CITY OF MULBERRY, ARKANSAS

CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – January 21, 2025

The regularly scheduled monthly session of the Mulberry City Council convened on Tuesday, January 21, 2025, 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:

Seth Fisher, Ward 1 Position 1

Ronnie Adams, Ward 1 Position 2

Bobby Tweedy, Ward 2 Position 1

Kimberly Bruce, Ward 2 Position 2

Damien Sadat Rice, Ward 3 Position 1

Jeff Marvin, Ward 3 Position 2

MEMBERS ABSENT:

None

OTHERS PRESENT:

Steve Hurley, Assistant to the Mayor

Cathy Adams

Shannon Gregory, Police Chief

Riley Walker

Jason Sumpter, Assistant Fire Chief

Kay Baxter

Alex Walker, Public Works Director

Tim Randolph

Darren Fields, Water Plant Superintendent

Isaiah Fields

Ben Brewer, Fire Chief

Beth Rice

Jeremy Shores, Hawkins Weir Engineers, Inc

Marie Crandell Brown

Charlotte Shores

Jake Pool

Tom Bugg

John Garner

Lori Layne

James Abley

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:

Steve Hurley, Executive Assistant to the Mayor, called the roll:

- Present: Ronnie Adams, Kimberly Bruce, Seth Fisher, Jeff Marvin, Sadat Rice, Bobby Tweedy
- Absent: None
- A quorum was declared.

Approval of Consent Agenda and Previous Meeting Minutes

The council reviewed the minutes from the December Regular meeting and the December Financial Statements.

- Motion to approve: Kimberly Bruce
- Second: Bobby Tweedy
- Vote: Unanimous approval

DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS

Police Department Report – Police Chief Shannon Gregory:

- **80 calls for service in December 2024**
- **102 traffic stops**
- **17 citations issued**
- **4 arrests (three misdemeanors, one felony)**
- **542 business/building checks conducted**
    - **15,122 total calls handled in 2024**

Chief Gregory stated that December was slightly slower than usual but overall, 2024 was a successful year with no major issues.

Fire Department Report – Fire Chief Ben Brewer:

- **Twelve calls for service** in December 2024, including:

    - **Eight emergency medical calls**
    - **One medical assist**
    - **One grass fire**
    - **One LP gas leak**
    - **One good intent call**

- Fundraiser planned for **March 16, 2025**
- Discussion about repairs needed for Pumper No. 2, which has a leak that requires further assessment.

- The 1942 antique fire truck was discussed, with plans to restore it for future use.

Fire Chief Brewer noted that the department has maintained strong response times and continues to provide essential services to the community.

Public Works Department Report – Public Works Director Alex Walker:

- **Fifteen service orders completed in December**
- **One sewer-related call**
- **Fifteen hours of hydrant flushing**
- **Ninety-nine visits to the recycling center**
- **Two water leaks repaired in December**
    - **Total of thirty-six water leaks repaired in 2024**

Public Works Director Walker confirmed that hydrant flushing is scheduled every six months, with additional flushing as needed for dirty water complaints. He also provided updates on ongoing water line replacements and pressure fluctuation issues due to manganese in the system.

A letter addressing seasonal water quality concerns will be included in the upcoming **water** bills to provide residents with an explanation of recent brown water complaints and steps being taken to resolve the issue.

OLD BUSINESS

- **None**
-

NEW BUSINESS

Resolution 2025-01: Establishing Rules of Proceedings for 2025 Council Meetings

A resolution confirming the City Council will meet on the third Tuesday of each month at 7:00 PM.

Motion to approve:

- **Motion:** Seth Fisher
- **Second:** Bobby Tweedy
- **Vote:** Unanimous approval

Laundromat Project Update (Lori Layne)

- Project was delayed due to unforeseen circumstances

- Construction expected to begin within three to six months
- Facility will initially house eight washers and eight dryers, with expansion potential

Appointment of Tim Randolph to the Planning Commission

Mayor Baxter appointed Tim Randolph to the Planning Commission.

