



**REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING
Tuesday, March 17, 2026; 6:30 P.M.
Bennettsville Public Safety Complex**

Minutes (Corrections)

1. CALL TO ORDER Mayor Tyron Abraham
2. INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE Gregory Scott, Sr.
3. ROLL CALL
District 1- Wanda Weaver
District 2- Tyrone R. Davis
District 3- Caraline Harpe
Mayor Tyron Abraham
District 4- Bill Jennings, Jr.
District 5- Cy Heim McRae
District 6- Gregory Scott, Sr.
4. APPROVAL/CORRECTION OF MINUTES
A. **Regular Council Meeting; Tuesday, February 17, 2026-** Mr. Davis made a motion to approve the Regular City Council Meeting minutes of Tuesday, February 17, 2026. Mr. Scott seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.
5. PUBLIC REQUESTS/ PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS
A. **Employees Anniversaries-** Steve Wilkes, Utility Billing, (13 years); John Cartwright, Electric, (7 years); Jordan Smith, Water Treatment, (6 years); William Porter, Fire, (4 years); James Hagan, Fire, (2 years).; Dennis Ridges, Public Works, (2 years); Ashton Williams, Electric, (2 years); Roger Hale, Public Works, (1 year)
B. **New Hires -**Solomon Troublefield (Electric); Benjamin Hendrix (Police), and Tristan Rivers (Fire)
Promotions- Mr. Joshua Duke (Sergeant); Joshua Graham (Corporal); Chaka Ray (Asst. Utility Manager)
C. **Pee Dee Coalition-** Miss. Wendy Woods from the PeeDee Coalition thanked the City of Bennettsville for its support and resources. April is recognized as Sexual

Assault Awareness Month and Child Abuse Prevention Month. The PeeDee Coalition's role in supporting victims and providing resources was highlighted. Upcoming events, including the 11th Annual Nia's Lemonade Stand and the Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Writers' event, were mentioned.

- D. **Friends of Crooked Creek**- Mrs. Jacqueline Adams introduced the Friends of Crooked Creek, a new organization. The vision for Friends of Crooked Creek envisions a safe, accessible, and enjoyable recreational destination that enhances the quality of life for our entire community. Their mission is to support and maintain the sustainability and enhancement of Crooked Creek by promoting environmental stewardship, raising funds for increasing community awareness, to preserve the available resources for all. As of an update on their progress, they have approved bylaws and secured a bank account. They are currently working toward obtaining 501(c)(3) status and standards, and they thanked the community for their ongoing support in helping them reach their goal for Crooked Creek.

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
No Business

9. PASSAGE OF RESOLUTIONS

- A. **Fair Housing Resolution**-April is recognized nationally as Fair Housing Month. The City of Bennettsville adopts the Fair Housing Resolution annually to reaffirm its commitment to equal housing opportunity for all residents. This action supports compliance with federal and state fair housing laws and promotes a community where housing is available without discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status, or national origin. By adopting this resolution each year, the city demonstrates its ongoing dedication to fairness, inclusion, and equal access to housing for all citizens.

Approving Action: A motion to approve the Fair Housing Resolution. Moved by Ms. Weaver. Seconded by Mr. McRae. Motion passed unanimously.

- B. **SCDOT Intersection Improvement Alternative Plan**-The SCDOT and Pee Dee COG had an intersection improvement project at US 15/401 and SC 385 W Main St in the City of Bennettsville that was put on hold due to a conflict with some potential economic development in area. At the September COG board meeting, we were asked to revisit the project. SCDOT would need municipal consent from the City of Bennettsville to move forward. After the city approved the plans, the Pee Dee COG & SCDOT decided to go with an alternative plan due to recent funding restrictions. Both plans are referenced below.

Approving Action: A motion to approve the Resolution to support the alternative plan presented by SCDOT. Moved by Mrs. Harpe. Seconded by Ms. Weaver. Motion carried.

In favor were Ms. Weaver, Mr. Davis, Mrs. Harpe, Mayor Abraham, and Mr. Scott.

Opposed were Mr. McRae and Mr. Jennings.

