that was in the paper about the political sign and where it was, but I understand the sentiment of it honestly and I guess the part that I wanted to read was how quickly it was resolved, was mind blowing to me and then in the paper it says ordinances,

ordinances, ordinances. You can't have a bad word. I come in here today and every month and talk about Ordinance 672. It's an ordinance, so why is it so hard to enforce this ordinance?" She ended by showing City Administrator, all members of Council and Mayor a video of a pregnant cat.

7. SECOND READING AND PASSAGE IN FULL OF ORDINANCES

- A. Business License Ordinance- This ordinance is an amendment to the current Business License Ordinance of the City of Bennettsville updating the class schedule as required by Act 176 of 2020. This Act is City of Bennettsville Office of the City Administrator known as the South Carolina Business License "Tax Standardization Act," that imposes additional requirements and conditions on the administration of business license taxes.
First reading of this ordinance was approved unanimously.

Approving Action: A motion to approve the amendment of ordinance 21-11-03 in order to comply with the requirements of the Standardization Act. Moved by Mr. Davis. Seconded by Mr. Taylor. Motion passed unanimously.

8. FIRST READING AND ADVERTISEMENT OF ORDINANCES
No Business

9. PASSAGE OF RESOLUTIONS

- A. US 15-401 Bypass W/sidewalk from S-518 to Sc385-Sidewalk Project- The South Carolina Department of Transportation proposes to construct, reconstruct, alter, or improve certain segments of the highways (s) in the State Highway.

Approving Action: A motion to approve the US 15-401 Bypass W/sidewalk from S-518 to SC 385-Sidewalk Project presented by the city administrator to authorize the scope of work presented by SCDOT. Moved by Mr. Taylor. Seconded by Ms. Weaver. Motion passed unanimously.

- B. Fair Housing Resolution April 2024- As part of our compliance with CDBG requirements, municipalities must have a fair housing resolution to qualify for funding.

Approving Action: A motion to approve The Fair Housing Resolution presented by the City Administrator to comply with the CDBG requirements. Moved by Ms. Weaver. Seconded by Mr. Taylor. Motion passed unanimously.

10. GENERAL BUSINESS DISPENSED BY MOTION

- A. Board Appointment to the Board of Architectural Review/Tree Committee (Ellie Fowler)-Appoint to the Board of Architectural Review/Tree Committee.

Approving Action: A motion to appoint Mrs. Ellie Fowler to the Board of Architectural Review/Tree Committee. Moved by Mr. Abraham. Seconded by Mr. Davis. Motion passed unanimously.

- B. Fee Adjustment Proposal- The Finance Committee met with the administration to discuss the impact of fees to the budget. After analysis, it was determined that current fees do not support the levels of services rendered or should be rendered. Administration made a recommendation to the Finance Committee and those changes are before you today for consideration.

Approving Action: A motion to adopt the recommended fee adjustment proposal with an effective date of May 1, 2024. Moved by Mr. Jennings. Seconded by Mr. Taylor. Mr. Abraham declined.

- C. Recommendation to allow Marlboro County to hold elections on behalf of the city- Recommendation to authorize the administrator to work with Marlboro County to create a joint ordinance to allow Marlboro County to hold elections on behalf of the City of Bennettsville, effectively dissolving the City Elections Commission. This ordinance will come back to city council for approval if this recommendation is approved.

Council met to discuss the responsibilities of the elections commission. Administration has provided council a guideline with responsibilities of a Municipal Elections Commission. If it is decided to keep the election commission in place, training must be given to commissioners.

Approving Action: A motion to authorize the Administrator to work with Marlboro County to create a joint ordinance to allow Marlboro County to hold elections on behalf of the City of Bennettsville. Moved by Mr. Abraham. Seconded by Mr. Taylor. Motion passed unanimously.

11. REPORTS AND INFORMATION PRESENTATION

- A. Fire Department Update-
- Chief Burks gave an update on a recent program that was started called the Firefighter Friends. It is when Firefighters go out to the Primary School and mentor 1st, 2nd & 3rd grade boys.
 - Sound Off with Fire Safety Patrol
 - Community Risk Reduction
 - Received \$50k from the state with the help of Rep. Henegan to help purchase PPE thermo imaging cameras and gas monitors
- B. Events Calendar-An updated events calendar was given to council. Mrs. Graves gave updates on events that will be coming up in the future.
- C. Finance Committee Update-Gave an update on fee adjustment proposal.
- D. Goat farm in residential community enforcement actions- A scheduled hearing was on March 24th at 10am in the City Council Chambers. The homeowner did not show up. The Planning and Zoning Department will move forward and turn everything over to the city attorney.

12. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CITY COUNCIL AND CITY ADMINISTRATOR

Ms. Weaver made a motion to go into Executive Session. Mr. Scott seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Exiting Executive Session Mr. Scott moved. Ms. Weaver seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

No actions were taken.

13. NON-AGENDA ITEMS FROM COUNCIL

Mr. Jennings stated that a budget does not do something that the Passover is really what you plan to do 12 months.

Mr. Abraham thanked everyone in all departments, all the employees that participated in the Community Clean-up.

Mr. Scott thanked all city employees for what they do. He also stated that prayer go out to the families of those who have lost a loved one.

Mr. Davis thanked all city employees for all the hard work they do. He thanked Mr. Simon for being courageous and overseeing the city. Next, he acknowledged the community for their participation in the Community Clean-up. Lastly, he gave the Fire Department a shout out for their hard work and dedication.

Ms. Weaver stated that she was looking to move forward and getting the team back together to be a city on the move. Lastly, she thanked the Fire Department.

Mayor Fowler stated , “We have a lot of good things coming to the city. We need to keep focus on moving forward.”

14. ADJOURN

Mayor Fowler

Public Comment Policy:

Citizens desiring to speak at any regular meeting must provide a written request to notify the City Clerk prior to the agenda deadline. Citizens interested in commenting at a regular meeting shall sign in to speak and limit comments to no more than 3 minutes.

Mission Statement: To utilize all available resources for the development of plans, programs, and projects to improve services to the citizens of Bennettsville and establish and maintain an active role in economic and community development.