REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING
Tuesday, October 20, 2026; 6:30 P.M.
Bennettsville Public Safety Complex

Minutes

1. CALL TO ORDER — Mayor Tyron Abraham

2. INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE — Tyrone Davis

3. ROLL CALL
All Council members were in attendance.

Mayor Abraham made a motion to amend the Agenda to add AMI Kids to Public Requests. Moved by Mr. Davis. Seconded by Mr. McRae. Motion passed unanimously.

4. APPROVAL/CORRECTION OF MINUTES
   A. **Regular Council Meeting; Tuesday, September 15, 2026**- Mayor Abraham made a motion to accept the minutes, approved with corrections. Seconded by Mr. Davis. Motion passed unanimously.

5. PUBLIC REQUESTS/ PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS
   A. **Anniversaries**- Mrs. Ward recognized all the October Anniversaries as follows: Daniel Blue (Police) 1 yr; Robert Cousar (Public Works) 5 yrs; Donald Hamilton (Fire) 3 yrs; Donald McElveen (Public Works) 7 yrs.
   B. **New Hires & Promotions -** William Parker (Fire), Trayvon Davenport (Electric), Landon Sweat (Gas), Daniel Lee (Public Works), Cheryl Turner (Wastewater Plant Operator A), Isaiah Ingram (Uncertified Police)
   C. **AMI Kids-**Shared participant Tyler Ford's experience and requested continued support. He read that while growing up, he made some poor choices and turned to the streets. However, he learned that respect for others is vital and can lead to a better life. Since joining AMI Kids, he has earned certifications. The program has shown him the importance of education and how it can help achieve his dreams. He also learned the value of giving back to the community. Participating in Community Kitchens and Food Shares gave him hope for the future. He ended by saying how grateful he is to the AMI Kids program and how he was once troubled, but now he has accomplished things he never thought possible.

D. **Pee Dee Coalition-** Katrina Stevens, Marlboro County Service Coordinator with PeeDee Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. October is Domestic Awareness Month; they wear purple to stand with victims and survivors. Purple represents peace, courage, and survival, and serves as a reminder of our shared commitment to ending abuse and supporting those whose lives have been impacted by it. They also discussed its 40-year milestone and the October 29 "In Her Shoes" event, and it's an interactive simulation designed to help participants better understand some of the difficult circumstances that victims may face when trying to lead a dangerous situation.
Wendy Woods with the PeeDee Coalition Resource Development thanked everyone for their support. She stated, " The city has always, since I've been at the coalition for the past six years, has always supported the services of the PeeDee Coalition, and we also like to thank Mr. Simon, for always supporting the services that we do and always supporting our events, thank you so much for doing that, and also the council." She stated, "Trauma has no time to say that, you know, whether it's any season or out of season, trauma. When it comes to domestic violence, when it comes to children experiencing that displacement, it doesn't matter. If the roads are broken up, trauma doesn't matter if someone's political stance is this, or someone's view is this. Trauma doesn't stop for anyone, and I just wanted to say that, and also just thank the mayor had a referral from a young lady that was living out her car in Marlboro County. Thanks to the mayor getting in touch with us, that lady with three children has a place to stay. Has a place to stay. So that's the mayor that you have. So, I want you all to know that as far as the PeeDee Coalition is concerned, we thank the city of Bennettsville, and we solicit all of your support of the services of the children and the mothers and the fathers and the families of the coalition in reducing violence in the homes of children, because at the end of the day, it doesn't matter what stance you have when it comes to trauma.

E. **Bobby Porter (Mentoring)-** Not Present

F. **Larry Pouncy (Marine Corps League)** - The Marine Corps League presented a proposal for a Vietnam War memorial at the courthouse, estimated at $6,405, with a proposed dedication on March 29, 2027. "They are asking for your support for the monument at the courthouse, and it is the Vietnam War Memorial. It is especially for those who serve and also those who gave the ultimate sacrifice. This monument will be a lasting place and a memory for those who serve, and it would be a wonderful spot on the courthouse lawn for a monument as such. He asked the council to support in this endeavor of the monument on the campus on the courthouse grounds, and that you would approve a fundraiser and consider a large donation. They really need donations before December the 31st, 2026.

6. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Joe McDonald- An out-of-town business owner reported an unresolved payment issue with the city.

Donna Ridges- A downtown business owner criticized property conditions and called for ordinances governing downtown buildings.

Jessika Gaudiomonte- A resident requested transparency and written public accounting of grants, financial redactions, disaster-relief liabilities, and unfinished projects.

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

8. FIRST READING AND ADVERTISEMENT OF ORDINANCES
No Business

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. **Loft Apartments-** Caroline Harpe requested documentation of the properties' history and any city warnings or citations, citing reports of deplorable resident conditions and unresolved problems.

Mr. Simon noted a failed public-private development arrangement intended to produce downtown lofts; additional historical details were not provided.

Apartment Conditions

- Administration described poor conditions at the apartments and gaps in the original agreement, which lacked annual inspection and maintenance-performance requirements. The city holds two mortgages, with payments not scheduled to begin until 2031; the project also received grant funding.
- Code and fire-safety enforcement has included inspections, letters, citations, and fines recorded on taxes. Officials said the city's authority is limited, enforcement procedures may not have been followed consistently, and the owner's status and possible ownership change have not been verified.
- Council discussed whether existing ordinances support property-maintenance enforcement, potential business-license revocation, recovery of cleanup costs, and tax-sale options. Questions remain about contract compliance, ownership, and remedies; the complete contract and enforcement file were requested for review.
- Administration said upcoming affordable housing arrangements will include performance language and city land ownership during the lease term.

B. **Renaming McLeod Street Park to Cozell McQueen-**

- Council considered referring the proposed Cozell McQueen Memorial Park name to the planning committee.
- Members expressed support and emphasized that the park must continue to receive maintenance.
- A dedication ceremony and possible participation by McQueen's family and NC State representatives were discussed.

10. OLD BUSINESS

A. **Finance Report-**

Credit Card Review

- The "unaccounted for" description referred to charges pending receipt and coding, not missing funds or improper purchases. The reported $10,000 was a total of multiple transactions, not one purchase; its

supporting breakdown was not presented, leaving the requested receipts unresolved.

- The city reported paying $14,000 to McDonald's Diesel last month and approximately $27,000 for September activity. The outstanding invoice register showed one open invoice, due October 29. Officials said the First Citizens revolving card would be paid in full monthly, avoiding partial payments and interest; the reported $19,000 balance may reflect statement timing.

Invoice Process

- Finance described a transition from manual, paper-based handling to electronic invoice documentation in BS&A. Invoices are scanned and linked to purchase orders, reviewed for approval and supporting records, then processed for payment; transaction details are retained in the system.
- The revised process was described as already underway, though officials acknowledged that some invoices had remained in manual workflows and the standard operating procedures and staff adoption still needed refinement. They reported four to six open invoices and said 90% of invoices since January had been paid within 30 days.

Cash Flow Outlook

- The Finance Committee discussed a possible short-term tax participation note to bridge uneven seasonal revenues and expenses. It could be about $1 million, run for roughly six months, and be repaid when tax receipts arrive in January; no amount or decision was finalized. Pursuit would require two council votes and an ordinance.
- Officials cited about $1.2 million in expected outlays over four months, including a January bond payment, alongside more than $400,000 in anticipated grant reimbursements and planned ARPA-funded work. The city said its budget was tight and flat, with no utility or tax rate increase in three years.

11. BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

A. **Planning Commission** (No Cases)

B. **Board of Architectural Review/Tree Committee** (No Cases)

C. **Board of Zoning Appeals** (No Cases)

12. COUNCIL COMMITTEES

A. **Finance Committee** (Chairperson Jennings)-Reviewed operating balance, seasonal revenue patterns, vendor and payroll payments, and department budget controls. Discussed upcoming ARPA and grant-related payments, delayed reimbursements, the December 31st spending deadline, and a proposed Special Meeting with financial advisors.

