City of Darlington
400 Pearl Street, Darlington, SC 29532
Regular City Council Meeting
Held in the Courtroom
December 2, 2025, 6:00 PM

Present: Mayor Boyd, City Manager Hawkins, Councilpersons McRavin, Baccus, Reed, Gardner, and Segars. Also present was Anna DeWitt, Bill Hancock with the Brittingham Group auditing firm, Steve Abbott, Jannie Lathan, Gloria Hines, Ernestine Lyde, Sean Odom, and others.

Councilman Milling was not present at the meeting because of sickness.

News Media Present: Mr. Stephan Drew with the News & Press.

Invocation & Pledge

The invocation was by Pastor John McMahan from the Community Apostolic Church of Darlington which was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Hearing on Increasing Outside City Water Rates

Mayor Boyd opened the floor for the Public Hearing at 6:03 PM. Ms. Jannie Lathan asked how much the increase was. Mayor Boyd said it's a 30% increase. Ms. Lathan asked if this is only for the residents outside of the city limits and only for the businesses outside. Mayor Boyd said residential and commercial outside the city limits. She asked when this would go into effect. Mayor Boyd said I believe January 1st. Ms. Lathan said, "So we are having a public hearing again during the course of a regular meeting. Mayor Boyd said, "Yes ma'am, that's how we do it and it has been done that way for years. Ms. Lathan said, it has not always been done that way. Mayor Boyd said, that's how we're doing it now and we have clarified that it's fine to do it that way. Ms. Lathan asked, "Has the citizens been given proper notification because we're passing this tonight? She said they wouldn't have much notice to know that their bill is going to be increased 30% so what has the city done to make them aware of this increase? Ms. Hawkins said it was placed in the paper last Wednesday regarding the public hearing. The first reading was last month, which was read aloud for your hearing and then placed the notice in the paper as well. Sean Odom asked, "Are we only supposed to have one public hearing or more than one. Mayor Boyd said, "Just one public hearing." Ms. Hawkins said, in some cases, the public meeting is not required, but because these rates are changing this precipitated having a public hearing and placing it in the paper and doing the two readings. Not every action will require a public hearing, however the ordinance does say if two members of the council request a public hearing, then they can also have that. Sean Odom said if this is a success for the outside residents bringing in revenue to the city, are you all thinking about doing it for the residents in the city? Ms. Hawkins said, "No." she said the council wishes to make it equitable between inside residential commercial users and outside residential and commercial users for water and

sewer distribution collections. The current way that it has been for some time before I got here, you have a base rate and then you have a tiered rate that did not exist with outside customers, so we're just trying to even that up. And then also because they are outside, and the mayor has said multiple times, we wish that you would come in …if you all are out there considering annexing into the city to allow that 30% increase to make it equitable to what inside residential users are experiencing right now". Ms. Lathan thanked Ms. Hawkins and said that was an excellent explanation and she appreciates it because while 30% seems really high, what you're saying is, it has been low compared to the residents so you're making this significant increase higher to make things more equitable within inside residents and outside residents. Ms. Hawkins said, it is an attempt not only to. … Mostly to make sure that whether you are inside or outside, you are contributing to the system. Ms. Lathan said, "I appreciate that because when Howard Garland was our city manager, we actually did have separate public hearings so that the public had an opportunity to understand why their rates were going up. With the last city manager, however, they combined them, so we never got an explanation, at least I haven't, until tonight. So, I appreciate you as our city manager for taking the time to explain everything to us because my first response is why so high, but the reality of the situation is that it has been extremely low, and you were trying to make things equitable. There were no further comments, so Mayor Boyd closed the public hearing.

Approval of Minutes

Councilwoman McRavin said before we approve the minutes an amendment needed to be done.

Councilwoman McRavin made a motion to amend the agenda to include an Arbor Day Proclamation after "Citizens Wishing to Appear." Councilwoman Baccus seconded the motion. Councilpersons Gardner, Reed, Segars and Mayor Boyd voted in favor of the motion.

Councilwoman McRavin said she also need to make certain that under "New Business" where we are doing the approval of the 2026 Regular Council Meeting Schedule, that it also includes the work sessions. Mayor Boyd said we don't have to approve those. He said we probably need to wait until Mr. Milling is here to discuss those also. Councilwoman Baccus said, we have a quorum and whether he's here or not does not change the fact that you have a legal quorum. Mayor Boyd said, "We don't have to approve the work sessions."

Councilman Gardner made a motion to approve the minutes of the November 5, 2025, Regular City Council Meeting. Councilwoman McRavin seconded the motion. Councilpersons Baccus, Reed, Segars and Mayor Boyd voted in favor of the motion.

