

AGENDA

Mayor & Council Meeting

5pm Tuesday, March 12, 2024

1. Call to Order
2. Prayer
3. Pledge of Allegiance
4. Roll Call
5. Adopt Agenda
6. Adoption of Minutes—February 13, 2024 Regular Meeting
7. Clerk's Report
8. Council Members Questions/Comments
9. Department Reports
10. Mayor's Report
11. Old Business
 - A. City Attorney's Update on Jones Street, Maiden Lane and Beauty Supply Properties
12. New Business
 - A. Re-Appointment of Mayor & Gas Superintendent as Voting Delegate & Alternate for ZOOM Annual Gas Authority Board Meeting/Election
13. Mayor & Council Work Session at 4:30pm Monday, April 1, 2024
14. Mayor & Council Ethics Training Work Session at 4pm Tuesday, April 9, 2024 Conducted by City Attorney
15. Mayor & Council Regular Meeting at 5pm Tuesday, April 9, 2024
16. Historic Preservation Commission Regular Meeting at 5:30pm Thursday, March 14, 2024 in City Hall
17. City Hall Will Be Closed on March 29, 2024 in Observance of "Good Friday"
18. Citizens' Input
19. Executive Session
20. Adjournment

City of Sparta
Mayor & Council Regular Meeting
5PM Tuesday, March 12, 2024

Elected Officials present were Mayor R. Allen Haywood, Mayor ProTem Rav Yisrael, Council Members Brandon Nolley, and Tom Roberts. Councilwoman Sandra Sherrod arrived late at 5:10 p.m.

City Clerk Virigina Webb was present. Attorney John Hitchcock was present.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor ProTem Yisrael at 5pm followed by a Moment of Silence, The Lord's Prayer, and the Pledge of Allegiance.

Adopt Agenda

Councilman Roberts motioned to adopt the agenda; Councilman Nolley seconded. No discussion. Vote unanimous.

Adoption of Minutes – February 13, 2024 Regular Meeting

Councilman Roberts motioned to adopt the February 13, 2024 minutes; Councilman Nolley seconded. No discussion. Vote unanimous.

Clerk's Report

1. On Wednesday, March 13, 2024, a "Constituent Service Event" will be hosted by representatives from Senator Jon Ossoff's office at city hall from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. Those in need of assistance contacting federal agency staff to address various challenges, such as accessing veterans' benefits, expediting a passport, resolving issues with Social Security or Medicare, or recovering funds owed to them from the IRS, are encouraged to attend. This event will provide information on how the office can help individuals, families, or organizations.
2. On Thursday, March 7, 2024, the City Clerk, Virigina Webb, attended the signing of the Read Across America Proclamation at M.E. Lewis Elementary School at 10 a.m. On that day, Mayor Haywood urged citizens to ensure that every child was in a safe place and being read to by a caring adult at any time during the current 365-day year, 2024. He pledged to engage the community in programs and activities that would help America's children become the best readers in the world.
3. The Georgia Department of Audits & Accounts for the fiscal year 2022, found that no items were identified for immediate correction during their review.
4. The City of Sparta has teamed up with Department of Health, Hancock County Schools, Sparta-Hancock Chamber of Commerce, and the Hancock County Board of Commissioners to present "It Takes a Village" Festival, Parade & Community Expo. This is a free event and it will be held at the Old Football Stadium from 10 am – 3pm. For more information contract Amanda Akins at 706-444-5753 ext.7.

5. Republication of ordinances with Municode will be August 2024, as council decided to wait and not pay extra fees to have missing ordinances added.

Council Members Questions/Comments

1. Councilwoman Sherrod stated that James Robbins is only trying to get answers. Mayor Haywood hired Donald Ingram, she stated, and only he could answer the questions that Robbins had voiced to her.
She wanted to make a motion that the mayor could not spend more than \$10,000 without the permission of Council.

Attorney Hitchcock stated that he would have to research how to do that, but it may involve changing the charter.

Councilman Roberts stated that if the council wants to get involved in the city's day-to-day operations, other council members should be able to sign checks. He added that while he signs a lot of checks, it is the responsibility of all council members, not just his.

Councilwoman Sherrod said she would not be signing any more checks, because "all checks are not the right checks."

