

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
CITY COUNCIL

February 6, 2023

Ronnie Thompson, Mayor

Sally W. Sandy, City Manager
Louis E. Vinay, Jr., City Attorney

Wendy Cato)
Christopher Hawkins) Council
Chris Jernigan)
Butch McSwain)

Interpreters
Ernest Williams IV
Danette Steelman-Bridges

- I. Call to Order - The Mayor called the regular meeting to order in the Council Chambers at City Hall at 6:00 p.m.
- II. Public Comment – The Mayor stated the guidelines for public comment and said speakers were to be called in order of sign-up for those who appeared in person; however, due to COVID-19 the Council was still accepting public comments via email, U.S. mail or hand-delivered letters. On one signed up to offer any comments. No other comments via email, U.S. mail or hand-delivered letters were received.
- III. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag – Councilmember Jernigan led the Pledge of Allegiance.
- IV. Invocation – Given by Rev. George Logan – New Day Christian Church.
- V. Introduction of Council – The Mayor introduced Councilmembers and staff.
- VI. Service Pins
 - A. Councilmember Chris Hawkins recognized Sally W. Sandy, City Manager of the City of Morganton, for her 30 years' service. A large room of current and past employees gathered in support of her years of service.

Councilmember Hawkins stated that City Manager Sandy always puts the citizens of Morganton first with a service heart. He said that he felt honored to present her with her 30-year service pin.

City Manager Sandy thanked everyone, current and past, for supporting her over the past 30 years.
- VII. Retirement Resolutions
 - A. Mayor Thompson read the retirement resolution honoring Jamie Clark, Fire Services Lieutenant, Morganton Public Safety – Councilmember Jernigan presented Lt. Clark with a framed retirement resolution.

Chief Jason Whisnant presented Lt. Clark with his fire helmet.

Lt. Clark addressed the crowd and thanked everyone for their support. He stated that it has been a joy working for the City of Morganton.

Upon motion by Councilmember Cato, seconded by Councilmember Hawkins, and carried unanimously, the Council adopted Resolution #23-04 honoring retiree Jamie Clark.

Upon motion by Councilmember McSwain, seconded by Councilmember Jernigan, and carried unanimously, the Council declared as surplus a fire helmet, Cairns brand, Serial Number 1044DSR, sold for one dollar, then presented to retired Fire Lieutenant Jamie Clark.

VIII. Public Advocacy Issues and Strategies - Mayor Thompson announced the following City of Morganton upcoming events:

- A. Announcement: City Council Workshop, Friday, February 24, 8:15 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., Morganton Community House.
- B. Presentation: John Bridgers, Tax Administrator, Burke County Tax Office – Mr. Bridgers addressed the Council. He thanked the Council for the opportunity to speak. He advised that his presentation is about taxes and revaluation.

He stated that State statutes require that property must be revaluated at least every 8 years. The NC Department of Revenue recommends that all counties adopt a 4-year schedule, if possible. Burke County has adopted a 4-year schedule. The last revaluation was done in 2019. The next revaluation will be done this year on January 1, 2023.

Mr. Bridgers stated that revaluation is not about raising taxes. It is about insuring the tax burden is fairly applied and is equitable and balanced for everyone.

He proceeded to define market value or true value. The County does a mass appraisal – they do not have complete access to the property unless the property owner allows access. They use market areas or neighborhoods to compare similar homes or pieces of land. Mr. Bridgers explained the differences/similarities of similar homes.

Mr. Bridgers then explained how the property tax rate is determined and showed several slides to illustrate his explanation.

He stated that property values in Burke County have increased due to inflation and the overall economy. He again used slides to explain his statement that some have increased significantly while others have increased moderately.

The sales ratio in Burke County is approximately 70, which means the appraised value from 2019 is about 70% of the selling price.

He advised that if a homeowners' property value goes up more than the overall base rate then their property taxes are probably going up and if the property's value went up less than the base rate or went down their taxes won't go up and may even go down.

He then opened the floor for questions. The only question came from Mayor Thompson who asked when the tax revaluation is scheduled to start. Mr. Bridgers advised the notices to property owners are scheduled to go out in approximately two weeks.

- C. Proclamation: 2023 the Year of the Trail
Accepted by: Bryan Fish, Director, Recreation Department

Mayor Thompson read the resolution. Councilmember McSwain presented the proclamation on behalf of the City Council to Bryan Fish. Councilmember McSwain stated he is excited and proud of our Greenway system and excited about extending it into future trails.

Mr. Fish thanked everyone for their support. He encouraged everyone to get out, be active and enjoy!

- D. Proclamation: February 2023 Black History Month
Accepted by: Anthony Radcliff, Vice President, Burke County NAACP and Ruth Roseboro.

Mayor Thompson read the resolution. Councilmember Hawkins presented the proclamation on behalf of the City Council to Anthony Radcliff, Vice President, and Ruth Roseboro of the Burke County NAACP.

Mr. Radcliff accepted the proclamation and thanked everyone on behalf of Alicia Connelly, President of the Burke County NAACP, and the NAACP membership.