Proclamation

Councilwoman McRavin read the proclamation for Arbor Day with Mayor Boyd and the council proclaiming December 12, 2025, as Arbor Day in the City of Darlington.

Old Business

Ordinance 2025-07: to approve the sale, transfer, and/or conveyance of real property owned by the City of Darlington and identified as 3.51 acres on Harry Byrd Highway Darlington SC 29532 TMS# 126–00–02–098 to Venue 151 LLC. **Councilwoman McRavin made a motion to approve Ordinance 2025-07 to approve the sale, transfer, and/or conveyance of real property owned by the City of Darlington and identified as 3.51 acres on Harry Byrd Highway. Councilwoman Reed seconded the motion. Councilpersons Baccus, Gardner, Segars and Mayor Boyd voted in favor of the motion.**

Ordinance 2025-08: to approve the sale transfer and or conveyance of real property owned by the City of Darlington and identified as 107.87 acres on Harry Byrd Highway Darlington SC 29532 TMS# 126–00–02–063 to Austin Boyce. *Councilman Gardner said he needed to recuse himself because this is his cousin. Councilman Gardner said he wanted to note that the property was actually sold to Palmetto Concrete and not to Austin Boyce.* Ms. Hawkins said the latest one she had showed Palmetto Pavement Company. Councilman Gardner left the room while they handled this item. Mayor Boyd said instead of Austin Boyce change it to Palmetto Pavement Company. Councilwoman McRavin said, it's written that way on the ordinance. The ordinance says Palmetto Concrete and Company, LLC so it's correct on the ordinance. **Councilwoman McRavin made a motion to approve Ordinance 2025-08. Councilwoman Baccus seconded the motion.** Councilwoman McRavin said for public knowledge both of these properties have already been sold. The reason we are doing an ordinance now is because the property was purchased and sold not exactly following state law. Any property being purchased or sold is supposed to be done by an ordinance and unfortunately, that was not done several years ago when the land was purchased, nor was it done when it was sold. So, in an effort to follow state law we are now backtracking and trying to make certain we put in place the ordinances needed for these properties**. Councilpersons Segars, Reed and Mayor Boyd voted in favor of the motion.** *Councilman Gardner returned to the meeting after the vote.*

Ms. Hawkins said, "We failed to put ordinance 2025-06 on the agenda but you have a copy of it. We did put the public hearing on there, but we don't have it as an ordinance to be read as second reading. Mayor Boyd asked if we need to amend the agenda again to put this on there. Ms. Hawkins said, "Yes sir, if we want it to be ready for next month. Mayor Boyd said, "We will need to amend the agenda again to add the Ordinance Number 2025-06 that was left off the agenda. To amend both residential and commercial outside water and sewer rates, increasing them by 30% and establishing a tiered usage rate structure. Councilman Gardner said, "I would like to object. He said this is an ordinance to change people's rates and it wasn't put on the agenda and we've got to do a little better about being organized. **Councilwoman Reed made a motion to amend the agenda to include Ordinance 2025-06 to amend both residential and commercial outside water and sewer rates increasing them by 30% and establishing a tiered usage rate structure. Councilwoman McRavin seconded the motion. Councilpersons Baccus, Segars and Mayor Boyd voted in favor of the motion. Councilman Gardner voted, "No."**

Councilwoman McRavin made a motion to approve First Reading on ordinance 2025-06. Councilwoman Reed seconded the motion. Councilpersons Baccus, Gardner, Segars and Mayor Boyd voted in favor of the motion.

New Business

Sustainability Partners - Lenessa Hawkins (Presented via Teams)

