

TOWN OF BRANCHVILLE
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
NOVEMBER 9, 2015

The regular Council meeting for the Town of Branchville was held Monday, November 9, 2015, 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 Times and Democrat newspaper was notified.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Pro Tem Tom Jennings, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and prayer.

The roll call showed that Mayor Glenn Miller, Mayor Pro Tem Tom Jennings, Councilman Michael Blankenship, Councilman Sam Whisenhunt, Councilwoman Amy Bryant, and Councilman Christopher Ott were present. Councilman Greg Oliver was absent due to the death of his mother.

Mayor Pro Tem Jennings welcomed the guests.

Minutes: Councilman Blankenship made a motion to approve the minutes of the Oct. 12, 2015, and Oct. 26, 2015, meetings as presented. Councilwoman Bryant seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Financial report: Mayor Pro Tem Jennings announced that the financial report for October could not be considered for approval because it had been mistakenly left off the agenda.

Playground Committee: Brandi Boan said it will cost \$14,414.20 to purchase the equipment desired for the playground beside Horton Field on Freedom Road. This price includes shipping, installation, mulch (9 inches deep in the "fall zone") and a free standalone object. The South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Parks and Recreation Development (PARC) Grant is in the amount of \$8,867.00.

The Playground Committee has raised \$1,329.93 so far with various fundraisers, including a little over \$400 selling concessions at Movie Night. Fundraising efforts are continuing. A drawing will be held on November 29 for a Yeti cooler. Christmas ornaments are still being sold. And another Movie Night is being planned.

Completion of the project will require \$2,423.94 if the Town provides its 20 percent match to the grant in the form of cash, or \$4,197.34 if the match is in the form of labor. In order to qualify for the sale price, the order must be placed by November 30 and half of the cost has to be paid at the time the order is placed. If the order is placed by November 30, delivery and installation probably will be done in January, at which time the balance must be paid. The Town will have to pay the costs upfront and apply to SCPRT for reimbursement. There is very little site preparation necessary because the site is flat. The committee still needs to figure out exactly where to install it.

Ms. Boan provided each Council member with warranty information as well as a list of potential projects at the other playground, in the Pleasant Hill neighborhood, such as a bench, picnic tables, swings, and checking for leaks in the shelter roof.

Ms. Boan said the restrooms in the Pleasant Hill playground had been badly vandalized. One option would be to repair the toilets and light fixtures and install doors that can be locked. People who want to use the park could get the key at Town Hall. There is the question of who would maintain the restrooms. The second option would be to close the restrooms.

Councilman Whisenhunt thanked the committee, saying they had done exactly what the Council had asked them to do.

Councilman Blankenship made a motion to spend \$2,423.94 in penny tax revenues for the equipment at the playground next to Horton Field. Councilman Ott seconded the motion. Motion carried. Council members encouraged the committee to continue their fundraising because it would let them make even more improvements.

Mayor Miller said he was glad to see progress in improving the playground next to Horton Field, but wants to see a proposal for improving the playground in Pleasant Hill soon and said the restroom should not be closed.

Addresses: Councilman Whisenhunt said Orangeburg County has a law requiring all residents to display their street address number on or beside their front door, and if the house is set back more than 50 feet from the road, the address has to be displayed along the road too. He said we need to start enforcing the law. Council members agreed to first have a public information campaign utilizing notices on the electronic marquee at Town Hall, fliers that can be handed out by police officers, and notices printed on water bills if that can be done.

Garbage contract: Council members discussed the impending deadline for notifying Republic Services if we are considering not renewing their garbage collection contract for another year. Mayor Miller said it's too late to solicit and consider bids from other companies. Councilman Whisenhunt and Councilman Blankenship disagreed. Councilman Blankenship said he will come up with a list of specific requirements so each company's quote is for the same services. He said he will report his findings at the Council budget meeting in two weeks. Councilman Whisenhunt said he wants to know if the companies would agree to bill the customers directly, instead of including it on the Town water bills as is done now.

Council salary ordinance: Councilman Ott, who had to miss the previous meeting because of a medical problem, asked for reconsideration of the salary ordinance that was approved in his absence. It says Council members who are absent from a regularly scheduled monthly meeting of Council for any reason are docked their month's salary, even if they attended special meetings and performed their duties as department supervisors. He said absences due to medical emergencies, a death in the family, military duties and work duties should be excused. The previous version of the ordinance allowed Council members up to three absences per year with no reduction in compensation.

Mayor Miller said there should be excused absences but the Council should follow established State law. Councilman Whisenhunt said he will provide Council members with copies of the State law. Councilman Ott said the ordinance should be amended to allow for excused absences with pay for medical situations, a death in the family, or military leave.

