

**MINUTES OF MARION CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING**  
**CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS**  
**TUESDAY, MARCH 8, 2022**  
**6:30 P.M.**

A regular meeting was held by Marion City Council on Tuesday, March 8, 2022 at 6:30 p.m. in which Mayor Ashley Brady presided. Council members Ronald Atkinson, Michael Baker, Mayor Pro-tem Emerson Hunt and Tassie Lewis were present. Councilman Joseph Frazier was not in attendance. Staff present were City Administrator Alan Ammons, City Treasurer Patricia Brown, City Clerk Lakesha Shannon, City Attorney James Brogdon, Police Chief Bobby Crawford, and Fire Chief Jeremy Bass.

Mayor Ashley Brady called the meeting to order, gave the opening prayer and led the Pledge of Allegiance. He then welcomed citizens and guests. Mayor Brady introduced the new City of Marion Fire Chief Jeremy Bass and his wife Ginger. He welcomed Chief Bass to the community, and commented that he has already gone straight to work in doing some great things for the City. Chief Bass commented that he and his wife are grateful to be here, and everything has been wonderful so far.

**APPROVE MINUTES:**

Mayor Brady thanked Mayor Pro-tem Emerson Hunt for presiding over the February city council meeting in his absence. Mayor Pro-tem Hunt made a motion to approve the minutes of the regular city council meeting held on February 8, 2022. The motion was seconded by Councilman Michael Baker; motion carried unanimously.

**FEBRUARY EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH:**

City Clerk Lakesha Shannon was named the February Employee of the Month. Mayor Brady thanked Lakesha for all she does for the City of Marion, and highlighted that she is working hard to get the City in compliance with the new business license standardization act.

**RESOLUTION OF APPRECIATION – MR. RALPH ALLEN ATKINSON**

A Resolution of Appreciation was presented to Mr. Ralph Atkinson who retired from city council on December 31, 2021 after serving 32 years. City Clerk Lakesha Shannon read the resolution into the record, highlighting his many accomplishments and contributions to the City of Marion and this community as whole. Mr. Atkinson was presented with a framed copy of the resolution, and a Key to the City. Mr. Atkinson thanked council for the presentation, and expressed his appreciation in serving. He thanked the citizens of District 1 for electing him to serve all these years, and noted that he enjoyed serving. He further commented that it was a pleasure to serve with the members of city council. Mr. Atkinson also thanked his family for supporting him over the 32 years.

Mayor Pro-tem Hunt thanked Mr. Atkinson for his service and commented that he learned a lot from him over the years as a new councilmember. He noted that he admired how Mr. Atkinson always remained conservative, how he would stabilize the council, and encourage everyone to be accountable.

## **PRESENTATIONS TO COUNCIL:**

### **Dr. Jermaine Ford, President of Florence Darlington Technical College**

Dr. Ford introduced himself, and stated that he started his position as President of FDTC on October 4, 2021. He noted that it is his goal to ensure that they are serving the community, bringing relevant programs, and providing quality opportunities for citizens to obtain high demand occupations. He commented that he is spending 90% of his time out meeting with community leaders throughout the region.

Dr. Ford highlighted upcoming programs to include Emergency Management Technician (EMT) and Commercial Driver's License (CDL). He stated that resources would be needed to bring these quality programs to the region. He is also working with the Marion County Economic Development Director to learn more about the economic growth of the community. In closing, Dr. Ford stated that he will continue to work out in the community, and asked that Council not hesitate to call upon him if he can be of support in any way.

Councilwoman Tassie Lewis thanked Dr. Ford for his presentation and asked if there would be any opportunities in the future for nursing programs. Dr. Ford commented that there are plans to expand the EMT program to opportunities such as paramedics. He stated that they would eventually create more allied health pathway programs such as CNA, medical assistance and phlebotomy. He noted that the EMT program was once of the most demanded areas that needed to be addresses based on this region.

Mayor Pro-tem Hunt inquired about the time frame of the program for obtaining an EMT certification. Dr. Ford stated that it would be a short-term program. He noted that they are in the beginning stages of creating the program and would first need to secure equipment, supplies and an instructor. There are plans to bring companies in while the students are training so that job opportunities could be secured as soon as they receive certification.

**Mr. Don Strickland, Executive Director of PDRTA**

Mr. Strickland stated that this is the time of year when the demand for PDRTA services increase. He noted that they have started a Monday, Wednesday, and Friday route that is doing very well. There is an average of 20-30 passengers daily on the route from Marion County to Myrtle Beach. He also commented on the route from Marion County to Florence which includes students and staff passengers for Francis Marion University and Florence-Darlington Technical College. Mr. Strickland stated that that they currently providing an average of 277 trips daily, and are in need of another bus and additional drivers to maintain that capacity. He stated that adding more services will allow for more federal funding.

