

City Council Meeting Minutes

City of Sylvester
City Council Regular Meeting
City Hall Council Chambers
Tuesday, January 28, 2025
Call to Order 6:02 p.m.

Attendees: Mayor Harold Proctor, Jr.
Councilman Melvin Powell, Ward 1
Councilman Isaac Jackson, Jr., Ward 2
Councilman Mark Giddens, Ward 3 (via phone)
Mayor Pro-Tem Councilman Earnest Carter, Jr., Ward 4
City Manager Chris Davis
Assistant City Manager Richie Childers
Assistant City Manager Tanita Norris
City Clerk Markesha Bivens

Absent: City Attorney Lester Castellow

Call to Order: Mayor Harold Proctor, Jr.

Invocation/Pledge: Dr. Willie Mae Marlin

Agenda Amendment/Approval

Upon motion by Councilman Jackson, seconded by Councilman Carter, the Council Meeting Agenda gained approval. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Carter, Giddens, Jackson and Powell. The vote passed 5-0.

Minutes Approval

Upon motion by Councilman Jackson, seconded by Councilman Carter, the December 2, 2024 – Regular Meeting Minutes gained approval. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Carter, Giddens, Jackson and Powell. The vote passed 5-0.

Speakers Appearance

Ms. Beverly Smith extended gratitude to the Sylvester Police Department for locating her property. She mentioned the social media post, displaying a rude police officer with obscene hand gestures, and asked for further review of her complaint; her family had previous interaction with law enforcement, including litigation, and requested body camera footage be reviewed. She inquired about reprimands for bad-mannered officers, promoted better pay for the dedicated, and feels employees with poor values should work in different areas.

Public Hearing

A. House Bill 581

The Public Hearing was called to order, unanimously, at 6:09 p.m. Mr. Chris Davis, City Manager, informed that this is the third (3) and final public hearing for House Bill 581 (HB581). Prior to this meeting, a joint workshop with the Worth County Board of Commission, Board of Education and the municipalities, Poulan, Sumner, and Warwick was held to determine next steps.

This new floating homestead exemption is in addition to and not in the place of and not replacing any existing homestead exemptions. Staff recommends the City of Sylvester opt out of the homestead exemption, as the other Worth County entities unanimously agreed, with the ability to opt in, in the future.

Georgia law requires three (3) public hearings to inform the public and answer questions accordingly. Following a similar schedule to the mileage rate increase, the three (3) public hearings for the City of Sylvester took place; the first on January 21, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. and due to inclement weather, the January 27 meetings were rescheduled with two (2) on January 28, 2025, at 10 a.m. and this meeting at 6:00 p.m.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Remarks

There were no remarks.

B. Amend Chapter 10 (Alcoholic Beverages) Sections 10-1, 10-4 and 10-25

Mrs. Glenice Stephens, Community Development Director, provided the purpose of this public hearing, to be uniform and consistent with the Georgia Department of Revenue, Rule 560-2-2.12 related to measurement of distance and the Official Code of Georgia proximity of sales requirements for Housing Authority Properties.

Documentation was provided to the panel prior to this public hearing. All advertisement and public notice requirements were satisfied and the Planning Commission recommends approval of the proposed changes.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Remarks

Councilman Powell inquired about who and how the city's ordinances are updated for the state and in the city charter.

Mr. Davis advised the Community Development Department keeps a book, and Municode updates online and at the state level, with changes and updates submitted by the City Manager or the City Clerk.

Mayor Proctor confirmed this amendment will mirror the state requirements entirely.

Councilman Jackson discussed the ballpark, included with change and Mrs. Stephens confirmed this was with the ordinance update in past years (2021 or 2022).

Councilman Carter convened to include all updates in the package store applications to ensure all information is given to the applicants and how some applicants would not have been interviewed, had the update been included. He also agreed the city's ordinance should mirror the states.

With no additional comments from the public, upon a motion from Councilman Jackson, and seconded by Councilman Carter, the public hearings adjourned. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Carter, Giddens, Jackson and Powell. The vote passed 5-0.

The Public Hearings adjourned at 6:21 p.m.

Upon motion by Councilman Jackson, with a second by Councilman Powell, the Mayor and Council resolved to opt out of House Bill 581: Homestead Exemption. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Carter, Giddens, Jackson and Powell. The vote passed 5-0.

With clarifying the waiving of the 2nd reading of Ordinance 2021-01: Amend Chapter 10 (Alcoholic Beverages) Sections 10-1, 10-4 and 10-125, the Mayor and Council approved the amendment. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Carter, Giddens, Jackson and Powell. The vote passed 5-0.

