

OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE MAYOR AND BOARD OF ALDERMEN TAKEN AT A REGULAR TOWN MEETING HELD ON MARCH 17, 2020 AT 6:00 P.M. AT THE ARNAUDVILLE MEETING ROOM, 107 RUE DE JAUSIERS, ARNAUDVILLE, LA 70512

Present: Mayor, Todd Meche

Aldermen: Jamie Huval, Debbie Kidder, Kevin Robin, Cynthia Stelly, Suzanne Stelly

Town Clerk: Dolores R. Quebedeaux

Town Attorney: Kay Theunissen

Town Engineer: Kenny Boagni (Absent)

Police Chief: Eddy LeCompte

Utility Superintendent: Todd Abshire (Absent)

Parks and Recreation Director: Zelma Jackson (Absent)

Called to Order: Mayor Meche

Prayer: Suzanne Stelly

Pledge: All

Jamie Huval made a motion to amend the agenda to add Sheriff Bobby Guidroz to the agenda seconded by Cynthia Stelly, motion carried.

Mayor Meche asked the board to amend the agenda to add Resolution 02-2020 A Resolution of the Arnaudville Town Council in Legislature to remove the Authority of Local Government to administer and collect local sale and use of tax, Jamie Huval moved amend the agenda to add Resolution 02-2020 seconded by Debbie Kidder, motion carried.

Mayor asked the Council to amend the agenda to add Ginger LeCompte with United Way, Jamie Huval moved to amend the agenda to add Ginger LeCompte seconded by Debbie Kidder, motion passed.

Approve Special Meeting Minutes February 13, 2020-Mayor Meche

Jamie Huval moved to accept the Special Meeting Minutes seconded by Debbie Kidder, motion passed.

Approve Regular Town Meeting Minutes February 18, 2020-Mayor Meche

Suzanne Stelly moved to accept the Regular Town Meeting minutes for February 18, 2020 seconded by Jamie Huval, motion carried.

Accept February 2020 Expenses-Mayor Meche

Jamie Huval moved to accept the February 2020 Expenses seconded by Suzanne Stelly and Kevin Robin, motion carried.

Utility Report-Todd Abshire (Absent)

A report was sent to the Clerk as per Todd Abshire and was given to the Mayor and Council Members.

Water-March 16, 2020 a Dollar Store delivery truck ran over a hydrant near the Dollar General. The hydrant valve was closed off and has been removed. They are in the process of getting price quotes for repair from a few local contractors so they can bill the delivery truck's insurance once repairs are made. EPA has issued a statement regarding the COVID-19 virus stating that this virus cannot live in a chlorinated environment. As long as they are within the EPA/LDH chlorine residual requirements, the drinking water remains safe. The monthly Safe Drinking Water Act daily chlorine residual logs were verified by Todd Abshire and are on file in the utility office filing cabinet as required by law.

Wastewater- The monthly flow records were faxed to HoPak Laboratories to verify flow in accordance with the discharge permit, as well as all analytical results being examined, reported and filed in the appropriate filing cabinet in the utility department files.

Gas- The gas system is operating near 40 pounds of inlet pressure at the Cypress Station and 50 psi at Koch Station.

Todd is working on a water and wastewater rate study as requested by the Mayor and he should have the results before the beginning of the new fiscal year budget proposed.

Police Report—Chief Eddy LeCompte

As it falls to the Chief to do everything possible to secure and protect the citizens of Arnaudville, he has in the past relied on the good relationship he has with the sheriffs of both parishes during times of critical need. He did, as previously, engage St. Landry Parish Sheriff's Office to provide for officers to fill gaps. However, he was later informed that he failed to follow steps for establishing a formal contract. He wished to apologize to the Council and the Town Attorney for not following procedure. His primary concern was, is and always will be Arnaudville's safety, in his attention to delivery of services. He failed to be as concerned over the administrative bureaucracy that is necessary for all Mayors and towns to oversee.

Having met with the Mayor after he abruptly terminated the arrangement, he suggested that he bring the request to the council for proper approval in order to implement a formal contract. As I explained to the Mayor, there was no intention to purposefully circumvent proper procedure. The past practices in this area had never come under scrutiny before, and given the fact that he was covering the costs under the approved budget, Chief perceived no obstacles to proceed. Chief does recognize, in fairness to the Mayor, that the nature of the need and the length of time he would need assistance was more than usual.