Mr. Strickland explained plans for a partnership to provide additional services, connectivity and routes between the Marion, Mullins, Britton's Neck and Sellers areas. He also mentioned discussions of a connection between Marion and Dillon counties to provide transportation to the various industries. He stated that they recently received federal funding to reopen the Marion bus station that's been closed for almost a decade. This requires the hiring of staff and additional bus drivers. He stated they are looking to bring together a group

of stakeholders to help with funding. Mr. Strickland reported that the City of Mullins is funding \$10,000. He stated that he met with Marion County Council today and asked for \$20,000 in funding. He is requesting that the City of Marion consider funding \$10,000 in the upcoming budget. This will provide a total of \$40,000 of which they could match. He is looking to secure a total of \$120,000 on the local level to provide all the planned services. He commented that federal funds have been given back due to lack of support, and he wants to prevent that from happening. He stated that federal funds are available; however, they need local support and funding.

The City of Marion currently provides \$2,500 in funding to PDRTA annually. Mr. Strickland stated that he would like to come back and present a PowerPoint presentation to council in the near future. He stated that he will also be submitting a budget request for the upcoming city budget.

### **REQUEST FOR STREET NAME CHANGE**

Mayor Brady stated that the Planning Commission has approved a request to change the name of Rich Street to Ransome Street. The commission would like to proceed in running the 30-day public notice ad in the local newspaper to allow for any public comments. Councilman Ronald Atkinson motioned to approve the street name change from Rich Street to Ransome Street. The motion was seconded by Councilman Michael Baker, and the motion carried unanimously.

**2<sup>nd</sup> READING OF ORDINANCE 22-02 AN ORDINANCE ESTABLISHING FILING FEES FOR MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS FOR THE CITY COUNCIL AND MAYOR**

Councilman Michael Baker motioned to approve 2<sup>nd</sup> reading of Ordinance 22-02 **An Ordinance Establishing Filing Fees for Municipal Elections for the City Council and Mayor**

The motion was seconded by Councilman Ronald Atkinson, and carried unanimously.

**AMENDMENT TO ORDINANCE 21-07 AN ORDINANCE TO ADOPT A REVISED BUSINESS LICENSE ORDINANCE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE BUSINESS LICENSE STANDARDIZATION ACT (2020 ESTABLISHING FILING FEES FOR MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS FOR THE CITY COUNCIL AND MAYOR**

Councilman Ronald Atkinson motioned to approve the amendment to Ordinance 21-07 **An Ordinance to Adopt a Revised Business License Ordinance in Accordance With The Business License Standardization Act (2020 Act No. 176)**. The motion was seconded by Councilman Michael Baker, motion carried unanimously. This amendment adds rate class 8.6 which was omitted from the ordinance in error.

**ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT:**

City Administrator Alan Ammons provided an update on Covid operations. He stated that the City is fully operational, and continues to track the cases. He noted that Marion County covid cases have averaged 0-2 per day over the past few weeks. Mr. Ammons commented that city facility rentals have started to increase. He also stated that baseball and softball signups have begun at the recreation department, and citizens are ready to get back out and enjoy the outdoor activities.

Mr. Ammons provided an update on the LED lights throughout the city. He stated that there have been some challenges with Duke Energy on this matter, as they will not provide an audit of the entire city. However, they will audit and provide a survey on a street or section of the City. Mr. Ammons recommended that they start with Main, Liberty and Godbolt Streets. He also asked that each councilmember provide a list of a few streets in their district to start audits on. Mr. Ammons stated that the police officers are checking for light outages at night and reporting them. He said there is an average of 25-50 light outages reported per week.

Mr. Ammons commented on the City's demolition policy. He explained that the city will demo a property for free if the property owner provides written consent, and pays for the asbestos survey. The survey must provide clear results before the demolition can be completed. Mr. Ammons stated that they have been compiling a list of properties that need to be demolished in the city, and noted that there is a CDBG Grant that will help fund demolition projects. Mayor Brady added that DHEC guidelines must be followed prior to demolishing a house. If there is asbestos present, the house cannot be demolished until it is removed. Mr. Ammons noted that the City can demolish one house for free each year, and one has already been approved for this current year. He is awaiting paperwork from the property owner to proceed.

Mr. Ammons stated that he recently met with the architects that will do the Capital Sales Tax project improvements at city hall. The project will be advertised for bid once the funds are released from the county.

Mr. Ammons provided council with a preliminary drawing of the Greene Street Sports Complex. He stated that the engineering company is currently working on the project and trying to design it to be a multipurpose facility. Mayor Brady highlighted some areas of the drawing and noted that the facility could be used for situations such as a testing site should there be another pandemic. Mr. Ammons stated that the fall football and soccer season will likely be delayed for play in the new facility due to necessary upgrades.

Mayor Pro-tem Hunt made a motion that Mr. Ralph Atkinson's name be included on any plaque or dedication item that is displayed at the facility as a founding member since he was a member of council when this project was approved. The motion was seconded by Councilman Ronald Atkinson; motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Ammons reported that the Forestry Commission will meet on March 19 to plan the planting of trees along Green Street and at Grice's Recreation Center.