2. Mayor ProTem Yisrael explained that Council finds out information after things happen from the citizens. Yisrael admitted that it is an embarrassment to Council to not be privied to all information before decisions are made or presented to them. He stated that he would like more transparency between mayor and council.

Mayor Haywood said that the city charter is mayor-friendly, but he has never spent money that was not budgeted for or discussed in work sessions or regular meetings. Council has witnessed everything. He encouraged Council to contact him with any questions and assured them that he would answer them all, as he had previously. He stated that if the charter is amended, the he would not be affected. He is aware that Councilwoman Sherrod has an ongoing issue with him, he concluded.

Councilwoman Sherrod asserted that she has no issue with the mayor other than his lying.

3. Mayor ProTem Yisrael commented on the possibility of raising water rates, stating that he will not support or vote for any increase until the mayor and council exhaust all other options, including abandoned property and dilapidated houses that owe back taxes. He proposed that the city auction them off, with the proceeds going toward utilities. The city will receive funds from the new owners, and if they are motivated investors, they will invest in the property. Auction sales will generate more tax revenue for the city, which will ultimately increase property values.

Attorney Hitchcock stated that utility rates and expenses cannot be supported by property tax sales. Utilities are enterprise funds that cannot be combined with general funds.

Attorney Hitchcock noted that despite providing Council paperwork on the ADU Ordinance, he still needs Councilman Roberts' advice on building difficulties. He discussed his training and agreed to share what he had learned with the council during a work session that would benefit everyone.

4. Mayor ProTem Yisrael inquired about whether Council had a rule prohibiting city vehicles from being taken home. He also stated that if this is the case, Council must either change or enforce the rule.

Councilwoman Sherrod stated that there is a policy against taking city vehicles home.

Mayor Haywood stated that department heads are always on call, allowing the vehicles to return home with them.

Departmental Reports – Police & Street Department

(See Page 8 & 9)

Mayor's Report

1. Mayor Haywood thanked the street department for doing a good job edging the curb.
2. The Valero gas station was robbed last week and the criminals were apprehended five hours later by the City of Sparta Police Department. Mayor Haywood thanked them and quickly apprehending the criminals and keeping the citizens safe.
3. Natural gas rates have gone down. In January, residential natural gas was \$14.64 per thousand cubic feet. In March, natural gas rates decreased to \$11.95 per thousand cubic feet. City of Sparta paid Municipal Gas Authority of Georgia (MGAG) \$51,358 in January.
4. EMI engineer Jerry Hood and his staff conducted a sanitary sewer evaluation and sewer rehab area survey including three major pump stations and will conduct the following week will be for water. One of the large upgrades will include a new water tank. The half million-gallon tank will ensure that the city does not lose water pressure.
5. TSPLOST funds are designated for Adams Street paving from Maiden Lane eastward to Highway 15. Also, on Maiden Lane from Hancock Street to Highway 22 and northward to include Rabun Street. Both projects are in phase one and will be completed within the next two years.
6. After providing Council with an audit for 2022, one finding was that the city overspent in the police department. Mayor Haywood explained that the city had anticipated combining all services for the Sparta and Hancock County; therefore, the city had only budgeted for expenses for half of the year. Due to a lot of overtime and a lack of officers, although it did not cost the city anything due to the contingency fund, but Council did not have an amendment to the audit before turning it in into the

Georgia Department of Audits and Accountants (DOAA). DOAA determined that the city is in compliance.

7. Bill Powell, from Georgia Rural Water, will be visiting the April or May Call Meeting to explain the need for water rate increases.

Old Business

A. City Attorney's Update on Jones Street, Maiden Lane, and Beauty Supply Properties

Attorney John Hitchcock stated the city concluded that part of the property on Jones Street, known as On the Way Motors owned by Trent Boone, that is occupied by cars was not within the city limits. The cars have since been crushed and removed from the property since the last council meeting.

The Beauty Supply property was purchased in a tax sale, but the former owner has up to four years to redeem the property. Attorney Hitchcock has tried to contact the former owner with no avail.

On the Maiden Lane property, the Harriston residence, the city has legally done everything that could be done at this time. The city has a judgment in municipal court against Mrs. Harriston in the excess of \$100,000 due to a \$500 a day fine upon her agreement. A FIFA has been signed by the judge, which is a lien against the property allowing the sheriff to levy on the lien and sell the property in foreclosure. After speaking to Ms. Harriston's attorney, he learned that she is currently in litigation with her neighbor, Ms. O'Neal. Hitchcock attempted to put together a deal for Ms. Harriston to sign the property over to another individual who has the equipment and the knowledge and will assume the responsibility of cleaning up the property.