So in order to address his oversight, in order to prevent the interruption of services to Arnaudville citizens, he is asking the Council to approve and open contract (employed on an as needed basis) with St. Landry and St. Martin Parish Sheriff's Department, and with that, approve the payment (negotiated or otherwise) affiliated with that contract, to be reviewed on an annual basis.

In regards to the staffing of full time Patrol Officers he is continuing his protracted search to obtain suitable candidates. Contrary to what some of you think, recruiting candidates for Patrol Officers is not a "come on in, we'll talk and if you seem qualified I'll hire you" type situation. Here is the typical scenario, not unlike most law enforcement agencies today. Over the past two months he has been in contact and interviewed nearly 30 candidates. These interviews are time consuming and intense, but despite his due diligence, over half were deemed unacceptable after the initial interview. If the remaining 15 passed the initial interview they were asked to return for a psychological examination. More than half of those asked to return did not do so, or had an appointment set but failed to come in at the appointed time. Of the six (out of 30) who did return to take the exam only two were deemed acceptable by Risk Management to be covered by insurance. He currently has three candidates being reviewed: One had taken his exam through another agency and he is waiting for that agency to email or mail him a copy of his results; one who did not complete the exam and is now working, and will not be able to return to finish it until the end of the month and finally one who will have to be set up to take the exam sometime this week. He hopes that by the end of this week he will have at least one applicant that will be eligible for hiring, if the council will expedite with a special meeting set up for approval.

On Thursday, March 26, 2020 Neighborhood Watch meeting has been cancelled. An attempt to reschedule will be made for either during the month of May or June. Chief stated in the past, all residents of the 70512 area zip code are invited to attend.

When a salary adjustment was approved by the Council at the last meeting for the Patrol Officers he informed the Council that he would ask for an adjustment to the pay for dispatchers.

- As such, chief request that the starting pay for Dispatchers be \$9.02 per hour (Grade 1, Step 33). After 6 months of satisfactory service the pay would increase to \$9.58 per hour (Grade 1, Step 39). These adjustments would be effective immediately.
- He also would like the Council to approve adjustments for longevity in that a dollar an hour adjustment would be made for those working five (5) years, ten (10) years, fifteen (15) years and twenty (20) years. Therefore a Dispatcher with 5 years working would receive \$10.58 per hour

(Grade 2, Step 7), with ten (10) years \$11.64 per hour (Grade 2, Step 15) with (15) years @12.69 per hour (Grade 2 Step 23) and finally after twenty (20) years \$13.74 per hour (Grade 3, Step 31). In short, these adjustments would show appreciation to the time and dedication of the Dispatchers for their loyalty on the job. These adjustments, for service time, would not become effective until the 2020-2021 budget years. This adjustment would currently only apply to two (2) employees.

- Chief petitioned the Council to approve the hiring of Ms. Tiffany Taylor to the position of Dispatcher. Chief stated that all the Council members had received Tiffany's application. The rate of pay for Ms. Taylor would be \$9.02 per hour (Grade 1, Step 33).
- Likewise he petitioned the Council to adjust the pay of Dispatcher Delores Neal to the same pay being approved for Ms. Taylor.

Chief recommended that Reserve Officer Jair Stelly be allowed to assume patrol duties on his own. Reserve PO Stelly has been sufficiently trained, for the past year, in what duties a Patrol Officer has. Further, Reserve PO Stelly would still have a full time Department Officer on the same shift he would be manning. He asked that approve be granted to Reserve PO Stelly be allowed to assume patrol duties on his own and that he be placed on the automobile insurance police as an approved driver. Statistics for the month of February were: 2 arrests. 6 citations, 2 MIC's issued, 3 FIC's and 78 calls for service. Statistics are low because almost a quarter of patrol time was covered by other agencies.

With respect to the current crisis concerning COVID-19, the department is closely monitoring the situation with the State, other Municipal Law Enforcement Agencies and local Parish leaders. The situation is very fluid and changes are happening at a very fast pace. Chief said that if he feels that the Police Department should adopt any new steps to protect the employees and the citizens of Arnaudville he will contact the Mayor to keep him informed.

Mayor said he wanted to clarify something what chief said about him abruptly terminated the contract, Mayor stated the he did not abruptly terminate the contract because there was no contract. Chief said he did not know it was a contract and thought this was an agreement with the Sheriff Department.