#### **CITY ATTORNEY'S LEGAL UPDATE**

There was no legal update.

#### **DISTRICTS AND CITY UPDATE FOR COUNCIL AND MAYOR**

**Councilman Michael Baker** no update.

**Councilman Ronald Atkinson** asked for an update on the overgrown grass inside the fence at the Heritage Sportswear building. Mayor Brady stated that he would contact County Administrator Tim Harper to discuss a plan to resolve this issue. Councilman Atkinson also reported that there is a fire hydrant leaning over with an out of order sign attached to it at the corner of Evans and Franklin Streets. He noted that it has been that way for about 3 months.



Mr. Ammons stated that he would report this issue to Grand Strand Water & Sewer. In closing, Councilman Atkinson asked about the restroom facility at the downtown commons, and expressed his disappointment of it not being available during the recent downtown events. Mr. Ammons stated that they are awaiting the completion of the sewer tap. He stated that the engineer has not been onsite as of yet, so he is unaware of the timeframe for completion.

**Mayor Ashley Brady** again welcomed the new fire chief Jeremy Bass, and noted that Chief Bass would be providing a brief presentation to Council in executive session. Mayor Brady reported that the recent Chili Cookoff event was a success. He also provided an update on the North Main Street paving project. He stated that the patching has been completed; however, they will resume work on the paving in late spring. Mayor Brady stated that he is working to secure funding for a project on Bobby Gerald Parkway to build a fishing pier at the Catfish Creek bridge. A ramp will also be installed to allow for boat, kayak and canoe access. A fishing pier will also be installed at Catfish Creek behind the old Blumenthal Mills plant. Mayor Brady has met with the contractor to discuss this project.

Mayor Brady stated that next month the City will have a new councilmember, Mr. Donny Gerald who is running unopposed to fill the seat of former Councilman Ralph Atkinson. He stated that the swearing in for Mr. Gerald will be scheduled for the next council meeting on April 12 at 6:15 pm.

**Councilwoman Tassie Lewis** asked for an update on the funding for the Iraq-Afghan monument that will be installed at the Veterans Memorial Triangle. Mayor Brady stated that half of the funding for the project has been committed. He also stated that the dedication

program will likely be held the Thursday prior to Memorial Day. He noted that an active duty General is scheduled to be the speaker for the event.

Councilwoman Lewis stated that about 3 years ago District #5 created a group called Citizens United Against Crime to help proactively address the issues of crime in the district. They would meet to discuss their complaints and concerns; however, the committee has been inactive due to covid but they maintained communication. She noted that the biggest concern individuals had regarding reporting information about crimes was whether they would remain anonymous. She mentioned the previous discussions of having crime drop boxes available for citizens to report information confidentially.

Councilwoman Lewis stated that she and Councilman Michael Baker recently discussed some issues of crime in their areas, and are planning a District 5 & 6 meeting on March 17 at 6:00 pm at the Marion Police Department. Councilman Baker stated that the meeting will consist of a small group of individuals who will meet to organize a group to represent these districts.

Mayor Brady expressed the importance of speaking up if you have information regarding a crime.

Councilwoman Lewis expressed to police chief Bobby Crawford the need for the crime drop boxes throughout the City. Mr. Ammons reported that the police substations in the public housing areas are active again, and they are already seeing a difference.

**Mayor Pro-Tem Emerson Hunt** reported on a complaint he has received numerous times from a citizen who wants to install a fence to address a problem with a neighbor. Mr. Ammons stated that he spoken with the citizen and explained the limitations to installing the

fence due to water lines in the area. Mr. Ammons stated that he does not recommend allowing the fence, or selling the property as requested by the citizen. Councilman Ronald Atkinson motioned to not allow the sale of the land, or the installation of a fence as requested by the citizen. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Tassie Lewis, motion carried unanimously. Mr. Ammons will contact the citizen in writing with an update on this matter.

Mayor Pro-tem Hunt thanked Council and the community for the love and support shown to him and his family during their recent family losses.

### **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Councilman Ronald Atkinson made a motion to go into executive session to discuss a personnel matter with the Fire Department and a legal matter with the Police Department. The motion was seconded by Mayor Pro-tem Emerson Hunt, and carried unanimously.

Returning from executive session, Mayor Pro-tem Emerson Hunt made a motion to return to regular session. The motion was seconded by Councilman Ronald Atkinson, and carried unanimously.

### **FIRE DEPARTMENT BUDGET REQUEST**

Mayor Pro-tem Emerson Hunt motioned to allow the Mayor and city treasurer Patricia Brown to approve \$50,000 from the budget for the purchase of fire department uniforms and equipment. The motion was seconded by Councilman Ronald Atkinson, and carried unanimously.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Hearing no further business, a motion was made to adjourn by Councilman Michael Baker and seconded by Councilwoman Tassie Lewis; motion carried unanimously.

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Mayor Ashley Brady

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City Clerk Lakesha Y. Shannon