Motion to approve:

- **Motion:** Jeff Marvin
- **Second:** Kimberly Bruce
- **Vote:** Unanimous approval

Randolph introduced himself, expressing his commitment to serving the community.

Resolution 2025-02: Updating Authorized Third Party for City Fund Withdrawals

A resolution removing Jimmy Moore and designating Kimberly Bruce as the authorized individual to withdraw city funds.

Motion to approve:

- **Motion:** Ronnie Adams
- **Second:** Seth Fisher
- **Vote:** Unanimous approval

Resolution 2025-03: Accepting Financial Assistance for Water Plant Fencing Project

A resolution approving funding from the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission for enhanced security fencing at the Mulberry Water Treatment Plant.

Motion to approve:

- **Motion:** Jeff Marvin
- **Second:** Kimberly Bruce
- **Vote:** Unanimous approval

Water Superintendent Darren Fields provided an overview of the fencing project, which includes:

- Upgraded chain-link security fencing with razor wire
- Electronic keypad access gate with remote monitoring
- Improved access road to prevent flooding issues

Resolution 2025-04: Accepting Financial Assistance for Wastewater Extension Project

A resolution approving funding from the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission for a wastewater extension from Marvin Elementary to the Workman's Travel Center development.

Motion to approve:

- **Motion:** Jeff Marvin
- **Second:** Kimberly Bruce
- **Vote:** Unanimous approval

Becky Hawkins (Workman's Travel Center) updated the council on the development, stating:

- **Estimated revenue**: Over $10 million annually (non-fuel)
- **Projected employment**: At least 60 full-time employees
- **Franchises included**: Wendy's & hot deli
- **Planned truck services**: Diesel repair, future truck wash

Jeremy Shores (Hawkins Weir Engineering) reported on the sewer extension:

- Approximately 3,400 feet of sewer line to be extended
- Easements required for private property connections
- Homeowners within three hundred feet will be required to connect under state law

Resolution 2025-05: Amending Resolution 2024-14 to Update Authorization Roles

A resolution amending Resolution 2024-14, which previously authorized the sale of unneeded city-owned property at 104 North Main Street to Milton Perez for economic development purposes. This amendment clarifies the authorization roles of the Mayor and Recorder/Treasurer to ensure proper execution of contracts and closing documents.

Motion to approve:

- **Motion:** Kimberly Bruce
- **Second:** Ronnie Adams
- **Vote:** Unanimous approval

Resolution 2025-06: Amending Resolution 2024-15 to Update Authorization Roles

A resolution amending Resolution 2024-15, which previously authorized the sale of unneeded city-owned property at 101 Reynolds Street to Milton Perez for economic development purposes. This amendment clarifies the authorization roles of the Mayor and Recorder/Treasurer to ensure proper execution of contracts and closing documents.

Motion to approve:

- **Motion:** Jeff Marvin
- **Second:** Seth Fisher
- **Vote:** Unanimous approval

Ordinance 2025-01: Transferring City Credit Card Services

An ordinance authorizing the City of Mulberry to transfer its credit card services from Elon Financial Services to Citizens Bank & Trust. This transition was recommended due to Citizens Bank & Trust's local branch access, which allows immediate processing of payments and improved financial management. The ordinance establishes credit card accounts with specified limits for city officials and employees and ensures continued oversight of expenses.

First Reading: Motion to suspend the rules and proceed with the second and third reading by title only.

- **Motion:** Kimberly Bruce
- **Second:** Jeff Marvin
- **Vote:** Unanimous approval

Third Reading and Final Passage:

- **Motion to approve:** Ronnie Adams
- **Second:** Seth Fisher
- **Vote:** Unanimous approval

Additionally, an emergency clause was introduced to ensure uninterrupted financial operations and prevent delays caused by the current provider.

Motion to approve the emergency clause:

- **Motion:** Jeff Marvin
- **Second:** Seth Fisher
- **Vote:** Unanimous approval

Approval of the Senior Center Contract

Mayor Baxter introduced the annual contract for the Senior Center, stating that this agreement is a requirement for disbursing city budgeted funds to the center. The contract remains unchanged from the previous year except for the date.