B. **Public Services Committee** (Chairperson Harpe)-Committee has not met since last meeting.

C. **Public Safety Committee** (Chairperson McRae)-Reported the October 5 Committee Meeting and updates on Animal Control, Police Staffing, a possible K-9 unit, and fire equipment. Reported break-ins at open shelters were flagged for follow-up to investigate the incidents and determine related liability concerns.

13. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CITY COUNCIL AND CITY ADMINISTRATOR

A. **Administrator's Report-** Mr. Simon gave thanks to the community members for supporting the city and highlighted several accomplishments. The city is described as one of the few remaining full-service cities in the state because it provides water, sewer, natural gas, electricity, solid-waste services, and planning and development services. He spoke about infrastructure projects that were funded through a "SCIIP Grant" awarded in 2021, but little progress occurred until 2023, when the current Administration accelerated construction and completed projects despite the resulting time pressure and disorder. He disputes claims that projects have not been completed, stating that a list of completed projects exists. The Administration also hired the city's first Grants Coordinator, who has applied for approximately $27 million in grants, including grants with small or no matching requirements. Next, he reported improvements to the city's utilities and said there had been no identifiable capital improvement plan for those utilities for several years, while inviting anyone who has found one to provide it.

He argues that it has improved city operations and finances through largely unseen infrastructure and staffing changes. Gas leaks and malfunctioning valves and meters were repaired, increasing gas-department revenue from about $700,000 in the first year to nearly $1 million in the second. Also reports that fully staffing the Electric Department—from two employees to seven—reduced monthly Mutual-Aid costs from approximately $50,000–$60,000 to less than $19,000, which the Administration characterizes as savings of hundreds of thousands of dollars over time. A study of the roughly 30-year-old Wastewater Treatment Plant identified significant future investment needs, giving the city a clearer basis for utility planning. Finally, he explains that blank sections on publicly shared credit-card statements were redactions of account numbers and other sensitive information, undertaken to protect financial data rather than conceal improper activity. These are statements made by the Administration in the meeting; the passage itself does not independently verify the financial figures or the condition of the utilities.

Lastly, he identifies several priorities for the city: establishing financial reserves, addressing overgrown vegetation, improving poor road conditions, and supporting downtown development. Administration has contracted Aspen, previously focused on city rights-of-way, to clear vegetation in neighborhoods as well; he acknowledges that correcting years of neglect will take time. To improve roads, the city plans to seek transportation funding, create a professional road inventory with repair estimates and priorities, and explore transferring some roads to state control. Next, he explains that the city owns many roads, whose maintenance requires substantial recurring funds, and says past problems resulted from an inadequate budgeting formula rather than necessarily from wrongdoing by previous officials. For downtown development,

the speaker favors working with private property owners and combining enforcement with cooperation and possible city assistance. The overall goal is a financially prepared city, better-maintained infrastructure, and a thriving downtown.

B. **Request for Documentation Procedure-** Information

C. **Applications for Asst. City Administrator for Public Utilities**- Information

D. **Humane Society Check Clarification-**Information

E. **Finance Report-**Information

F. **Grants Report-**Information

G. **Upcoming Events Report-**

Miss Jones invited the public to the third Downtown Dash and Bash on Saturday: the 10K starts at 8:30 a.m.; the 5K and fun run start at 9 a.m. The event includes food trucks and music. Other Saturday activities mentioned included a Smithsonian exhibit at the Murchison Museum and an AMI Kids flag football game at Carroll Field. Residents were encouraged to visit local merchants and vendors.