Mayor Pro Tem Jennings made a motion to give first reading, in name only, to an amendment to the Council salary ordinance authorizing certain excused absences. Councilman Blankenship seconded the motion. Motion carried. Council agreed to continue the discussion at the work session in two weeks.

Grocery store: Councilman Ott said he regrets closing his grocery store but he did what he had to do for his family. He said he is working to get the store reopened, but it is months away from happening and he would not necessarily be the person operating it.

Streetlights on Buttes Street: Councilman Ott said the Council has been talking for years about installing streetlights on Buttes Street. He said it is a popular street for walkers. He asked the Council to consider putting money for the streetlights in the new budget.

Timber: The Town has contracted with Caw Caw Land and Timber to harvest trees on Town-owned land near the convenience site. Councilman Blankenship said the company laid a pipe to gain access to the timber but it has been too wet to get anything else done.

Upstart Life Ministry: Upstart Life Ministry is using the cafeteria portion of the old high school and using "sweat equity" instead of cash for rent. The Rev. John Green said the ministry would like to start a learning center that would offer after-school tutoring, an after-school recreation room, and an adult computer literacy program. He asked Council to expand the rental agreement to include the rest of the former school. Councilman Whisenhunt said the ministry has been a good steward of the building and made a motion to accept the proposal. Mayor Miller seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Christmas party: The Town of Branchville traditionally sponsors a Christmas party for employees and Town officials. Councilman Christopher Ott volunteered to find out prices and availability of places in Branchville where this year's party could be held. He will report back to Council at the work session in two weeks. Council agreed to follow tradition and invite the mayor-elect and the two councilmen-elect.

Movie Night: Councilwoman Bryant thanked elected officials and the public for supporting the most recent Movie Night. She made a motion to have a third Movie Night on Thursday, December 17, showing two 30-minute holiday themed movies and offering children's photos with Santa Claus for \$2 during the intermission. Councilman Blankenship said he feels events like these bring the community together and seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Flood insurance: Clerk Lee Hendren referred to a memo he had given each Council member saying a representative of the Federal Emergency Management Agency had contacted him to say the Town had been suspended from participation in the National Flood Insurance Program.

Mayor Pro Tem Jennings said banks won't issue mortgages for homes or businesses in a flood zone without flood insurance and it is very costly outside of the federal program. However, he did not think there were any residences or businesses in a flood zone in Branchville. Council asked Mr. Hendren to obtain more information and report back at the Council work session in two weeks.

Mayor Miller asked how much it costs to participate in the program. Mr. Hendren said there is no fee but there appears to be a considerable amount of paperwork involved in administering the program.

Business license ordinance: Mr. Hendren said he is cross-training to learn the duties of the clerk-treasurer and has found several versions of the business license. He said he cannot tell if the one that is being used on a daily basis is the most recent version approved by the Council. Councilman Ott said the Council most recently approved a business license ordinance in mid-March of 2008. Mr. Hendren thanked Councilman Ott for that information and said he would further into the documentation.

Installation of new officials: Mayor Pro Tem Jennings made a motion that the Council hold a special meeting for the first Monday in January 2016 for the purpose of swearing in the newly elected Mayor and Council members, electing a Mayor Pro Tem, and electing a presiding officer for Council meetings. Councilman Whisenhunt seconded the motion. Motion carried, 5-1, with Mayor Miller voting nay.

Christmas parade: Under Items for Information, it was noted that the Christmas parade will be held Saturday, November 21, at 4 p.m.

Public comments:

- Lorianne Miller said she does not support closing the restrooms at the Pleasant Hill playground.
- Ms. Boan said there is no recycling program in Branchville and asked if that situation could be discussed with bidders for the garbage collection contract.
- Mayor-elect Franklin Dickson said he feels he should be given the opportunity to demonstrate his ability to be the presiding officer at Council meetings. Also, he suggested seeking a group that would be willing to sell street address numbers as a fundraiser. He said the Bamberg Fire Department does that. He was informed that the Branchville Fire Department sells street address numbers for roadside use, but not the kind that can be attached to doors or houses.
- Desiree Connelly asked if there will be any other events along with the parade on November 21. Last year the parade was part of a "Fun Day." Mayor Pro Tem Jennings said the Council decided not to do that this year because of other events going on that day, college home football games in particular. He said a Fun Day might be scheduled next spring.

Executive session: Mayor Pro Tem Jennings made a motion to enter executive session to discuss a personnel matter. Councilman Whisenhunt seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Councilman Blankenship made a motion to return to public session. Mayor Pro Tem Jennings seconded the motion. Motion carried. Mayor Pro Tem Jennings said there was nothing from the executive session that required a vote by Council.

Adjourn: Councilman Whisenhunt made a motion to adjourn. Mayor Pro Tem Jennings seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,



Lee Hendren