## REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING
## Tuesday, June 16, 2026; 6:30 P.M.
## Bennettsville Public Safety Complex

## Minutes

1. CALL TO ORDER — Mayor Tyron Abraham

2. INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE — William Jennings, Jr.

3. ROLL CALL
   All Council members were in attendance.

4. APPROVAL/CORRECTION OF MINUTES
   A. **Regular Council Meeting; Tuesday, May 19, 2026-** Motion was made to accept the minutes with the necessary corrections. Moved by Mr. Jennings. Seconded by Ms. Weaver. Motion passed unanimously.

      A correction was requested to the previous meeting minutes to accurately reflect the motion to approve the minutes with corrections, rather than as currently recorded. Mr. McRae also requested that Item 8A indicate that the council members' dissenting statement be reflected in the minutes.

5. PUBLIC REQUESTS/ PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS
   A. **Employees Anniversaries-** Mrs. Ward recognized all the June Anniversaries as follows:
      Calvin Avant (**Police**) – 3 years
      Rahquise Brown (**Public Works**) – 3 years
      Chris Burks (**Fire**) – 13 years
      Don Galloway (**Public Works**) – 9 years
      Michelle Hodges (**Planning/Zoning**) – 11 years
      Lisa Jones (**Business Development**) – 1 year
      Michael Leggett (**Water Plant**) – 25 years
      Talisha McCall (**Municipal Court**) – 9 years
      Ezekiel Miller (**Gas**) – 3 years
      Elizabeth Norton (**Public Works**) – 1 year
      Terry Powers (**Electric**) – 12 years

Chaka Ray (**Utility Billing**) – 4 years
Kuavei Robinson (**Public Works**) – 1 year
Jeffery Sessoms (**Police**) – 1 year
William Simon, Jr. (**Administration**) – 3 years
Daniel Simpson (**Public Works**) – 1 year
Todd Woodham (**Wastewater Plant**) – 5 years

B. **New Hires & Promotions- New Hires**
Xavier Ridges – Uncertified Police Officer (Police)
Gloria Kaye Hicks – Police Records Clerk (Police
**Retirement**
Barbara Baker – Customer Service Representative (Administration)

C. **AMI Kids – (Koya Johnson)-** As board chair, she is eager to build partnerships with local leaders, schools, and businesses to create positive outcomes for the youth and families they serve. She mentioned that AMI Kids is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping young people who may be struggling academically, behaviorally, or personally find a new path forward through education, mentoring, counseling, and career development. Their mission is to give youth the tools, support, and opportunities they need to succeed and become productive members of our community. They believe every child deserves a second chance and someone willing to invest in their future. She thanked the City of Bennettsville for the opportunity to introduce AMI Kids Camp and share our passion for making a difference.

D. **Sewer System Evaluation – AECOM-** AECOM consultant Porter Rivers presented a study on the city's wastewater treatment plant, highlighting the need for significant upgrades due to outdated equipment and compliance issues. The plant, built before 1970 and last upgraded in 1995, serves 3,800 residential and 400 commercial customers. The purpose of the study is to develop a capital improvements plan for the city's wastewater treatment plant, addressing infrastructure upgrades. Recommendations included replacing the headworks, upgrading electrical components, and implementing a supervisory control and data acquisition system. The total estimated cost for the capital improvements is $23-$24 million, with a suggested timeline of 5-7 years. He discussed the need for upgrading the plant's confined spaces and electrical materials, recommending a single design and construction project for efficiency. Implementing sequentially would extend the timeline by 9-10 years. The city's sewer rates are below average, with a 40% increase from 2018 to 2025.

6. PUBLIC COMMENTS (Agenda Items Only)
**No Comments**

7. SECOND READING AND PASSAGE IN FULL OF ORDINANCES
**No Business**

8. FIRST READING AND ADVERTISEMENT OF ORDINANCES

A. **Digital Signage (Ordinance #26-06-003)**
The City of Bennettsville is considering the installation of a digital sign along the U.S. 15-401 Bypass to enhance communication with residents, visitors, and

travelers entering the community. The sign would serve as a highly visible platform for public notices, community events, emergency information, and promotional messaging that supports economic development and tourism. Strategically located on one of the region's primary transportation corridors, the sign would help strengthen the City's outreach efforts while showcasing Bennettsville as a vibrant and welcoming community.

**Approving Action:** A motion to approve ordinance #26-06-003, the establishment of a policy that supports digital signage. Moved by Mr. Scott. Seconded by Mr. McRae. Motion passed unanimously.