14 NON-AGENDA ITEMS FROM COUNCIL

Mr. Scott- Thanked all employees for their hard work. He also gave his condolences to the family of Mr. Barry Thomas, a retiree employee who was the City Animal Control Officer 20 years ago. He was a dedicated worker, he said. He went on, saying that council members should go through the proper procedures when doing things for citizens so that the departments have documentation. Discussion of documenting constituent law-enforcement issues through the police department and setting expectations for information-request response times. Lastly, he thinks council should come up with setting expectations for information-request response times for Administration due to collecting material from different departments.

Mr. McRae- Mentioned the Brownfields Workshop that was held, and they presented redevelopment and funding opportunities; attendance by residents was low. He emphasized supporting existing businesses and considering downtown development and affordable housing. Lastly, he ended by saying, “Everything ain't good and everything ain't bad. We still got some work that we got to do, And it's room in areas for improvement in everything that we do. So let's just try to get on board and learn the system first, and then we can, you know, show out and complain. Then, you know, you say everybody say, "Oh, downtown looks so terrible. We don't have anything downtown. Then you put out this thing to try to get a restaurant downtown. Oh no, we don't want this restaurant downtown. No, no, no. But you just complain that it's nothing downtown. Oh, people are moving from business. Everybody moving. We ain't got people out trying to get affordable houses. We don't want affordable housing. No, everybody, don't sign that. Don't go with it. We don't want that. No. We are so close-minded. We got to be open-minded. We want our students to grow, and that's all I'm gonna say. Ain't gonna take up too much more time. But let's just be open-minded, and let's just try to get on board with growth. And if it don't work out, it'll be much better than what we got now.”

Mr. Jennings- He raised trimming dead city trees and grinding visible stumps, subject to coordination with DOT on state roads. He named a few areas such as: Main St., Fayetteville Ave., and Jordan St.

Mrs. Caraline Asked about mortgages on the two downtown buildings. Requested minutes showing whether council voted to enter into mortgages on two downtown buildings. Legal consultation was raised; the attorney reported no known legal barrier to determining whether a vote occurred. The minutes were not checked during the meeting.

Mr. Davis- Thanked employees for all their hard work. He mentioned a lot of good things are still going on in the city, such as getting a new tennis court and basketball court. Lastly, he stated he was happy about naming the basketball court after the late Cozell McQueen.

Mrs. Weaver- Pleaded with citizens to shop downtown. Lastly, mentioned a busted window at a council member's business, which was replaced with plywood.

Mayor Abraham- Thanked Pastor Ore and First Lady Ore of the Second Baptist Church and the community pastors, volunteers, and the citizens who participated in the 24-hour city set-apart prayer. A Bible was also donated to the City of Bennettsville. This was the first time this took place and it was amazing, he said. Next, he thanked the PeeDee Coalition for coming out for Breast Cancer Awareness and Domestic Violence Month.

Mayor says he rarely hears complaints about downtown from people outside the city; instead, Mayors and residents elsewhere often praise the city's efforts and wish their own communities were doing similar things. This contrasts with the predominantly negative feedback heard locally. He welcomes residents identifying problems and submitting complaints, while wishing those concerns had been raised earlier, because earlier attention might have prevented the city's current situation. He acknowledges that people are now working to identify and address issues, including downtown problems. Next, he repeatedly urges residents to verify information before sharing it on social media, rather than trusting claims simply because they come from friends and family. Finally, he says he loves the city, makes no promises of perfection, but he commits to working as hard as possible to do what he can.

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15. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Mr. McRae made a motion to go into Executive Session not to exceed 30 minutes to discuss Personnel Matters related to hiring a DPU Director. Ms. Weaver stated she didn't like the time limit on it. No second was received, and the record noted that no action was taken.

Ms. Weaver made another motion to enter Executive Session to discuss applications for the DPU position. No second was received, and the record noted that no action was taken.

Councilman McRae stated, " I would like the record to show that the attempt was made to go over a few applicants for the DPU, and we took no action on. This was the position that there was a lot of complaints that we needed to fill, which

we could have held off in the budget process and saved that. But that's either here nor there."

16. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting ended at 9:12 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.