

TOWN OF BRANCHVILLE
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
FEBRUARY 10, 2014

The regular Town Council meeting of the Town of Branchville was held on February 10, 2014, at 6 p.m. Mayor Glenn Miller called the meeting to order. All present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance. All of the council members were present: Tom Jennings, Sam Whisenhunt, Chris Ott, Gregory Oliver, Michael Blankenship and Amy Bryant.

Mayor Miller welcomed the guests.

Ordinance Codification:

Mayor Miller introduced Richard Frommeyer of American Legal Publishing Corporation, saying the company could "offer solutions to a lot of our problems."

Mr. Frommeyer said his company helps municipalities compile their ordinances into organized, indexed, bound books and a searchable online database as well if desired. He said the company has 16 attorneys who specialize in reviewing a municipality's body of laws. If there are gaps, they will suggest "model" ordinances that the Council can consider passing to meet specific needs. If there are ordinances that do not conform with recent court decisions, they will suggest ways to revise those laws. He said the company's president is a former mayor and a current council member and the company's other employees also understand the needs of municipalities in South Carolina and across the nation. He said the company's services can be paid for over two budget years.

Mayor Miller said, "We have a mess. This is not something I created. I inherited this mess." He said the town's official papers are stored in "a hundred-gallon drum" among other places. He asked council to "put an end to this and get these ordinances in order."

South Carolina Pathways:

Belinda Guerrero introduced herself as the founder and director of South Carolina Pathways, a 501(c)3 nonprofit Christian organization that focuses on prison ministry and community advocacy. Frank Vass introduced himself as a videographer, chaplain and former creative director of a long-running Christian television program.

They gave a presentation on their plans for redeveloping the old elementary school at 460 Lockett Street. They would like to provide education and training to the general public, but in particular to veterans, offenders, the homeless and those with learning disabilities.

Ms. Guerrero said the old school "does need a considerable amount of renovation" but she knows "people across the state that would love to help. ... Contractors have offered their services" and the CP&L electric utility has agreed to evaluate the building's electrical system. Ms. Guerrero said Pathways will offer many educational and religious programs for specific audiences as well as the general public. She said long-term plans might include making the old gymnasium into a dormitory. Mr. Vass wants to establish a Christian television station, a Christian newspaper and a print shop on the property.

Ms. Guerrero said she is doing this as a ministry, not as a money-making venture. She anticipates getting funding from private donors as well as the government sector such as the Veterans Administration. She asked the Council for "a key and a plat" and "a commitment that we can use the building."

Mayor Miller said, "I think it's a good idea. You have my blessing. But there are a lot of details that have to be worked out." He asked who would volunteer to follow this up. Council members Bryant and Oliver volunteered.

Council agreed to hold a community meeting on the proposal on Monday, Feb. 17, at 7 p.m. in council chambers.

Executive Session:

At 6:34 p.m., council voted to go into executive session to discuss a personnel matter. Council returned to public session approximately an hour later. Miller said, "Nothing was said that needed to be voted on in open session."

Approval of Minutes:

Councilman Ott made a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Councilman Blankenship seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Public Comments:

Mr. Clifton Ott asked if the water leak on Ott Street near Harriet Hughes' residence could be fixed. Mayor Miller said the damage is "serious" and involves a "huge section, 15 feet" of the road. He said it's "too big for Branchville" to fix it alone, but the county has promised to assist with the repair.

Mr. Richard Wimberly complained about being told he'd have to pay \$2,750 to connect his residence to the wastewater system. After much discussion, Mayor Miller said there had been some "misunderstanding" about the situation. He said, "Mr. Richard, I'll come and see you tomorrow."

Ms. Betty Glover of Zion AME Church said, "In front of my church now is a total mess. Mud is being tracked into the church." Water lines are being installed to residences on Hunting Road, off Bowman Branch Road. "Couldn't it have been done better?" she asked. Mayor Miller replied, "We contracted Metts Engineering for the job." He said he would contact Metts Engineering about improving the condition of the church yard.

Ms. Glover also asked if the Town has granted church denominational officials' request for a permit to demolish the former Bethel AME Church building on Edward Street. Mayor Miller said, "Let the record show that this is not the Town getting involved with a church." Mayor Miller said he met with a delegation of church leaders and he is pleased that they ultimately decided to explore whether the building could be preserved as a historical site.

Financial Report:

Councilman Ott moved that the financial report be approved. Councilman Oliver seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS**Playground:**

Mayor Miller said the sliding board "fell apart" as it was being moved per Council's instructions at the previous meeting. Councilman Bryant asked, "Where is it?" Mayor Miller replied, "It's down to the lagoon."

Mayor Miller said it was Council who voted to close the playground and "I cannot reopen it" single-handedly. "I need some direction from Council."

Councilman Blankenship said, "If the problem is gone, we should be able to open it."

The Mayor said, "Let the record show the playground will be open tomorrow."

Councilman Whisenhunt asked about "a power line for the spray park." Mayor Miller said it would not prevent the playground from being reopened.

Councilman Jennings asked what the newly named four-member Playground Committee has the authority to do and whether it can call its own meetings.

Councilmen Jennings and Blankenship asked how much money is available for playground improvements.

Councilman Whisenhunt said the Town right now has \$8,337.17 in Capital Project Sales Tax (penny) revenue for it.

The Mayor asked, "Are we going to replace the sliding board?"

Councilman Blankenship replied, "Why don't we wait until the committee meets and see what they propose?"

