

TOWN OF BRANCHVILLE
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
October 20, 2014

A special called meeting of the Branchville Town Council was held on Monday, October 20, 2014, at 6 p.m. at the Town Hall. A notice was placed on the door of the Town Hall with the time, date and place of the meeting at least 24 hours before the meeting.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Glenn Miller. The Mayor, Council and all of those present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by prayer.

All Council members were present with the exception of Amy Bryant and Christopher Ott.

Mayor Miller welcomed the only guest, Beverly Berry.

Executive session: Mayor Miller asked for a motion to go into executive session to discuss some personnel matters. Mayor Pro Tem Tom Jennings made the motion. Gregory Oliver seconded it. Council returned to public session approximately 45 minutes later.

Loan: Mayor Miller said the Town always takes out a loan at this time of the year to pay our bills until the end of the year. He said last year the Town borrowed \$50,000 and agreed to repay it in 30 days. He said that was not enough time because the Town does not receive most of its property tax money until January. He said this year he is asking for approval to apply to Farmers and Merchants Bank of South Carolina for a \$60,000 loan for one year and withdraw amounts only as needed to pay necessary bills.

Mayor Pro Tem Tom Jennings said, "The requests for draws need to be approved by Council."

Mayor Miller said, "Yes, so now do I get this motion?"

Councilman Sam Whisenhunt said, "I make a motion."

Councilman Gregory Oliver said, "I second."

The motion passed, 4-0. Mayor Pro Tem Jennings abstained from the vote to avoid a conflict of interest because he is an executive with Farmers and Merchants Bank of South Carolina.

Mayor Miller said he hopes this is the last year the Town has to borrow to get through the year.

Backhoe: Councilman Whisenhunt said, "I make a motion that we have sealed bids for the backhoe with a minimum of \$10,000." Councilman Blankenship seconded the motion and it was approved without objection.

Mayor Miller said he would have the backhoe sale announced on the town's electronic sign. Councilman Blankenship said, "I make a motion to add that we earmark whatever we get from the backhoe sale to repay the \$60,000 loan immediately." Councilman Oliver seconded the motion and it was approved.

Timber: Councilman Blankenship said, "We have discussed looking into selling timber on the property owned by the town next to the dump. It has old-growth pine on it." He said Mayor Miller will meet with Beth Richardson, the forestry agent with the Clemson Extension Service in Orangeburg, to get her recommendations.

After some discussion, Councilman Blankenship said, "I will make the motion to take three bids toward the sale of the timber. We can accept or deny any of the three. If there is a bid accepted, I include in this motion to earmark that money also toward repayment of the \$60,000 loan." Councilman Gregory Oliver seconded the motion and it was approved.

Dump truck: Mayor Miller said the Town paid around \$60,000 for a truck it rarely uses. (*Note: It's a 2008 Ford F-750 with 2,545 miles on the odometer.*) He said the longer it's parked, the lower its resale value is going to be.

Councilman Blankenship said, "No town employee can even drive it."

Mayor Miller said, "We really have no use for it. What we have here is a show vehicle and we don't need that; we need hard cash." He said the Town needs to sell the truck "based on the average sale for a comparable vehicle."

Metal: Mayor Miller said, "We have three lawn mowers out there. You gave me the OK once to get rid of them but I was reluctant because I didn't know how to get rid of them. I don't want to throw them into the garbage. I need some direction on how to go about doing it."

Councilman Whisenhunt said, "Scrap them. Get Sunshine to bring us a little metal container down here and we'll throw them in it and other metal scraps in it and clean up the yard. That way you get something out of it." Mayor Pro Tem Jennings agreed.

Back to the dump truck: Councilman Whisenhunt made a motion to get the dump truck's value appraised and try to sell it, but not to earmark the proceeds for paying off the loan. He said, "Certainly we need to pay our bills before we do anything, but at the same time we need to make sure we keep up the equipment we have." He said the Town needs to have a 1-year, 3-year and 5-year plan for replacing aging items of equipment, including the police cars.

Councilman Oliver seconded the motion, stipulating that the proceeds from the sale of the dump truck will be put into a contingency fund the town will create.

Mayor Pro Tem Jennings asked, "Are we 100 percent sure that we can sell the dump truck? It was bought with grant money. Some of those grants have stipulations, that's what I'm saying." Mayor Miller said the dump truck and most other Town property can be sold. "The only thing we can't sell is the Charger." He said he will check into it and make sure he is right on that.

Council approved the motion without dissent.

Budget discussion: Councilman Blankenship said, "It just seems to me that if we didn't have this \$50,000 loan to repay year after year after year, then we'd be in the black, so we've got to figure out a way to get out of that."

Councilman Whisenhunt asked, "Do you anticipate raises for any employees next year?"

