CITY OF DARLINGTON
REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING / PUBLIC FORUM
REGULAR MEETING & PUBLIC FORUM
FIRST CHURCH OF GOD FELLOWSHIP HALL
620 NORTH MAIN ST., DARLINGTON, SC 29532
SATURDAY FEBRUARY 1, 2025, 10:00 AM

Present: Mayor Boyd, City Manager Hawkins, Councilpersons Baccus, Reed, McRavin, Milling, Segars, Gardner. Department Heads: Police Chief Davis, Fire Chief Cavanaugh, Building & Codes Official Sheila Bryant, Street Supt. Lucas Reed, W&S Director Charles Shugart, Communications Director Hunter Thomas and Recreation Director Brantley Jett. Also present was Mark Face, Anna DeWitt, Gloria Hines, Joyce Thomas, Ernestine Lyde, Rosa Hudson, Katrina Ham, and other community members. (*Each attendee was asked to sign in and they were given a ticket for the door prize drawing)*

Call to Order: Mayor Boyd called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM to handle business of the Regular Meeting with the Public Forum to follow.

Invocation: By Pastor Allen Waibel of First Church of God

Pledge of Allegiance

Resolutions
Resolution to adopt the 2024 Pee Dee Regional Hazard mitigation plan - City Manager Hawkins Ms. Hawkins said this resolution came to us from the Pee Dee Regional Council of Governments. It is recommended that you receive and adopt the resolution because it gives us an opportunity to receive FEMA funds. She said you have done this in the past and you have worked on this process. Councilman Gardner said, point of order. Was this advertised as a regular meeting too? I see on the agenda that it says public forum / regular meeting. Mayor Boyd said that it was advertised. **Councilwoman Elaine Reed made a motion that we adopt the Resolution the 2024 Pee Dee Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan. Councilman Bryant Gardner seconded the motion. Councilpersons Baccus, McRavin, Segars, Milling, and Mayor Boyd voted in favor of the motion.**

PUBLIC FORUM

Ms. Hawkins said she would call each department head to give a brief update of things that are going on in their departments. Ms. Sheila Bryant said they had a lot of good things happening in the City of Darlington in 2024 including construction of affordable rental property, and the construction of affordable houses. and then the remodel of older vacant homes. Just on the residential side, investors, developers, and homeowners have invested in 2024, $3,446,387.44. Starbucks, while it looks completed on the outside, they are working on it on the inside and

anticipate it will open in the spring. Tractor Supply did some remodeling and adding to their facility the courthouse was completed as well as the historic museum. Genesis continues to remodel and bring new health services into our community. So, on the commercial economic side 6,504,403.41 has been invested into the beauty and betterment of the City of Darlington. And as we continue to grow, we're on course to see more commercial growth this year. And while I can't say names of companies, I can say that in 2025 we anticipate another restaurant and another major retail store to add to the community as well as several smaller retail spaces. And then there's a restaurant that's going to go through a major remodel and then we have another museum that will be coming the other thing that we have been doing and we finally finished is the database for the department so that we can keep track of all of the nonprofits that we have in our city as well as the difference between others from other occupied properties and tenant space; as well as how many parcels of property that we have, and each zoning district and vacant property. All of our information and communication, if you call into our office, we are able to make a record of all verbal communication, and all written communication. All of our parcels of land have their own digital file so if there's ever a question How about what's going on we have everything in one spot, and everything recorded so ten years from now you know why we made decisions. Ms. Hawkins asked Sheila to comment on the vacant building ordinance. Ms. Sheila Bryant said new letters will be going out and we have to finish the database so that we will have an accurate count of the vacant properties so new letters will be going out.