Ms. Hawkins said a few months ago Representative Williams put her in touch with Sustainability Partners. She said I spoke with them, and they were eager to present to the city council regarding how they might help the city take care of some of the things that we need to take care of. Mr. Bert Carson said what they do is they are a very unique type of funding. Unlike traditional funding of bonds and loans, … what we do is we look at a project, and we call it infrastructure as a service. Mr. Carson said to give you an example of that I'm sure you had to buy software as it all came out now you pay like a subscription and it keeps it up-to-date or the copy machine scenario when they bring the copy machine in and you don't worry about ink or paper or anything you just pay so much per copy. We have kind of taken that same utility model like the electric company when you have lights on you pay for it and a transformer blows or whatever you don't care. We've taken that same model and brought it to infrastructure as a service. What that means is we will look at a project of whatever it is you want to do and we look at the lifespan of it and we make our model … stretch it out over that lifespan in the sense of we buy the infrastructure product, whatever that may be; we also install it, build it but we also maintain, repair, replace it as needed so that's what is very unique about us in the sense of from traditional funding. When you get into something it is still your responsibility to make sure it's working and it's going and if it doesn't, they don't care, they want you to keep making that payment. Where with us if it stops working, what we call our monthly usage fee immediately stops until we fix, replace, repair or whatever the situation is that we will do. Mr. Carson said, "With that also you don't make the first monthly usage fee payment until 30 days after the project is done. Mr. Carson said they don't do any kind of usage fee filing; they don't do any kind of revenue share. He said how it works is …. What we've seen is debt in this country has gone up and infrastructure has gone down. What they're doing with their model is we are keeping your infrastructure constantly improving and we keep that monthly usage fee more or less steady. Because their monthly usage fee has a little bit of flexibility, it follows the Capella law which means that it's not debt on your books. Mr. Carson said they are just like your electric bill. Wherever your electric bill is in your books, that's where we would be because we are a service. Mr. Carson said they don't mark up any goods or services, so they are bringing the project to you at whatever the cost of that project is. He said they do have eighty basis points fee that they charge and that's where they make their money. He said their money comes in from the same places as the bond market, pension fund, insurance fund, teachers' union fund, etc. Mr. Carson said they mitigate a lot of risks … Again, we are putting up all of our money upfront, doing the project …and if it's not working, or it's not what you want it to be and you want something changed, then you don't sign off on it and we've got to go fix that. Mr. Carson said that mitigates that risk of …. Again, as people say, the Ford, the Chevy, the Dodge …. we also mitigate a risk in a sense of … a little bit like an insurance policy. He said they mitigate that risk on a Black Swan event. So, going back to COVID-19, they had a lot of customers that did a lot of water projects with them, and they couldn't collect the fees from people because no one was working.

The governor said you can't cut people's water off, so they called and said we have no revenue coming in and we're not going to be able to make those monthly usage fees, and we told them that it was fine. So, we suspended their usage fees; some for three months, some for six months until they got back on their feet. When they came back, they wanted to know how much they needed to add on to catch up and we said, "nothing." So, they asked if we were putting it on the backside and we said no because another thing is our contract, which is only a 10-page contract, is every 30 days. So, every 30 days you can get out of our contract, so there is no back end. Our philosophy is we are trying to develop hundred-year customers with the cities and with pension funds, or whatever it may be. So, if you don't make those payments for six months in one hundred years that's fine. Mr. Carson said, we're also the people that … we're not just handing you money, we do that project, we're not expecting you to keep paying us for the next hundred years. We are going to constantly be deploying money, because as these items get close to their useful life and you want to stay with us, we're replacing all those items again. So, we're constantly deploying money, which again, no one else does. Mr. Carson said with our investors they are trying to have that relationship and so they are willing to do like single-digit yield and that yield is based on you staying with them for the entire time. He said it's not an interest rate and it's not a typical loan and as far as infrastructure that's a loose term for us. So, we can kind of do anything you're looking for …. I think one of your main goals is work force housing and so that is something that they can do. He said they do a lot of water projects, water meters, those kinds of things. Mr. Carson said in the case of a water meter, that's kind of low hanging fruit. Because of the way our system and our model work you actually make more in additional revenue than you pay us in a monthly usage fee. He said they do have a lot of their revenue generating infrastructure items to where you are making money in month number one which again is unheard of. Ms. Hawkins asked Mr. Carson to give them an example of a project that they've done for a smaller city. Mr. Carson asked if there was a particular project she had in mind or … Ms. Hawkins said, "fire trucks, buildings, facilities, …. Mr. Carson gave an example of a city that was about to be taken over by the state. He said they went in and again we feel like water meters are a very important thing to a city because that is your cash register. Mr. Carson said, "So, we went in and we did their water meters and because they were 40 or 50 years old, they had about a 52% increase in revenue and because of that we were able to show them how to reinvest that extra money into other projects using our model and they ended up paying off $1 million loan and a $3 million dollar upgrade to their sewer system. So, they got all new meters, paid off a loan to the federal government, and $3 million dollar's worth of upgrades and it literally cost the city zero from the very beginning because of the new revenue we developed for them. There was another city with 1,001 people and we went in and did the water meters and in less than 18 months they had over $100,000 sitting in an account that is normally zero. They were able to start being able to buy lawn mower equipment and bulldozers and things that they needed for years and years to the point that now the city has people moving back in and building houses again. Mr. Carson said Jackson, Mississippi was a total catastrophe with their water meters. He said they all went out. They had to sue the company, get the money back. We went in with water meters and increased their revenue by an unbelievable amount overnight. Even though the federal government came in with the justice department, or whoever it may be, they literally fired every vendor associated with the city of Jackson Mississippi, except for us because we were in there trying to do the right thing. Mr.

