CITY OF OGLETHORPE

OGLETHORPE CITY HALL

115 CHATHAM STREET

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

OCTOBER 5, 2023 – 6:00PM

**Call to order:** 6:05PM Mayor Hill

Council and Dept Heads in Attendance: Mayor Hill, CM Harrison, CM Cross, CM Coogle, City Clerk Melissa Jones, PD Captain Hill

Council absent: CM Mahone

**Pledge of Allegiance:** Mayor Hill

**Invocation:** Ms. Lee Felder

**Approval of Agenda:** Motion to approve Agenda with the addition of line items 8 and 9 under new business made by CM Harrison, 2nd CM Coogle, AIF

**Approval of Minutes** from September7, 2023 Regular Council Session and September 28, 2023 Work Session – Motion to approve as presented by CM Harrison, 2nd by CM Coogle, AIF

**Recognitions of Guest(s)**: Brenda Harvey, Lee Felder, Gloria Stewart, Elijah Ford, Jerome Hannor

**New Business:**

1) Brenda Harvey – CDBG update – Would like an update in regards to the public meeting for those waiting for grant work to be done. CM Cross advised that the city is still waiting for River Valley Regional Commission to accept the job of administrator for this grant. CM Harrison advised that she spoke with Mr. Jim Livingston from RVRC last week and RVRC had had some things happen in their office that took priority that they had to take care of. CM Harrison reached out to another couple from Sumter County who are state and federally approved to administer grants in regards to the administration of the grant and they may be interested. They advised that they may be interested. CM Harrison advised the room to just give us a couple of weeks to try and work out the details. (Sherrie Kurtz) CM Cross – But basically, until we find someone to administer the grant, we are at a standstill.

2) Lee Felder – CDBG update – same as above concern so Ms. Felder advised to pass at this time.

3) Gloria Stewart – update on Anna Drive and Richardson Street – absent – CM Harrison advised that the city had been awarded over $200K from GDOT to fix the issue on Anna Drive and Richardson. It won’t cover everything, but we have enough money in Splost funds to cover the difference. The project is now out for permitting and frontend initial administration, etc. That should take 2-3 weeks and hopefully will be seeing the work started. CM Cross – In addition we are looking at an insurance coverage from the contractor that caused the damage that we may be able to get a settlement from to help cover the damages.

4) Elijah Ford – City basketball park/limbs - absent

5) Jerome Hannor – concerned citizen – absent – Ms. Jones advised that he called to advise that he would not be able to attend and she advised that she would send his information to CM Harrison to give a call back.

6) MOU between City of Oglethorpe and Macon County School System to jointly collaborate in allowing the city gym as a site for the evacuation, relocation, or reunification in case of an emergency. Motion to approve Mayor Bruce Hill to sign on behalf of the City of Oglethorpe by CM Cross, 2nd CM Harrison, AIF

\* CM Cross – Also for clarification we do still own the building behind the police department over by the playground equipment. Need to look at different avenues to possibly create some revenue from it.

7) Motion to approve the 2023 Millage Rate at 13.75 (reduced from last year’s 15.17) made by CM Harrison, 2nd CM Cross, AIF

8) Blinds for Council Chambers and Library side windows – CM Cross I looked up the plantation shutters in here now are about $350 for each window, opposed to the regular sliding wood ones are like $60.00, but we have to look at the length and the width. So, it would be like $700, plus installation. We need to allow $1,000.00 from ARPA to be sure we’re covered. We need to decide if we want to go with what’s in here or the regular ones. CM Coogle – Would they look that much different? CM Cross – No, probably not. CM Coogle – Why don’t we go with what’s cheaper? CM Harrison – I agree. Motion to spend $250 from ARPA for blinds in council members chambers made by CM Coogle, 2nd CM Harrison, AIF (CM Harrison advised that Mr. Jimmy Windham had installed the same type blinds in her home and that is possibly who we could reach out to.)

