

Walterboro City Council
Regular Meeting
April 24, 2012

MINUTES

A Regular Meeting of Walterboro City Council was held at City Hall on Tuesday, April 24, 2012 at 6:15 P.M. with Mayor Bill Young presiding.

PRESENT WERE: Mayor Bill Young, Council Members: Paul Siegel, Dwayne Buckner, Charles Lucas, Randy Peters, Tom Lohr and Bobby Bonds. City Manager Jeff Lord, City Clerk Betty Hudson and City Attorney George Cone were also present. Approximately 34 persons were present in the audience.

There being a quorum present, the Mayor called the meeting to order and called on former Mayor Charlie Sweat for the invocation and Council Member Siegel to lead the Pledge of Allegiance to our flag.

PUBLIC INPUT ON AGENDA ITEMS:

Ms. Judy Bridge, a City resident, addressed Council on agenda item No. 3, under Old Business, Response to SC Housing Finance and Development Authority on Proposed Tax Credit Housing.

She stated that since Council's last meeting she and other persons have been working diligently in an effort to help Council with respect to the proposals for tax credit housing through the South Carolina Housing, Financing and Development Authority. She said that we have talked to many people in our subdivision, namely Forest Hills Subdivision and Westview Subdivision. An overwhelming response was received in opposition to this tax credit housing, located specifically on Bells Highway.

She told Council that she had 267 persons to sign a petition in opposition to this housing in the Forest Hills Subdivision. Ms. Bridge told Council that she would like to present some other ideas and concerns that Council might wish to consider. She then presented the following concerns:

- 1) In traveling around the community in the last two weeks, she counted the number of apartments that we do offer, and there is no question that we need apartments for all different levels of economic concerns. She said, I traveled from Highway 63 around the loop to Brice Herndon Funeral Home, and in the scope of that area, there were over 12 housing developments. Many of these are related to low-income housing. Ms. Bridge stated that she went on line to the site for the SC Housing Authority. She said, I found some information there, and I have a question for City Council. As I looked at the South Carolina counties, there are 46 counties with 28 counties that applied for funding. Colleton with a population of 38,264 had received 4 applications. Aiken County with a population of 160,000 had 3 applications filed. The most applied was 6 in counties that ranged from 66,000 to 119,000 people in their county. Out of concern and reflecting on this, how is it possible that we have 4 developmental groups that want to come into our county? Did we ever have the opportunity to express or to survey our own county and ask the questions ourselves - What do we afford the people of Colleton County and what are our needs from Colleton County? When you look at the properties that we have available in our City of Walterboro, there are not too many tracts left in our City that are the size for these proposed low-income housing. One parcel is 7+ acres, and the other is 4 acres. I worked a couple of years on the Planning Commission, working on the Comprehensive Plans for our City, and I question if this is what we want to use our properties for in the City, when we are so limited in what we have left available to develop.
- 2) As I drove around to these different housing developments, I went to Bay Meadows, and I talked to the housing manager there, and I looked around. I

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am going to say that of all the places that I visited, however, all the places were well kept, which is not an issue of these housing developments. But as I left Bay Meadows, that street behind Bay Meadows, is full of houses with for sale signs. All I can say is that neighborhood has gone to the point where houses are empty and yards are unsightly.

- 3) If you look at these developments on Bells Highway. They start on Bells Highway, which we have already considered the traffic problem issues there, go through to where it really falls on the Forest Hills Subdivision and Westview Subdivision. If you would look at the diagram of the development, it would be put next to the Belks Shopping Center. For people who live on the street behind the development, the apartments are going to be hanging over their back yards. So, there is going to be no way, I mean most of these people have lived there for 35 or more years. It's a long developed area. So, if these people get ready to sell their homes, they are not going to be able to do that. Nobody is going to want to buy a house or continue to live in a house that is flooded with night lights and noise. If you consider a 42-unit housing development that comes in, you've got 200 people. Can we honestly say that we want to infiltrate an area like this with that increase in population?
- 4) I am talking to you as a concerned citizen that we shouldn't let somebody come into our City and tell us what we need. So, they bring in three quarters of a million dollars to build this unit, who profits from that? These developers are from Atlanta, Greenville, Columbia, they are not from Walterboro. Now, what are they bringing us; they will bring their crews, and they'll bring their own materials. They will leave with their three quarters of a million dollars and go back to where they live comfortably.

In conclusion, Ms. Bridge stated, I just wanted you to consider all this information, and I want you to consider the fact that we did not ask for this. It has been imposed upon us, and it's not going to be a very good thing for the citizens of the particular subdivisions or those traveling on Bells Highway, and it's certainly not going to be good for our tax base.

