CITY OF MULBERRY, ARKANSAS

CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – March 19, 2024

The regularly scheduled monthly session of the Mulberry City Council convened on Tuesday, March 19, 2024, 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

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:

Kimberly Bruce, Ward 2 Position 2

OTHERS PRESENT:

Steve Hurley, Executive Assistant to the Mayor

Molly Dickerson

Thell Riddle, Police Officer

Kay Baxter

Dwayne Fields, Public Works Director

Scott Oestreich

Darren Fields, Water Superintendent

Barbara Richards

Jake Pool, Captain, Fire Department

Marie Crandell

Jeremy Shores, P.E. – Hawkins Weir Engineers

Eli Clardy

Justin Anthony, CPA – Hubbs & Whitehead, CPAs

Donna Staton

Sadat Rice

Angela Gardner

Alex Walker

Riley Walker

Ann Schmidt

Derek Schmidt

Call to Order

Mayor Baxter called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m., leading the gathering in prayer followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call:

Executive Assistant to the Mayor, Steve Hurley, conducted the roll call, confirming the presence of a quorum.

Approval of Consent Agenda and Previous Meeting Minutes

Council Member Bobby Tweedy moved to approve the Consent Agenda and the minutes from the previous month, seconded by Council Member Sheila Trent. The motion passed unanimously among the council members present.

DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS

Police Department Report – Officer Thell Riddle:

- In February, the department responded to 119 calls, conducted sixty-nine traffic stops, issued seven citations, made six arrests, and completed 424 building checks.

Fire Department Report – Captain Jake Pool:

- In February, the Fire Department addressed eighteen total calls: twelve medical calls, two grass fires and four cancelled calls.
- The Mike Gray annual chili dinner raised around $2,800.

Public Works Department Report – Public Works Director Dwayne Fields;

- During the council meeting, Public Works Director Dwayne Fields reported that thirteen leaks had been addressed, with one remaining leak on 8th Street to be completed shortly, completing the repairs from winter damage. Road repairs are underway by McCormick Works without a specific order, influenced by weather conditions affecting asphalt availability. A collaborative effort with the dump truck company is planned for the repair of 4th Street and Main, focusing on maintaining road integrity during and after nearby construction activities. Council Member Stacy Muntz inquired about the cost of repairing these leaks, to which Fields promised to provide details at the next meeting. Additionally, Council Member Wilma Peevy raised a concern about a significant pothole on 9th Street, which Fields agreed to investigate.

OLD BUSINESS

- **RESOLUTION NO. 2024-04 A RESOLUTION ACCEPTING THE ENGINEERS RECOMMENDATION AND AUTHORIZING APPLICATION FOR ADDITIONAL FUNDING**
  - The council revisited old business, focusing on Resolution 2024-04, which accepts the engineer's recommendation and authorizes applying for additional funding for the Mulberry Water Treatment Plant improvements. Steve Hurley read the resolution, emphasizing the need for $7,142,983 in additional funds based on Hawkins Weir Engineers' recommendation. Jeremy Shores from Hawkins Weir clarified that the resolution facilitates formalizing funding agency requirements, noting an opportunity to secure more favorable terms through USDA Rural Development compared to the Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund. The

goal is to minimize fiscal impact on Mulberry by pursuing the best financing option. The council unanimously approved the resolution following a motion by Stacy Muntz and a second by Jimmy Moore.

- **Appraisal on 104 North Main Street**
  - The Mayor updated the council on the appraisal of 104 North Main Street, appraised at $11,000. The council had previously approved an appraisal and potential sale. An interested buyer, Mr. Steele, was informed of the appraisal value and terms for holding the property with a 10% deposit. Mr. Steele has yet to visit the property but has been briefed on its appraisal. No further council action is required on this matter.

- **Appraisal on 136 West 4th Street**
  - The Mayor reported on the appraisal of the property at 136 West 4th Street, valued at $10,000. It was estimated that demolishing the house on the property would cost around $3,000, potentially reducing the net value to $7,000. The council discussed options for selling the property as is or after demolition, considering both a $7,000 and $10,000 selling price. Council Member Stacy Muntz proposed selling the property for $7,000 as is or $10,000 with the city undertaking demolition. This motion was seconded by Council Member Jimmy Moore, and the council unanimously approved the proposal without further debate.