9) Police Department – CM Cross discussed that we had this Temporary Agreement with Montezuma that finishes up in February 2024 and that we need to make some decisions now to prepare for that. Are we going to reinvest and continue this relationship that has been successful? Do we want to begin to start looking for our own police chief as this was supposed to be a temporary fix until we can do something more permanent? I revisited where we advertised last time (handed out copies) as well as the starting salary of $47,500.00. I can tell you right now they are short 21 officers in Warner Robins with a starting salary of $52K. That’s just a base officer. So we are talking about a police chief for $47.5K in addition we said that he had to live within 35 miles of the city limits. I did reprint to see what we wanted to do. I suggest that we do advertise and go up to at least $55K and put that in the new budget. Just put that fishing hook out there and see if anybody is biting even. They might not be, but at least that way we would be prepared when it hit December. We can either go ahead and get this agreement ready and get it signed to keep Montezuma on and keep this relation ship or hire our own police chief. We have to make some decisions and we can’t wait until January or February to make this. We have to make this decision now to at least put the fishing line in to see if there’s anybody biting. If someone good is interested, we can get them in here and get them trained up so we can get our own police department back. And thank Montezuma and be finished in February, or we can get a new agreement going. CM Harrison – I think we need to put the fishing line out, but we do need to revisit what we are offering. I think the salary needs to go up and broaden the range of 35 miles. Yes, I agree that we need to start looking. We went into this saying that this is temporary and it makes no sense to wait until the day of to start advertising. I just think we need to put it out there and vet them as they come in. We need to discuss the offer, but at least put it out there that we are looking. CM Cross – I’m hesitant about increasing the mileage too much because of the wear and tear on that vehicle as well as when you only have one officer on… CM Harrison – That can be part of the incentive though. CM Cross – Well we let them have a take home car now, but if it’s more than 35 miles then it costs you more with the gas, wear and tear, and all. (Looks at Chief Woodard and asks if he has a radius for where they can take a car home – Chief Woodard said they used to, but to be competitive they don’t anymore. CM Harrison – This is a national shortage and people aren’t beating the door down to come to Oglethorpe so we have to make it attractive. CM Coogle – My thoughts are we have a very thing with Montezuma. So, why change unless you have to? I mean this city is better protected than it’s been in a long time. It’s been real good. CM Cross – I will agree with that statement 100% for when our neighbor got lost and Montezuma came over and assisted in the search. So we did have two officers instead of one. There has been advantages. CM Coogle – Maybe even a longer - term agreement, it just makes too much sense for the financials of this city. CM Cross – Just hearing from the citizens and the new council coming in, I’m hearing the direction is having our own police chief. I mean we just had citizens here stating they wanted our own police chief. CM Harrison – Factoring in also that our revenue is way down from what it was. I think we need to stick to what we said originally that this was a temporary agreement. CM Cross – Well it could be permanent if nobody bites. CM Harrison – Could be, but… CM Coogle – Everybody is looking for officers, like Columbus, it’s all over. CM Cross – Like Warner Robins needs 21 officers at $52K, I thought gosh. CM Harrison – But then Warner Robins brings in a whole different set of dynamics. It’s not the same as here. I think we need to stick to what we said going in that this is temporary. Put the ad out there and see what we yield. Then we can make a more educated decision come February when the agreement is up. CM Cross – I’m game and that’s the whole reason of me bringing it up so we can at least see what happens at least by December so we will know if we need to redo the agreement. CM Harrison – I would just rather us be proactive then reactive, that’s where I stand. CM Cross – Agreed. For the last two years we have been reactive from when this occurred. Being proactive, we are satisfying the need of our citizens to say we’ve heard you, we will look, we will put the fishing line out, but we have to make the best decision for the city itself. CM Harrison – I agree. Mayor Hill – I agree with the consensus, I have also had people come to me saying we need our own chief of police. CM Cross – We do have one of our own when we hired Chief Finch as our police chief. I think that’s part of the education that we do have a police chief. And then we have the resources of having both police departments. But at the same time, I understand that if I had to share with somebody. I would like to make the Motion to advertise the police chief position, using this description with a starting salary of $55K and have it posted in the budget for next year. I would like to set a term for how long we are going to look so that we can get started and get this agreement nailed down and more spelled out so if it doesn’t work that Chief Finch has more stringent bylaws that he can go by, that gives him more span of control. CM Harrison – What’s the end of this contract? CM Cross – February 2024, but if we are going to hire a chief, we need to have them hired by December so that they can get ready to take over by February. We still only have 2 full time officers. (Ms. Jones and 2 part time). That’s not enough to run a department. CM Coogle – To me we don’t have the police officers now, why would we go and get a police chief and still not have officers for him to be chief to? What we have with Montezuma makes financial sense and it’s worked very well. So I would think it would be up to the next council. CM Cross – So you would like us to leave this up to the next council in January? CM Coogle – We’ve already agreed to it until February. CM Harrison - I wouldn’t dare as a new council person, put that on the brand new council. I think we need to start the process now, it is not defined and we need to be proactive instead of reactive. So, where are we? CM Cross – Can I ask Captain Hill with what we are determining what is your opinion with the position you hold? Captain Hill – To be honest with you, the reason that chief hasn’t been trying to get more full- time officers is because of the financial situation within. So, if we can make it work and save Oglethorpe some money instead of giving 4, 5, or 6 officers, then you got a whole lot to feed money to. With that said we have 3 officers that runs both cities now anytime during the week. They run swing shift in Oglethorpe and our guys are 7-7. I think someone sent Chief something yesterday saying they wanted to come here to work. CM Cross – Matt, since you are here, could you give us an opinion? Chief Woodard – I think you need a department before you can have a chief, but you can’t get a department until you have a chief. CM Harrison – I agree, it’s catch 22. CM Cross – But I mean we have a chief. So Jill would you like to make the motion to go in this direction? CM Harrison – I motion that we move forward with recruiting a Chief of Police with the base salary of $55K using the afore mentioned job description and that we cut off the recruitment January 15th. CM Cross – I won’t second that motion as I would like to see the recruitment date cut off sooner than that. CM Harrison – What would you prefer? CM Cross – I would like to see is during our December meeting that if we don’t have any… CM Harrison – The December council meeting? That doesn’t give much time. CM Cross – That gives us 2 months if we get the ad out. I’m just talking about applicants that we review it, we see it, do we have some likely candidates. And that we revisit it at the December work session. CM Harrison – I think that we are setting ourselves up to think that we are going to have a whole pool of applicants in one month. CM Cross – That way we can discuss it at every work session to see where we are. CM Harrison – Ok, I can go along with that to discuss it at the work sessions. So you make the motion because you know what you are saying. CM Cross – I make the motion to start advertising immediately the Chief of Police position at $55K per year, that we will discuss at each work session so that we can have a determination before the 2024 year on whether to continue to our relationship with Montezuma or to hire our own Chief. 2nd by CM Harrison, not in favor CM Coogle. Motion passed.