Carson gave another example of a town in Louisiana that was collecting about $14,000 a month and after they put in new meters, they collected over $40,000 a month and is paying them $5,000. Mayor Boyd said, we have a developer looking to put approximately 140 homes in the area and we have to put in the infrastructure (curb & gutter, water, sewer, water tower), can that work for this purpose. Mr. Carson said we can do 100% of the infrastructure on your behalf that you need to do for that developer. Mr. Carson said, “Roads are still a little sticking point. There are some roads we can do and some roads we can’t. Mayor Boyd said, “The main thing is whatever the project was a new firetruck, a new fire station or new housing development, infrastructure is if it’s money that we’re getting from them, $10 million let’s say, how do we show that we are going to prove that we will be able to pay that back? It’s still like a debt-to-income ratio, isn’t it? Mayor Boyd said, “He said it’s not going to be on the books.” Mr. Carson said, “Again, on a $10 million project we look at the scope of work or look at the useful life of those items, and we will come up with a monthly usage fee and that’s how you would pay it back. He said they look at what would be the best way to pay it back. He said everything is based on the useful life. He said they do all of those calculations, and present all of that to you to where you know all of that way in advance, all transparent, before you ever sign off on anything. Councilman Gardner asked Ms. Hawkins what the benefit is besides keeping an offer of debt income ratio and what are the benefits. Mr. Carson said, “They have a lot of value ads ….so obviously we are keeping it off of debt. So, one of the things is because we’re technically…. We have cash in hand so a lot of times we can get things cheaper or faster than you can because we’re paying people upfront. We also keep someone involved (we call an infrastructure specialist) that is going to be the liaison between you and the vendors, and they are there from now on. He said we are your partners and we’re not going anywhere. We’re trying to keep your business every 30 days, so we do a lot of proactive preventive type things. He said we don’t do the run to fail model; we don’t do the band aid; we’re constantly trying to keep your infrastructure improving. He said we look at a lot of your finances in the sense of, here’s a lot of ways we can save you money or try to get you the best bang for your buck. Councilwoman McRavin asked if it’s a twenty-year project and a new administration comes in twelve years later and decides they are not happy with it and they want out but the project is not paid for, would all of it be due in a lump sum or how is that repayment? Mr. Carson said, “You actually have two different options.” They bring in a third-party appraiser that you agree to, and we agree to because if you are buying something out, you by law have to get the value of what you’re buying. Mayor Boyd said, “We were looking to buy a trash truck, and we were told by the accountant that we didn’t have the funds/debt ratio to be able to borrow anything and then it came back that we could. I think at this second, we could borrow $800,000 on the books at this moment. We have the capacity to borrow that amount which means we can pay what we have to pay back if we borrow that full amount. If we came to you and said we want to borrow $800,000 then that doesn’t go against our debt ratio but then if we are still paying the same amount out that we would normally have to pay for an $800,000 debt … but it’s not showing on the books, but then it looks like we can still pay it but we really can’t pay it. Then we can go to the bank and borrow $800,000 and we’re still paying you and so then how can we pay both? Mayor Boyd asked, “How does that work by doing it off the books? Mr. Carson said, it’s not on your books ….so the thing is, we’re on your books, but we’re not on your books as debt. If we’re the first ones and you come to us and you pay us $40,000 a month and you go to the bank, the

bank is still going to see that $40,000 a month going out, but it would be no different than if it was $40,000 a month going out for the electric bill. It's part of your expenses and that's what the bank is going to look at. He said when you're trying to get some kind of a rating or something like that, we're not debt on your books. We are on your books as an expense, but we're not on your books as debt, that's the difference. Council continued to ask questions and discuss the subject. Councilwoman McRavin said, "I think what you are saying is, if you were doing a project for us we're making monthly payments to you like we do any other utilities and any other billing, but it's not reflecting that we still owe $10 million on our book like it would if we went to the bank to take a loan. We're just making payments. So that is what he's saying is the difference. Nowhere will it look like we have that type of debt, it just looks like we have a monthly payment that we have to do every month and the bank or anyone would take that into consideration when we're trying to go for a loan the fact that we have this monthly obligation. They just won't necessarily know that it's a $10 million obligation. They just know that it's a monthly debt of $40,000 that we have to pay". Councilman Gardner said he is a visual person so he would like some literature in his hands at some point. Mr. Carson said, "Sure. We can get all kinds of stuff for you. He said **s.partners** is a website and there's all kinds of stuff there, but yes absolutely we'll send you whatever material you are looking for." Mayor Boyd asked for references of cities he's worked with. Mr. Carson said there are plenty of references on the website. He said they will try to see exactly what projects they are trying to do and match you up with someone who's done something just like it or similar to it.