Police Chief Jimmy Davis

Chief Davis said they are almost fully staffed. They have a new traffic unit that is trying to get traffic enforcement under control. If we actively enforce traffic laws, they may seem petty to me at this time but last year in South Carolina we had almost one thousand traffic deaths and if enforcing traffic will prevent some of those that's what I'm here for. We enforce seat belt laws and of those 1,000 deaths, over three hundred were not wearing seat belts. Major crime has gone down in the City of Darlington. Unfortunately, smaller crimes, such as larceny, have increased. He said one area that we've noticed a big increase on is theft from a motor vehicle. Chief Davis said residents will park their vehicles and leave them unlocked overnight. Chief Davis said, "We ask that you lock your doors, even when they're in your yard and remove the firearms at night." He said another area that they would like to see calm down would be scams. He said if you think it's a scam it probably is. He said be careful when you open emails. If you open an email and send it somewhere else, and if you open that attachment, these people will have access to everything on your computer. He said if you think it's a scam, please call us. He said last year they wrote out over 2,500 traffic tickets and over 2,500 reported calls for service.

Fire Chief Cavanaugh Fire Department Update

Chief Cavanaugh said at this time the fire department is fully staffed. They have three people on 24-hour shifts. We have a daytime shift which includes myself and my Assistant chief, who also serves as the City Fire Marshal, and he also helps with the safety coordination. Chief Cavanaugh said last year we ran around 683 calls. We responded to all of the mutual aid calls out in the County. He said last year we received a V-Safe Grant from the State. It was $13,000 to help us buy equipment. They were also very fortunate to receive $250,000 from Senator Malloy and Representative Robert Williams to replace radios for the Fire Department and Police

Department which enabled up to be on the Palmetto 800 System. Chief Cavanaugh said as always, we do a smoke alarm installs. If you need a smoke alarm in your house and you are in our district, if you give us a call my guys will come out and we will install the smoke alarm, and we'll teach you a little bit about fire safety and things that will help you around the house. He said they have three volunteers that joined with the fire department this year and they could always use more volunteers. If someone feels like they want to help the community I urge you to come and apply and we will provide free training.

Brantley Jett - Recreation Department

Brantley said now we are in basketball season and it's coming to an end next week. Brantley said, we are due to host one of the districts at the end of the month. He said they said they just had a Little League meeting via zoom and are scheduled to host three of the state tournaments so far. He said I know we are hosting two on June 26th, and that will bring in about 10 to 12 teams and tournaments throughout the state. That will be between June 26th to June 30th. Brantley said, "And then we will host another tournament on July 10th. He said we are engaging in trying to bring people to Darlington." Our numbers at the recreation department are very solid. We have about two hundred kids playing basketball. Baseball registration is ongoing. In baseball we estimate that we normally keep our number in over …. We average about four hundred kids playing baseball. We average about twenty teams, so that number should stay the same. Brantley said, as far as the ballfields, we got an update yesterday and they were supposed to get the keys on the 14th, but they were advised that it will probably be a week later on the 22nd. He said they are actually letting the high school go on the field and practice starting Monday, but they won't have power until the 22nd. Everything else is on schedule. He said they are estimating starting their season around April 1st. He said their opening ceremony will be on the 12th and Hunter will be doing a concert that day as well. They are planning a couple of movie series for the summer at Wells Park on Main Street. They don't have the dates for that yet. The Father Daughter dance is next Thursday. Right now, they have about 36 couples that have signed up. They have a schedule of monthly trips for the seniors coming up. The young lady over events at the recreation department is doing a good job with scheduling activities such as bingo, she had a Valentine's painting class, a glass cutting and cooking classes. Brantley said they are trying to get more kids involved. He said they have two local sponsors that donated $3,500 towards the baseball fields.

Lucas Reed - Street & Sanitation Director

Lucas said, as of yesterday, yard debris is fully back on track. Everything is caught up. Residential garbage pickup has been on track this whole time. He said there was a slight hiccup at first due to the truck being down but in April we were able to purchase a truck from Timmons waste service. Lucas said as of today, recycling is costing the city roughly $30,000 a year, but we make no profit off of recycling so that there could be revenue that we can put elsewhere in our department. Lucas said a few projects that are underway in the next one to two years: we're looking at paving Lee Street. Next on the list will be Magnolia Street as well as ….and then looking at possibly Coker Street. Lucas said they have a good working relationship with Hartsville, and they assisted in helping them put up the Christmas lights. With their help they were able to get everything done in half a day whereas it normally takes them about two days.