Motion to approve the contract:

- **Motion:** Jeff Marvin
- **Second:** Seth Fisher
- **Vote:** Unanimous approval

MAYOR'S REPORT

Mayor Baxter provided the following updates and announcements:

- **City Calendar Distribution**:
  - The 2025 city calendar was placed at each council member's station.
  - Copies of the calendar will be included in upcoming water bills to keep residents informed of city events and deadlines.
  - The Mayor encouraged council members to review the calendar and provide feedback before it is finalized for public distribution.
- **Infrastructure Projects & Grant Applications**:
  - The city has applied for $300,000 from the Street Aid Committee to overlay Main Street from the railroad tracks to the four-way stop.
  - Although denied funding for 2024, the city remains eligible for 2025 consideration without reapplying.
  - The Mayor emphasized continued focus on sewer, water, and street improvements.
- **New Business Developments**:
  - The new Dollar General across from Mulberry City Park is expected to begin construction in early 2025.
  - Temporary electrical service has been installed, but no confirmed construction start date has been provided.
  - Workman's Travel Center development continues to progress, and a Mexican restaurant has been proposed at the Industrial Park entrance. However, the property owner is waiting for funding before proceeding.
- **City-Owned Property Updates**:
  - The city is actively seeking a tenant for the former flower shop building.
  - A potential café owner had expressed interest but has provided conflicting information, leaving the project uncertain.
  - The Fourth Street property, owned by the city, has a potential buyer interested in building a single-family home. The city attorney is still processing the title work for finalization.
- **Condemnation Orders & Code Compliance**:
  - Some previously approved property condemnations have expired due to legal delays.
  - The Mayor stated that these cases may need to be revisited by the council for further action.
- **City Recognition & Awards**:
  - The City of Mulberry was recognized at the Arkansas Municipal League Winter Conference for its advancements in Technology and Security.

- Mulberry is one of only nine or ten cities in Arkansas that is fully cloud-based, providing enhanced security and data protection for city operations.
- The Mayor credited Steve Hurley for leading this effort and ensuring the security of city records and citizen information.
- Mayor Baxter recognized Steve Hurley's efforts in securing an Honorable Mention award for Tourism Development and Creative Culture at the Arkansas Municipal League Winter Conference.
- The Mulberry Disc Golf Course is the only course in Arkansas to feature permanently installed solar-powered lights, allowing for night play.
- Since the installation of solar lights in July 2023, course usage has significantly increased:
- Pre-lighting installation: The course averaged 8.74 rounds per month.
- Post-lighting installation: Monthly rounds surged to 68.17 per month.
- Mulberry's course is now one of only two nine-hole courses in the U.S. that offers permanent nighttime play and one of only nine courses nationwide to have such a feature.
- The Mayor noted that out-of-state players have been visiting the course due to its unique lighting system, further boosting local tourism.

- **Future City Projects**:
  - Plans are in place to expand sidewalks and trails within city limits.
  - Additional street and water system improvements will be prioritized after ongoing sewer projects are completed.
- **Council Announcements & Comments**:
  - The Mayor opened the floor for council members to make announcements or final comments.
  - Council Member Sadat Rice inquired about the remaining funds from the spay/neuter grant. The Mayor advised that questions regarding specific city programs should be directed to the office.
  - Rice also asked about the lease amount for the flower shop building. The Mayor stated that the council had authorized negotiations, and any significant changes in rental terms would be brought back for discussion.
- **Public Comment Period:**
  - No residents had signed up to speak at the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss Ronnie Adams made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Bobby Tweedy seconded the motion. All present members voted yes.

This meeting was adjourned at 8:40 p.m. The next scheduled City Council meeting will be on February 18, 2025.

Minutes written by: Steve Hurley

APPROVED: _____
Gary D. Baxter, Mayor

ATTEST: _____

Carla Dickerson, Recorder-Treasurer