2024-2025 Audit Presentation - Mr. William Hancock, The Brittingham Group, LLC

(Mayor, council, and Ms. Hawkins were given a copy of the audit) Mr. Hancock went over the 2024-2025 audit. Mr. Hancock said first off, a letter from his firm is included as it has in previous years, which provides information about what they did, and if there were any problems, arguments, or disagreement with management, etc. and they didn't have any issues. Mr. Hancock said the city has what is known as a single audit, which means we have spent more than $750,000 of federal source money during the fiscal year. He said he doesn't have information or opinions on that tonight because the compliance supplement wasn't issued until last week. He said we've done the work and we're putting the opinion letters together, and then we can give it back at some time in the near future. We're going to get your financial statements done. Mr. Hancock started on page 1, which is their opinion on our financial statements. Based on the work that we did, we feel like that they're materially correct. Jumping around and going to pages 46 and 47, we've talked about these things before. These are what I call the secondary opinions of your report. The first part of that is on page 46 where we talk about your report on the current controls over financial reporting. As you're well aware, there is no perfect system of financial reporting. All human beings take part in it. And we talked about compliance and other matters. That is whether or not the city is following the rules by folks who are externally in person with the federal agencies, state agencies, payroll tax withholdings, retirement withholdings, health insurance withholdings. The course of our work that we did where we verified different parts of your financial system, we didn't find any errors. Your payroll tax deposits were made on time. You sent your police fine money on time and in the right amounts. You withheld and matched your health insurance and sent it in to people on time and in the right amounts. Mr. Hancock then went to page 10 which is the general fund statement of revenues,

expenditures, and changes in the fund balance – budget to actual. So, the general fund appears to be in fairly decent operating shape. Page 12 showed a statement of revenues, expenses, and changes in your net position in your proprietary funds. This is the water sewer fund and your storm water fund. The water & sewer fund lost about $203,000 dollars, but your storm water fund made about $344,000. In all we ended up with a $202,000 loss in the water sewer fund and that's concerning. I think 3 years ago the city engaged a company to do a rate study. The folks that do that rate study don't just take into consideration what your rates need to be to pay your light bill. They try, if it's done right and engineers participate, they'll take a look at your system, they'll assess what the age is and what the future rehab reconditioning costs are, they'll estimate what your expansion costs might be given the demographics and the way it seems like everywhere in South Carolina is growing. And so, they'll tell you what your rates need to be to cover all of those different things. And if you don't go up incrementally, then all of a sudden, several years pass by and you paint yourself into a corner, you're looking at a 30 percent increase. Councilwoman McRavin said, "Looking at the information from last year… I think there was a $250,000 deficit in the water sewer fund. She said a few years ago you did advise about scrutinizing …. You said in 2021 to scrutinize on a very detailed level where the money is going. Is that something that you suggest that we still need to do at this point? Mr. Hancock said, "You all have been doing it, and you continue to do it. He said there's no lack of transparency on where the money is going and the focus now needs to be on do we have a rate schedule that would support not only the system as it is, but will it support funding the rehab, repairs, capital improvement, and extensions and so forth. Mr. Hancock said that's the question that the rate study folks will answer for you. They will tell you what your rate study needs to be. Councilwoman McRavin asked if the rate study was ever done because that predates her. Councilman Gardner said, "It was." Councilman Gardner said, "We've been going back and forth about doing an incremental increase every year. There are ordinances other cities have passed where it just naturally goes up 2 percent, 5 percent, whatever the number is. Is that something that you would advise us to do? Is that what you are telling us? Mr. Hancock said, "As a best practice and a little bit of personal preference, I think that if this board institutes an annual increase as an automatic, I think you will tie the hands of future administrations. And I think that something as important and as sensitive as rate increases, I think deserves this board's attention every single year. When I say this board, I'm talking about whatever board is doing it because I think that it's as important if not more than a budget ordinance. Mr. Hancock said, "That's my personal take on it." Councilwoman Reed asked, "And that's your recommendation and that we should at least be discussing it and kind of coming up with something? Mr. Hancock said, "Well, I'll say it's the best practice. Making recommendations would assume that you're doing something wrong when an auditor speaks. So, we don't make recommendations because if we do, we're just telling you that what you're currently doing is wrong and we want you to change it to another way. I'm just saying best practice is done and I'll look at other places. Mr. Hancock said we could talk about the situation and the different issues with your long-term debt. So, on your books is what the State considers your share of the unfunded pension liability. The State has this much money invested to pay for pension benefits and actuaries believe that it's going to take this much to do it and so this gap is the unfunded portion. Mr. Hancock went to page 34. He said it doesn't matter whose fault it is. The reporting requirements say it goes on your financial statements. You may ask why you are putting it on my books? That's just the

