

City Council Meeting Minutes

City of Sylvester
City Council Regular Meeting
City Hall Council Chambers
Monday, July 15, 2024
Call to Order 6:00 p.m.

Attendees: Mayor Harold Proctor, Jr.
Councilman Melvin Powell, Ward 1
Councilman Isaac Jackson, Jr., Ward 2
Mayor Pro-Tem Mark Giddens, Ward 3
Councilman Earnest Carter, Jr., Ward 4
Interim City Manager Tanita Norris
City Attorney Lester Castellow
City Clerk Markesha Bivens

Call to Order: Mayor Harold Proctor, Jr.

Invocation/Pledge: Dr. Willie Mae Marlin

Agenda Amendment/Approval

With Mayor Proctor’s request to amend, removing Item F, under New Business and adding the new City Manager’s Contract, Councilman Jackson motioned to approve the agenda, seconded by Councilman Giddens. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Carter, Giddens, Jackson and Powell. The vote passed 5-0.

Approval of Minutes

Upon motion by Councilman Giddens, seconded by Councilman Jackson, minutes from the June 3, 2024 and June 17, 2024 – Regular Meetings and June 26, 2024 – Special Called Meeting gained approval. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Carter, Giddens, Jackson and Powell. The vote passed 5-0.

Speakers Appearance

A. Mr. Fredrick Mohammad, Sylvester Resident

Mr. Fredrick Mohammad spoke before Mayor and Council to inform of the YES Program at the Mary Alice Shipp Center, under the direction of Mrs. Fidila Griffin. Mr. Mohammad has witnessed the success of this program and requested the City’s consideration of aiding the community and youth advancement by collaborating with Mrs. Griffin.

B. Mrs. Fidila Griffin, Sylvester Resident, YES Program

Mrs. Fidila Griffin approached Mayor and Council with request of assistance and housing for the YES Program. Current events show the youth need guidance and the creation of the program by great community leaders; Barbara Debose, Mary Alice Shipp, Daisy Gamble, was to provide not just an afterschool program, but a whole development and entrepreneurship program. A foundation for right decisions, with mention of ethics, manners, respect and removing bad habits, the 12 and up group would center on earning an income, with an online and retail focus.

With mention of the Opal Project's departure from the Mary Alice Shipp Center, several organizations requesting spaces for community enrichment and Councilman Powell reporting first hand, of the program's success with his son participating, it was determined that this topic will need to be reviewed and revisited on a future agenda.

Old Business

A. Ayers Street Renaming "Simon Buddy Anderson Way" (between West Railroad and West Streets)

Councilman Powell inquired about the completion of the street renaming in honor of Mr. Simon Buddy Anderson. Mayor Proctor advised the attendance of Mrs. Patricia Nelson is required to have the occasion to rename to street for her father. Councilman Powell will contact Mrs. Nelson and move forward with scheduling the street dedication accordingly.

B. Short & Paulk Request for Closure of Portion of Cherry Lane

Attorney Castellow advised Mayor and Council of the status of closing a portion of Cherry Lane by Short & Paulk in August and September of 2022. One requirement, to place a notice in the Sylvester Local, informing of this request to close the street, where the pavement ends. With proof of advertising provided, Attorney Castellow stated it is appropriate to abandon this portion of Cherry Lane, no longer used by the City of Sylvester.

Upon motion by Councilman Jackson, seconded by Councilman Giddens, closing the portion of Cherry Lane near Short & Paulk was approved. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Carter, Giddens, Jackson and Powell. The vote passed 5-0.

New Business

A. Event Application: Back to School Dance

Ms. Kelly Grantham, Community Development Specialist, offered details for the Back to School Dance requested to be held at the H. H. Woolard Center. This event is open to the public and will be held August 9, 2024. There will be an admission fee of \$3 per person, with an estimated attendance of 50 people, for children between the ages of 6 – 8 years old. No food will be sold at the event.