New Business

A. Re-Appointment of Mayor & Gas Superintendent as Voting Delegate & Alternate for Zoom Annual Gas Authority Board Meeting/Election

Mayor Haywood explained that the mayor serves as the voting delegate.

Councilman Roberts motioned to vote for Mayor Haywood and Utilities Supervisor Timmy Griffin for re-appointment; Councilman Nolley seconded. Mayor ProTem Yisreal voted "yes." No discussion. Councilwoman Sherrod refused to vote.

Mayor & Council Work Session at 4:30 pm Monday, April 1, 2024

Mayor & Council Ethics Training Work Session at 4 pm Tuesday, April 9, 2024 Conducted by City Attorney

Mayor & Council Regular Meeting at 5pm Tuesday, April 9, 2024

Historic Preservation Commission Regular Meeting at 5pm Thursday, March 14, 2024 in City Hall

City Hall Will be Closed on March 29, 2024 in Observance of “Good Friday”

Citizens’ Input

1. Markello Merriweather, a resident of the county, who is also running for sheriff addressed council. He is a retired army veteran with a background in military intelligence, infrastructure, and personnel security and cross trained as a weapons expert. He invited the community to get to know him and looks forward to offering his expertise to better the Sparta/Hancock County area.

Mayor Haywood thanked Merriweather for his military service to this country.

2. Sherry Sibert, resident of the city, voiced interest in where the neighborhood watch meetings will be held.
Chief Tommie Walker stated that locations will be determined once the police department complete organizing the details, and he encouraged everyone in the community to participate. The public will be updated when the plans are finalized via the Sparta Ishmalite and on the official City of Sparta Police Department Facebook page.
3. DeeDee Hider, a city resident, inquired about the police department's ability to obtain a grant to match citizens' purchases of security cameras.
Chief Walker responded that certain procedures can be implemented, and the police department is currently looking into community cameras. Cameras will reduce crime and help identify traffic violations throughout the city. He also informed her that no grants were available for that.
4. Theresa Hines, Sparta Ishmalite editor, congratulated Councilman Nolley on his newly appointed position as head football coach at Hancock Central High School.
5. Pat Morgan, a resident of the county, announced that the Chamber of Commerce will be partnering with CJE to host a program honoring the women in Hancock County on Saturday, March 16, 2024 at 11 AM. Buffet will be available. Everyone is invited to come and enjoy the fellowship.
6. James Robbins, a resident of county, inquired about the chain of command within the street department. He requested a clearer understanding on how Donald Ingram became the street supervisor and what are his qualifications to hold such a position.

Mayor Haywood stated that the superintendent is Timmy Griffin, the foreman is Tremaine Ingram, and the supervisor of the street department is Donald Ingram. Mayor

Haywood also stated that Ingram was appointed as supervisor at his discretion. Mayor Haywood invited Robbins to speak with him during working hours, explaining that the position had been advertised and that he recommended Ingram as a candidate for the supervisory position. He then stated that Council then voted to approve the hire.

Attorney Hitchcock stated that the mayor and council cannot discuss employment matters in open meetings. He explained that the policy of the city is to allow citizens' input but there is nothing in the law that *requires* citizens to have input at meetings.

7. Matthew Jones, a resident of the city, stated that he is the owner of Mix-N-Mingle and there was an excessive amount of police around his business and they were searching in dumpsters and he requested a reason for that.

Chief Walker answered that Jones should have come to the police department if there were indeed suspicious activity going on around his place of business. Walker stated that the police department has been extremely busy patrolling and serving the community that they were not searching dumpsters near his property.

8. Dip Polatty, resident of the city, asked Chief Walker could the police begin patrolling the logging trucks. They travel extremely fast on Broad Street especially in the early morning hours.

Chief Walker stated that they have been able to stop a few but they will patrol the area more for the safety of the public.

9. Willmertine Tolbert, a resident of city, asked about the ordinance about dilapidated houses and the fence on the corner of Hancock Street.

