DARLINGTON CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2024, AT 6 PM
400 PEARL STREET, DARLINGTON, SC 29532

1. Invocation - Mayor Boyd

2. Pledge of Allegiance – Led by Mayor Boyd

3. Approval of Minutes

September 3, 2024 - Regular City Council Meeting. Mayor Boyd said we will put them on the agenda for the workshop/meeting on November 19, 2024.

October 1, 2024 - Regular City Council Meeting. Motioned to approve by Councilman Gardner. Seconded by Councilwoman Reed. All in favor.

October 22, 2024 - Darlington City Council/Planning Commission Workshop. Motioned to approve by Councilman Gardner. Seconded by Councilwoman McRavin. All in favor.

4. Citizens Wishing to Appear Before Council
(5 Minutes per person. Maximum of 30 total Minutes) *Neither* personal *attacks* nor *disruptive behavior are allowed)*

<u>Ms. Tonya Bailey</u>

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Council. My name is Tonya Bailey. I live on F Avenue in the City of Darlington. It started about a year ago. I started having issues with my plumbing backing up in my house. I've called plumbers. They came. They did their due diligence. They were paid. I know I must have called them at least four times. Then I said, well, it's got to be a different problem. So, I had them to come and they said, well, you're not tapped into the city. I said, what do you mean I'm not tapped into the

city? Because I pay sewer every month. So, I hired an excavator to come dig up. He dug eight feet down and still did not find any tap or anything for me to put the lines into it. So, several occasions I've called the city water department to come out and tell me where the tap is. Nobody can locate the tap. So, if I'm paying for sewer, somebody should be able to tell me where my tap is. And I shouldn't have to call a plumber every four months, paying him $150 to come and blow my system out. So, I came up today. I was supposed to get a call back from Mr. Shugart. I have not received a call back from him as of yet. And I must have come up to the water department probably around 11 o'clock today. And I still have not received anything and don't know anything, still don't know where anything is. Now, if the sewer, the manhole says four feet down and they dug eight feet down, where is it? And I just need some feedback, so I'll know exactly what to do going forward. Mayor Boyd wanted to know what her address was and she stated 111 F Avenue. He stated they will take care of it.

<u>Mr. Shawn Odom</u>

Good evening, Sean. When I came to Council meeting today, I received a paper about a purchase of land from the club. And when I was reading this paper, it was saying about this land wasn't even structural. It flooded. It would have flood damage. It would cause serious flooding. And I just have problems with our city funds going to this thing. If I'm not mistaken, $25,000 is going to this property. It's not even constructional. We have other needs. The young lady just came up here talking about she has plumbing issues. Let's put our money and stuff like that for the citizens, things that citizens need.

<u>Mr. Gregory Hamlin</u>

Hello. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you. My name is Gregory Hamlin. I live in the county. But I volunteer coaching basketball and football at the recreation department. And I was given an anonymous letter from some parents with some complaints. And to start off, this is not a personal attack against anyone at the Recreation. But there are some issues that are going on that we want some answers and some things addressed. So the letter reads, to our elected officials and city of

Darlington Recreation Department, we are writing this letter to make a statement that our children deserve better. Starting back to last football season, the rec department has let our children and parents down. Example one, in 2023, the parents' All-Star hoodies did not come on time, so we didn't have hoodies for the games. No reason or apology was given. Example two, this football season, the uniforms were late again. As a result, the rec department cancelled the jamboree with no make-up date named, also our cheerleader uniforms were not wearable or suitable for some of our girls. The reason given that the director, Lee Andrews, and athletic director, Bradley Jett, gave us, was that they tried a new vendor, and once again, no apology was given. Example three, the rec department didn't offer team pictures this season. Excuses that were given by the athletic director, Bradley Jett, was that the photographer had a death in the family with no make-up date. Once again, no apologies were given. Example four, All-Star uniforms and parent hoodies were not available for the first All-Star game this past Saturday. No reason, and once again, no apologies given. Added to that, they weren't there for our second game this past Saturday, so that was the Saturday before, and then this Saturday we didn't have them. But they did, the ones we ordered, but they did order us some replacements that we did wind up having to turn in. And also, I was given a text from the rec department today that they are refunding the parents for the recreation All-Star uniforms, but the hoodies they ordered, they're going to have to come and get those. Example five, the athletic director, Bradley Jett, decided he would have a parent meeting and just completely bullied and blamed the parents for why the uniforms were not on time. Even told the parents we could take our children to Florence if we had a problem. Once again, no apologies were given. Dear Darlington Recreation Department, our kids deserve better. Anytime we bring an issue to the rec department, Director Lee Andrews or Athletic Director Bradley Jett, it is taken as a personal attack and becomes chaotic, and most parents fear retaliation will be taken out on the children. This type of interaction has to stop. Again, this is not a personal attack towards anyone, person at the rec. We all know things happen. We just ask to be treated with respect, talk to proper, don't harbor a grudge, not to be bullied, and to treat all children with fairness. Thank you, concerned parents. I'd also like to add, I've been coaching with the rec department since 1994. I started with Wallace Bradley, and Bobby Cook was the athletic director then. I'm

