CITY OF MULBERRY, ARKANSAS

CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – April 16, 2024

The regularly scheduled monthly session of the Mulberry City Council convened on Tuesday, April 16, 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	Kimberly Bruce, Ward 2 Position 2

MEMBERS ABSENT:

None

OTHERS PRESENT:

Steve Hurley, Executive Assistant to the Mayor	Dena House
Billy Mongold, Police Officer	Kay Baxter
Jason Sumpter, Assistant Fire Chief	Marie Crandell
Alex Walker, Public Works Department	Mandy Oestreich
Sadat Rice	Scott Oestreich
Alex Walker	Jason House
Ann Schmidt (did not sign visitors list)	Ronnie Adams
Derek Schmidt (did not sign visitors list)	Cathy Adams
Jacob Sturdivant (did not sign visitors list)	Gary Sturdivant

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 Jimmy Moore 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 Billy Mongold:

- In March, the department responded to 141 calls, conducted eighty-one traffic stops, issued seventeen citations, made six arrests (five misdemeanor and one felony), worked four traffic accidents, completed 457 business checks, and gave thirty-one clean up orders.
- Council Member Kimberly Bruce commended the police for their effective management of the traffic disruptions caused by the eclipse.

Fire Department Report – Assistant Fire Chief Jason Sumpter:

- In March, the Fire Department addressed twenty-five total calls: one vehicle fire, two grass fires, seventeen medical calls, four vehicle accidents, and four cancelled calls.
- Successfully held the third annual Mike Gray Chili Luncheon in March, raising approximately $3,000 with a net of $2,500 after expenses.
- Completed trade agreement with Arkansas Truck Center: exchanged the old engine for services on the new tanker. The new tanker is now equipped with decals, lettering, and a tank.
- Final installations on the new tanker include emergency lights, a siren, and a radio; the tanker is almost operational.
- Active planning for the Independence Day celebration scheduled for June 29th from 3 PM until dark, featuring a car show, vendors, water slides, and bounce houses for children.
- Preparations include distributing promotional flyers around town and ticket sales starting soon for the event.
- Car show details: $10 registration fee with trophies for top car, truck, motorcycle, rat rod, and choices by people and firefighters; ribbons for 2nd and 3rd places, event from 3 PM to 5 PM.
- Last year's car show saw significant town participation, with similar expectations for this year, including a variety of vendors and food options like hot dogs and hamburgers.
- Mayor Baxter emphasized the exemplary collaborative efforts of both the fire and police departments during Eclipse Day, noting that their coordinated response was instrumental in ensuring the event proceeded smoothly.

Public Works Department Report –Alex Walker:

- Conducted forty-two service calls and repaired seven leaks along with miscellaneous maintenance around town.
- Repaired two significant potholes on 9th Street.

    - Citywide cleanup resulted in filling three dumpsters and two trash trucks, along with clearing a large amount of scrap at the municipal shop.
    - Removed twenty loads of brush from town, planning to burn them in the upcoming weeks.
- **Discussion on Public Works Procedures:**
    - Bobby Tweedy inquired about public participation in brush burning events; clarified by Mayor Baxter that such collections are typically post-storm and not regularly scheduled.
    - Stacy Muntz requested follow-up information regarding costs for pipe and street repairs, not provided in the current report. Mayor Baxter instructed to obtain and email this information to Muntz.
- **Equipment Clarification and Misunderstanding:**
    - Stacy Muntz mentioned the possibility of a sidearm attachment for a Bobcat skid steer, believing it to function similarly to a tractor sidearm. The City was not aware of any such attachment for skid steers that were suitable for the tasks typically performed by a tractor with a sidearm.
- **Next Steps and Actions:**
    - Mayor Baxter and Public Works to provide clarity on equipment capabilities and costs in a follow-up meeting, encouraging direct communication with the involved parties.

