

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
CITY COUNCIL

January 4, 2021

Ronnie Thompson, Mayor

Sally W. Sandy, City Manager
Louis E. Vinay, Jr., City Attorney

Wendy Cato)
Christopher Hawkins) Council
Chris Jernigan)
Butch McSwain)

Interpreters:
Danette Steelman-Bridges
Ernest Williams, IV

I. Call to Order – The Meeting was called to order in the Council Chamber at City Hall at 6:00 p.m. by Mayor Thompson.

II. Public Comment – The Mayor stated the guidelines for public comment and said speakers were to be called in order of sign-up for those who appeared in person; however, due to COVID-19 the Council was still accepting public comments via email, U.S. mail, or hand-delivered letters.

No speakers signed up, appeared, or sent letters/email.

III. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag – The Pledge was led by Councilman Jernigan.

IV. Invocation – The invocation was given by City Attorney Louis Vinay.

V. Introduction of Council – The Mayor introduced Council and staff.

VI. Retirement Resolutions

•The Mayor read a resolution honoring Jimmy Earl Franklin who retired from the City of Morganton on January 1, 2021, with 21 years and 4 month's service. Franklin retired from the Public Works Department as an Expert Equipment Operator. Franklin was unable to attend and will be given his resolution at a later time.

Upon motion by Councilwoman Cato, seconded by Councilman Jernigan, and carried unanimously, the Council adopted Resolution #21-01 honoring retiree Jimmy Earl Franklin.

•The Mayor read a resolution honoring Joseph Scott Lookadoo who retired from the City of Morganton on January 1, 2021, with 34 years and 11 month's service. Lookadoo retired as Director from the Public Works Department. Councilwoman Cato presented the resolution to retiree Lookadoo. Councilwoman Cato stated there was no way to express enough appreciation; not just for the job well done, but for the extra personal effort.

Lookadoo thanked God first, his family, neighbors, friends, and the community of Morganton. He stated he has had a truly rewarding career. He said the pleasure has been the people he has worked with, seeing them give more than imaginable, because that is what our job is. He specifically acknowledged the City Manager and the good friendship they enjoy along with a good working relationship. Lookadoo also recognized former City Manager Mike Cronk and elected leadership who served the City.

The City Manager thanked Scott saying he was the second person she met when coming to Morganton. She said it has been an honor and privilege to serve alongside Lookadoo.

Upon motion by Councilman Jernigan, seconded by Councilwoman Cato, and carried unanimously, the Council adopted Resolution #21-03 honoring retiree Joseph Scott Lookadoo.

•The Mayor read a resolution honoring Fred Harrell Stines, Jr. who retired from the City of Morganton on January 1, 2021, with 26 years and 5 month's service. Stines retired from the Public Works Department as a Mechanic. Councilman McSwain presented the resolution to retiree Stines saying he and Stines have a lot of personal history. Stines' family has been very involved with the Parks and Recreation Department, Councilman McSwain said. Stines stated he enjoyed his time at the City, saying some days he went home wondering why but he always came back the next morning.

Upon motion by Councilman McSwain, seconded by Councilman Hawkins, and carried unanimously, the Council adopted Resolution #21-02 honoring retiree Fred Harrell Stines, Jr.

VII. Service Pins – The Personnel Committee and City staff have decided to recognize long-term employees for years of service at a Council meeting. Sharon Jablonski, Director of the Cultural & Creative Development Department, is recognized for 30 years' service to the City. The City Manager stated she has had the privilege of working alongside Sharon for 28 years. She appreciates employees' long-time commitment to the City making it a better place every day. She stated the City is proud of a national award honoring Sharon's commitment to Downtown and said there is still work to do.

Councilman Hawkins presented the Service Pin to Jablonski and thanked for her dedication to Downtown, her creative ideas, and her 30-years' of service.

Jablonski stated that retiree Stines had it right, there are some days you wonder why you went to work but you got up the next day and did it again. She stated she cannot say thank you enough for all the opportunities she has received working for the City.

VIII. Public Advocacy Issues and Strategies

The Mayor shared a message about COVID-19 reminding citizens about the 3-Ws washing hands, wearing a mask, and waiting 6' away in order to slow the spread of the virus.

a. Bob Hunter stated he is the President of Friends of Fonta Flora, an advocacy group benefiting the Fonta Flora State Trail. Hunter introduced Beth Heilie and Andrew Kota, both members of the Friends executive committee. Hunter shared a PowerPoint about ways to support State Trails and Parks. Hunter said the trail is envisioned to run through three counties, Burke, McDowell and Buncombe. The Friends of Fonta Flora Board of Directors is made up of participants from these three counties as well as local municipalities and other interested entities.