Jamie Huval motioned to approve the adjustments for the longevity seconded by Debbie Kidder, motion carried.

Jamie Huval motioned to approve the hiring of Tiffany Taylor seconded by Cynthia Stelly and Suzanne Stelly, motion passed.

Jamie Huval motioned to change the step for pay for dispatchers seconded by Suzanne Stelly, motion passed.

Jamie Huval motioned that the council adjusts the pay of Delores Neal to \$9.02 per hour seconded by Debbie Kidder and Cynthia Stelly, motion carried.

Kevin Robin questioned Chief about entering into an agreement with Sheriff Guidroz and asked where in the budget was this going to be taken from. Chief said he has never used the Sheriff Department for a long length of time but this time he had to. Chief said his plan was to take it out of the budget where he was under budget. Kevin said before entering into an agreement you have to make sure the money is there to pay those individuals. Kevin stated that they taught they had reached high ground and all would start working together. Kevin thanked Sheriff Guidroz for the work they provided to the town and wants to pay him for his services.

Kevin feels that they need to table the payment until some kind of legal agreement can be reached with the guidelines. Cynthia said her concern is perhaps having the Sheriff staffed to do the patrols at \$40.00 an hour instead of hiring someone at regular wage to fill the gaps.

Chief said he wishes that someone would talk to him about making plans for anything that needs to be discussed. Jamie Huval said he and Debbie Kidder went to speak with the Chief and the whole

time they were in the chief office the conversation was about annexing and nothing to do with the police department.

Kevin Robin told chief to stay in his lane and follow the Lawrason Act; the streets need to be patrolled.

Mayor stated that as far as an agreement goes he would be happy to present something to the council if that is the avenue they choose.

A line item would have to be added to the budget to add contract laborers. Mayor Meche thanked the Sheriff for the assistance his officers provided for the town.

Mayor stated that the payment due to the Sheriff's office will have to be approved by the council members. The budget will have to be amended in order to pay the sheriff.

Jamie said that in no way is he in favor of not having a Police Dept., but the department cannot stay staffed. Chief feels that the increase in the pay will go a long way and encourage people to stay on. Chief also stated that added benefits such as insurance would encourage officers. Kevin said the Council added in good faith to raise the salaries, Kevin said his door is always open and he knows Chief door is open as well, but doors swing both ways. Kevin stated that the council knows there is not an adequately staffed police department. Kevin said the Chief should have had a discussion with the board members to avoid all of the unnecessary happenings. Kevin said it is time to press the reset button and all work together.

Cynthia Stelly motioned to table the paying of the bill for the Sheriff's office and look at a contract from the Sheriff's office seconded by Suzanne Stelly, motion passed.

Kevin Robin made a motion to table Reserve Officer Jair Stelly (Reserve Officer) to allow him to patrol alone, seconded by Debbie Kidder, motion passed.

Sheriff Department—Sheriff Bobby Guidroz

Sheriff Guidroz explained that he is not at the meeting to demand payment for the work performed by his officers. If the bill has to be forgiven he is willing to do so. Sheriff stated that when the Chief called him and asked for help in the past Sheriff gave him deputies, but the Sheriff department would pay the overtime. Sheriff explained that he has to look out for his budget. Sheriff said that he was neglectful about not checking with the mayor. Sheriff Guidroz said that he will work with the Chief to provide protection. He is paying his deputies \$17.00 per hour; he said these small towns cannot pay that kind of money. The day has come to where the small towns cannot police their own community because of lack of resources and lack of manpower. Sheriff explained that he is willing to offer a proposal to the Council. There are surrounding Parishes that a begging for help from the Sheriff's office. Sheriff Guidroz asked chief to take his responsibilities seriously in making sure his police officers are doing their jobs correctly.

To contract as an outside agency to patrol the area 3 things have to happen, 1. The people have to request this. 2. The Council has to abolish the chief's budget and the chief stays on until the end of his term. 3. The Legislature has to say OK and have this approved.

Sheriff stated that by far he is not at the meeting to take the Chief's job. Sheriff said no one should support wrong things. Debbie Kidder inquired about the Sheriff Department policing the town and wanted to know if the officer would stay here in town and the Sheriff replied that the officer would stay in Arnaudville. Kevin also mentioned the importance of the jail tax renewal.