MULBERRY PUBLIC LIBRARY REPORT – Branch Director Tammy Watts

- In March, the library recorded 1,759 visits.
- There were twenty-seven programs and attendance reached 174, and 227 participating in passive programs.
- Patrons checked out 984 books and checked in 828 books.
- The library recorded 1,201 visits.
- Program attendance reached 161, and 219 participating in passive programs.
- Computer usage was recorded for ninety-two people.
- 680 people utilized Wi-Fi usage.
- Various programs that took place in March at the library were then discussed.
- Council Member Stacy Muntz expressed her gratitude for the organization of the eclipse viewing event at the park, highlighting the enjoyment and appreciation felt by all attendees. She thanked those responsible for coordinating the successful gathering.
- Wilma Peevy thanked the library for providing eclipse glasses. Tammy Watts responded that the surplus glasses are being collected through the Crawford County Library system to be sent to Latin America, ensuring recipients can safely view the eclipse.
- Discussion of various programs that are upcoming to the library were then discussed.

ECLIPSE EVENT DISCUSSION

- Mayor Baxter noted the exceptional cleanliness of the city park following the eclipse event, with Public Works reporting minimal litter.
- Stacy Muntz and Jimmy Moore commended the respectful behavior of visitors from across the country, noting the park's cleanliness and the short duration of the eclipse as significant highlights.
- Mayor Baxter and other council members received positive feedback from the community and visitors about the event.
- An inquiry into whether city park bathrooms were being unlocked led to a discussion on operational oversight. Mayor Baxter acknowledged a recent oversight in bathroom accessibility due to schedule changes in Public Works and confirmed that measures had been taken to prevent future occurrences.

OLD BUSINESS

- **No Old Business**

NEW BUSINESS

- **RESOLUTION NO. 2024-05 A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE MAYOR TO NEGOTIATE AND ENTER INTO A CONTRACT FOR THE SALE OF A CITY-OWNED RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY LOCATED AT 136 W 4TH STREET AT MARKET VALUE.**
  - Mayor Baxter introduced new business including the appraisal and potential sale of two city-owned lots at 104 North Main Street and 136 West 4th Street.
  - Legal counsel recommended adopting resolutions for clarity and documentation: Resolution 2024-05 and 2024-06 for each property, respectively.
  - Resolution 2024-05 read by Steve Hurley, authorizing the Mayor to negotiate and finalize the sale of the property at 136 West 4th Street at market value.
  - Wilma Peevy motioned to approve Resolution 2024-05, seconded by Stacy Muntz.
  - The council discussed and voted on the resolution; Mayor Baxter updated that an appraisal valued the property at $10,000 with structures removed, with a potential buyer agreeing to purchase terms adjusted by the City Attorney.
  - Public Works is currently demolishing existing structures on the property, keeping costs under the budgeted $3,000.
  - Council members unanimously approved the resolution.

- **RESOLUTION NO. 2024-06 A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE MAYOR TO NEGOTIATE AND ENTER INTO A CONTRACT FOR THE SALE OF A CITY-OWNED RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY LOCATED AT 104 NORTH MAIN STREET AT MARKET VALUE**
    - Steve Hurley presented Resolution Number 2024-06, which authorizes the Mayor to negotiate and finalize the sale of the city-owned residential property at 104 North Main Street at market value. The resolution highlights that maintaining the property is not in the city's financial interest and that its sale is beneficial.
    - Jimmy Moore motioned to approve the resolution, and Kimberly Bruce seconded the motion.
    - There was no discussion following the motion, and all present council members voted in favor of the resolution.

- **Planning Commission Update**
    - Mayor Baxter discussed challenges in developing a land use plan for Mulberry, citing obstacles with finding suitable partners for the task. The Western Arkansas Planning and Development District indicated a delay in obtaining the necessary resources.
    - **Proposal for Land Use Mapping:**
        - Mayor Baxter introduced a proposal for detailed mapping of all city plots, including their location, ownership, zoning, and current use. These details will be organized into a spreadsheet and subsequently translated into a color-coded map. This initiative aims to facilitate town hall meetings for public input on city development.
        - Hiring of Dena House: The Planning and Zoning Commission recommends hiring Dena House, a candidate completing a degree in emergency management, to undertake the mapping project on a contractual basis. The council discussed employing her at an hourly rate with a budget of $10,000 allocated from the community economic development fund.
        - Motion and Approval: Kimberly Bruce motioned to hire Dena House for the project with a budget up to $10,000, seconded by Stacy Muntz. The council unanimously approved the motion.