E. Upcoming events:

- Downtown/City Hall
American Red Cross Blood Drive
Thursday, February 9th from 9:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at City Hall in the Council Chambers – Open to the public.

American Pop-Up Farmers' Market
Saturday, February 11th from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at 111 North Green Street.

Art in the Hall: John David Brown, III – is an artist, graphic designer and director that lives in Conover, North Carolina. His work has a whimsical folk-art, storybook style, with colors and shapes informed by mid-century design. He strives to create happy art that resonates with people of all ages and backgrounds. His art will be displayed in City Hall during the months of February and March 2023.
- CoMMA Performing Arts Center
Thursday, February 9th at 7:30 p.m. – ZuZu African Acrobats

Thursday, February 23rd at 7:30 p.m. – Kelly Swanson - Who Hijacked My Fairytale?
- Collett Street Recreation Center
Saturday, February 25, 2023, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. – Black History Festival.

IX. North Carolina Municipal Power Agency Number 1 Update - No update reported.

X. Consent Agenda – City Manager Sandy presented the Consent Agenda and asked if any items should be removed. No request was made to remove any items.

Upon motion by Councilmember Jernigan, seconded by Councilmember Hawkins, and unanimously carried, the Consent Agenda was approved and each individual item adopted as stated, those being as follows:

- A. Approved minutes as submitted for a Regular Meeting held on January 9, 2023.
- B. Approved the date for advertisement of unpaid real estate tax accounts for April 5, 2023.
- C. Adopted a Resolution 23-03 stating the City of Morganton has no objection to abandonment by the NC DOT of Kimball Glass Drive (SR 1318).
- D. Approved the revision of the Electric Department requirements for Electric Services 600 amp and above as submitted effective March 1, 2023.

- E. Approved budget amendment (Ordinance 23-04) to receive grant funding of \$24,500 from the Governor's Crime Commission for one (1) Public Safety Evidence Incinerator.
- F. (a) Approved a budget amendment (Ordinance 23-02) of \$7,469.65 to recognize receipt of payment for insurance reimbursement for damage to Public Works vehicles.

(b) Approved a budget amendment (Ordinance 23-02) of \$4,614.65 to recognize receipt of payment for insurance reimbursement for damage to Electric Services vehicle.

(c) Approved a budget amendment of \$3,298.18 (Ordinance 23-02) to recognize the receipt of payment for insurance reimbursement for damages to Catawba Meadows entrance.

XI. Items Removed from Consent Agenda – There were no items removed.

XII. New Business

A. Other Business

1. Consideration of Budget Amendment to Appropriate \$32,200 for Phase II Environmental Assessment of City properties located on the corner of East Union Street and White Street and the 400 Block of East Meeting Street

City Manager Sandy stated the City has contracted separately to sell two properties located at the corner of East Union Street and White Street, and the vacant parcels of the 400 Block of East Meeting Street. Both properties will require a Phase II Environmental Site Assessment.

Norvell Properties, one of the contracted purchasers, will contract for the work on East Union Street and White Street. Amicus Partners, LLC, one of the contracted purchasers or its assignee, will contract for work on East Meeting Street. Both parties will use a reputable company to complete the work and obtain a fair and reasonable price. The City will reimburse Norvell Properties and Amicus Partners for the bill once the work has been completed.

Upon motion by Councilmember Hawkins, seconded by Councilmember Jernigan, and unanimously carried, approved budget amendment (Ordinance 23-03) to appropriate \$32,200 for Phase II Environmental Assessment of City Property on Corner of East Union Street and White Street and City property on the 400 Block of East Meeting Street.

2. Consideration of Award of Contract and Approval of Budget Amendment for City of Morganton Wash Station Project

City Manager Sandy stated this project has been in planning and design stages for over a year. The need for this project was encouraged in our recent stormwater audit. This Wash Station is a major component of the City's compliance with State permits.

Funding for this particular project would be from The American Rescue Act 2021 ("ARPA") funds. This project involves the construction of an Arco Building Systems Building or approved equal with approximately 2,850 SF +/- for housing a car wash station. The project will also include demo and site preparation, including concrete work, asphalt work, plumbing, and various piping apparatus to tie-in drain line to sewer system, water line improvements, catch basin, utility work storm drainage, electrical, etc. To be located behind the existing City of Morganton Garage.

The original bids were received on Tuesday, December 20, 2020. Only two bids were submitted, so bids were returned unopened. The project was re-

bid, with proposals to be received and opened by the Development & Design Services Department on Wednesday December 28, 2022. Only one bid was submitted for the project. The responsive, responsible bid was submitted by V. Stewart McKee General Contractors of Morganton, NC for \$1,069,600.00. The bid was over budget, so City staff negotiated with the responsive bidder to reduce the project scope and lower the project cost for a contract not to exceed \$700,000.00.

City Staff requests to use ARPA funds for the new budget of \$700,000 for the City of Morganton Fleet Wash Station Project. At budget time, \$530,000 was estimated. The Electric Department will pay for their portion of the project.