Councilman Whisenhunt said the Playground Committee needs to establish a chairperson; give public notice at Town Hall of its meetings; take minutes of its meetings; and report to Council at least once a quarter. He said the committee should assess both of the playgrounds in Town and make recommendations on what they need.

Online initiatives:

Mayor Miller reported that Town Attorney Russell Blanchard "gave us the OK and I'm asking Council to move forward with" establishing a Town website and online bill payment and authorize one day of training in Columbia for the person who will serve as webmaster.

Mayor Miller also said Cross Pointe Studios is working with the Orangeburg County Development Commission to set up a web site featuring short promotional videos of each municipality in the county. Each town that wants to participate would have to pay for the production of its own video, approximately \$3,500. Councilman Jennings said the Town first needs to get its own web site up and going first before considering something like the video.

Backhoe:

Mayor Miller said several people have expressed interest in buying the surplus backhoe but no one has offered \$15,000, which the Town hopes to get for it. Council members reiterated their support for entering into a contract with auctioneer Joe Burns to try to sell the surplus backhoe. Mr. Burns had included the sale of a dump truck in his contract proposal with the town but Council agreed that the contract needed to be for the backhoe only.

Farmers Market:

Councilman Whisenhunt said, "I would like to pursue developing" the old railroad freight depot – "the 10th oldest building in South Carolina." The walls and roof look great, but prospects are dim that it could be renovated quickly enough to be used as a farmers market this spring. He suggested setting up the farmers market somewhere else, such as Branch Junction or the empty lot next to The Churn restaurant. Councilman Jennings said, "Let's get it going" at a temporary location and see what interest it generates.

Street lights on Buttes Road:

Councilman Ott said, "I propose we do it and the one on Logan Street." Councilman Whisenhunt said the distance was much more than previously stated so it would cost a lot more than previously quoted. Councilman Ott said a man from SCE&G was coming to town the next day to look at Logan Street and could take another look at Buttes Road while he is here. Mayor Miller said he would put the matter on the agenda for the March 10 council meeting.

Four Way Stop Sign on Ott Street:

Councilman Blankenship said, "I get the impression it's going to take an act of Congress." But he still thinks it's a good idea and "I'm not ready to drop it."

2014 budget:

Councilman Whisenhunt made a motion to give third and final reading to the Town's 2014 budget. Councilman Ott seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS**Pumps:**

Mayor Miller said the Town needs to replace both pumps at the wastewater treatment lagoon.

Ordinance request:

Marianna Street said, "The Mayor did respond within the time frame allowed" to her request under the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act for a copy of the ordinance that gives the Mayor the authority to hire and fire Town employees. However, the response stated that the ordinance could not be located within the specified time period. She asked, "Do we have an ordinance book?"

Mayor Miller replied, "Yes, somewhere we have an ordinance book. That is not the answer I would want someone to tell me. ... It's here, somewhere, but where? ... We're looking. ... I'm doing my level best."

Ms. Street said, "I do remember we had the tornado" that destroyed Town Hall. "We do need to have the ordinances codified but first we need to have to give them the ordinances to codify. ... I'm glad we're finally going

to get it together. We need things codified. We need to find the ordinance book. ... It should bother you that you couldn't find the book."

Councilman Whisenhunt said, "It's council's obligation to find them."

Councilman Whisenhunt made a motion to have a work session on Monday, Feb. 24, 2014, at 6 p.m. for the specific purpose of going through the old temporary offices in the maintenance warehouse and looking for the missing ordinances. Councilman Ott seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Councilman Whisenhunt made a motion that all council meetings – regular meetings, work sessions or public hearings alike – be conducted in the same manner, which means the agenda must be posted at least 24 hours in advance, the news media must be notified, meetings must be opened in council chambers and minutes must be kept. Councilman Jennings seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

2013-2014 Action Item List:

Councilman Whisenhunt said there was nothing to discuss at this time.

Resolution in support of rail passenger service:

Mayor Miller spoke about a proposal to restore passenger rail service through Branchville. He asked Council to pass a resolution supporting the concept. Councilman Jennings asked if the resolution obligated the Town to provide a station or ticket booth. Mayor Miller said no. Councilman Jennings made a motion to pass the resolution. Councilman Oliver seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Progress Report/Capital Improvements:

Mayor Miller asked Councilman Oliver to report on a South Carolina Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (SC WARN) Tabletop Exercise that he and the Town's maintenance employees attended on Jan. 14 in Lexington.

Councilman Oliver said he learned from the event that the Town is "way behind" in having equipment that would be helpful in emergencies. Some items we do have are not in working order. We have no plan for blocking off public access to emergency scenes in the event of a scenario like a chemical spill. We have no way of warning the public about emergencies.

Mayor Miller said, "We need to put together an emergency action plan and this needs to be a priority." He nominated Councilman Oliver to head up the emergency preparation efforts.

Councilman Jennings noted that an ice storm was forecast for later in the week. He asked, if the Town loses electricity, can we still operate the utility pumps? Mayor Miller said yes.

Items for Information:

Councilman Whisenhunt said he read the radio-read water meters this month and 30 of them consistently do not get picked up. He said we have another 70 meters that are manual read.

Councilman Ott made a motion authorizing Clerk/Treasurer Jenny Elliott to attend two professional training and education events in Columbia: the Victim Assistance Fines, Fees and Assessment Fund Training event on Thursday, Feb. 20, and the Municipal Association of South Carolina's Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute, March 12-14. Councilman Oliver seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Approximately 1 hour and 22 minutes after Council returned to open session, a motion was made and seconded to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,



Lee Hendren/Clerk of Court