CITY OF MULBERRY, ARKANSAS
CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – March 17, 2026

The scheduled meeting of the Mulberry City Council convened at 7:00 p.m. at the City Council Center, 606 Church Avenue, Mulberry.

Gary D. Baxter, Mayor
Carla Dickerson, Recorder/Treasurer

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Ronnie Adams, Ward 1 Position 2
Seth Fisher, Ward 1 Position 1
Damien Sadat Rice, Ward 3 Position 1
Jake Copeland, Ward 2 Position 1
Kimberly Bruce, Ward 2 Position 2

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Jeff Marvin, Ward 3 Position 2

OTHERS PRESENT:

Steve Hurley, Executive Assistant to the Mayor
Carla Dickerson, Recorder/Treasurer
Shannon Gregory, Police Chief
Alex Walker, Public Works Director
Tammy Watts, Branch Director of the Ralph D. Graf Library of Mulberry
Jason Sumpter, Fire Chief
Melissa Sampson, City Finance Director
Jeremy Shores, Hawkins Weir Engineering
Riley Walker
Darlene Smith
Cathy Adams
Michael Harp
Mandy Oestreich
Bryan Curtis
Mandy Oestreich
Linda Jarvis
Marie Crandell-Brown
Zachary Miller
Larry Hart
Debbie Peters
Scott Oestreich
Kent Colburn
Channon Phipps
Adam Tolleson
Laci Tolleson

Call to Order

Mayor Baxter called the Mulberry City Council to order at 7:00 p.m. A prayer was offered, and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Roll Call

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

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Seth Fisher, Ward 1 Position 1
Jake Copeland, Ward 2 Position 1
Damien Sadat Rice, Ward 3 Position 1
Ronnie Adams, Ward 1 Position 2
Kimberly Bruce, Ward 2 Position 2

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Jeff Marvin, Ward 3 Position 2

With 5 out of 6 Council Members present, a quorum was established.

Consent Agenda

Approval of the February regular minutes, February special minutes, and February financial statements.

Motion: Kimberly Bruce
Second: Ronnie Adams
Vote: Approved unanimously (Seth Fisher, Jake Copeland, Sadat Rice, Kimberly Bruce, Ronnie Adams all voted yes)

Departmental Reports

Police Department – Police Chief Shannon Gregory

- 128 calls for service in February 2026
- Sixty-three traffic stops
- Fourteen citations issued
- Eleven arrests: Four misdemeanors and seven felonies
- Three accidents
- 453 business/building checks conducted
- Chief Gregory noted that calls and activity are increasing with the arrival of spring

Fire Department – Fire Chief Jason Sumpter

- Twenty-Seven total calls for the month: Eighteen medical calls, Nine fires (two vehicle fires, five grass fires, one structure fire, one outside fire)
- All fire trucks are operational
- Chili dinner and pie auction fundraiser was a success, raising a total of $3,375; approximately 30 pies and one firearm (donated by Representative Chad Perry) were auctioned
- Easter egg hunt is scheduled for Saturday, March 21, beginning around noon to 12:30 p.m. at the fairgrounds; over 2,000 eggs prepared and will be divided into age groups; event coordinated with craft show vendors by Jerry Ladd
- Fundraiser proceeds are designated primarily toward the city's annual fireworks event; plans also include a bounce house, water slide, car shows, pie auction, and vendors for the summer event

Fire Department Credit Card – Action Item

City Finance staff requested council approval to issue a new city credit card in Fire Chief Jason Sumpter's name, as the previous card was in the former chief's name and has been surrendered. Bank policy requires council authorization.