kind of on a double-edged sword here. I see the progress we have made, but I also see where we have been lacking and falling behind. Personally, I've had a lot of parents come to me to say they're taking their children to Florence or other areas to play versus bringing them here to Darlington. Sports isn't the best thing for the kids to do, but it's something for the kids to do. If we have those kids here and they have the talent that we can nurture and grow, that they may have an opportunity to better themselves and their families, I would love for that to be here in Darlington. I have no specific answers for you, but we just need a better way forward. These kids, we're losing a lot of our kids to the streets, and I think the rec can help guide them back on the right path.

Ms. Janie Lathan

Good evening, council. At our last council meeting, I think we deferred discussion, and I see it showing up as old business for the purchase of property in the Country club for the sewer pump station. And I think the rationale for purchasing this right away was because it was required for grant funding. So, my question tonight, and perhaps the public works director, I see he's on the agenda, can answer that for us. But my question is, has a grant been submitted? And if so, has it been approved? And for how much? And what is the funding agency? My concern is that perhaps the council will move forward in purchasing land again, just like this mayor and some of the council members moved forward and spent approximately $700,000 of the citizens' money for a project where we didn't have all of the approvals, even access of right of way. So that land is still sitting vacant. The city's out of $700,000, and nothing's being done. My concern is we move forward on some projects too quickly without doing the appropriate due diligence. I'm not sure, I'm not aware of any major infrastructure grant that requires purchase, this type of purchase. What they require is that the municipality actually own the land. But they don't require purchase before you submit the grant. So, this might be some funding we could hold off on. Because another thing that happened at council meeting last month, we realized we didn't even have funding in the budget for a proposal that was being presented before the council to approve. So, I think fiscal responsibility is very critical. And we don't even have certain department heads. We used to have department heads giving

updates on departmental budgets and activities. None of that is showing on the agenda tonight. We used to have the city manager giving us an update. Here are the key projects that we're working on. Here's the budget. Citizen has come before this council on numerous times, including myself, asking for a monthly update on finances in terms of revenue and expenditures, especially in the water and sewer department. There's still a number of issues that our citizens are having while at the same time our water and sewer rates continue to increase. I've come before council a number of times, and I asked for a copy of our capital improvement plan. I was told that the capital improvement plan does not exist for the city of Darlington. This is almost inconceivable, and in my assessment very irresponsible because citizens like myself are taxed three times each month for a capital improvement fee. That money is supposed to be going to implement a capital improvement plan, yet we don't have capital improvement plan. And citizens like myself come before this council month after month after month. We make comments, and apparently, it's falling on deaf ears. So perhaps in council comments, where I see there's no council comments on the agenda for tonight, perhaps someone can explain to me what's the process. We come before council, we make comments. What's the process for responding back to citizens? There was an issue about some of the fire hydrants not working. That doesn't even show up on old business or new business. What is the status? That's a life-threatening issue. My concern is that we really respond to citizens' issues and concerns. Otherwise, why waste our time? I appreciate everything that each of you do, and I hope you will take my comments seriously. Thank you.

<u>Old Business</u>

A) Purchase of Property for Country Club Sewer Pump Station

Mayor Boyd said that the property was appraised at, I think, $35,000. He was asking $25,000 for it. We called him and talked with him, and the property owner told him to take $22,000 for it. The purchase of the property will then give the opportunity to be able to apply for the grants for the upgrade on that station. There is a minor wetlands on there. Sheila Jones said that there's no issue with upgrading or any issues with whatever we