There were no further comments on agenda items.

No Minutes were before Council for Approval.

PROCLAMATIONS AND RESOLUTIONS:

A Proclamation to Honor Carol Seigler and April Beach for Outstanding Service in a Life Saving Event was adopted on the motion of Council Member Lucas, seconded by Council Member Buckner with all members voting in favor. Mayor Young read the proclamation in its entirety and presented copies to Ms. Seigler and Ms. Beach. Mr. Alfred and Nancy Aloise were also present. Mr. & Mrs. Aloise had requested that this proclamation be presented to Ms. Seigler and Ms. Beach because of their assistance in a lifesaving emergency for Mr. Aloise. A copy of said proclamation is attached as part of these minutes.

A Proclamation Recognizing Ms. Estelle W. Sanders on her 100th Birthday was read into the records by the Mayor and adopted by Council on the motion of Council Member Peters, seconded by Council Member Lohr and passed unanimously. Members of Ms. Sanders family were present to receive a copy of the proclamation. A copy of said proclamation is attached as part of these minutes.

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Resolution No. 2012-R-05, a Resolution Supporting the "Complete Streets" Concept, was adopted by Council on the motion of Council Member Lucas and seconded by Council Member Peters. In a discussion of the motion, Council Member Buckner said, reading over this resolution, I think it is very important that the City of Walterboro through this resolution, makes sure that we have bicycle paths and pedestrian rights-of-way. This is a good thing for the City to increase more physical activity in the City with our residents, and I am really excited about us adopting this "Complete Streets" concept for the City of Walterboro.

The motion to adopt Resolution No. 2012-R-05 then passed with all members voting in favor.

OLD BUSINESS:

There was no old Business before Council.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Reconsideration of Conditions for Special Permission to House (2) Pigmy Goats and Chickens at 523 Hampton Street in the City Limits, by M. Scott Steedley

Mr. M. Scott Steedley addressed Council on this request. First, he thanked all members of Council who voted in favor of his request to keep the two goats. As I said, those are our family pets. Mr. Steedley then told Council that he had some current news on the goats. Yesterday morning, I went out to feed the goats and found the mother goat was dead in the pen. So, I am hoping that it was just from natural causes, old age. I am making arrangements at this point to find another home for the baby goat, because I don't think it is appropriate for the goat to be there by herself. So, we have been dealing with that, and I want to let everybody know that I am in total adherence and compliance with City laws and any laws within the county. I am not here to cause any problems. I never really saw the goats as a problem, and I really didn't see the chickens as a problem, other than the fact which I mentioned in my letter, that there were some rosters there, which made some noise. The rosters have been removed at this point. I do still have two hens, and 2 small chicks, which I would still ask and request permission to house. I don't think that they cause any odor or any kind of problem.

The Mayor then entertained a motion to grant the exception to allow the goats and chickens at 523 Hampton Street. No motion was made and the **request was denied.**

2. Request to Use the City Parking Lot on July 21, 2012 for Taste of Culture and on September 15, 2012 for an Oyster Roast by the "To Do the Right Thing, Inc."

A representative from the group, entitled To Do the Right Think, Inc., stated that both events were fund-raising activities for the group to secure funds for their after school program. The group not only has an after school program, but it is also trying to prevent kids from being in the streets with teen-age drinking and driving, drug abuse, etc. This fund-raiser is to get funds to get transportation to get the children back and forth from school, to their homes, and to get a bigger building.

A motion granting permission to this group to use the City Parking Lot on July 21 and September 15 was made by Council Member Buckner, seconded by Council Member Lucas. In discussing the motion, Council Member Lohr asked what were the times for the events to be held. It was noted that the July 21 Taste of Culture event would be held from 11:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M., and the September 15 Oyster Roast would be held from 12:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M. Mayor Young reminded the City Manager

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to let users of the parking lot know the part or section of the lot which actually belongs to the City and the part that belongs to the Methodist Church. He said, I could see if we are not careful, we could end up with a wedding or something taking place at the church at the same time that we have given somebody permission to use the parking lot. Council Member Peters then asked, are you saying then, that we will just grant them part use of the parking lot? Mayor Young responded, we only own part of it, so what I am saying is that we need to make sure that we don't infringe on the Methodist Church when we grant use of the parking lot. He asked the City Manager, how do you usually handle this? Mr. Lord responded, usually when somebody asks to use the parking lot, we allow them to use 1/3, either the front third on Lucas Street or the side by the Methodist Church. That way, there are still two lanes of parking available and an in and out.

The motion passed unanimously.

3. Consideration of Response to South Carolina Housing, Finance and Development Authority Request for Comments on Proposed Tax Credit Developments

The Mayor then told Council, you have in your packets the letters that I received about all four developments, inviting us to respond to that within the next 14 days.

