

CITY OF MULBERRY, ARKANSAS

CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – October 17, 2023

The regularly scheduled monthly session of the Mulberry City Council convened on Tuesday, October 17, 2023, at precisely 7:00 p.m. The meeting was held at the City Council Center, located at 606 Church Avenue, Mulberry.

Gary D. Baxter, Mayor

Carla Dickerson, Recorder-Treasurer

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Jimmy Moore, Ward 3 Position 2

Kimberly Bruce, Ward 2 Position 2

Bobby Tweedy, Ward 2 Position 1

Wilma Peevy, Ward 3 Position 1

Stacy Muntz, Ward 1 Position 2

Sheila Trent, Ward 1 Position 1

MEMBERS ABSENT:

None

OTHERS PRESENT:

Steve Hurley, Executive Assistant to the Mayor

Laura Bryant

Shannon Gregory, Police Chief

Mandy Oestreich

Dwayne Fields, Public Works Director

Scott Oestreich

Jason Sumpter, Assistant Fire Chief

Kay Baxter

Darren Fields, Assistant Water Superintendent

Wanda Kimes

Tammy Watts, Branch Director of Mulberry Public Library

Jose Aguirre

Joseph Swad

Eric Pierce

Jennifer Schneider

Katie Cunningham

Derrick Bryant

Sadat Rice

Emily Bryant

Ronnie Bryant

Clay Bryant

Greta Bugg

Tom Bugg

Karen Rhoades

Zane Allen

Maria Duncan

Margaret McCabe

Eli Clardy

Nancy Sanders

Randell Bryant

Call to Order

Mayor Baxter called the Council Meeting to order at 7:00 p.m., led in prayer, and followed with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call:

Steve Hurley conducted the roll call and confirmed the presence of a quorum.

Approval of Consent Agenda and Previous Meeting Minutes

Kimberly Bruce moved to approve the Consent Agenda and the minutes from the previous month. Bobby Tweedy seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously among the council members present.

DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS

Police Department Report – Chief Shannon Gregory:

- The department responded to 113 calls, conducted eighty-two traffic stops, issued eight citations, and made four arrests (two misdemeanors, two felonies).
- Performed 403 business checks.
- Announced the Chili Supper and Pie Auction for the Christmas With A Badge event, set for Sunday, November 19, 2023.

Fire Department Report – Assistant Fire Chief Jason Sumpter:

- Addressed twenty-three calls: two grass fires, nineteen medical calls, and two cancelled calls.

Public Works Department Report – Director Dwayne Fields:

- Noted several leak repairs over the past month.
- Confirmed the cleanup of the lot gifted to the City on Main Street and adjacent property.
- Addressed the issue of gravel on streets and sidewalks, indicating a preference for paving when funds become available.
- Committed to providing Stacy Muntz with a key for the dog waste bag dispenser.

MULBERRY COMMUNITY FOOD PANTRY REPORT

Due to her absence, Suzy Ferguson, Director of MCFP, submitted a written report which Steve Hurley presented to the Council:

- The MCFP successfully conducted a fundraising event in September, accumulating a total of \$8,700.
- The monthly food distribution occurred on October 12th.
- The September distribution extended beyond the usual two-and-a-half-hour duration, lasting over four hours.

- A total of 267 households were served: 70 through delivery and 197 via drive-through.
- Nineteen households were first-time recipients of the pantry's services.
- Distribution included over 6,000 pounds of raw chicken, approximately 13,000 pounds of fresh produce, over 1,500 pounds of bread products, and 8,400 pounds of dry pantry staples.
- The pantry also provided over 2,800 pounds of mixed chilled and frozen products.
- Contributions included a canned food donation from East Side Baptist Church.
- The AR Hunger Relief Alliance and State Representative Chad Puryear awarded the MCFP with a \$500 donation, which was included in the total funds raised.
- Five emergency food boxes were distributed to families within September.
- The MCFP recorded 480 volunteer hours for September, with an annual total reaching 2,306 hours.
- Proceeds from the "Boo's Cruise" shirt sales were pledged as donations to the MCFP.

MULBERRY PUBLIC LIBRARY REPORT

Tammy Watts, Branch Director of the Mulberry Public Library, addressed the Council to deliver the Library's September report:

- Patrons checked out 1,283 books and returned 1,007 books.
- The library recorded 1,680 visits.
- Program attendance reached 110, with 320 participating in passive programs.
- Computer usage was recorded at 79 people.
- Wi-Fi usage saw a significant increase, with 1,687 individuals accessing the service, doubling August's numbers.
- Two new Saturday programs were initiated.
- New after school and homeschool programs were introduced.
- The library organized a food drive and hosted a voter signup event.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Review and Approval of Police Policy Manual and Employee Handbook

- The Police Policy Manual and Employee Handbook, carried over from the previous month's meeting, were revisited.
- A motion to approve the documents was put forward by Council Member Stacy Muntz and seconded by Council Member Kimberly Bruce.
- The council proceeded to a vote without further discussion. The motion was unanimously approved by all present council members.

NEW BUSINESS

1. ORDINANCE 2023-08 AN ORDINANCE TO ESTABLISH CEMETERY PLOT PRICES FOR THE CITY OF MULBERRY, ARKANSAS, FOR THE MULBERRY NEW CEMETERY, AND TO SET FEES FOR OPENING AND CLOSING

GRAVES ON WEEKDAYS AND WEEKENDS; AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY.