Upon motion by Councilman Jackson, with second by Councilman Giddens, the event request application for the Back to School Dance gained approval. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Giddens, Jackson and Powell. Voting no was Councilman Carter. The vote passed 4-1.

B. Department Report: Main Street

i. Event Application/Road Closures: Debra Snipes & BBQ Cook Off & Festival

Mrs. Karen Singletary, Main Street Director, reminded the Mayor and Council of the Debra Snipes and the Angels Gospel Concert Friday, June 19 and invited everyone out to the Swine Festival, starting August 23, with The Tams Concert and BBQ Cook-Off August 24. The request to close Front Street at City Hall to Alchemy Games will apply for both events. This will ensure the various vendors and food trucks have ample space. Parking near the Train Depot will close Friday morning, but the time on Friday afternoon is to be determined, due to the lunch hour for restaurants.

Upon motion by Councilman Giddens, seconded by Councilman Jackson, the event applications and road closure requests for the Debra Snipes and the Angels and Swine Fest Events gained approval. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Carter, Giddens, Jackson and Powell. The vote passed 5-0.

ii. Fireworks 2024 Report

Mrs. Singletary summarized the success of the 2024 fireworks. A request for security behind the stage at the Woolard Center was discussed, where the majority of bands, past and present, reported frustration with the public accessing of the area, where belongings are kept.

Mrs. Singletary also highlighted a few items for future fireworks events: the portable restrooms available, so the public has no reason to enter the Woolard Center. As for parking, a huge thanks was extended to the Council, City Staff and American Legion members who transported citizens from parking to the stage. Maybe next year, more carts for Public Works and Utilities Departments to help could be rented. The Sylvester Police Department and SGSR could collaborate with traffic control, like for the Peanut Festival, depending on budget.

Mention of what time Carter Road should be closed came about, where some citizens were unable to access the alley to their homes. Mrs. Singletary informed that she only requested the gate to the field area to be closed, so this will be watched closely in the future. Overall, everyone enjoyed and provided positive feedback, even travelers from Alabama and Florida joined us and had a great time.

C. Event Application & Road Closures: 60th Annual Georgia Peanut Festival

Mrs. Karen Rackley of the Sylvester-Worth County Chamber thanked the Mayor and Council for the City's annual assistance at the Peanut Festival. The event application and road closure requests are for the standard parade route and are needed for processing. This year is expected to be a big event for the 60th Jubilee and the Chair of the Committee was also present and expressed excitement for the partnership. The size of the event and relocation was also mentioned.

Upon motion from Councilman Jackson and second by Councilman Carter, the event application and road closure applications for the 60th Annual Georgia Peanut Festival was approved. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Carter, Giddens, Jackson and Powell. The vote passed 5-0.

D. Worth County Tax Commissioner Contract

Ms. Tanita Norris informed the Mayor and Council of the standard contract from the Worth County Board of Commissioners, also reviewed by Attorney Castellow. This carves out the tax collection services by the newly elected Tax Commissioner Mrs. LaKeysia McGill, with an annual fee of \$16,000.

Upon motion by Councilman Carter, and second by Councilman Giddens, the execution of the Worth County Tax Commissioner Contract gained approval. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Carter, Giddens, Jackson and Powell. The vote passed 5-0.

E. Birdsong Expansion Rates

Ms. Norris summarized, to Mayor and Council, the plan for Birdsong Peanuts to expand and highlighted staying competitive, base rate, collection, and 10% margin above market price. In order to ensure the City is taking steps for the best rates, city council must approve this agenda item.

Upon motion by Councilman Giddens, and second by Councilman Jackson, the Expansion Rates for Birdsong gained approval. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Carter, Giddens, Jackson and Powell. The vote passed 5-0.