Hunter stated that accomplishments thus far include building partnerships in Old Fort; McDowell Technical Community College is working to secure grants to begin a Trail Construction and Sustainability Program; and working with the State to purchase 30 acres in Old Fort which will be a trailhead and park and will connect to the Point Lookout Trail. Hunter stated that Black Mountain has expressed interest in working with the Friends group.

Hunter stated the Friends group needs an executive director to run the organization. He stated they are talking to each of the counties and local municipalities asking for funding from each to hire someone. The group has requested funding amounts based on population. Buncombe County and the City of Asheville have already turned down the request for funding, so they will look for a part-time director rather than a full-time director. Hunter requested the Council consider funding \$10,000.

The Mayor asked Andrew Kota if this trail will tie in with the new Oak Hill Park. Kota stated it was their hope that it would; they are in the final stages of the Masterplan for the park. Kota stated that he hoped the City and the County would support and fund an extension from Freedom Park up to the Oak Hill Park. He feels we are on the precipice of something huge to make this area a hub of outdoor recreation and a "trails destination". Kota also announced they recently received a grant for mountain bike trails at Catawba Meadows.

The Mayor asked Beth Heilie about the Lakeside Park in Valdese and whether it would tie in to this trail. Heilie stated that last year she began work on the Catawba River Trail with a vision to connect Eastern Burke County towns along with the Lakeside Park to the edge of the Morganton Greenway below Grace Heights. The Wilderness Gateway State Trail, which goes through South Mountain State Park, will be hooked-up to the Catawba River Trail in Valdese.

Councilman McSwain stated the City has just accepted bids to continue the Greenway Connector from Downtown Morganton to the Greenway at Catawba Meadows. Work should begin progressing soon. He stated it is an exciting time for trails and will only help outdoor enthusiasts visiting Morganton. He sees trails as a long-term investment that will pay dividends in the years to come.

The Mayor thanked the group for appearing and requested a copy of the PowerPoint presentation.

•The City Manager introduced Michael Chapman as the new director of Public Works. She stated the City is very excited about this announcement. Michael has been working for the City in the Finance Department, responsible for purchasing, inventory, the Warehouse, building maintenance, and is now the new Director of Public Works. He brings a lot of skill, expertise, and is very much a people person, she said.

Chapman stated he has worked with the City for about 9 years and truly appreciates the opportunity. He thanked Scott for taking him under his wing and working with him over the years. Michael stated that tonight, due to the retirements, about 100 years of institutional knowledge has walked out the door but he knows he can call them for advice if needed.

b. The Mayor announced there would be a pop-up Farmers Market on January 9 from 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. at the Green Street mini-market location.

IX. North Carolina Municipal Power Agency Number 1 Update – The City Manager stated there was nothing to report at this time.

X. Consent Agenda – The City Manager presented the Consent Agenda and asked if any items should be removed from the Consent Agenda. No request was made.

Upon motion by Councilwoman Cato, seconded by Councilman McSwain, and unanimously carried, the Consent Agenda was approved and each individual item adopted as stated, those being as follows:

A. Approved Minutes for a Regular Meeting and a Closed Session, both held on December 7, 2020, as submitted.

B. Approved a budget amendment (Ord. #21-03) in the amount of \$16,300 for the receipt and related expenditures for a Racial Equality Community Grant for Human Relations Commission programming use.

C. Approved a budget amendment (Ord. #21-02) in the amount of \$30,000 for Recreation and Mainstreet projects

D. Approved a budget amendment (Ord. #21-01) in the amount of \$6,000 for recreational purposes.

E. Approved Extending the Emergency Paid Sick Leave Under the Families First Corona Relief Act (FFCRA) and the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the Approval of 2021 COVID-19 Emergency Leave for Employees as outlined.

XI. Items Removed from Consent Agenda – There were no items removed.

XII. New Business

A. Public Hearings

1. Public Hearing and Consideration of a Rezoning Request to Change the Zoning for 20.08 Acres of Property Located at 115 Wamsutta Mill Road from Medium Intensity District (MID) to High Intensity District (HID)

The Mayor opened the public hearing at 6:49 p.m.

Phillip Lookadoo, Director of Development and Design, stated the property proposed for rezoning is located along Wamsutta Mill Road. Adjacent properties are zoned Conditional Use (CU), Medium Intensity District (MID), High Intensity District (HID) and Exclusive Industrial District (EID).

The future land use designation as stated in the Mission 2030 Land Development Plan is "Light Industrial/Flex." As stated in the rezoning evaluation the map amendment request was brought to the Planning and Zoning Commission in an effort to bring the property into compliance, with agreement of the owner of the property, with the Mission 2030 Plan.