- **Update on Senior Center Signage**
  - During the meeting, Council Member Jimmy Moore provided an update on the senior center signage. He had received a sketch and obtained a quote from Tori at Tori's Sign Shop, resulting in the signage being ordered at a cost of approximately $725, significantly lower than the initial estimate of $1,200 to $1,300. The sign is to be made from a durable baked enamel aluminum for longevity. Moore last communicated with the vendor the previous Wednesday and awaited the completion of the sign, dependent on weather conditions for installation.

NEW BUSINESS

- **Justin Anthony with Hubbs and Whitehead CPAs to discuss the Water Audit**
  - Justin Anthony from Hubbs and Whitehead CPAs presented the 2023 audit for the Mulberry Water, Sewer, and Sanitation Fund to the council. The audit yielded a clean opinion with no material misstatements or major findings, indicating a well-managed fund with effective internal controls and segregation of duties. Key financial highlights included:

- Total assets increased by $110,000 to just under $4.5 million, driven by a rise in current assets.
- Current liabilities remained stable, while non-current liabilities decreased slightly due to principal repayments.
- Operating revenues slightly decreased to just over $1 million, with operating expenses increasing due to contract repairs and engineering costs.
- A positive change in net position of $240,000 was reported for the year.
- Cash flow from operations decreased slightly, but unrestricted cash and equivalents increased by about $30,000.
- Restricted cash increased by approximately $200,000, with all deposits and cash either FDIC insured or collateralized.
- Long-term debt stood at $1.7 million, with total future principal and interest payments estimated at $2.2 million.
- The fund was in compliance with all debt service reserves and covenants.

- The audit also included notes on significant accounting policies, deposits, restricted cash, and long-term debt, affirming the fund's compliance and financial health. A note on subsequent events mentioned the start of a water treatment expansion project. The council expressed satisfaction with the audit results, noting the absence of findings and the achievement of a clean audit.

- **Proposed HVAC Unit Purchase for the Water Treatment Plant**
  - Water Superintendent Darren Fields requested council approval to purchase a new HVAC system for the water treatment plant, noting the current unit's age, inefficiency, and frequent need for repairs. Fields presented three quotes for a new three-ton unit, emphasizing the need for enhanced cooling capacity due to sensitive and expensive equipment in the plant. The quotes were from Arctic Temp for $10,426.25 (Frigidaire unit), Blaylock Heating and Air for $10,320 (York unit), and Ashley Air for $10,536.88 (Goodman unit), all including installation and relocation of the outdoor unit due to construction.
  - The council discussion focused on the units' capacities, warranties, and the contractors' previous work with the city. Arctic Temp was noted for offering a 10-year warranty, and the council expressed a preference for this option due to their positive past experiences and the extended warranty. Council Member Jimmy Moore motioned to approve the purchase from Arctic Temp, and Council Member Sheila Trent seconded. The motion passed unanimously with no further discussion.

- **Proposed Purchase of Mowers**
    - Public Works Director Dwayne Fields proposed the purchase of a new diesel mower for maintaining 55.2 acres of city property, including parks and a cemetery, due to aging equipment and high repair costs. Fields presented two bids, recommending a Kubota diesel mower for its efficiency and durability. Despite concerns from Council Member Stacy Muntz regarding fiscal responsibility and public perception, especially after recent water rate increases, the Mayor clarified the purchase would be funded from parks and recreation, not affecting water rates. The council discussed the current mower inventory and repair issues, emphasizing the need for reliable equipment to manage extensive mowing requirements efficiently. A motion to purchase the Kubota mower was made by Council Member Bobby Tweedy, seconded by Council Member Jimmy Moore, and passed with Muntz voting no and all other members in favor.