F. New City Manager Contract

Mayor Proctor recapped the search for a new City Manager. Advising the extensive search, how the City council conducted interviews, discussed contract details and with review from Mr. Castellow, a contract for the next City Manager was offered to Mr. Christopher Davis. Mayor Proctor informed the panel that the next step in the process is a vote.

Prior to this vote, Councilmen Carter and Powell requested to review the contract and Attorney Castellow suggested discussion in Executive Session. The vote will officially close out the City Manager search. This agenda item was tabled until after Executive Session.

Reports/Remarks

Interim City Manager Tanita Norris – Ms. Norris informed that Ms. Karen Slayton-Dixon, Chief Financial Officer, is working on amendment of the Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Budget. This will aid in the transition to the FY 2024-2025, recently approved, where City Departments currently are over budget and SlyTel as a line item and amendments were also discussed. As for the next fiscal year, Department Heads will need to be mindful of spending and manage different.

Attorney Lester Castellow - Attorney Castellow had no report.

Councilman Earnest Carter Jr., Ward 4 – Councilman Carter checked on the status of the benches for Shipp Park. Per Mr. Greg Jackson, Public Works Director, the company advised that they are on the way. Councilman Carter also requested review of the March 6, 2023 Consent Agenda and Minutes, as it relates to the March 20, 2024 Consent Agenda and approved Minutes; where three (3) items which were never discussed appeared and minutes reflect that he motioned to approve this agenda. He listed all items on both and requested the Interim City Manager and City Attorney investigate the tampering of minutes and noted the sketchy invoice dates of the City Manager consulting from 2018, 2019 and 2022, while he was the City Manager.

Councilman J. Mark Giddens, Ward 3 – Councilman Giddens asked on the completion of the signs/boards at the park, listing rules and expectations. Mr. Richie Childers, Assistant City Manager confirmed once they are completed, he will present to the Mayor and Council, and make changes accordingly.

Councilman Melvin Powell, Ward 1 – Councilman Powell had no report.

Councilman Isaac Jackson, Jr., Ward 2 – Councilman Jackson had no report.

Mayor Harold Proctor, Jr. – Mayor Proctor mentioned a citizen inquiring on the tables and benches at the Holly location. Mr. Greg Jackson confirmed these are the same benches to be placed at Shipp Park.

Executive Session

Councilman Carter moved to convene an Executive Session to discuss personnel, seconded, Councilman Giddens. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Carter, Giddens, Jackson and Powell. The vote passed 5-0.

Executive Session: 6:57 p.m.

Regular Session Reconvened: 7:19 p.m.

Councilman Powell motioned to reconvene and accept the minutes, as read in Executive Session, seconded by Councilman Carter. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Carter, Giddens, Jackson and Powell. The vote passed 5-0.

Upon return from Executive Session, Councilman Giddens motioned to approve the one-year contract for Mr. Chris Davis, City Manager, with a second by Councilman Jackson. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Carter, Giddens, Jackson and Powell. The vote passed 5-0.

Announcements

Mrs. Glenice Stephens, Community Development Director, reminded the Mayor and Council of the information provided by the Mayor at the June Council Meeting. The City applied for a Workforce Housing Initiative Grant and has been awarded over 1.3 million dollars for infrastructure improvements toward assisting the development of Phase II of Quail Pines.

Documentation was sent for Mayor Proctor to sign; it was suggested to announce for the execution of these documents from the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) in order to bring this project to fruition.

Upon motion by Councilman Carter, with second from Councilmen Jackson and Powell in unison, the execution of documents from DCA for infrastructure improvements at Quail Pines Subdivision.

Adjournment

With all agenda items covered, Councilman Carter motioned to adjourn, with a second by Councilman Giddens. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Carter, Powell, Giddens and Jackson. The vote passed 5-0.

Mayor Proctor duly adjourned the meeting at 7:22 p.m.

CITY COUNCIL
SYLVESTER, GEORGIA

HAROLD PROCTOR, JR., MAYOR

ATTEST:

MARKESHA BIVENS, CITY CLERK