New Business

A. Beer, Wine and Alcohol License

i. Application: El Metate

ii. Renewals: Sylvester Food Mart, El Supremo Grill and Uncle Bills Pizza

Mrs. Tenneisha Cushion, Deputy City Clerk, informed the Mayor and Council of the new application for El Metate, due to a change in ownership, by poll and ratification. The renewals listed: Sylvester Food Mart, El Supremo Grill and Uncle Bills Pizza for 2025 were provided as well, with staff seeking approval for these businesses, for the record.

Upon a motion by Councilman Jackson, with second by Councilman Carter, the Beer, Wine and Alcohol License Application for El Metate and Renewals for Sylvester Food Mart, El Supremo Grill and Uncle Bills Pizzeria gained approval. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Carter, Giddens, Jackson and Powell. The vote passed 5-0.

B. Southwest Georgia Regional Commission Council Appointment

Ms. Bivens relayed details of the responsibility of each city in the Southwest Georgia Region to appoint a municipal elected, non-public or additional member to the Council of the Southwest Georgia Regional Commission (SWGRC). Mr. Melvin Harris, Sylvester Resident, is eligible for reappointment for 2025, and has committed to the council. A letter is necessary to reappoint Mr. Harris and staff recommends approval to allow Mayor Proctor to sign said letter and submit to the SWGRC.

Upon a motion by Councilman Powell, with a second by Councilman Carter, re-appointment of Mr. Melvin Harris to the SWGRC Council gained approval. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Carter, Giddens, Jackson and Powell. The vote passed 5-0.

C. Aerial Fire Truck Purchase

Mr. Davis informed the panel of the fire truck that he, Mr. Richie Childers, Fire Chief Jack Colby and Mr. Casey Chapman inspected in Pooler, Georgia. In the past, research reflected two (2) or three (3) million dollars required, with a wait list to address the current and future city need for a fire truck. Within six (6) months, this group located a fire truck in good shape, less than 1/3 of the cost, with additional equipment suitable for five (5) story buildings, apartment complexes; reaching the top of each building, maintaining the ISO rating for the city and ensuring children's safety at Worth County Schools.

Upon the Georgia Municipal Association granting the city a low interest loan, providing a rate less than the local banks, staff is seeking approval to move forward with the aerial fire truck purchase. Annually, this item has been included in the fire department's budget and will aid with future expansion in the community north of Highway 82 and improve response time.

Upon a motion by Councilman Jackson, with a second by Councilmen Carter and Powell, together, the request to proceed with the aerial fire truck purchase gained approval. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Carter, Giddens, Jackson and Powell. The vote passed 5-0.

Reports/Remarks

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

Councilman Isaac Jackson, Jr., Ward 2 – Councilman Jackson provided a recap of the past week's training. He shared that issues are in every city and overall enjoyed the training. He gave kudos to the group that accepted the Archway Program Award and mentioned his recognition.

Councilman J. Mark Giddens, Ward 3 – Councilman Giddens had no report.

Councilman Earnest Carter Jr., Ward 4 – Councilman Carter noted that this would be the last year the school system uses Pope Park, with the school system building the new baseball field. A review and/or revitalization plan is needed, in the near future.

Mayor Harold Proctor, Jr. – Mayor Proctor agreed Pope Park needs to be addressed to keep vagrants off the property and it should be maintained. He also mentioned the Comfort Station that opened at the Train Depot for the freezing temperature nights. There were one or two individuals who were present. Getting the word out is necessary and ensuring if people do not officially have anywhere to go, beside family, friends, etc., they can utilize the Train Depot.

City Attorney Lester Castellow – Attorney Castellow was not present.

City Manager Chris Davis – Mr. Davis thanked the staff for their hard work on the Archway Program and gaining recognition at the state level. Kudos for the achievements in making the community a better place. With having the meeting last week, January 28, due to inclement weather. He proposed to cancel the Monday February 3, 2025 Council Meeting, due to no pressing issues.

Upon motion by Councilman Powell, with second by Councilman Powell, the February 3, 2025 council meeting will be cancelled. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Carter, Giddens, Jackson and Powell. The vote passed 5-0.

Executive Session

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

Executive Session: 6:53 p.m.

Regular Session Reconvened: 7:29 p.m.

Announcements

There were no announcements.

Adjournment

With all agenda items covered, Councilman Jackson motioned to adjourn, with a second by Councilman Carter. Voting yes were Mayor Proctor, Councilmen Carter, Jackson and Powell. (Councilman Giddens disconnected from the call.) The vote passed 4-0.

Mayor Proctor duly adjourned the meeting at 7:29 p.m.

CITY COUNCIL
SYLVESTER, GEORGIA

HAROLD PROCTOR, JR., MAYOR

ATTEST:

MARKESHA BIVENS, CITY CLERK