- **Proposed Purchase of John Deere Tractor with Side Arm Attachment**
    - During the meeting, the Mayor introduced the topic of easement clearing for sewer and water lines, highlighting the necessity of maintaining clear paths for potential maintenance. Public Works Director Dwayne Fields emphasized the challenges of managing vegetation on city properties and proposed purchasing a new tractor with a sidearm for more efficient clearing. Fields detailed the limitations of the current equipment, and the safety hazards it presents. Despite concerns about spending from Council Member Stacy Muntz, who questioned the necessity and cost-effectiveness of the purchase, the discussion concluded with the Public Works Director advocating for the tractor's acquisition to maintain city easements effectively. The motion to purchase the tractor was proposed by Council Member Bobby Tweedy, seconded by Council Member Jimmy Moore, and passed with majority approval, despite Muntz's opposition. The purchase aims to improve the city's ability to keep rights-of-way clear and reduce potential maintenance costs.

- **Proposed purchase of Ditch Witch with Vac Trailer**
    - Public Works Director Dwayne Fields proposed the purchase of a Ditch Witch with a vacuum trailer to enhance the efficiency of locating and repairing underground infrastructure. This equipment utilizes high-pressure water to create small holes, allowing for precise identification of leaks or pipes with minimal excavation, even through paved roads. It also offers utility for clearing manholes and is self-contained with a Kubota diesel engine. Despite concerns from Council Member Stacy Muntz regarding the lack of a detailed cost analysis, the proposal highlighted potential savings in manpower, materials, and road repairs. Two bids were received, with the Ditch Witch bid at $83,844. Financing options were discussed, with a preference for a 48-month plan to balance budgetary constraints. After discussion, Council Member Jimmy Moore motioned to purchase the equipment with the 48-

month financing plan, seconded by Council Member Wilma Peevy. The motion passed with majority approval, except for a dissenting vote from Muntz.

MAYOR'S REPORT AND PUBLIC COMMENT

➢ Mayor's Report

Mayor Gary D. Baxter provided updates on various city projects and initiatives during the council meeting. Key points included:

- Approval from Washington for grant-funded expenses for Industrial Park Drive, Paperwork is starting, and environmental reviews are being scheduled.
- Potential for applying for Highway Department grants for trails and sidewalks to enhance connectivity in the city, including a proposed extension of the walking trail from the Senior Center towards Jack Alexander's field.
- An update on the pollinator planter in the city park funded by a $5,000 grant from the conservation district, with plants to be added in spring and additional wildflower seeds for Bluff Hole and the Archery Range.
- A request sent to the street aid program seeking $300,000 to overlay Main Street, if approved, work would be unlikely to begin for two to three years.
- Coordination with Cass Job Corps for cleanup and construction work at the city lake, offering practical training for students and addressing city needs with minimal cost.
- Pre-application submissions to the Water Wastewater Advisory Committee for grants to modernize the city's water distribution and wastewater collection systems, with potential funding amounts outlined.
- Progress on school projects, ongoing liaison with the city attorney regarding property issues, and engagement with community projects like the citywide garage sale and brush cleanup initiative.
- Addressing residents' concerns about leash laws and maintenance of city roads and cemetery, with county assistance confirmed for routine road maintenance.
- Discussion on a mandatory five-day stay at the campground during the eclipse to ensure cleanup funds are available post-event.
- Steve Hurley, contributing additional information on marketing efforts for the citywide garage sale and upcoming community cleanup initiatives, highlighted the city's proactive approach to community engagement and environmental stewardship. The mayor emphasized the city's ongoing efforts to seek grant opportunities and improve infrastructure and community facilities, reflecting a broad commitment to city progress and resident well-being.

➢ Public Comment

- Donna Staton who resides at 805 Dyer came to the podium to speak. She discussed her candidacy for Justice of the Peace District 12.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss Wilma Peevy made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Sheila Trent seconded the motion. All present members voted yes.

This meeting was adjourned at 9:02 p.m. The next scheduled City Council meeting will be on April 16, 2024.

Minutes recorded by: Steve Hurley

APPROVED: Gary D. Baxter

Gary D. Baxter, Mayor

ATTEST: Carla Dickerson

Carla Dickerson, Recorder-Treasurer