City of Darlington

Special City Council Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, January 19, 2022

Present: Mayor Boyd, Councilman Howard Nettles, Councilwoman Elaine Reed, Councilwoman Shelia Baccus, Councilman John Milling, Councilman Bryant Gardner, Councilman John Segars, City Manager John Payne, Lacie Weatherford and a room full of visitors.

Mayor Boyd called the meeting to order at 5:38pm and opened with prayer.

Upon motion to approve the meeting agenda by Councilman Milling, seconded by Councilman Gardner. All in favor.

<u>Public Comment</u>

Mr. Greg Blair presented council with a list of streets that he would like to be included in the projects for the American Rescue money that the city will receive. He explained that he had submitted this information over a month ago and had asked for feedback in writing or email. He stated that he still hasn't received any response back and was again asking for a response in writing or email that council would consider these streets. Councilman Milling wanted to know if any of these streets were City streets. Mr. Payne said he would look into it.

Ms. Gloria Hines stated that she knows what's been going on with council 27 or so years. She stated that ever since she been a part of council they have been talking about Chestnut and Jessamine Street, and at that time no other streets were being mentioned. She said that she doesn't see Jessamine Street on the list. She said that she knows that they did something on Chestnut Street with the Vac truck, and it has improved. She said Jessamine Street is in bad shape and that she would like to see them add Jessamine Street to the list. She said it had been on the list to do for many years and it desperately needs attention. She said she would also like to see the city put a bigger piece of playground equipment at Carroway Park. She said when you ride by it looks like a bunch of ants. She said it looks so itty bitty to Hampton Streets

playground. She said that they need to at least consider putting a bigger piece of equipment at Carroway Park, so it doesn't look so lost.

Mr. Payne said that the reason Jessamine Street was not on the list is because the city plans to buy a big piece of equipment themselves that will do the work on Jessamine and the surrounding areas.

Ms. Janie Lathan stated that City of Darlington along with the world is going through a devasting pandemic, with over 40 million Americans losing their jobs, including many residents in Darlington. She said numerous corporations and banks were providing relief for our citizens. Yet, in those dire times, the mayor and all but two of our City Council members voted to raise our water bills. This has posed a serious hardship on the people you serve and is unacceptable. She stated that poverty was an issue for your Darlington constituents especially your African American community. She said the American Rescue Fund Act is designated to address financial hardships and burdens imposed by the pandemic. She said the water bill increase has imposed an additional hardship and burden on our citizens. She said she would like to recommend that Mayor and Council allocate a significant amount of the American Rescue funds to the City Water and Sewer Department so that council could lower our water usage rate and lower the water bills back to the pre-pandemic level.

<u>American Rescue Plan-Discussion and Recommendation –City Manager John Payne</u>

Mr. Payne explained that there are about six buckets that money can go into and unfortunately reducing water rates for people is not one of the allowable areas to use the money. He explained what the money could be used for and that the list in their packets was recommendations based off priority issues for the City. He stated that list outlines projects for Water and Sewer, Stormwater and Parks. He explained these were just items for them to look at, nothing yet was to be voted on.

Councilwoman Reed wanted to know what reason the city raised the water fees. Mayor Boyd said the City Water and Sewer department was constantly losing money and having issues that they could not fix. Councilman Nettles stated at the last meeting, that him and Councilwoman Baccus discuss that they needed to revisit the situation and add it to the next month's agenda. Mr. Payne stated that during fiscal years 2019-2020 the Water and Sewer and Storm Water lost 1.1 million dollars. He said with that and the fact the city hadn't raised their fees in decades is why we had an 40% increase.

Mr. Alex Gainey explained that they know they have obstructions in the sewer and drainage lines but the camera they have now is for a small pipe in diameter. He stated that if we are going to utilize a $100,000 piece of equipment then they need to invest in a crawler or tractor so that can see what they have going on in the pipes.

Councilwoman Reed had concerns why the list of proposed projects for the American Rescue money had not been made public prior to the meeting. She felt like the information should be shared with the public, so it didn't look like we were trying to hide something. Mr. Payne said that he would post the list the next day on the City's Website.

Ms. Baccus wanted to know why Jessamine Street, Reed Street and Chestnut Street had not been added to the list. She stated that she had asked on five times that these Streets be added to the list for repairs. She added that there were no projects on that list on the South side of Darlington. Ms. Baccus also ask that the ditches in South Dargan be added as well. She said they have ditches that haven't been cleaned out in over 30 years.

Mayor Boyd said that we can add all of those. He stated that they were not there to vote on anything just discuss what needs to be fixed.

Mr. Shugart explained that most of the projects on this list (Gravity Sewer-Country Club Pump Station Elimination, Cashua Ferry Road Pump Station, Fire Hydrant Upgrades City Wide and Renovate Sewer Pumping Stations) under Water and Sewer projects were required by DHEC to have the problems addressed to avoid hefty fines due to violations. Mr. Shugart said that if these problems aren't fixed by March 2022 or a plan put in to place to fix them, DHEC can charge the city up to $10,000 a day. Mr. Shugart went through the list discussing all the issues.

Ms. Elaine Reed would like something done about the drainage from Sav-way all the way down Pearl Street and area in front of Hardees on South Main Street. Also, to fix the hole at the Harkless home and the collapse behind St. James.

Mayor Boyd stated that they would discuss all this again at the February council meeting. He stated that there is a lot to be fixed but also prioritized.

Mayor Boyd suggested that Mr. Alex Gainey check to see if he can get more bids for the tractor and nozzle.

Mr. Payne said he is working with some people out of Columbia on some grant money for the Stormwater Project (listed on recommended projects) on East Broad and South Main Street. He said hopefully taken that 1.6-million-dollar total down some.

Ms. Lathan said that the money being given to the city is to lessen the burden on City residents cause by the pandemic and that she asks that council please respect them and honor their recommendations.

Motioned by Councilman Milling to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Councilman Segars. All in favor. The meeting adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

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Mayor

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Clerk & Treasurer