Attorney Hitchcock answered that the city has an ordinance that regulates fences/structures that block that view of an intersection. A variance will have to be put in place by the city for the property owner to be able to continue to build the fence. Pertaining to dilapidated houses within the historic preservation district and for homes not in the historic district there is a maintenance code that allows property to be cited. The city is in need of a code enforcement officer.

10. James Culver, resident of the city, thanked the police department for doing a great job serving and protecting the residents in the city. He stated that the police department should not be chasing dogs or be code enforcers. He shared that it would be a good idea for citizens to be able to use their property to build housing because it would bring down the tax digest for the city, bring in more money, and lower the water bills. He said city employees are not allowed to drive vehicles home, he stated that he thinks the police does not follow that ordinance.

Culver stated that Mayor Haywood disclosed information about him that almost cost him his position on the Board of Elections & Registration. He informed Mayor Haywood he would be seeking legal representation on how to precede going forward.

He thanked Donald Ingram, street supervisor, and his work crew for the great job that they are doing with in the community. However, he stated that as part of Mayor Haywood's mayoral campaign there would be no nepotism at the city.

11. Lynn Walden, a resident of the city, stated that she would like the city retirement to be raised from \$300. In 1992, city retirement was \$100 and it has raised only \$200 in 13 years.

Mayor Haywood stated that he understood her concern and would have to research what can be done.

12. James Robbins, resident of the city, apologized for walking out of the meeting. He continued his concern (#6), sharing that there will be a conflict of interest concerning Donald Ingram's hiring for the city. He would accept the mayor's invitation to meet with him.
13. Paula Dixon, a resident of the county, stated she does not want citizens to feel intimidated when speaking publicly in front of mayor and council.

Executive Session

Councilman Nolley motioned to go into executive session; Councilman Roberts seconded. Councilwoman Sherrod refused to vote. No discussion.

Back to Regular Session

Councilman Roberts motioned to go back to regular session; Councilman Nolley seconded.

Roberts motioned to raise Judge Blanton Linggold monthly rate pay as the City of Sparta Municipal Court Judge to \$500; Councilman Nolley seconded. Councilwoman Sherrod refused to vote.

Adjournment

Councilman Roberts motioned to adjourn the meeting; Councilman Nolley seconded. No discussion. Vote unanimous.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:36 pm.

City of Sparta Street Department Report

March 12, 2024

- Serviced Lawn Mowers, weed eaters, pole saws and chainsaws in preparation for grass cutting season
- Replacement tires for lawn mowers were purchased that were needed
- Replacement heads for weed eaters were purchased that were needed
- Crepe Myrtles were pruned and fertilized
- Storm drains are being cleaned to ensure proper drainage of water & help prevent flooding of roadways throughout the city
- Sidewalks are being edged and streets cleaned of excess grass. Trash was picked up in each work area.
- Crew currently working on Powelton Avenue cutting overgrowth, edging sidewalks, opening storm drains & picking up trash
- Crew worked with Water Department to clean out ditch/drain near old Furniture Factory to allow proper drainage of water
- Crew has completed cleaning sidewalks, cleaning around storm drains, edging curbs, and overgrowth downtown, around courthouse, Jamie Kennedy Blvd and Hwy 22.
- Next project will be East Broad and East End area
- Cold Patching has been ordered to fill ^{some} potholes on city streets
- Meeting has been set to discuss reapplying for grant for street sweeper and cutting arm attachment for tractor and other equipment to assist in keeping the overgrowth cut back
- Met with Wastewater Supervisor to discuss assisting in cutting grass at Wastewater Facility.

MARCH 2024 COUNCIL MEETING

SPARTA POLICE DEPARTMENT ACTIVITY REPORT

(STATS BELOW ARE FROM THE MONTH OF February 2024)

267 - TOTAL 911 CALLS FOR ASSISTANCE

162 - TOTAL WRITTEN TRAFFIC CITATIONS

- 51 - SPEEDING
- 25 - NO SEATBELT
- 2 - DUI
- 84 - OTHER TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS

83 - TRAFFIC VIOLATION WARNINGS

18 - ARREST

19 - STATE WARRANTS ISSUED

PREVIOUS MONTH STATS: JANUARY 2024

201 - TOTAL 911 CALLS FOR ASSISTANCE

63 - TOTAL WRITTEN CITATIONS

57 - TRAFFIC VIOLATION WARNINGS

11 - STATE WARRANTS ISSUED

13 - ARREST