- C. **Safety Resolution-**The City of Bennettsville adopts a Safety Resolution each year to reaffirm the City's commitment to maintaining a safe workplace for employees and a safe environment for the public. This annual action supports the City's participation in the South Carolina Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund (SCMIRF) safety program and helps ensure compliance with risk management and loss-prevention requirements. By adopting this resolution, the City Council demonstrates its continued support for safety training, accident prevention, and responsible risk management practices across all City departments.

Approving Action: A motion to approve the Safety Resolution. Moved by Mr. Davis. Seconded by Mr. McRae. Motion passed unanimously.

10. GENERAL BUSINESS DISPENSED BY MOTION

- A. **Bridge Improvement (Gas Line Relocation):** Deferred item still under discussion.

11. PUBLIC COMMENTS (Non-Agenda Items Only)

Shirley McBride- Asking the city to remove the gas meter from her home because she pays \$60 a year for a service that is not being used. Her house doesn't even use gas, so why does she have to pay for this service if it's not being used?

Dean Moore- Emphasizes the need for immediate relief for residents struggling with high utility bills.

Bessie Canty- Calls for additional options to provide support to residents, including adjustments to bills and extended payment programs.

James McCall- Suggests reevaluating the billing cycle to give residents more time to pay their bills.

Brandy Howard-Suggest that we reconsider the billing cycle. Reevaluate the timing of the billing to help customers better budget for their payments. In the past, they received bills about two weeks before they were due, which allowed for better budgeting. With only eight days to pay an already high bill, it's hard for people to manage their finances.

Pearly Lawson- She discussed the community-wide cleanup from March 23 to 28, with volunteers choosing their own dates and locations. Various organizations, including schools and churches, are participating. She urges citizens to participate in helping clean up Marlboro County.

Rocky Brown- He discussed transparency, public service, and the importance of being transparent with the community.

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 gave an update from the Finance Committee. He stated that they are working on the budget and everything is in line.
- B. **Public Services Committee**- Chairperson Harpe stated they have not met.
- C. **Public Safety Committee**- Chairperson McRae stated they did not meet, but they will meet soon and get some updates.

14. REPORTS AND INFORMATION PRESENTATION

- A. **Finance Report**- Mr. Sparkman gave an update on the last budget workshop, focusing on revenues, which exceeded expectations at around 90%. Expenditures have also increased, but we have about a month, and a half left in the fiscal period, and we plan to avoid unnecessary expenses. There are some ARPA projects set to begin in the next couple of months, which need to be completed by the end of the year. We're excited about plans for the Community Center and Parks. He also mentioned how he's passionate about Crooked Creek and would love to see it enhanced for activities. The plan is to restore it, and he looks forward to the transformation. He ended by saying his door is always open for discussion.
- B. **Grants Report** – Miss. Lisa Jones submitted 10 applications for funding for a total of \$6.3 million. The city was awarded one grant from the South Carolina Department of Energy, and we have enrolled in the Forestry Commission's Trees 4 SC Bradford Pear Bounty Program with Clemson Extension, which will allow us to replace the invasive Bradford pear trees in our community.
- C. **Upcoming Events**
Community Clean-Up- March 21st; 8:30am -City Hall
Bennettsville & Co.-Book Signing, March 21st; 11 am-1 pm
Easter Egg Hunt- March 28th, 3 pm-5 pm (Kids Land Park)
Gulf Celebration- (Gospel on the Gulf)-April 18th, 3 pm-6 pm

15. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CITY COUNCIL AND CITY ADMINISTRATOR

- A. **Administrator's Monthly Report**- Mr. Simon gave a few updates on some projects and how the city is addressing high utility bills through educational forums and individual meter reviews. The city already has budget billing. It's been in practice for a while. We don't have a lot of people that's taking advantage of it. In his professional opinion, he thinks it needs more criteria, requirements, and regulations around it. For example, first start with helping those who are in need, with budget billing, we will be resurrecting that program. "So, if you ask yourself, do you want to take advantage of budget billing? You can come to City Hall and say, I want to get on budget billing, and we're going to give you a form to complete. We're going to do your averages, look at what that number is, and if you're happy with that number, you can move forward. So, we're doing those things for you now." Mr. Simon explained that a third-party billing company had

caused delays, prompting a switch to in-house billing starting May 1. This will reduce costs and improve control over bill content. He released the Crooked Creek water study to any citizen who requests it, and will provide copies to council and legislators as needed.

