

MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF WILLIAMSON, WEST VIRGINIA, HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS OF CITY HALL ON THURSDAY AUGUST 27, 2015, AT 6:00 P.M.

Mayor Knopp opened the meeting by requesting that those present please bow their heads for prayer and remain standing for the Pledge of Allegiance, with the prayer being offered up by Audrey Lee, Reporter for Mingo Messenger.

The Mayor next requested a Roll Call and it was ascertained by the City Clerk the following persons were present, in person:

MAYOR: STEVEN JOHNSTON KNOPP

COUNCIL MEMBERS: YORK SMITH
SHERRI HAIRSTON BROWN
JUDITH HAMRICK
MATTHEW NEWSOME

CITY ATTORNEY: C. CHRISTOPHER YOUNGER.

Mayor Knopp requested approval of the Minutes of the meetings of August 13, 2015, and special meeting August 17, 2015. Whereupon, Councilman York Smith moved to approve said Minutes and which motion was seconded by Councilman Matthew Newsome, and carried.

Mayor Knopp then presented General Fund bills in the amount of \$17,599.49, and following review thereof, Councilman York Smith moved to approve the said bills as the money is available, and which motion was seconded by Councilwoman Sherri Hairston Brown, and carried.

Mayor Knopp then informed the Council he was going to read a statement that was not on the agenda. The statement was his resignation as Mayor of the City of Williamson due to a serious medical problem. He expressed his displeasure with not being able to remain on the Council and help correct the issues currently facing the City. He will remain Mayor through the next Council meeting, making his resignation effective September 10, 2015.

The Mayor recognized Jeff Reynolds and Drema Dempsey, from Mingo County Schools. They gave a brief presentation then asked the Council to recognize September as National School Attendance Awareness month. Councilman York Smith moved to approve a proclamation recognizing September as National School Attendance Awareness month, and which motion was seconded by Sherri Hairston Brown, motion carried.

A personnel matter was the next item on the agenda. Councilwoman Sherri Hairston Brown moved to go into Executive Session, and which motion was seconded by Councilman York Smith, and carried. The Mayor recessed the meeting at 6:15 p.m.

7:30 p.m. Mayor Knopp reconvened the meeting. He announced that in addition to his resignation, the City Attorney, C. Christopher Younger, and City Clerk, Frances Frye, also tendered their resignations, with both effective August 31, 2015. A motion was made to accept the resignation of the Mayor, the City Attorney, and the City Clerk by Councilman York Smith and which motion was seconded by Sherri Hairston Brown, motion carried.

The next item brought before the Council was assessment and inquiry. The Council requested an investigation of the Williamson Utility Department from the beginning of two thousand six through the present. A motion was made by Councilwoman Judith Hamrick to authorize the City Attorney to send a letter to the U.S. Attorney requesting an investigation, and which motion was seconded by Councilman York Smith, motion carried.

The next item on the agenda was Mayor Comments. The Mayor spoke earlier in the meeting, and did not have any additional comments.

Councilman York Smith expressed his surprise and displeasure with the resignation of the Mayor, City Attorney, and City Clerk. He thanked all three for their service to the City.

Councilwoman Sherri Brown stated that she agreed with Councilman Smith's remarks concerning the resignations. She went on to say that the Council just found out about the issues in the Water Department "about three weeks ago." She said the Utility Board was not supplying the Council with copies of their minutes as required. She said that "no one wants the water and sewer fees to raise;" however, the Council "will find out what happened and hold those responsible accountable if wrongdoing has occurred."

Councilwoman Judith Hamrick said she hated to see good people leave the City. She asked that the public keep communicating their concerns with the Council, and she bid "farewell and great lives folks" to the Mayor, City Attorney, and City Clerk.

Councilman Matthew Newsome said the Mayor's resignation "caught him by surprise." He said it was a difficult time for the City.

With no further comments from the Council, the Mayor stated the City Attorney reminded him that he needed to bring up one more personnel item that he had inadvertently left out of the earlier vote. He stated with the resignation of long time City Clerk, Frances Frye, the Council had to fill the position. The Mayor stated the Council had agreed to appoint Larry Brown as interim clerk on a one hundred twenty day trial basis. He thanked Mr. Brown for his willingness to step up and take the position. Accordingly, Councilman York Smith moved to appoint Larry Brown as interim clerk, and which motion was seconded by Councilwoman Judith Hamrick, and

carried. Mr. Brown will assume his duties as City Clerk effective September 1, 2015.