The Planning and Zoning Commission, at their regularly scheduled meeting held on December 10, 2020, unanimously (8-0) voted to recommend this map amendment for approval to City Council.

There being no public comment the Mayor closed the public hearing at 6:49 p.m.

Upon motion by Councilman Jernigan, seconded by Councilman Hawkins, and carried unanimously, the Council voted to certify that this rezoning request is in compliance with the Mission 2030 Land Development Plan.

Upon motion by Councilman Hawkins, seconded by Councilman McSwain, and carried unanimously, the Council adopted Ordinance #21-04 for a Map Amendment of 20.08 acres of property located at 115 Wamsutta Mill Road from Medium Intensity District (MID) to High Intensity District (HID).

B. Other Business

1. Consideration of a Resolution of Intent to Permanently Close and Abandon an Unopened Portion of Beach Street and to Call for a Public Hearing

The City Attorney stated that Airlie, Inc. or associated companies own a number of lots along or near Beach Street, including the tract on which the weekly Saturday Farmers Market is conducted. Airlie, Inc. has submitted a Petition to Close Abandoned Street, with supporting survey maps and other documents. The Petition seeks closure of that portion of Beach Street which is not and may never have been open for traffic or maintained as a public street, and which is currently covered by landscaping, and by a corner of a building constructed many years ago. This portion appears as a street 30 feet wide on a plat, and on the City's records. Airlie, Inc. is the sole owner of properties adjoining this unopened portion of the street, although other parties own properties on Beach Street which could be affected by this closing.

In order to continue use of Beach Street, which is the primary access to the current site of the Farmers Market and is the only street access to some of the properties to the east of the Morganton Station complex, Airlie, Inc. has offered to convey and dedicate to the City a portion of its property which is already paved for use as a parking lot and driveway, and which is already used as a connector to the lower portion of Beach Street. After reviewing the proposed dedication and its survey map, City staff agrees that this would be a suitable re-routing of Beach Street, and therefore proposes that the dedication be accepted, and that the City take over this area and maintain it as part of Beach Street.

The City Attorney stated that if Council wishes to pursue this matter, a Resolution of Intent must be adopted, setting a public hearing for the February, 2021 Council meeting, and directing the Clerk to properly advertise and notice the same, all in accordance with N.C.G.S. 160A-299.

Councilman Hawkins asked if the portion the City is abandoning is inaccessible as it is currently. The City Attorney stated it is basically unusable as it stands.

Upon motion by Councilman Jernigan, seconded by Councilwoman Cato, and carried unanimously, the Council adopted a Resolution of Intent (Res. #21-04) to Permanently Close and Abandon an unopened portion of Beach Street, to set a public hearing for Monday, February 1, 2021, at 6:00 PM in the City Hall Council Chambers to consider this action, and to direct the City Clerk to appropriately advertise such hearing and post notice of the same in at least two (2) places along Beach Street.

2. Consideration of Approval of a Resolution for a Building Reuse Grant / Toner Machining

The City Manager stated that Toner Machining (aka Project Parts) is purchasing the vacant "Food Lion" on East Fleming Drive. In order to assist in the upfit and move, the

City is applying for a Building Reuse Grant. The first step is to adopt a Resolution allowing application. The project/expansion is projected to create 31 new jobs.

The City Manager stated the request was for \$260,000 but the City has received notice from the Department of Commerce that the grant would be for half of that at \$130,000 with a dollar for dollar match provided by the owner. The WPCOG will administer the grant. Burke County and the City will share equally the up to \$6,500 for administration.

Upon motion by Councilman McSwain, seconded by Councilman Jernigan, and carried unanimously, the Council approved Resolution #21-05 to apply for a Building Reuse Grant and to authorize the Mayor and/or City Manager to execute any other related documents as necessary.

a. 30-Day Notice – Boards and Commissions – The Mayor announced that terms on the Morganton Housing Authority Board are expiring and anyone wishing to be considered should fill out an application and turn it into the Clerk's office.

XIII. Other Items from City Manager and City Council Not on Agenda – There were no other items presented.

XIV. Reports – Reports were distributed to Council.

XV. Adjournment – The Mayor adjourned the meeting at 6:58 p.m.

Preparation of Minutes. These minutes were prepared by Mikela D. Russell, Assistant City Clerk. Copies of all resolutions, ordinances and orders referenced in these minutes are intended to be incorporated into these minutes as if fully set forth herein. Prior to including them into the official minute book, the minutes have been read and approved by the City Manager and the City Attorney, then distributed to each member of the City Council for further review and final approval, at a subsequent Council Meeting.

Mayor

Assistant City Clerk