Mayor Miller replied, "I'd hope that we'd find monies to give a raise, yes. We're behind times. Our salaries are low. We have good employees: they work, they don't complain. I'm in favor of it, yes, a good raise. We have good people."

Councilman Whisenhunt said, "I would like a copy of all of the electric bills for a year." He said he specifically wants to find out if "some of the pump stations are running too much."

Councilman Whisenhunt asked, "How many phone lines do we have? I'd like to see a good summary of cell phone and land lines."

Mayor Miller said the phone expenses are "just too much." He said CenturyLink has invited him to meet with a representative to discuss what the Town has and what it needs by way of telephone services. He said, "Let me talk to them."

Councilman Whisenhunt said he wants an updated compensation chart showing each Town employee's base salary, retirement and health care "broken down completely for the year."

Councilman Whisenhunt said he wants to know how much property tax revenues the Town can expect in the coming year. Mayor Miller said he has received some information on that and will contact County Auditor Roger Cleckley for more information.

Councilman Whisenhunt said money for capital expenditures "needs to be integrated into this budget. I don't care how we have to do it."

Councilman Whisenhunt said he wants to know how much money we can expect from the "penny tax" and on what types of projects various portions of this money can be spent.

Councilman Blankenship said, "It's hard to budget when you don't know the numbers."

Councilman Whisenhunt said he wanted the electric bills "this week if possible" and the rest of the information before the Nov. 3 budget work session.

Agenda: Councilman Whisenhunt said the agendas for work sessions do not need to include the items that were labeled H through M on this meeting's agenda. Mayor Pro Tem Jennings said, "Make sure the heading says work session."

Movie night: Mayor Pro Tem Jennings said Councilwoman Bryant sent him an email regarding the movie night she is planning for the first Friday in December on the front lawn of the train depot museum. She asked for increased police patrols to help keep pedestrians safe.

Mayor Pro Tem Jennings said truck traffic on U.S. Highway 21 can be noisy and could interfere with moviegoers' ability to hear the movie. He suggested getting permission to close several blocks of U.S. Highway 21 for three hours and stationing a police officer at each intersection to redirect traffic. Several other councilmen thought that would be problematic.

Councilman Oliver suggested closing a portion of Reeves Branch Road instead, but that too was seen as problematic because it would not reduce truck traffic noise and it might interfere with parking for the Eatery at the Depot.

Holiday Fun Day: Mayor Pro Tem Jennings said the Holiday Fun Day will be held Saturday, Nov. 22. The tentative schedule is: "I hope to have a lot of people come and do yard sales in Branch Junction" from 8 a.m. to noon. Children's activities and games from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Lunch from noon to 1:30 p.m. "One of my festival vendors is going to bring his barbecue wagon." Bingo from 2 to 3 p.m. Corn hole tournament from 2 to 4 p.m. The parade will start at 4 p.m., followed by music, stage entertainment and activities at Branch Junction. He encourages any interested person or group to contact him to sign up for a 15-minute or 30-minute block of time to perform. He said he does not know how many people will turn out for the Fun Day events but one never knows how successful an event will be unless one tries.

Mayor Pro Tem Jennings instructed the town clerk to contact the state highway department and obtain a parade permit, and to send letters to individuals and groups on the Raylrode Daze parade mailing list, inviting them to participate in the Fun Day parade as well. He added, "Don't wait for an invitation. Come on and be in the parade."

Mayor Pro Tem Jennings said a lighting ceremony was looked into, but there is no way to turn on all of the street lights with one flip of a switch.

Audience comments: Beverly Berry asked how many acres of timber the Town has to sell. Mayor Miller said he guessed 10 to 12 acres. (*Note: Beth Richardson's professional estimate later in the week was 10.9 acres.*) Ms. Berry asked if the Town has any timber on its land behind the old Lockett Elementary School. Mayor Miller said no; that land was logged years ago.

Items for information: Councilman Oliver said he sent packets to four corporations about opening a grocery store here. He also said he is trying to get funds to restore the freight depot.

Mayor Miller said he remembers that Branchville in the 1940s had eight grocery stores, five gas stations, two drug stores, a 5-and-10 and many more businesses.

Councilman Oliver asked who owns the old freight depot. Councilman Whisenhunt said he has a document showing the Norfolk Southern Railroad conveyed ownership to the Town.

Mayor Miller said the railroad at one point in time was poised to tear it down and had to be persuaded to leave it standing.

Mayor Pro Tem Jennings said the town's railroad connection and history can be used as a draw for tourists.

Councilman Blankenship said the idea of restoring regularly scheduled passenger train service through Branchville is a great idea.

Adjourn: Mayor Pro Tem Jennings made a motion to adjourn. Councilman Whisenhunt seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.