- The ordinance pertaining to the establishment of cemetery plot prices in the City of Mulberry, Arkansas, for the Mulberry New Cemetery, along with the fees for opening and closing graves on weekdays and weekends was tabled.
- Mayor Baxter withdrew the item from the agenda due to the reception of additional information. It was noted that the ordinance would be revisited in a future meeting.

2. RESOLUTION 2023-10 A RESOLUTION DESGINATING AND AUTHROIZING THE MAYOR TO EXECUTE CERTAIN DOCUMENTS IN CONNECTION WITH FUNDING ADMINISTERED BY THE ARKANSAS NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION.

- Council Member Steve Hurley presented Resolution 2023-10, authorizing the Mayor to execute documents in relation to funding administered by the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission.
- Council Member Jimmy Moore motioned to approve the resolution, with Council Member Sheila Trent seconding the motion.
- The vote was called, with no discussion preceding it. All present council members voted in favor of the resolution.

3. Planning Commission Report: Zoning Ordinance Variance Request

- The Planning Commission's decision on October 16, 2023, to deny a Zoning Ordinance Variance Request for 700 Mulberry Wire Road was reported. The decision was by a vote of 3-2.
- An appeal to the City Council was filed by the requester, including both a verbal and a written appeal.
- Mayor Baxter suggested that the council hears arguments for and against the request without deciding at the present meeting.
- Council Member Wilma Peevy motioned to hear the arguments. Council Member Sheila Trent seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

4. Zoning Ordinance Amendment Application #2023-03

- Mr. Derrick Bryant addressed the council regarding his application to amend the zoning ordinance for a parcel of land, providing detailed information about the proposed construction of turkey houses and addressing potential community concerns.
- Following Mr. Bryant's presentation, Mayor Baxter acknowledged receipt of the written appeal.

5. Public Comment: Opposition to Proposed Turkey Houses

- Jennifer Schneider addressed the council expressing opposition to the rezoning application on behalf of the residents of Wire Road.
- She raised concerns about property values, water pressure, potential flooding and runoff, road safety and traffic, and the character of the neighborhood.
- Mayor Baxter provided context regarding the area's zoning history and emphasized the importance of council's further investigation into the matter before voting.
- No vote was taken, and it was noted that a Zoning Variance Ordinance would be forthcoming.

MAYOR'S REPORT AND PUBLIC COMMENT

- **Church Avenue Sidewalks Project Update**
 - Mayor Baxter reported on the progress of the Church Avenue Sidewalks project. The construction is complete, with the exception of the railing installation in the ditch area of the nine hundred block.
- **Food Pantry Project**
 - It was communicated that the Food Pantry Project is nearing completion.
- **Playground Maintenance**
 - Repairs on the broken see-saw equipment at the local playground have been carried out successfully.
- **City Buildings Roofing Projects**
 - The roofing project on eleven city buildings is advancing well. The ventilation equipment for the Kirksey Hospital is ready for installation.
- **Industrial Park Restaurant Initiative**
 - Plans to begin the construction of the new restaurant at the junction of the industrial park and Highway 64 by the end of the current year were announced.
- **Compass Cold Storage Expansion**
 - The second phase of the Compass Cold Storage facility has been completed and is now operational.
- **Silver Bridge Transfer**
 - The transfer of Silver Bridge to the City of Harrison has been rescinded. Documents for reverting ownership to the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) were received and signed, with construction on the new bridge proceeding as planned. A subsequent discussion was held on the matter.
- **Bridge Memoriam Request**
 - In relation to the Silver Bridge matter, Stacy Muntz inquired about obtaining a segment of the bridge for a memorial. Mayor Baxter directed Steve Hurley to compose a formal email to ARDOT regarding the request.
- **Christmas Parade Announcement**
 - The Fire Department has taken up the mantle of organizing the Christmas Parade, which is scheduled to be a nighttime event on Saturday, December 16th, at 6 pm.
- **Youth Shelter Construction Update**
 - It was announced that the construction of the Youth Shelter would commence once full funding for the project is secured.
- **Real Estate Updates**
 - The Dairy Dip is currently listed for sale.

- Clean-up has been completed at the lot located at 105 Main.
- The lot at 106 Main Street is scheduled for clean-up, with incurred costs to be added to the property's lien.
- **Property Acquisition**
 - A deed for the property at 136 West 4th Street was received; the City now has ownership.
- **Complaint Regarding Roofing Contractors**
 - Stacy Muntz brought to attention the issue of roofing contractors leaving behind nails, leading to multiple flat tires. Mayor Baxter requested Steve Hurley to communicate with the contractors to address the complaint.
- **Community Clean-Up Event Feedback**
 - Kimberly Bruce praised the success of the September Clean-Up event, which saw 17 volunteers contributing to the effort.
- **Senior Center Modification Proposal**
 - Wilma Peevy sought approval for the Senior Center to solicit bids for modifications to a City-owned building, intending to lower the ceiling for better acoustics. The Center personnel would undertake fundraising for the construction costs. Councilman Bobby Tweedy agreed to evaluate the building for potential acoustic improvements.
- **Public Comment**
 - Citizen Eric Pierce, residing at 1926 Alma Avenue, inquired about the maintenance responsibility for Alma Avenue North of Wire Road. Mayor Baxter clarified that the road is privately maintained.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss Stacy Muntz made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Kimberly Bruce seconded the motion. All present members voted yes.

This meeting was adjourned at 8:21 p.m. The next scheduled City Council meeting will be on December 19, 2023.

These minutes were taken by Steve Hurley

APPROVED: 

Gary D. Baxter, Mayor

ATTEST: 

Carla Dickerson, Recorder-Treasurer