B. **Annexation – 804 Ansel Street (Ordinance #26-06-002)**

The purpose of annexation is to promote the orderly growth and development of the municipality by extending city boundaries to areas that can be efficiently served by municipal utilities, infrastructure, and public services. Annexation helps ensure consistent land-use planning, economic development opportunities, and the equitable provision of services for residents and businesses within the community.

**Approving Action**: A motion to approve ordinance #26-06-002, the annexation of 804 Ansel Street, also identified as tax map number 032-26-01-018. Moved by Ms. Weaver. Seconded by Mr. McRae. Motion passed unanimously.

C. **Annexation – Wallace Road Tract (Ordinance #26-06-001)**

The purpose of annexation is to promote the orderly growth and development of the municipality by extending city boundaries to areas that can be efficiently served by municipal utilities, infrastructure, and public services. Annexation helps ensure consistent land-use planning, economic development opportunities, and the equitable provision of services for residents and businesses within the community.

**Approving Action**: A motion to approve ordinance #26-06-001, the annexation of the Wallace Road tract identified as tax map number 032-14-01-033. Moved by Mr. Jennings. Seconded by McRae.
**Those opposed:** Mrs. Harpe and Ms. Weaver. The vote was 5/2. Motion carried.

Mrs. Harpe's, "Stated she would like it noted in the minutes her reason for the opposition is that according to the information she provided you, which was the deed she obtained from the courthouse, after this request was made, according to that deed, Miss Mohammed is not the owner of this property, and she doesn't think it's proper to annex based on a request from someone other than the property owner until that deed is incorrect. She thinks we need to get a copy of the correct deed on file before we proceed with annexation."

D. **Budget Transfer Ordinance (Ordinance #26-06-004)**

The purpose of the Budget Transfer Ordinance is for more financial oversight.

**Approving Action**: Mr. McRae made a motion to "send it to the Finance Committee to examine and come back with us for proposal." Then Mr. Scott

made a motion to amend the previous motion, “To go to the Finance Committee first, then come back to Council.”
Mayor Abraham made a motion for the Budget Transfer Ordinance to be sent to the Finance Committee for review, then brought back to the July meeting. Moved by Mr. Scott. Seconded by Mr. Davis. Motion passed unanimously.

E. **Large Purchase Ordinance (Ordinance #26-06-005)**
This ordinance establishes council-approved requirements for municipal purchases, contracts, and expenditures exceeding $50,000. So, in other words, giving Council the only way $50,000 can get spent, unless it's a true emergency, is by Council approval.

**Approving Action**: Mr. McRae made a motion to approve Ordinance #26-06-005 First Reading, and make changes before Second Reading. Seconded by Mr. Jennings. Motion carried (4 in favor,/3 opposed).
**Those in favor**: Ms. Weaver, Mrs. Harpe, Mr. Jennings, and Mr. McRae.
**Those opposed**: Mr. Davis, Mayor Abraham, and Mr. Scott.

9. PASSAGE OF RESOLUTIONS
No Business

10. GENERAL BUSINESS DISPENSED BY MOTION
A. **Discussion of Ordinances Regarding Council & Administrator Authority & Expectations**.
Mayor Abraham made a motion that this item be tabled the Discussion Ordinance Regarding Council and Administrative Authority and Expectations and Public Discussion Workshop. Seconded by Mr. Davis. Motion carried (6 in favor, 1 opposed).
**Those in favor**: Mr. Davis, Mrs. Harpe, Mayor Abraham, Mr. Jennings, Mr. McRae, and Mr. Scott.
**Those opposed**: Ms. Weaver.

11. PUBLIC COMMENTS (Non-Agenda Items Only)
**Dr. Carolyn Prince-** Noted the progress of the tennis court renovations and asked when the basketball courts on McLeod Street would be renovated, mentioning community interest and the higher level of use at the basketball courts.
**Pamela Best-** Expressed appreciation to Mr. McRae for the City's efforts while urging stronger enforcement of animal welfare laws, particularly regarding pets left tethered outdoors in extreme heat. Next, she encouraged the City to adopt more proactive enforcement measures similar to those used by other municipalities. Mrs. Best raised concerns about the demolition of homes in the Shady Rest and Richardson Park areas and questioned the City's role in those actions. Lastly, Council clarified for the record that the City was not responsible for the demolitions or the actions referenced by the speaker.
**Don Strickland-** Director of PDRTA, reported that transit services continue to perform exceptionally well, with Marlboro County reaching an all-time high in ridership. More than 50,000 trips have been provided during the fiscal year, representing an increase of approximately 12–20% over the previous year. The Bennettsville Bull Express continues