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:

- **Van Sale Report:** Mayor Baxter reported the sale of a city-owned van purchased on May 13, 2020, for $6,775, has been sold for $7,000. The buyer has taken the van to Little Rock.
- **Senior Center Sign:** Mayor Baxter praised Mr. Moore for his efforts with the new senior center sign, noting positive feedback from the community.
- **Disc Golf Course Usage:** Steve Hurley shared usage data from the UDisc app for the city park's disc golf course, reporting twenty-one recorded rounds in March, with estimates suggesting around forty-two people used the course. Notably, the course attracted a visitor from over three hundred miles away and seven first-time players. The course's rating on UDisc is currently 3.9 out of five with efforts ongoing to improve this.
- **Pickleball Courts and Pollinator Gardens:** Reports of increased usage at the pickleball courts, with requests for additional lighting. Mayor Baxter also noted upcoming enhancements to the city park's pollinator gardens, including new plantings at Bluff Hole and Vine Prairie.
- **Rescheduling Council Meeting:** Mayor Baxter requested rescheduling the next council meeting to May 14th to attend the Arkansas Rural Development Conference, highlighting its importance for securing grant funds. Sheila Trent made a motion, seconded by Stacy Muntz, to move the meeting to May 14th. The council unanimously approved the motion.

➢ **City Council Member Comments and Updates:**

- **Laundromat Site Progress Inquiry:**
  - Stacy Muntz inquired about the development at the local laundromat site. Mayor Baxter reported recent activity but noted slow progress due to changes in investment ownership. He confirmed that the project is ongoing, with recent permits issued for structural modifications.
- **Pickleball Court Popularity:**
  - Muntz also reported a high demand for pickleball courts, with people waiting to play, indicating strong community interest.
- **Interest in Starting Pickleball Leagues and Court Reservations:**
  - Steve Hurley mentioned potential interest in starting pickleball leagues, with inquiries from residents about reserving courts for tournaments.
- **April 6th Trash Cleanup Results and Future Plans:**
  - Kimberly Bruce shared results from the April 6th trash cleanup, with fifteen volunteers collecting over thirty bags of trash. Plans for future cleanups involve greater community participation.
- **Local Dental Services Inquiry:**
  - Bruce asked about dental services in town, with Mayor Baxter confirming no current dental practices or prospects known.
- **Status Update on New Mexican Restaurant**
  - Bobby Tweedy questioned the status of a new Mexican restaurant, with Mayor Baxter noting difficulty in contacting the owner and potential delays due to other business dealings.
-

- **Update on Property Development Across from Court House:**
  - Property Development Update: Tweedy also inquired about development across from the courthouse, with Mayor Baxter confirming ongoing efforts to secure funding and plans to proceed with the project.

➢ **Public Comment**

- Presentation by Jacob Sturdivant: Addressing the council on behalf of Mulberry High School Theatre to announce their upcoming play, "Goldilocks on Trial."
- Event Details: The play is scheduled for Friday, April 19th, and Saturday, April 20th.
- Mayor Baxter's Endorsement: Highlighted the Mulberry Pleasant View Education Foundation's positive reception of the theatre group and encouraged community attendance to support the students.
- Appreciation Expressed: Sturdivant thanked the council for the opportunity to present and promote the event on behalf of Mrs. Mc Haffie.

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 8:00 p.m. The next scheduled City Council meeting will be on May 14, 2024.

Minutes recorded by: Steve Hurley

APPROVED: _____

Gary D. Baxter, Mayor

ATTEST: _____

Carla Dickerson, Recorder-Treasurer