St. Martin Parish Council on Aging—Burton Dupuis

Mr. Burton is the Chairman of the St. Martin Parish Council on aging. Mr. Dupuis explained what Council on ages aids the elderly people who qualify, such as providing congregate and home delivered meals, nutritional education, information and assistance, outreach, material aid, home repairs, utility assistance, homemakers, recreation, legal assistance, disease prevention, health promotion, and transportation.

Blighted Property—Suzanne Stelly

Suzanne Stelly spoke to the mayor about a few areas of concern she has about the blighted property. Mayor explained that letters were sent out to property owners about their blighted property. Steps are being taken to arrest the blighted property issues.

United Way—Ginger LeCompte

Ginger is the Executive Director for St. Landry and Evangeline Parishes. Ginger presented information on the Coronavirus, some of the impacts that are happening or will happen. Ginger said that they are supporting a central location called 211; they are connected with the Department of Health and other government agencies. This operation is up dated on a daily basis.

Police Department and Council—Willie Wyble

Willie Wyble stated that it has been over 30 days and he has not received his Police Report. He said he received 3 reports and none of them are correct and wants to know when he will receive a correct copy. Chief said he did not know what Willie is talking about because the officer goes out there and talks to the individual or tries to talk to the individual. Chief said at the time of the accident Chief said he was not informed. The officer went out there and thought there was a very dangerous situation, he was not aware that Mr. Wyble was an expert; if he (the chief) would have been there he would have probably told him what needed to be done. The officer was trying to keep everyone safe. Chief said he had a discussion with the police officer and is trying to have him produce a correct report. The officer will be working on his report tonight (3/17/2020) and the report will be ready 3/18/2020. Willie said he wants the officers to know that he works for the church and does go to the cemetery at night and he is not out there to steal bodies he is doing his job.

Resolution 01-2020 WMPP (Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality)—Mayor

Jamie Huval moved to accept Resolution 01-2020 seconded by Kevin Robin, motion carried.

Resolution 02-2020 A Resolution of the Mayor and Town Council of the Town of Arnaudville in Opposition of all proposed Legislation that enables the Legislature to Remove the Authority of Local Governments to administer and collect local sales and use taxes—Mayor

Jamie Huval moved to accept Resolution 02-2020 seconded by Debbie Kidder and Kevin Robin, motion carried.

Up-Date on Drainage, Water Well, Sewer, Generators, Roads—Mayor

The audit was done from pipeline safety on the gas, there is a gas loss, a study was done and there is multiple gas meters that should have been replaced due to being old meters. A plan has to be put together to give to pipeline safety, it is recommended to change out some of the commercial gas meters. Changing out the meters would be approximately \$7000.00. Mayor said he needs a motion to adopt a Resolution to cover the expenses. Jamie Huval moved to accept the Resolution seconded by Debbie Kidder, motion passed.

Residential meters are being looked at as well; there are old meters that are being inventoried so the cost can be added to the next fiscal year budget.

The generators are all fixed and running, there were some major issues with the generators, but everything is up and ready for the storm season.

The drainage project is winding down weather permitted it should be completed in a couple of weeks.

A change order was done for the \$15,000 the town had from St. Landry Solid Waste to complete road patching. Patching did take place in some areas of town, but there is plenty more patching that needs to take place. Mayor is working on plans to see what steps will be taken for the next fiscal year to give to the Council.

On Mills Street there was an issue with the sewer lift station, Griner was called out and the pump was un-repairable. The pump had to be replaced.

There will be overages in the budget this year due to major repairs.

Specs are being drawn for the water plant and hopefully this can be put in the next budget. The water line at the water well had a rupture in the main pipe; a contractor had to fix that problem as well.

Citizens' Concern

There were concerns about plans on a local level for the Coronavirus for people who are compromised. The board members did offer their services to the public. Mayor also suggested utilizing 211 for information and also calling City Hall so we can try and help anyone in need. Kevin Robin thanked Jamie Huval for wanting to help the constituents.

Adjourn

Kevin Robin moved to adjourn the March 17, 2020 Regular Town Meeting seconded by Debbie Kidder and Jamie Huval, motion carried.

Attest:

Dolores R. Quebedeaux, Town Clerk

Todd Meche, Mayor