A motion was then made by Mayor Young that,

"Council authorizes the City Manager and Mayor to draft a letter to the South Carolina State Housing Authority on behalf of City Council, stating our concerns about the proposed tax credits, and those of the public, and include, but not limited to: safety issues, impact on our Public Safety Department, impact on infrastructure roads and traffic, proliferation of high density housing in some proposed areas, proximity of schools, the significant public opposition to some of the sites, crime statistics as they relate to exiting apartments, impact on adjacent neighborhoods and anything else that Council would deem as appropriate." Council Member Peters seconded the motion.

In discussing the motion, Council Member Buckner said, I just want to understand where we are in this process on these particular developments. Specifically, the one on Bells Highway, is that property currently zoned to allow for these apartments to be built there? City Manager Lord responded that there are three properties along Bells Highway, one is off of Mt. Carmel Road. Which property are you talking about? Mr. Buckner responded, well, the one not on Mt. Carmel Road - the other two properties. Mr. Lord responded that the other two properties are zoned appropriately. Mr. Buckner then asked, are we sure they are zoned appropriately? That's my question, are they zoned to allow for this development to be put there? Mr. Lord responded, yes. Mr. Buckner then said, I thought at the last meeting there was some question on whether or not it was actually zoned properly, and I think Ms. Bridge raised that concern. Mr. Lord then said, we reviewed that and it is zoned appropriately.

Mr. Buckner then said, my next question is, who is the property owner of those properties? Have the potential developers already purchased this property? The development that is being proposed, have the developers bought the property? Mr. Lord responded, I am not familiar with what the contractual arrangements are. Council Member Buckner then said, I am trying to determine whether or not the property owners have already given their blessing to this development, to put the housing there. This is what I am trying to find out. Council Member Lucas then said, the property as you are facing the current Belks to the right is under an "option to purchase." I would think anybody is going to have the property under option before they draw plans and do all this. I feel that any of the property would be under an option contract.

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Council Member Buckner then stated, the reason that I asked, I was trying to see whether the City could buy that piece of land, and therefore we wouldn't have to allow a development to go there. That's my only idea that I can think of that could stop this development from coming.

Council Member Lohr, then stated, I see nothing wrong with representing the voices of the people. Again, I mentioned this, several people from different areas last week pointed out, and I did go back and try to check them out, that there are vacancy advertisements in many of the other apartments around town. Now, I don't like to overstate or understate it. I do not know that these would be what would be termed "lower-income" or "for over 55", but I would be in opposition to them, because there are vacancies elsewhere. I can't pass judgement on the others. I commend Ms. Bridge for visiting some of them, but I have not. I think her data which she presented tonight, I heard loud and clear. I do know our City population is about 5,000+ of 38,000 or 39,000 in the county. For us to be receiving or knowing about 4 different ones for that size population compared to the City or county of Aiken, and they are only putting in two applications. I feel like right now that we might be getting picked on, and I don't like that idea at all.

Council Member Bonds then asked, are we going to address those concerns to all four parcels that were proposed. On the Mt. Carmel property, we did not rezone that property, but do we still want to include Mt. Carmel? I think we ought to include all the concerns to each one of those properties. I want to make sure we are going to include those concerns on the Mt. Carmel property also, even though it's not rezoned. Mayor Young responded, that was my intent in the motion. Because there are other concerns on some of the other sites, the way they are laid out, would make it difficult for us to provide the kind of security that we need to provide. We will address the different concerns for the different sites and share the public concerns that have been expressed to us. If Council has any other concerns to add, then you need to do it quickly because the letter was written on April 17 and they gave us 15 days to respond, so that will need to happen quickly.

Council Member Lucas then abstained from voting due to a conflict of interest, since his company is representing one of the sellers.

The motion then passed with a vote of 6/0 with Mayor Young, Council Members: Siegel, Buckner, Peters, Lohr and Bonds voting in favor, and Council Member Lucas abstaining from voting on the motion due to a conflict of interest.

There were no committee reports before Council.

A motion to enter an executive session was made by Council Member Bonds and seconded by Council Member Lucas and passed unanimously. The Mayor then announced that the meeting would enter into an executive session for receipt of legal advice. The meeting then convened into an executive session.

The meeting returned to Open Session and there being no further business, a motion to adjourn was made by Council Member Lucas, seconded by Council Member Peters and passed unanimously. The Mayor adjourned the meeting at 7:40 P.M. Notice of this meeting was distributed to all local media and posted on the City Hall bulletin board at least twenty-four hours prior to meeting time.

Respectfully,

Betty J. Hudson
City Clerk