accounting rules. Mr. Hancock said they're assuming that every single state, county, city, and every employee in the system is going to get between a 3 percent raise and 11 percent raise every single year. They're assuming that wages are going to increase this much every single year. So, to your question, why is this on our financial statements? The Governmental Accounting Standards Board came up with this and said there's a lot of …. when they came up with this. In 2011- 2013, there were a lot of pensions that were really severely under water. And when they looked at South Carolina, they were too. And so, they said the legislature said we have to fix it because we have to report this underfunding. So, the state law reads that whenever the pension plan in the state of South Carolina has a shortfall or needs to be bolstered, the legislature will provide for additional funds to be put in. The match is over 20% for the police system and 9.75 of the money is coming out of his check already. So, combined with that it's almost 30% going to the retirement system. He said as soon as the system reaches a funding rate of 85%, they're going to incrementally start bringing those withholding rates down 1% a year just like they took them up 1% a year from I think it was 2017 – 2022. Councilman Gardner asked if there was any anticipated idea of when they'll start coming back down? Mr. Hancock said, I think the funded ratio now is between 70 and 74 percent. Councilman Gardner said, "You didn't give me a year. Do you have any idea? I know you don't like the talking realities of things you're guessing at." Mr. Hancock said, I would like to have it done and I'd like to have it done in 3 to 5 years, councilman. And you have to remember there's going to be a delay too because all the reporting is a year behind because we don't get to see what happened until the following year. So, once we hit that mark, it'll be a year later, and it's going to get tossed around in the state house. Mr. Hancock said, "If you have any questions, let us know." He said we'll come back and give you the compliance report for your federal money. Mr. Hancock said sometimes council might do a budget workshop or a finance workshop. If you all need some … if you all need someone of us here, we can tell you about the best practices that we see in other parts of the state. And we're not inviting them. We just say, well, here's what they do over here that seems to work.

Upon motion of Councilman Gardner, seconded by Councilwoman Reed, to accept the 2024-2025 audit presentation given by Mr. William Hancock from the Brittingham Group, LLC. Councilperson McRavin, Segars, Baccus and Mayor Boyd approved the motion.

<u>Approval of 2026 Regular Council Meeting Schedule</u>

Councilwoman McRavin said the meeting in August was changed to a Thursday night because National Night Out is the first Tuesday, that we be consistent and if we're moving, that the meeting in November be on Thursday night as well. **Councilwoman McRavin made a motion to approve the 2026 Regular Council Meeting Schedule with the change of the meeting date in November to Thursday the 5th. Councilwoman Baccus seconded the motion. Councilpersons Gardner, Segars, Reed and Mayor Boyd voted in favor of the motion.** The schedule is as follows: ***Tuesday January 6, 2026; Tuesday February 3, 2026; Tuesday March 3, 2026; Tuesday April 7, 2026; Tuesday May 5, 2026; Tuesday June 2, 2026; Tuesday July 7, 2026; Thursday August 6, 2026; Tuesday September 1, 2026; Tuesday October 6, 2026; Thursday November 5, 2026 & Tuesday December 1, 2026.***

Clean up and Removal of Fence on City Property on E. Broad Street (Old Dixie Cup Parking Lot) – Mayor Boyd

Mayor Boyd said he just wanted to ask everybody if they would, to take time, not to vote on anything tonight, but just go by and look at the property that the city owns. And at the next meeting, we can decide and talk about it. He said George Pacific has spent a lot of money over there. Mayor Boyd said Wells Park cleaned up really well over there. Sam Evans has spent a lot of money on the five buildings over there. The apartment's been built. The whole area is starting to look really good. The fence looks really rough. It doesn't have a gate or anything on it. Mr. Evans is going to finish getting the rest of that dirt and the pipes and all that's over there cleaned up and moved. That parking lot that was being used temporarily for holding dirt and pipes for the structure that's going down Broad Street will be cleaned up. But, just asking to see about possibly removing that fence. I've talked to Lee and he said his guys could remove the fence and cut it down and dispose of it. So it would be at no cost, but it would make that parking lot area a lot cleaner until we decide what we want to do with it. So, if you just take time to look at that then we can discuss that next time on the next agenda.