He said they have SCDOT on aboard assisting them with some of their street. What we've done is we utilize our equipment, and they provide the product. He said a lot of complaints came in about the railroad crossing on Washington St. The people from the railroad came out, we utilized our equipment, and they furnished all the materials. They are on schedule to follow that same procedure each summer and fix at least one railroad crossing throughout the city.

Mr. Charles Shugart – W&S Utility Director

Mr. Shugart said, "I direct four departments and six different divisions. Those are water treatment, water distribution, sewer collection, sewer treatment, customer service and storm water. Mr. Shugart said since 2021 the city has been blessed with awards from CDBG, SC Rural Infrastructure Authority and others to complete nearly $10 million in sewer collection system projects and one small sewer treatment plant project. Mr. Shugart said he put 2-3 flyers on each table, and it concerns pump stations and trash that we're receiving at the pump stations. He said we are being overwhelmed by garbage in our wet wells. He said we are receiving a lot of flushable wipes, which are not flushable. They collect together and make bowling ball sized clogs in our sewer lines and stop up our sewer pumps. He said we had one pump station that was completely rebuilt with new pumps and controls. And a new wet well less than two years ago. We have had to pump out that pump station with a contractor because we don't have the equipment to pump out the pump station and to rent other equipment to pull the pumps out because we don't have the equipment to pull the pumps out on five different occasions in less than two years. That should be at most an annual preventive maintenance. That's done by the city and the city's sewer department on an annual basis to keep those systems working. And we've done it five times in two years. Mr. Shugart said, "It's not just flushable wipes that we're finding in the sewer lines, but every type of garbage imaginable, from clothing, to cut up handles, utensils, …. you name it. He said I did an impromptu study of different folks in the area and our sister City of Hartsville, in the same county as us, with nearly the same population and demographics just a little bit higher than us, but by resolution; by city law, they increased their water rates by 3% a year. He said on July 1st of this year; they will be at $34.85 for 4,999 gallons of water. He said the 4,999 gallons of water is from the American Water Works Association, which they claim the people in this area use an average of 642 or 624 cubic feet of water. Mr. Shugart said he rounded up to 4,999 to compare everybody's rates to the same amount. He said he included Cheraw on the sheet because they had the lowest rate in the State for ten years. Mr. Shugart said everybody wondered how they did that four years ago their city manager retired, and they increased rates by 20% the year after that they increased rates by 10% percent. They weren't rebuilding their system and keeping up with maintenance. He said last year they raised their rates again by 20%. Mr. Shugart said, "last week the City of Cheraw was at the retreat last week and they are considering a 25% rate increase for this year. Mr. Shugart said, "We've got to keep up with maintenance and we absolutely need the equipment to continue or to begin doing the annual maintenance to the sewer system that was never done here in Darlington. He said we also need some upgrades in the water system. The filters on our water treatment plants are over 40 years old and they need to be replaced. Our elevated tanks are under contract now, and they should stay in good shape, however our ground water tanks are not. We have some other areas that need funding and two of those are replacement of antiquated sewer lines. We know that we've got at least six or

seven sewer lines that could fail at any given time and cost the city $500,000 to $1,000,000 apiece. One of those is Woods St. where we recently made a repair. Another area that's going to need funding in the near future is the abandonment of all of our metal water lines in town.