Motion: Jake Copeland
Second: Kimberly Bruce

Vote: Approved unanimously (Seth Fisher, Jake Copeland, Sadat Rice, Kimberly Bruce, Ronnie Adams all voted yes)

Public Works – Director Alex Walker

- Eighteen service calls completed in February
- Forty-Six meters read; Thirty-Six meter change-outs
- Seven water shut offs conducted
- Eighty-Five individuals utilized the recycling center
- One water leak addressed in February
- Director Walker noted that many additional service calls are handled directly in the field without formal documentation and that the reported totals underrepresent actual workload
- Council raised questions about blow-off valves on the main lake line; Director Walker to investigate and confirm locations
- Possible water leak reported near Today's Bank at 5th Street drive-through; Director Walker to investigate
- Possible drainage or leak issue in ditch across from Vine Prairie Church; Director Walker to run chlorine test and coordinate with state if needed

Library – Library Director Tammy Watts

- 2,042 visits in February
- Twenty programs held with 311 in attendance
- 230 attendees in passive programs
- 743 books checked out; 662 checked in
- Sixty computer uses; 469 Wi-Fi sessions
- February programs included: Library Thrills (walking tacos on February 2; pizza on February 23), book club reading Fanny Crosby, and other interactive youth programming
- Staff member Mariah returned from maternity leave on February 17
- Upcoming events include two author visits and a garage sale in March
- Director Watts expressed gratitude to council for continued support

Boys & Girls Club – Zach Miller

- Averaged approximately fifteen kids per day in February; increasing to approximately twenty-two per day as of March
- 350 meals served; 111 snacks served
- Continuing focus on recognizing students who are doing well through the "Student of the Month" program
- Ongoing efforts to secure donations and community support

Cemetery Committee – Ronnie Adams

- Benches have been installed in the pavilion
- Councilmember Adams is working on memorial name plates; sourcing aluminum plates to prevent rust
- Pricing obtained on railing for the facility
- Council and public encouraged to visit and view progress

Old Business

Resolution 2026-06: TAP Grant – Sidewalk Project (Church & Third Streets)

Council revisited Resolution 2026-06, which had been tabled at the previous meeting. The resolution concerned applying for a Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) grant for construction of new sidewalks along Church and Third Streets.

- Engineer Jeremy Shores of Hawkins Weir Engineering clarified that the project is an 80/20 matching grant. The total estimated project cost is approximately $400,000+, with 80% funded by the state and 20% ($89,350) from the city; proposed funding source was the Capital Improvement/Sales Tax Fund
- The project is not locked to either the east or west side of Church Street; the exhibit was prepared to estimate quantities and costs
- Several council members expressed concern about allocating $89,350 toward new sidewalks given the current condition of city streets, including Ninth Street (between Alma and Church), Main Street, and others
- Mayor Baxter noted that a $300,000 Street Aid grant for Main Street overlay (from the four-way stop south to the railroad tracks) is expected to be approved in December 2026 with construction in spring 2027
- Council discussed the condition of Ninth Street between Alma and Church (chip-and-seal surface); Director Walker noted the road needs to be milled out; council directed staff to obtain bids for overlay of that section, provided no water/sewer work is pending in that corridor
- After discussion, no motion was made; the resolution was allowed to die without further action. Council declined to pursue the TAP sidewalk grant at this time

New Business

Resolution 2026-08: Authorization to Obtain Financing for Truck Stop Sewer Expansion Project

Steve Hurley read Resolution 2026-08, authorizing the City of Mulberry to obtain financing not exceeding $1,000,000 for the purposes of completing the truck stop sewer expansion project (from Marvin Elementary School to the Workman's Travel Center project).

- Engineer Jeremy Shores explained that the original funding source, the Natural Resources Division (NRD), cannot meet the timeline required by Workman's Travel Center for their planned opening due to the lengthy regulatory and environmental documentation process
- City Finance staff (Melissa Sampson) presented three financing options to the council comparing NRD funding, Citizens Bank (placement bond loan, 45–60 days to close), and Today's Bank (lowest rate, closes within two weeks)
- Today's Bank option (Option 3) was identified as the most favorable: monthly payment of approximately $15,188 over five years, with total interest savings of approximately $338,000 compared to other options
- Projected additional sewer sales tax revenue from Workman's Travel Center estimated at $3,000–$4,000 per month, in addition to existing $11,000–$12,000 monthly collections

- Plans and specifications for the project are complete; upon approval, bids can be solicited within two weeks with a target substantial completion date of end of June 2026 to meet Workman's July opening timeline
- City ordinance requires residences within 300 feet of a new main sewer line to connect; council noted this would generate additional revenue
- These payments will be made from the Sewer Sales Tax Fund

Motion: Kimberly Bruce
Second: Ronnie Adams
Vote: Adopted unanimously (Seth Fisher, Jake Copeland, Sadat Rice, Kimberly Bruce, Ronnie Adams all voted yes)

Other Communications

Friends of Mulberry – Larry Hart

Larry Hart presented on behalf of Friends of Mulberry, requesting council authorization for the organization to use available city facilities for fundraisers and special events throughout the year.