Late Water Bill Discussion – Councilman Bryant Gardner

Councilman Gardner said we had a billing issue with the company that we contract with when it comes to the water bills. There's a late fee that was added in to people who didn't know about it. I think there was a week or 2-week extension under the late fee timeline. And so, my thought was since we didn't get the bill out in time that we may forgive those late fees. Councilman Gardner said it comes to $27,386.49 that the city would lose in revenue. He said when I first heard about the issue, I actually reached out and the assumption was that we weren't charging a late fee this month, but the billing management didn't come to that conclusion, and they figured that two weeks was good enough so that's the decision they made". The department head now says that if council wants to change that he'll be happy to honor it. Councilman Gardner said, I just wanted to see what the council's thoughts were on the subject. Councilwoman Reed said, "My thought is because if … as you started out that this is a fault of the company that we have and that should never be passed on to our customers. So, I don't see why that should even be a discussion. That should've been a decision made in the department and should never have come for us to have a discussion about it when it was obvious, it was the fault of the people we hired." Councilwoman McRavin said, "On the water bill it still said that if you didn't pay your bill by the 15th, it would increase with that late fee because that's how it always is. The water bill, even the first of last year, prior to this current city manager, would arrive late. You are getting the bill on the ninth and the bill is still due on the fifth (said fifth, but I think she meant fifteenth) and it's really not fair. I know they can call the water department and ask what their bill is because they can tell you, but who really does that? And should you really have to do that? While talking with some of the employees they said that, especially when there's a holiday and they've been off, it can push things back. It will delay the company getting the information and it can end up creating a delay in citizens receiving the bill. But with that being said, maybe we need to actually consider moving the date so that people will have at least a full two weeks to make payment on the bill. Maybe if we move the date to the 20th so that if there is a slight delay because of a holiday, they will still have time to make the payment before the late fee gets assessed". Councilman Gardner said, "Point of order. As much as I

agree with that, I have brought that subject up years ago. He said that is a subject that I will support you 100% Ms. McRavin, but unfortunately that isn't an agenda item tonight. He said this is a late water bill discussion, but moving the date of it though, is not part of the discussion. He said, "I think that would be a lovely topic to discuss at the next work session. Councilwoman Baccus said, "I think maybe we need to put something in writing … in place or give the city manager the authority to put something in writing for the water department (something that they will physically have in writing) that says if the water bill is late due to an error of the company that the late fee would not be charged until whenever instead of automatically charging them a late fee on the 15th. Councilwoman Baccus said, "We should give the city manager, or we need to put something in place in writing for the water department. That way it takes the discretion out of their hands to eliminate this problem." Councilwoman Reed said, "I just don't see where we need to do anything because it's up to the department. When you have a problem like that it's not passed on to the resident. It's up to this department not to even try to collect a late fee when it is not the citizens' fault. Because that's not gonna happen next month and that same language it's gonna be on the bill. It's not gonna happen in a couple of months. It's an isolated incident. You are going to have these kinds of problems …. That department should be able to function if a problem exists." Ms. Hawkins said, "Your ordinance says not getting your bill does not absolve you from paying your bill. Not getting a paper bill does not absolve you of paying your bill and paying it on time. She said you may need to amend the ordinance." Councilwoman Baccus said, "We need to revisit that ordinance." Councilman Gardner asked Ms. Hawkins if this was something she was comfortable with doing or actually with that ordinance, I think that takes it out of your hands. So, it would be something the council would have to do. Ms. Hawkins said, "And that's what they reflected to me. They said Ms. Hawkins we are going by what the council has put in place." **Councilman Gardner made a motion that we waive the late fee for the previous month because of the billing issue in the amount of $27,386.49. This would be a credit to the person who got charged a late fee on the following month bill and the second thing I'd like to add to this motion is that we reach out to the company and ask if they would waive the fee that they charged us this past month for the service.** Councilwoman Reed said that was a lot of … Councilman Gardner asked if she wanted him to separate the motions and she said, "yes." **Councilman Gardner said, I'd like to amend my motion to only deal with the water bill issue of the late fee and ask that the city credit the residents who were charged a late fee and the next month the follow up bill. Councilwoman Reed seconded the motion. Councilpersons McRavin, Baccus, Segars voted in favor of the motion.** Mayor Boyd said, "I guess I can talk before I vote Yes. I agree that the citizens should've known, but I also agree that there are citizens out there that don't. So therefore, we should give the citizens that money back and make sure that from here out that it's corrected. Mayor Boyd said the reason we put this on there was because we didn't feel like they had the authority to do this. That's why we were asking for the authority to be able to do this, and this was just a clean-cut case to help the citizens out. **Mayor Boyd voted yes.**

Board / Commission Appointments

Tree Board Appointment

Councilman Gardner made a motion to appoint Albert James to the Tree Board. Councilwoman McRavin seconded the motion. Councilpersons Baccus, Reed, Segars and Mayor Boyd voted in favor of the motion.

PDRTA Committee Appointment

Councilman Gardner made a motion to appoint Ms. Paula Pugh to the PDRTA Committee. Councilwoman Reed seconded the motion. Councilpersons McRavin, Baccus, Segars and Mayor Boyd voted in favor of the motion.