Hunter Thomas – Public & Community Affairs Director

Hunter said, “I do all of these social media. I work with the company on our website. He said I host the events, and I assist the council in any way that they need. Hunter said since I came in April, our content interaction on our Facebook has gone up by about 3500%. When it comes to events, the first event that I hosted was the Car Haulers Parade. Since we went into the fall, I assisted the recreation department with their Scare on The Square. Hunter said, and then of course, you saw all the Christmas lights.” Which was a vision of the city. Council and the mayor, he said. We installed 20,000 feet of 80,000 plus Christmas lights just in Wells Park. He said we had movie night there was attended very, very well. He said the Beautification Board lit up part of the Square as well. Going into this year, they are going to do more Christmas or holiday decorations as well. Hunter said, “I'm working on a concert series for Spring and is going to host concerts in three different areas; On April 12th, 2025, they are going to have a concert for our opening night at the new ball fields. And then on May 10th, 2025, we will have a concert at Virgil Wells Stadium, and on June 13th, 2025, which is a Friday, we're going to have a big concert on the Public Square. Hunter said one big project that he would like to take on this upcoming budget year is a new website. He said if you reach out and go on our Facebook page right now one of the top posts is our new newsletter. He said you can click on that, and you'll be able to subscribe. And we send that out monthly and we also send out a printed newsletter as well, which comes in the utility bill. Anytime you know of any events or anything that you'd like to see covered, please reach out to me at hthomas@cityofdarlington.com. Mayor Boyd asked Hunter to explain about the QR code. Hunter said the QR code that you see right here would take you to our contact page. But if you fill out that form on there, that message will be sent, but right now it is going to all the directors, but eventually we're going to get it set up to where it’s streamlined to a specific department. He said you can leave us an issue or concern or a nice message.

Ms. Hawkins said, “One of the things we want to do is to find a way that everybody can be satisfied. I want you to give the directors their opportunity to correct whatever issue there may be. This Contact form is a great way to communicate. Give the department heads an opportunity to serve you or to resolve any issue you may have. And don't be shy with the accolades and praise when they do a good job. Praise us to perfection if you would. I do believe in that. I don't believe in knocking you down because we need to give each other an opportunity and to empower each other to do better. So please, give the department heads an opportunity to resolve the issue before you take other steps, and I won't say what those other steps are.

Ms. Hawkins gave council members an opportunity to ask questions. Councilpersons Reed and Baccus both had questions for Mr. Shugart.

5-minute break

The following citizens made comments or asked questions:

Mrs. Anna Dewitt – Question for Mr. Shugart concerning privatizing our water & sewer system. Ms. Hawkins told Mr. Shugart if it's something he needs to get back with them on, we can take their name and number and get back to them.

Ms. Gloria Hines – Questions for Mr. Shugart about how many fire hydrants are working or not working at all. Ms. Joyce Thomas – Has about ten things, but they will not be question & answer. She said if the city and the County would have a regular meeting every 2-3 months and they could iron out a lot of these problems. She commented on water problems, and the infrastructure making sure the Seniors are in tune to technology.

Ernestine Lyde – Her issue is with the water department. She brought a sample of rusty looking water that is coming out of her faucet. They are saying they flush it, but I am still having these same problems. She is buying water, and she is boiling her water. Ernestine said her mother lives at 206 B Avenue. She said her mother is 90 years old and her water bill keeps going up. They have already had a plumber come and check the lines, but her bill keeps going up. Ms. Lyde said, "There's something going on, but you shouldn't have this kind of issue. This is the water that came from my house this morning and it even has bugs in it. I heard you talk about Brockington. And that's the side I'm living on. A lot of people that live on that side of town complain about the water pressure being very low. She said she's been coming and been talking and she's still in the same predicament. She said if you talk about going up, at least have a service that's better than this. Mr. Shugart said, "I agree with you. We have a schedule of flushing. We can add you to that and increase the amount of flushing done in your area. There should not be any bugs in that water, but I will send somebody to your house this week to collect a bacteriological sample along with a chlorine sample. It said there should not be anything living in your water. We test the system every month. And we know that we have never ever had a positive bacteriological sample. He told Ms. Lyde to give Jonathan Boatwright her phone number before she leaves, and he will give it to our customer service department, and they will look into your mother's issue if you give us the address.