have to do for the pump station or if they turn it into a gravity feed for that property. The service is, I think, a good lower station. Councilman Gardner said “It is my understanding is this will do away with the pump station, which has been being run by a rental unit for years now, and they'll be turned into a gravity sewer line. Councilwoman Reed asked “So this is necessary? Yeah, I mean, it's necessary for the pump station to be there, right? Mayor Boyd said we're not going to buy a piece of property to build a house were buying to upgrade the pump station in order to do that we need to own the property. Councilman Gardner said the gravity system is a lot cheaper than putting a whole new infrastructure for a new pump station. My understanding is the gravity line will take the sewage to a pump station that's right in another part of the neighborhood, so we don't have to have two pump stations there. Just make it all one unit. Councilman Segars said the property owners in Woodcreek subdivision, which is below where this piece of property is, they've been contacting and we've tried to get an easement with them so we wouldn't have to purchase this piece of property, and that was not fruitful. They didn't want to cooperate with us on that, so that kind of leads us into why we need to purchase this piece of property. Councilwoman Baccus, So let me ask a question, and I'm going to ask Ms. Latham this question since she does these grants. Explain to me, do we need to purchase this property before we apply for the grant? Mayor Boyd states that Ms. Lathan is not the expert on this case right now, so I don't think Ms. Latham needs to speak on this. Councilwoman Baccus said we're talking about getting a grant for the property. The only way we're going to be able to do this work is going to have to be a grant. Ms. Latham is an expert on that. She writes grants. She actually gets grants. Mayor Boyd stated that Ms. Lathan isn't hired by the city to give any advice. Councilwoman Baccus said I'm not hiring her; I'm asking her a question. Ms. Latham, I'm asking you a question. We don't have anybody qualified with the city to even answer the question. Ms. Lathan states that most grants, infrastructure grants, depending on the agency, if you're

getting a CDBG grant, right, purchasing this property before you submit the grant would, in fact, be problematic and would, in fact, put securing that grant in jeopardy. Rural infrastructure, right, you don't have to own the property before you apply for the grant because there's provisions in the grant that allow you to purchase the property after you secure grant funding. My concern, as I noted before, is oftentimes our council may move forward, like we did with the purchase of over $700,000 of land. Mayor Boyd stated 'I've got enough of that. Ms. Lathan stated that "I have a First Amendment freedom of right from constitutional right to speak and so you cannot breach that constitutional right. You need to understand that. And so, with that, I think the council should consider that before they make a final decision. Does that answer your question, Ms. Baccus? Councilwoman Baccus said yes. Mayor Boyd asked Ms. Lathan to have a seat. Councilwoman Baccus stated that Mayor Boyd has a problem because you know what you're talking about and he don't want you to speak. That's his problem. That's his problem. Councilwoman Baccus wanted to know why they only got one appraisal. Councilman Millings said why would you get more than one appraisal on the same property. You don't three appraisals on one piece of property.

Motioned by Councilman Milling to approve the purchase of the property for the Country Club Sewer Pump Station for $22,000. Seconded by Councilman Gardner. Councilwoman McRavin, Councilwoman Reed Councilman Segars all in favor. Councilwoman Baccus voted no.

<u>New Business</u>

A) Approval of matching grant funds for 800 MHz fire and police radios

Chief Jimmy Davis explained to council that they receive a grant for $230,000 but the cost of the radios are $264,000 and some change. They need the difference of $34,887.11 to purchase the radios.

Motioned to approve the amount of $35,000 to go with the $230,000 grant funds to purchase the 800 MHz fire and police radios by Councilman Milling. Seconded by Councilwoman McRavin. All in favor.

B) Discussion of funds for Community Grants Committee - (Elaine Reed)

Motioned by Councilman Milling to approve $2500 donation to the Sweet Potato Festival and $2500 donation to the African Negro College Fund by Councilman Milling. Seconded by Councilman Gardner. All in favor.

Motioned by Councilman Gardner to go into Executive Session. Seconded my Councilwoman Reed. All in favor.

<u>Executive Session</u>

(b) Discussion of negotiations incident to proposed contractual arrangements and proposed sale or purchase of property, the receipt of legal advice where the legal advice relates to a pending, threatened, or potential claim or other matters covered by the attorney-client privilege, settlement of legal claims, or the position of the public agency. And all the adversary situations involving the assertion against the agency of a claim. Motioned to exit Executive Session by Councilman Milling. Seconded by Councilman Gardner. All in favor.

Upon returning from Executive Session. Motioned by Councilman Gardner to hire new City Manager Ms. Lanessa Hawkins. Seconded by Councilwoman Reed. Councilman Gardner amended his motion to have the City Attorney and Councilman Milling look over the contract and make sure everything is comfortable for both parties. All in favor.

Motion by Councilman Milling to send a letter under the City Manager signature advising Darlington County School district that we are interested in exploring with them the acquisition, the receipt of the amphitheater on the old St. John's Elementary and High School properties as well as working with them in connection with the redevelopment of the properties

where the Brunson-Dargan Elementary School was at one time located. Seconded by Councilman Gardner. All in favor.

Motion to adjourn meeting by Councilman Gardner. Seconded by Councilwomen Reed. All in favor. Meeting adjourned.

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Mayor Curtis C. Boyd

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Lacie Weatherford, Secretary