to drive significant ridership, providing daily transportation for residents traveling within Bennettsville and from surrounding communities for work, medical appointments, grocery shopping, and other essential needs. Mr. Strickland thanked the Mayor and Council for participating in a transit ride-along and noted the overwhelmingly positive public response, reflecting strong community appreciation for the service. Survey results indicate that approximately 78% of riders do not have access to a personal vehicle, while many others have limited household vehicle availability, underscoring the importance of public transit in providing access to employment and essential services.

12. BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS
    A. **Planning Commission** (No Cases)
    B. **Board of Architectural Review/Tree Committee** (No Cases)
    C. **Board of Zoning Appeals** (No Cases)

13. COUNCIL COMMITTEES
    A. **Finance Committee** -Chairperson Jennings discussed establishing a dedicated capital improvement budget line item to fund future capital projects rather than routine maintenance expenses. Additional discussion and consideration are expected during the third quarter. He confirmed its commitment to a fiscally responsible budget process, emphasizing the importance of maintaining departmental budgets while carefully managing revenues and expenditures. Lastly, he discussed developing long-term financial strategies and budget priorities to support the City's future growth and economic stability. These discussions are ongoing, and no formal proposals have been presented at this time.
    B. **Public Services Committee** -Chairperson Harpe discusses Fourth of July plans. Due to budget constraints, fireworks will not be held this year. Instead, the committee will focus on holiday decorations and other activities to celebrate Independence Day, with additional details to be announced following its next meeting.
    C. **Public Safety Committee** -Chairperson McRae reported that the committee has not met formally but has checked in with both the Police and Fire Departments. A request was made to ensure that relevant public safety information, such as road closures and service updates, is routinely communicated to 911 dispatch to improve coordination.

14. REPORTS AND INFORMATION PRESENTATION
    A. **Finance Report-** Mr. Sparkman reported that the City is meeting its budget projections and that the budget planning process has positioned the City to move forward with several upcoming improvement projects throughout the community.
    B. **Grants Report-** Miss. Brittany Jones was happy to report positive progress with our grants. The city is managing over $16 million citywide and has applied for more than $912,000 this month, including funding for cybersecurity, a Rural Law Enforcement Initiative, and infrastructure improvements. We have also secured the SRO Grant for our Police Department, allowing us to add an officer to assist our School District at no additional cost to the School District. In downtown,

streetscape landscaping has begun, replacing dead shrubs, and we completed the striping at the Fayetteville and Tyson intersection with new solar flashing beacons to enhance safety. We will schedule a ribbon-cutting ceremony for these improvements soon. Finally, we have two grant announcements on the 24th, and I will share more details then.

C. **Upcoming Events** Miss. Graves announced that July is Parks and Recreation Month and shared information about a recently submitted USA Grants application that includes funding opportunities for Parks and Recreation programming. As part of the July celebration, the department plans to host several community events, including:

- A Special Needs and Disabilities Day featuring adaptive tennis.
- Sports Day
- Hoop Fest
- Play Day

Lastly, she emphasized that as parks are renovated and improved, ensuring accessibility for individuals with disabilities will remain an important consideration so that all residents have opportunities to enjoy the community's parks and recreational facilities.

15. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CITY COUNCIL AND CITY ADMINISTRATOR

A. **Administrator's Monthly Report-** Mr. Simon thanked the community for working with us and having patience with us, as we are probably 85 to 90% complete on our water meter installations. In about three and a half weeks, a survey will lead us to replace all of our electric meters in the residential area. He acknowledged community questions about improvements to parks beyond the tennis courts, noting that residents are eager to see progress throughout the city. Reporting that the City Council has approved funding for several Parks and Recreation projects, including:

- Community Center upgrades, consisting of new flooring, paint, and other facility improvements.
- McLeod Street Park upgrades.

**McLeod Street Park Project Update**

Mr. Simon reported that the City is in the process of selecting a contractor for the McLeod Street Park improvements. The project is moving through the required procurement and approval process, and staff is evaluating final design and construction options. He noted that certain project requirements must follow established procedures and agency guidelines. He then expressed appreciation for staff members who have helped ensure the project remains compliant throughout the planning process.