Ms. Rosa Hudson wanted Lucas to clarify about the recycling. Lucas said, right now, we're operating every two weeks for recycling. But we've been doing a cost analysis, so recycling is currently a free service offered to the citizens. It's not included in your sanitation bill. Lucas said I finally located old flyers from when the city first started with recycling. It clearly states on that flyer that it's a free service offered to the citizens. When we started with this cost analysis, it's costing the city roughly $30,000 a year to run recycling and we have to take all the recycling that we do to Sonoco. He said at this point in time it is not cost effective. That $30,000 could be used for maintaining equipment and upkeep on vehicles. Ms. Hudson thanked the Police Department because crime has been going down, but she would like to see more police presence. She said she lives in the same area as Ernestine and her water has been brown too. She asked that the council act on some of the concerns that the citizens bring forward to you and give them some kind of resolution. She asked a question about the museum not being open on Saturday, but that is not a city issue.

Ms. Hawkins asked Lucas, on the recycling. Is there not an opportunity for citizens to use the convenience centers with the county? She said they would not be without the ability to haul off their debris. She asked Lucas to let them know where the closest convenience center is to the city. Lucas said one is located right there on Smith Ave.; there is another one on East McIver as well as West McIver. She said, “So, we do want to continue to support environmental awareness. And leaving as much as you can, such as plastics out of our landfill. She said your fats, oils, and grease also goes into our sewer. So, if you would take a paper towel or paper cup and soak up your hamburger grease and discard it in your garbage and not down the sink, because it still can coagulate inside the pipes and that can prevent things from flowing through. She said, our restaurants are already doing that, but also our homes can contribute to problems in the sewer lines. Councilman Gardner asked Lucas to give him a monthly or yearly tonnage that we’re actually utilizing with recycling. Lucas said I don't have that right off the top of my head but on Tuesday night I will present it at the council meeting. Councilman Gardner asked, “Do you have any idea of how much recycling we're actually picking up in the city? Lucas said the last total, if I remember correctly for this past week, it was roughly 12 tons.

Debra Jones Recycling. She asked Lucas if he has done any research in regard to other cities to see how they're doing with their recycling and what we could do better to compare. She said recycling is very important. And I would hate to see it just thrown away because you say it's not cost effective, but it can be cost effective. She says she is from up north and they do recycle, and it can be profitable for the city. So, her suggestion would be that someone do some type of research. She says she will do some type of research too, to see how it can be done better. And so that we won't just throw the program away.

Katrina Ham

Katrina said she lives at 133 Jefferson Street. She said. I'm trying to figure out why it's so hard for the people that come through on Fridays to pick up the trash in our area. Sometimes it stays there for weeks. A lot of times they say that the truck is broken down. And they can't get it, but it's a mess over there. There's a house that burnt down a couple of months ago and it's an eyesore and it looks terrible on our side of town. She says she wishes somebody could give her some feedback on that. Ms. Hawkins said Mrs. Bryant had to leave, but she would have Mrs. Bryant give Mrs. Ham a call. Lucas said they have had a truck down and he and Ms. Hawkins have had numerous discussions about the repair costs. He said they finally have all the trucks back up and running. He said as of yesterday, everyone had been serviced on their normal route. Ms. Ham said the trash was still there. Ms. Lyde said I’m on Flynn Circle too and my trash has been there for about 2-3 weeks. Lucas said, “I will check that on Monday, because that should also be a Friday route. Councilwoman Reed asked Lucas if they can get another list of things that are recycled. She said we need to put that out to let our citizens know what to put in the recycling bin. Lucas said, “Like I said earlier, I found one of the old flyers. I'm going to work on updating that and have that put in the next utility bill and we’re also looking at enclosing a copy of the city ordinance concerning yard debris.

Karen said she lives in Darlington County but moved out here from Ohio. She said she is learning the difference between what is city can do and what the county can do. Her concern