**Old Business:**

**1)** Discussion of names to vet for Council Member appointment to seat left vacant by Jimmy Daniels, Jr. CM Cross – We talked about qualifications at our last meeting and I went home and prayed on it and thought about what qualifications do I have? Jill, Tommy, Michael, Bruce – what qualifications do they have. The only qualifications that we have are that we reside in the city of Oglethorpe. (Ms. Jones – and your taxes are paid) and the willingness to serve. I feel strongly as we discussed that we need to go ahead and fill the seat and wondered if anybody else had any names they wanted to give. CM Cross gave the three names that she had and advised that she had reached to a couple more, but they were not interested. One of the names given (ET Hosley) had advised he was running for something else. CM Harrison advised that she too had reached out to several people, but they were not interested. CM Coogle said he asked a couple of people and they were not interested. The three council members present discussed the 3 names given at the previous meeting further. More discussion of Joy McNutt and Gerald Beckum by council. CM Coogle – I would be good either way. CM Harrison – I’m always about grooming new people and Mr. Beckum has definitely put in his years, but his reach, network, and his involvement on a county level, no one else has that either and that can’t be ignored. If I had to make a decision it would be Mr. Beckum. Motion to appoint Gerald Beckum to finish the last 2 years of Jimmy Daniels, Jr.’s term was made by CM Cross, 2nd CM Harrison, AIF

**Other Business:**

**Adjourn:** 6:38PM CM Coogle, 2nd CM Cross, AIF