“We are doing meter replacement kickoffs. So, what the city is doing is we are replacing all of our water meters in the city, we recognize that a lot of our meters have just been old. A lot of our infrastructure is old, so we're constantly trying to find funding to upgrade things, so we don't find ourselves in any situation. But we just want to let our community know, because this is part of the skip grant, a \$10 million grant we got some years ago, and we're finalizing some of the projects in this grant. And so just know this, when they come to your area, they're going to put door knockers on your home. You won't be surprised. We're going to try and put out some other notifications via social media, maps, and so forth. So, you know that they are working on the meter in your yard. An average meter replacement should be less than 30 minutes. Next, he talked about the submitted appropriations package for a fire truck for \$800,000 and an electric meter replacement for \$600,000. Next month, he will discuss the appropriations in more detail.

He ended by saying, “So, if you want to participate in our budget process openly, you will be able to go in and take that survey and enter some information while we are contemplating, while administrators contemplating what he's going to recommend to council. Council will be ultimately in charge of putting together your budget. Other than that, please be mindful that these dates can change as we move forward and adjust.”

- B. **Real Estate Purchase Update** -The owner of Project Downtown accepted the offer and proposed an acceptable counteroffer. The city’s next step is to secure the services of an attorney to structure the agreement. This initial cost will be paid out of the FY 2026-2027 Budget.
- C. **Meter Replacement Kick-Off Update**-City of Bennettsville personnel met with our engineers and contractors for the kickoff meeting of the next phase of the \$10 million SCIP grant from the South Carolina Rural Infrastructure Authority, which will bring automated water meters to properties across the city. Over the next 16 weeks, crews from HST will be working throughout our community installing the new meters. HST team members will be wearing reflective safety vests and will go door-to-door to notify residents before installation. The process typically takes 10–20 minutes, and a doorhanger with follow-up information and a contact number for HST will be left at each property. These upgrades will help modernize our water system and improve service for residents across Bennettsville. Thank you for your cooperation as we continue investing in our city’s infrastructure.
- D. **Appropriations Request Update**
 - Fire Truck (Pumper) \$800K
 - Meter Replacement \$600K
 - Well Maintenance \$200K
- E. **Budget Update**
 - Budget Survey Released – Deadline: April 14, 2026

- Department Meetings Held with Finance
 - City Council Budget Workshop Meeting – March 11, 2026
- Budget Public Hearing – March 17, 2026 (5:30-6:30 p.m.)
 City Council Budget Workshop – March 24, 2026 (6:00 p.m.)
 City Council Special Meeting – March 31, 2026, **1st Reading**
 City Council Regular Meeting – April 7, 2026, **2nd Reading**

F. **Project List (UPDATED)**

16. NON-AGENDA ITEMS FROM COUNCIL

Mr. McRae- Mentioned how good it was to see so many citizens come out to the meeting. Next, he asked, “Whenever someone gets their meter read, and there's an issue with it, what happens?” That process was discussed, and he ended by saying, “Hopefully, we can get the community garden at the Smith Park back up and running and looking good.” Also, when reports are turned in late, can they be emailed?

On April 21, 2026, Councilman McRae requested that his Non-Agenda item from Council on March 17, 2026, be recorded in the minutes in its entirety, as listed below.

“Well, first off, so good to be back. It's good to see that we have a good number of people here, so many that we have to keep the door open. Hopefully, that means we can get a better and better space, so we won't have to all be crammed up. But I just got a few questions, and thank you to every public speaker tonight, I got a few things.”

“So, I got a phone call, of course, about the utility bills. And so, I was just wondering, whenever someone gets their meter read, and there's an issue with it, what happens when you say issue, you mean if there's a leak or whatever, what happens out there? Because I got a phone call and someone told me that the meter, of course, was red, but they had, like, a leak or something like that. And prior, they had a leak before, but they got a card on the door. However, she said that she didn't get it this time. They didn't notify her, and she, but the guy who, the person who read it put a comment in the system. And so, I guess my question would, my next question would have been, what happens when, like, a comment is put in, or something like that, missing issue with someone, I just don't have enough information about that specific one. I'll have to see what's Yeah, well, I'm talking in general, if somebody, if they put a comment in for issue, if they come read my meeting, they put a comment in, what happens to that comment? Like, where does that comment go? That comment is read by utility billing manager, okay, and so it formulates like, it pops up in a system right up there. It notifies that utility billing manager, yes, okay, well, this person wasn't notified so, but I think the issue is now fixed. She had to make a few phone calls, and then they finally found out.”