Madonna Shapiro reported that tall grass has grown on property, behind her house, that is owned by the City. She said the City was not cutting it. She told the Council that children play in the area and it concerned her. After a brief discussion it was decided that the Mayor and Fire Chief will meet Ms. Shapiro, at her residence.

Shawn Williamson approached the Council with concerns about the Utility Department. The Mayor and Mr. Williamson had a lively discussion of his concerns. He asked the Council about the sink holes on Vinson Street. It was suggested Mr. Williamson contact his state representatives concerning Vinson Street because it is a state road. He then asked about a special election for Mayor. The Mayor advised the City Charter does not have provisions for a special election.

Steven Hager also addressed the Council with concerns about Vinson Street, too. He asked why the State Police were not watching the area on Vinson Street since it is a state road. Mr. Hager was directed to contact his state representatives with that question. Mr. Hager asked why the city police was writing tickets to the motorists ignoring the closed road signs. He was informed the city police have jurisdiction to give tickets within city limits regardless if it is on a state owned highway or a city owned highway. The Mayor recommended everyone contact their state representatives concerning the Vinson Street matter.

Robin Williamson asked the Mayor what bills were reported to the Council, and if the City was in arrears on any of its bills. The Mayor informed Ms. Williamson that no other bills are in arrears as far as he is aware. He informed her that we have had several audits and things appear to

be in good order with the City. She asked the Mayor when the next audit report would be released, but that was unknown. The Mayor advised the City publishes annual financial statements in the newspaper to inform the public of the City's financial condition.

Teresa McCune said that the citizens were concerned about the rate hike. She is proud of the people for being present in the meeting and thought the Mayor and Council would be, too. Councilman Smith said that he "wishes five hundred or six hundred people would show up for Council meetings." The Mayor agreed with Councilman Smith and reiterated the need for the public to attend Council meetings.

Inas Evans expressed her disappointment with the "Water Board." She asked the Mayor why the sewer rate was higher than the water rate. The Mayor explained why the two rates differed. Ms. Evans then asked the Mayor if the petition to stop the rate increase would "do any good." The Mayor explained that the Council approved the rate ordinances and it is now in the hands of the West Virginia Public Service Commission.

Michael Baisden said the Council needed to change the City Charter to allow for a special election since such a provision is not currently in it. He also asked if the incoming City Clerk, Larry Brown, was bonded. Mr. Baisden was assured the incoming City Clerk would be bonded once he takes the position.

Ricky Wilkerson asked why the City could not get the materials from the state and do the work on Vinson Street. Mayor Knopp explained that the state road does not want to do anything without their engineers looking at the issue first. The City Attorney pointed out to Mr. Wilkerson how long it took the state to fix the problem in the Harvey Street underpass.

Delegate Justin Marcum was present in the meeting. He informed the Council and those present the state has been working on the Vinson Street issue for a while. He said the state could not give funds or materials to the City for the repairs because Veolia is a private entity. Mr. Wilkerson informed Delegate Marcum that the state did before when he served on the Council. Delegate Marcum stated that Vinson Street was not a state owned street. Councilwoman Brown informed Delegate Marcum that the street was owned by the state. Delegate Marcum said this was an issue of two government agency's "butting heads." The Mayor said "I think we all can agree that this can be done."

Vicky Rowe asked if Veolia Water paid business and occupation tax to the City. City Clerk, Frances Frye, informed that Veolia Water does not pay business and occupation tax. Ms. Rowe asked why Veolia does not pay this tax if all other businesses are required to and why the City does not start requiring them to pay it immediately. The Mayor informed Ms. Rowe that Veolia Water and the City's relationship is bound by a contract. He informed Ms. Rowe that there was most likely a provision in the contract that exempted them from paying business and occupation taxes because they provide services to the City. The Mayor said it is a possibility to include this when the contract comes up for renewal.

Betty Ward approached the Council with her concerns about the Utility Department. She expressed displeasure with the findings in the 2012 audit conducted by the West Virginia State Auditor's Office. She also expressed doubt that no one on the Utility Board or Council knew about the large debt the Utility Board owes Veolia Water. She asked that the water rate be rescinded until an investigation is completed.

There being no further business to come before the meeting, the same was adjourned, upon motion by Councilman York Smith seconded by Councilman Matthew Newsome, and carried.

MAYOR

CITY CLERK