was with semi-trucks in her area where the residents parked them on the street, or they parked them partially in the street. And when there are noise nuisances, do we call you for those things? Chief Davis said, certainly call us and you can also call 911. She asked Chief Cavanaugh about the volunteer roles at the Fire Department. He said if someone comes to volunteer, we send them to the Fire Academy. The role of volunteers is the same as the full-time staff, whatever their certification is. Pretty much all of our volunteers are certified in interior firefighting. He said we get physicals for them. As long as they passed the standard, there's no difference except the guys on duty get paid and the other guys get paid per call. Karen asked Lucas what options are where we can recycle glass. Lucas said currently the city does not offer any type of recycling for glass. He said you would have to take it to one of the county collection sites. She asked about the Chamber of Commerce. Hunter said that's a separate entity than the city. Karen said events are being publicized in the city - I found out about a lot of events through Rosa Hudson. She asked how those are publicized and what's the location. Hunter said. We haven't had too many events since I've been here. But it's advertised and publicized on a variety of social media networks. We have a print newsletter that goes in the utility bill. So, it's on there. We just got a new electronic sign on the Public Square, so information will start going on up there as well. Typically, the Chamber and other entities such as the DDRA help push it out too. The DDRA actually has a texting service. And we are hoping to get our own texting service too. Right now, it would depend on the impact of the organization. We do events that center around the city, and they're going to attract hundreds of people. Hunter said they also need to be in the city too and not just Darlington County.

Councilwoman Baccus asked Chief Cavanaugh if he knew how many fire hydrants have black bags over them. Chief Cavanaugh said I believe we only have three or four of those. Out of the 340 something hydrants the city has we have 11 that have issues. There's five of them that are missing. And some are just leaking water, so we do keep track of it. He said they are missing one and they can't black bag those. The ones that have small leaks, we don't black bag those. Because if we have a fire, we can still use them.

Councilman John Milling said people have contacted him about water collecting at the intersection of E. Broad Street and South Main Street in the Hardees area and I was just trying to get an answer as to what's causing that water when it rains to gather quickly in that area. Mr. Shugart said, "Recently, my understanding is that it's been an area that flooded here in town for many, many years." Councilman Milling said, "In front of the Baptist Church on South Main St. there used to be a water problem where it would back up from Hardees all the way back in front of Saint Matthews. This is something that is more recent where it is occurring. Mr. Shugart said we did an investigation of that. That storm drain and the catch basins in front of the pawn shop appear to be that someone filled it with some type of concrete. He said those storm drains belong to SC DOT. He said we are responsible for keeping any debris off the top of the catch basins. And if any debris falls into the catch basin, we are responsible for getting it out. The storm drain itself belongs to SC DOT. He said we don't know who filled this catch basin up with concrete on the leg that drains down Broad Street. So, there's no way for water to flow away from that catch basin so it's going to collect right there. We recently met over there with our new Senator J.D. Chaplin and explained this problem to him. We also met with our local SC DOT

people. We have sent messages to the district engineer and it's my understanding that a week or so after we met with Senator J.D. Chaplin that the district engineer was there on site doing his own investigation into it. So, that particular funding problem should be addressed by SC DOT.

Mayor Boyd said, “I would like to thank Ms. Hawkins for finally making this come to fruition. For five years I have asked how many people have called and complained about yard debris this month? Do you know? About brown water? A lot of citizens have made complaints time after time, and we try to get back to you, but there has been no record of how many times a particular citizen has come and complained about water, no record of complaints about fire hydrants or potholes, etc. Mayor Boyd urged citizens to please use the text system. We do not own the text number for DDRA. He said DDRA and the Chamber are separate entities. The Chamber is here for the County and for the city. DDRA is solely for the city. Mayor Boyd said they have thousands of text numbers. When Lisa left, we quit promoting that, so now I beg and plead to make sure that we promote that. We will be able to send out mass text messages in a matter of minutes. He said we have a $21,000 digital sign that we beg and pleaded for and thanks to the county, they paid half of it. We have the utility bill that goes out each month with updates. We are trying every way we can to get communication out to everybody. Mayor Boyd reiterated again how important it is for the citizens to take advantage of the text feature.

Reminders

Tuesday February 4, 2025, Regular City Council Meeting at 6:00 PM.
Tuesday, February 18, 2025, Council work session at 6:00 PM

Adjournment

Councilman John Segars made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 12:10 PM. Councilwoman Elaine Reed seconded the motion. All approved the motion to adjourn the meeting.

_____
Mayor

ATTEST:

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Clerk & Treasurer