“But another thing is about the getting the bills late; that is a common problem, and I do think that we somehow need to kind of let everybody know what's going on with that, because even mine comes late, so we do need to do that. And this appropriation request, I just got a question, and I know what you talk about private more in much detail, but I don't mean I'm not kind of putting down, but I'm just concerned that we don't have our

priorities in the right place. And what I mean by that is we got much major infrastructure improvements that need to be made. We discussed other than a budget workshop, such as that generator that we were talking about, and yet we put in a request for a new pumper, and we just got a new pumper, you know. So, I'm a little concerned about that as well. But however, thank you all for your time and everything like that, and look forward to seeing y'all around this month, doing some projects and all that good stuff like that. It'll be time to plant some stuff soon. So hopefully we can get the community garden at the Smith Park back up and running and looking good, maybe doing nothing. But I do want us to look into that stuff that I just brought up; other than that, I think that that is it. Oh, and when we get reports late, can we start getting an email? So, in other words, like this report wasn't included in the packet. So could it get instead of just receiving it today. Could we get it? I would rather have got it the other day through email. So, let's start getting it through email so I can have these finance reports.”

Ms. Weaver- She mentioned that she usually receives her bills on the 10th, but they are currently due on the 25th. She always had extra time to budget. She ended by saying a new business called Grandma's Treasures and Creation Station has opened on Marlboro Street. They offer antique and vintage goods, along with creative workshops for birthdays and celebrations.

Mr. Jennings Thanked Mr. Simon for the explanation of the bills. He appreciates everyone’s patience.” Mr. Simon is right; utility bills have suddenly skyrocketed, and this trend is affecting other towns as well. While I’m not making excuses, we are committed to making things more affordable. I may not speak for the whole council, but I’ve been surprised too. Our first budget meeting looks positive, and I look forward to finalizing it in the next five weeks.”

Mr. Davis- Thanked all employees and Mr. Simon for their hard work in keeping the city running. He wanted an update on the Crooked Creek County engineer's water study and stated that citizens can request this information from the city, and it's also been shared with our legislators to help secure more funding for Crooked Creek. The study is available for review.

Mr. Scott- Thanked everyone for coming out. He understands that sometimes it may seem like the council doesn't care, especially when they don't respond during meetings. We have procedures that limit interaction, allowing citizens three uninterrupted minutes to speak, and we can’t answer, said Scott. He also shared his concerns about high utility bills, as he has them too. It’s important to recognize that while we face challenges, we shouldn’t overlook the positive things happening in our city. In the past, we worried about law enforcement, but we’ve since seen improvements, such as a new fire truck and progress in the Richardson Park and Shady Rest areas. Mrs. Miller is working hard to get the necessary training. We’ve also established the Friends of Crooked Creek organization to support our efforts. Let's remember that we have dedicated employees in Bennettsville working for the community, even when times are tough. Together, we can overcome these challenges. He ended by thanking everyone for understanding.

Mrs. Harpe- She thanked all citizens who came out to share their thoughts. She appreciates their engagement. Mrs. Harpe stated that they are all aware of the utility issues and are committed to addressing them. As they work through the budgeting process, it’s crucial to prioritize those needs. However, she also urged council to consider

how we can make our city more business-friendly in the future. Small businesses are struggling, and it's important we come together to find solutions to support them.

Mayor Abraham- Thanked everyone for coming out. He understands the frustration the citizens feel. He constantly thinks about how to make a difference in the community.

Mayor Abraham is committed to helping the city thrive, even when progress seems slow. He stated that there are many rumors about how funds are being used, and he wants to clarify that if you have concerns, please come to City Hall for accurate information. "I'm eager to engage with citizens by visiting churches and grocery stores to share how our processes work. We're working on improving our communication. We are also making strides in our Public Works and Electric Departments to improve street lighting and safety. Together, we can navigate these challenges and make meaningful progress. I can't thank the employees enough, because we couldn't operate the services without them."

17. ADJOURN
Meeting Adjourned at 7:55 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.