

TOWN OF BRANCHVILLE
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
JUNE 9, 2014

The Branchville Town Council held its monthly meeting Monday, June 9, 2014, at Town Hall. Public notice was given to The Times and Democrat newspaper and agendas were posted at the Town Hall.

Mayor Glenn Miller Sr. called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. All stood for the Pledge of Allegiance. Mayor Pro Tem Tom Jennings gave the prayer.

Mayor Miller called the roll. Councilmen Tom Jennings, Michael Blankenship and Sam Whisenhunt and Councilwoman Amy Bryant were present. Councilmen Christopher Ott and Gregory Oliver were absent.

Mayor Miller welcomed the guests.

Minutes: Mayor Miller said the May 29 minutes as submitted were "a little short and a little too incomplete for me." He said they would be reworked and presented for approval at the next council meeting.

Mayor Pro Tem Jennings made a motion to approve the May 12 minutes as submitted. Councilwoman Bryant seconded the motion and it was approved.

Public comments:

Vivian Fogle said she sees progress and improvement around the Town. Mayor said he appreciated her compliments.

Shirley Crosby asked when residents on Hunting Road would be connected to the newly installed water system.

Mayor Miller responded, "We have a backlog of work orders." He said Town employees have been diverted by "emergencies" along with required preparations for DHEC's annual Sanitary Inspection of the Town's water system, scheduled for next week. He added that the Hunting Road applicants would get water service as soon as possible even if it meant employees had to work on a Saturday.

A man wearing a ball cap, who did not identify himself, offered more compliments to the Town and in particular to the Police Department.

Mayor Miller said he mowed 4 acres of grass last week but cannot continue to work at that pace. He said others need to pitch in and help beautify the Town. Mayor Miller said, "I'm going to come and look for the most improved neighborhood" and "I'll let people know."

Vivian Fogle noted that it's "extremely hot" outside and asked if youths could be given access to the old elementary school gymnasium, "not necessarily tomorrow or next week but in the future."

Mayor Miller said, "We'll give you an answer one way or another. You deserve an answer." He said one big concern is who would supervise the youths at the gymnasium.

Luvenia Williams asked for a progress report in getting a Dollar General Market in Branchville.

Mayor Miller said he has not heard from real estate developer Steve Allen for quite a while, which is unusual, and tried to reach Mr. Allen earlier in the day. Mayor Miller said: "We gave him everything he requested. It's nothing that we're holding back," so all the Town can do is wait.

Harriet Hughes asked, "What is the situation with mosquito control?" She said the mosquitoes are as big as nickels.

Another audience member said the "mosquitoes are as big as helicopters."

Mayor Miller said the Town was sprayed twice last week. Two councilmen and several in the audience said they smelled or saw the mosquito spraying once last week.

Harriet Hughes said a man "broke into" Branchville Baptist Church while the secretary was working inside. She said the man was also observed "messaging around with her car." Ms. Hughes said, "Nothing has been done about it" beyond the filing of an incident report. "Was there an arrest? ... What's going to stop him from coming into my house?" Mayor Miller said the man was not arrested but the police "will follow up on" the incident.

Sam Whisenhunt – Police: Councilman Whisenhunt stated that he had asked all three police officers to attend the council meeting but the only officer present was the officer on duty, who was assigned to attend Council meetings that are held during his shift.

Councilman Whisenhunt proceeded to ask Lt. Eric Bonnett three questions: whether he is a professional police officer certified by the State of South Carolina, whether he has served on the Branchville police force for at least one month and whether Branchville has a drug problem.

Lt. Bonnett answered in the affirmative to each of the questions.

Mayor Miller said he felt compelled to stop the questioning because "you're about to let some secrets out of the bag" and spur "half-stories out in the streets. I just can't allow this. ... I did not put the policemen on the agenda. ... This is serious business."

Mayor Miller further stated that Councilman Whisenhunt should have communicated directly with him, rather than to the clerks, about putting this item on the agenda. Mayor Miller said he felt this omission was "outrageously disrespectful" and "very offensive to me."

Sam Whisenhunt – Operations: Councilman Whisenhunt said: "The water quality of Branchville is good. There's no issue there."

But there are problems with broken infrastructure. For example, Councilman Whisenhunt referred to leaks at the splash fixture in the park.

Mayor Miller said he ordered and received the parts needed to repair the fixture but town employees have not had time to do the work.

Councilman Whisenhunt said the Town is "plagued with water meter issues" – 49 radio-read meters and 11 manual-read meters had to be re-read last month – and leaky pipes, one of which is losing "a million and a half gallons a month."

Councilman Whisenhunt said: "Allow me to manage the water department."

Mayor Miller said: "We have a water system that's older than water. The point is, we don't have the personnel."

Councilman Whisenhunt said: "I am the maintenance manager of 20-some people (at Zeus Inc.). That's what I do: I fix things, I make things happen, I schedule things." He said he ran for Council to help the Town.

Vivian Fogle objected that Councilman Whisenhunt could not possibly run the Town's water and sewer operations "all by yourself" while maintaining his full-time employment at Zeus.

Councilman Whisenhunt said the current employees will continue to do the bulk of the "hands-on" work as they have been doing all along. He said, "My request is to manage it."

Mayor Miller asked for a motion. Councilwoman Bryant made a motion to accept Councilman Whisenhunt's offer. Councilman Blankenship seconded the motion and it was approved.

Financial report: Councilman Whisenhunt said the amount the Council budgeted for water and sewer carry-over funds for depreciation "doesn't show up on here." He made a motion to approve the financial report with the aforementioned "correction" to be made. Councilman Blankenship seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Old Business:

Mayor Miller said he is looking forward to the day when he can celebrate the first municipal water service to a resident of Hunting Road.

Council asked Clerk of Court Lee Hendren about progress in getting a branch library. Mr. Hendren said each council packet contained a copy of an email from Regina Pencile of the Lower Savannah Council of Governments, advising that if the Town wishes to apply for a Community Development Block Grant in the fall application round, the library might be the most viable project. The Town would have to provide a 10 percent match if it won the grant. Council received the correspondence as information.

Mayor Miller said Councilman Oliver is steering the farmers market effort now but he was not in attendance to talk about the status of that project. Mayor Miller said, "Let's not give up on it."

4-way stop sign: Councilman Blankenship said, "I'm getting nothing" from the state highway department by way of response or dialogue on the request. "We need to take it off the agenda."

Mayor Miller said being ignored is unacceptable and the Town deserves an answer, even if it's no.

Harriet Hughes said, "I've gotten over 50 percent of the residents and property owners on Ott Street" to sign a petition but it's "not enough signatures to do what we want to do."

Mayor Miller said she should not assume that: "They can't just disregard you and get away with it."

New Business:

Mayor Miller said Billy Staley once again apologized that he could not attend the council meeting and asked to be placed on the July 14 agenda to talk about the Reverse 911 program.

Steven Hayes of Harbourtowne Real Estate gave official notice to the Town and the public that the property adjacent to Town Hall is for sale. He said, "We always reach out to the abutters" to see if they're interested in buying a property that is available. The property consists of two lots totaling 0.75 acres with two buildings (27x27 feet and 60x60 feet) with a kitchen, a canopy and a parking lot.

Mayor Miller said the Town is not interested in buying the property but would be willing to assist in marketing the building to a retailer.

Adjournment: At 7 p.m. Councilman Whisenhunt made a motion to adjourn. Councilwoman Bryant seconded the motion and it was approved.

Respectfully submitted by Clerk of Court Lee Hendren
in the absence of Clerk/Treasurer Jenny Elliott