Upon motion by Councilmember Cato, seconded by Councilmember Jernigan, and unanimously carried, a contract was awarded to V. Stewart McKee General Contractors of Morganton, NC in the amount of \$700,000 to complete the City of Morganton Fleet Wash Station Project, including approval for the Mayor and City Manager to execute all agreements regarding this contract.

Upon motion by Councilmember McSwain, seconded by Councilmember Hawkins, and unanimously carried, approved the appropriation of retained earnings of \$47,420 and fund balance of ARPA Funds of \$652,580, for a total of \$700,000 for the Wash Station project (Ordinance 23-05).

3. Consideration of Approval of a Revised Take-Home Car Policy for Public Safety

Chief Jason Whisnant advised Council that recruiting, retention and emergency call-back of public safety officers has been a constant challenge for the Public Safety Department. To assist with this complex issue, Public Safety began offering a take home vehicle to officers living within Burke County in 2006. Initially, this was adequate and met the unique emergency response needs of the agency. However, over the past several years, police agencies have expanded their take home vehicle policy in an effort to hire and retain personnel from areas beyond their take-home car policies. Also, law enforcement agencies realized it was a necessity in order to remain competitive with the expanded, take-home car policy other agencies were offering.

Numerous local law enforcement agencies in our region have expanded their take-home vehicle program to a radius either around their city/county limits, from a fixed point, or a specified drive time. Below is a list of what several law enforcement agencies currently have in place:

- Burke County - 10 mile radius from beyond county line
- Charlotte - 50 mile radius from city limits
- Boone - 30 minute drive time from city limits
- Marion - 25 mile radius from city limits
- Lenoir - 25 mile radius from headquarters
- Longview - 25 mile radius from town hall
- Hendersonville - 25 mile radius from city limits
- Mint Hill - 27 mile radius from city limits
- Granite Falls - 35 mile radius from headquarters
- Hickory - 25 minute drive time from city
- Boone - 30 minute drive time from city
- Maiden - 30 minute drive time from city limits or Chief's discretion
- Lincolnton - Anywhere within Lincoln County or a neighboring county (Burke, Catawba, Gaston, Cleveland).

Over the past several years, Public Safety has lost numerous potential applicants because they were not eligible for a take-home vehicle. Several of these individuals lived in McDowell and Caldwell County where law enforcement pay is less than what Public Safety offers.

Public Safety proposes an enhancement to the current take-home vehicle policy to a 25-mile radius from Public Safety headquarters. The enhancement would allow Public Safety to attract applicants from surrounding counties and remain competitive with those as well.

Upon motion by Councilmember Jernigan, seconded by Councilmember Cato, and unanimously carried, approved a revised Take-Home Car Policy for Public Safety as submitted, to allow for take-home cars to officers within a 25-mile radius from headquarters.

4. Appointments to Boards and Commissions – None to report.
5. 30-Day Notice Boards and Commissions – None to report.

XIII. Other Items from City Manager and City Council Not on Agenda

A. Consideration of Amending the Guidelines for Single-Family Housing Stimulus Program

City Manager Sandy advised there continues to be a real shortage of housing and particularly single-family housing. In September 2021, the City Council considered and reinstated a revised version of a housing stimulus program used in the early to mid-nineties to support single-family housing development. The 2022-2023 approved budget includes funding for utility and street infrastructure associated with new single-family housing development.

Since the program was re-established in 2021, several developers have tried to use it, but costs for development have made it not feasible. City staff discussed how the stimulus could be more effective. The program guidelines can be amended to increase the City's investment in infrastructure to up to \$5,000 per lot for water, \$5,000 per lot for sewer and up to \$75,000 for street construction. This will not require a budget amendment at this time. The guidelines limit City participation to these amounts, but in no case will the City participate in more than half the costs of the street and never more than the total costs of the water and sewer.

Additionally, since the goal of the program is to get single-family housing constructed, staff is proposing extending the balloon payment term from 5 years to 7 years.

Funding for this program for FY 2022-2023 is \$150,000 each for water and sewer and \$120,000 for streets. Any consideration of additional funding for this program after June 30, 2023 would be discussed in budget sessions this Spring.

Upon motion by Councilmember Hawkins, seconded by Councilmember Jernigan, and unanimously carried, Council approved the amendments included in addendum #1 to the Guidelines for Single-Family Housing Stimulus Program.

XIV. Reports – No reports given.

XV. Adjournment – The Mayor adjourned the meeting at 6:55 p.m.

Preparation of Minutes. These minutes were prepared by Renee C. Carswell, City Clerk. Copies of all resolutions, ordinances and orders referenced in these minutes are intended to be incorporated into these minutes as if fully set forth herein. Prior to including them into the official minute book, the minutes have been read and approved by the City Manager and the City Attorney, then distributed to each member of the City Council for further review and final approval, at a subsequent Council Meeting.



Ronnie Thompson, Mayor



Renee C. Carswell, City Clerk