Mr. Simon explained that, if funding and project conditions allow, the completed park will feature resurfaced basketball courts, expanded green space, improved fencing, enhanced lighting and security, additional seating, and upgraded access. He asked the community for patience as planning continues and stated that another progress update is expected within approximately two weeks. He ended by saying the City intends to celebrate the project with a groundbreaking ceremony, similar to the recent tennis court improvements, while recognizing the park's history and looking ahead to its future improvements.

B. **Information Requested by Councilman McRae** (Fire Department)-No presentation.

C. **Hospitality Tax Summary-** Council Member McCrae had no formal presentation. Mr. Simon invited citizens to ask questions if additional clarification was needed.

16. NON-AGE NDA ITEMS FROM COUNCIL

**Mr. Jennings**- Discussed establishing a dedicated capital improvement fund within the budget to support future capital projects rather than routine operating expenses. The committee also reviewed the budget process, emphasizing fiscal responsibility, maintaining departmental budgets, and developing long-term financial strategies. Preliminary discussions are ongoing, with additional recommendations expected to be presented in the third quarter.

**Mr. McRae-** Thanked everyone for attending the meeting. He recognized District 5 community members and commended individuals for walking around the neighborhood picking up litter and helping to keep our community clean. Next, he mentioned annexation and clarified that there was no such issue. Nothing related to "That come before us in any case, so I didn't want us to leave with false narratives."

"I've been asking about separating this hospitality fund, and uh you know it's kind of like I guess some people may have thought I was just bickering or complaining for no reason. But uh, now, I can kind of see line by line. Do I agree with some of these expenses? No, I don't understand how the hospitality tax, but um, we need to kind of look into that. So, when we do a workshop based on finances, um, I think we need to look into doing this hospitality tax." Lastly, he expressed appreciation to the PDRTA representative for attending and shared condolences over the recent passing of a church member who was a dedicated advocate for PDRTA and served on several city boards and commissions. He suggested considering the use of remaining hospitality funds to further support PDRTA, emphasizing that public transit is an essential community service, much like the Humane Society, because it provides transportation for residents who cannot drive or afford transportation costs. Mr. McRae urged continued support to prevent service reductions and reaffirmed their commitment to funding PDRTA. He concluded by inviting everyone to attend the July 18 kickball tournament.

**Mr. Scott-**Thanked city employees for their dedication and recognized the outstanding presentation on the city's Water Treatment System. He noted that major improvements had not been made in nearly 30 years and appreciated learning that the city's utility rates are lower than often perceived, making the planned infrastructure upgrades especially encouraging. He also emphasized the importance of the committee process, stating that committee recommendations, supported by facts, policies, and input from department heads, help guide council decisions. By encouraging committee members to communicate if new information changes their position before a matter returns to the full council, stressing that consistency and communication strengthen the committee process. Lastly, he recognized Lieutenant Boston for his consistent attendance at Council Meetings and expressed appreciation for his ongoing support and encouragement of the Council's work.

**Mrs. Harpe-** A question was made regarding frequent power outages in the Williams Drive area, with a request for an update on whether there is an ongoing issue affecting the electrical system. She also raised concerns about the commercial trash service policy for multi-tenant properties. Clarification was requested on whether vacant units with separate utility accounts are required to pay trash service fees or if service can be discontinued until the units are occupied. Mrs. Harpe asked, “Do you have some flexibility there to look on a case-by-case basis?”

**Mr. Davis-** Expressed gratitude to all employees for their hard work. Next, he requested an update on McLeod Park and the paving on Livingston Street because it is getting worse.

**Mrs. Weaver-** No comment.

**Mayor Abraham-** Appreciation was expressed to City staff and employees for their hard work and dedication in managing a demanding workload despite limited resources. He explained the procedure for public comments, explaining that the council typically does not respond immediately during meetings to ensure accurate information is provided through appropriate follow-up, either by phone or in writing. Next, he addressed concerns about the demolition of homes acquired through voluntary Buyout Programs, noting that once a property is purchased through the program, demolition is required and the land must remain as green space. The City has no authority to prevent the demolitions or allow redevelopment of those properties. Positive feedback was shared regarding the City's transit service, with appreciation expressed for the professionalism of the staff and the quality of the ride-along experience. Lastly, he encouraged citizens to contact City officials directly with questions or concerns rather than relying on secondhand information, reaffirming the Council's commitment to serving the community and improving the city.

17. ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 8:59 pm.

**Public Comment Policy:**

Citizens desiring to speak at any regular meeting must make a written request to notify the City Clerk prior to the 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.