- 2026 marks Mulberry's 150th year as a recognized settlement (first commercial building established in 1876) and America's 250th anniversary; events will celebrate both milestones
- The Edamame Festival has been renamed "Mulberry Days"; festival planned for April 24–26
- Festival events include pageant (teen/Miss and youth divisions) with a Mulberry Queen and Crawford County Queen; parade featuring old tractors, equipment, and cars; car and tractor show at the fairgrounds; kids' zone (free for children up to age 14); vendors and food trucks
- Friends of Mulberry is partnering with Sue Holcomb and the Crawford County Fair, and Vicki Bear (new board member/treasurer) who previously managed fair vendors
- A portion of proceeds will fund repairs to the pageant building at the fairgrounds, which has a damaged roof
- A "Legacy Night" community awards ceremony is planned prior to July 4th to recognize residents who have contributed to the community
- Council requested that a single designated key holder from Friends of Mulberry be responsible for facility access

Motion: Seth Fisher
Second: Ronnie Adams
Vote: Approved unanimously (Seth Fisher, Jake Copeland, Sadat Rice, Kimberly Bruce, Ronnie Adams all voted yes)

Surplus Equipment – Sadat Rice

- Councilmember Rice raised the matter of selling surplus/outdated city equipment including the old sewer machine, old tractor (with failing clutch and outdated parts), lawn mowers, and scrap metal
- Mayor Baxter noted that procedures for surplus property disposal are already covered under existing city ordinance and fall under the mayor's authority; staff will handle accordingly

- Director Walker and department heads to review their areas for additional items to be cleared

East Tank Inspection Update

- Mayor Baxter reported that, according to prior council authorization, a contract has been executed with Oklahoma Tank and Tower Company to inspect and clean the East water tank
- A commercial diver will inspect the tank interior/exterior, remove debris, and seal any failing gaskets
- Cost: $3,750 for the dive inspection plus $1,700 for a detailed condition report; additional charges of $200 per inch apply for debris exceeding three inches
- The City Attorney has reviewed and approved the contract; recovery of associated costs is expected to be pursued through ongoing litigation

Generator Load Testing – Ronnie Adams

- Councilmember Adams recommended that the emergency generators at the water treatment plant undergo formal load testing (testing at approximately 90% capacity) to ensure they can handle the full electrical load, particularly given the new water treatment plant expansion
- Engineer Jeremy Shores of Hawkins Weir Engineering concurred and indicated load testing of the generators could be arranged; will follow up

Council Comments and Community Announcements

- Cars & Coffee at First Assembly Church (now "Chili Dogs and Cars"): 31 cars attended the February event; $500 raised above expenses, donated to church youth. Next event is March 28, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., featuring a non-perishable food drive for the senior center. – Sadat Rice
- Citywide Cleanup: Saturday, April 11, from 8:00 a.m. to noon. Dumpsters will be located at the fairgrounds for Mulberry residents (proof of address required). Lions Club will sponsor a pancake and sausage breakfast at 8:30 a.m. in the community building. City encourages residents to take recyclable materials (cardboard, plastic, paper, cans, scrap metal) directly to the recycling center. Tires are not accepted at the dumpster site and must go to Van Buren. Volunteers are encouraged; council members challenged themselves to participate. – Kimberly Bruce
- Citywide Garage Sale: March 27 and 28. – Steve Hurley / Kimberly Bruce

Citizens Signed Up To Speak

One citizen (Ken Cockrum) was signed up to speak and had previously addressed the council during the meeting.

Adjournment

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned.

Motion: Jake Copeland
Second: Kimberly Bruce
Vote: Unanimous (all present voted aye)

The meeting was adjourned at 8:07 p.m. The next regularly scheduled City Council meeting will be on April 21, 2026.

Gary D. Baxter, Mayor

Carla Dickerson, Recorder/Treasurer