City Manager's Report - City Manager Hawkins

Ms. Hawkins asked Council to keep the family of our belated member of our staff in prayer - The McCray and Mason families during this holiday season. She said the nearly one year that she's been here she has come to know quite a few people here in the community and develop relationships with the employees, and they have shown much resilience over the past 12 months in many things. She said Mayor you asked for a texting service and we now have text.gov. She said Mayor you also asked for a contact page, and we do have a contact page that is listed under our departmental telephones. She said we are now in the process of getting our payroll system together. This will give us some more effectiveness and efficiency as it relates to our small but mighty administrative team. She said employees will have more of a tie to their information like their W-2s and changing their W-4's. It will be done electronically, and we won't have to do keypunching to get information into the system to process. The credit card processing is on its way to the inspection department and business license office. Business licensing as well as permits will be able to use the credit card function. They have gotten all of the data into the Brightly Software and they are now doing their data integration, putting that software together. Ms. Hawkins said we'd also come here while the splash pad was in progress and that was finished. At the fields at Blue Street, we went out there and worked along with the recreation department and Mr. Andrews to see about that huge project we did with the baseball fields. The city has also substantially completed the upgrade to the pool on Gary Street. That was pointed out to be something that I had a particular interest in. Ms. Hawkins said staff and I have looked into doing a broadcasting message. That message will be broadcast over all of the city and/or just those that haven't paid by the 10th of the month. We found out that we have been writing off quite a bit of money / accounts for people who left and didn't think to or didn't remember to pay their last bill, so we are going to work with a company that I've worked with before in North Carolina, just to start that process. She said we are going to do a program similar to something she started while in Lake City. She said it was a round up program, and the funds would be put into a fund to help people that are not able to make their payments. They would be able to do it twice a year and it would be handled by an outside nonprofit. She said we don't have anything signed so she can't tell them who that nonprofit would be. She said we were able to celebrate with all of our employees last week. I also want to mention, and I didn't have him come today, that our employee of the year 2025 was Dana Chrisley.

Executive Session

In accordance with S.C. Code 30-4-70

A public body may hold a meeting that is closed to the public for one or more of the following reasons:

(1) discussion of employment, appointment, compensation, promotion, demotion, discipline, or release of an employee, a student, or a person regulated by a public body or the appointment of a person to a public body for administration department.

However, if an adversary hearing involving the employee or client is held, the employee or client has the right to demand that the hearing be conducted publicly. Nothing contained in this item shall prevent the public body, in its discretion, from deleting names of the other employees or clients, whose records are submitted for use at the hearing.

(Upon returning to open session, Council may take action on matters discussed in executive session)

Mayor Boyd said we are going to table the executive session until all of the council is here. Councilwoman Baccus asked, why? **Mayor Boyd made a motion to table the executive session. Councilman Segars seconded the motion. Baccus, McRavin and Reed voted, "No." Councilman Gardner voted, "Yes." Mayor Boyd said it's tied so motion failed.** Councilman Gardner said, when it is tied, it fails, so we'll have to go into executive session. **Councilman Gardner made a motion to go into executive session at 7:50 PM. Councilwoman Reed seconded the motion. Councilpersons McRavin, Baccus, Segars, and Mayor Boyd approved the motion**.

Mayor Boyd made a motion to go out of executive session at 8:33 PM. Councilman Segars seconded the motion. Councilman Gardner discussed another issue concerning an employee while in executive session.

Councilman Gardner left the meeting at 8:34 PM. (He made his motion prior to leaving the meeting)

Councilman Gardner made a motion to end the executive session. Councilman Segars seconded the motion at 8:35 PM.

Mayor Boyd made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Councilman Segars seconded the motion. Councilpersons Reed, Baccus, and McRavin voted, "No" to adjourning the meeting.

Councilwoman McRavin made a motion to continue the contract that we have with our current city manager, and that any issue that we have has been resolved. Councilwoman Reed seconded the motion. Mayor Boyd and Councilperson Segars voted, "No." Councilwoman Baccus voted, "Yes." She said motion carries 3 to 2.

Reminders

1)Friday December 5, 2025 “photos with Santa” in Wells Park at 6:00 PM
2) Saturday December 6, 2025, Downtown Darlington Christmas Festival, starting at 12 noon
3) Wednesday – Friday December 24th, 25th & 26th, Christmas Holiday, City Offices Will be Closed
4) Thursday January 1, 2026, New Year’s Day, City Offices Will Be Closed

Adjournment

Upon motion of Councilwoman McRavin, seconded by Councilwoman Baccus, the meeting adjourned at 8:38 PM.

_____
Mayor

ATTEST:

_____
Clerk & Treasurer