

Council Meeting  
September 6, 2022

Members Present: Mayor Buddy Duke, members Terry McClain, Greg Paige, Walter Cowart, Celestine Hayes and Jody Greene.

Others Present: John Flythe, Rhonda Rowe, Tim Tanner, Chad Castleberry and members of the public and press.

Invocation was given by Councilman McClain.

#### Pledge of Allegiance

Approval of Minutes: Councilman Paige made a motion to approve the minutes of August 15, 2022 and August 24, 2022 as presented. Councilman McClain seconded with all in favor.

Public Hearing (FY22-23 Budget): Councilman Paige made a motion to enter into public hearing to gain input on the FY22-23 budget. Councilman Greene seconded with all in favor. City Manager John Flythe advised the state mandates an annual budget adoption. Because of the current delayed billing situation with our software program, which affected the financials to be used in the preparation of a budget, Mr. Flythe recommended the adoption of our FY21-22 budget. The exception is that the capital items have been removed. The total budget amount is \$29,519,146 with the difference between last year and this year being for capital items we have either already purchased or will be purchasing. He further noted that for balancing purposes in the sewer and sewer treatment expense accounts, the differences in the budgeted amounts were offset between miscellaneous and machinery/equipment line items. Councilwoman Hayes asked about an article in the Georgia Cities magazine referencing that cities had received funds for water and sewer infrastructure with Adel receiving \$946,100. She asked where this money was located in the budget? Being unfamiliar with the particular article she was referring to, Mr. Flythe stated that if it's been expended, you guys voted on it. She replied that no, she had not voted on anything. There were no further comments and the public hearing was closed.

Ord. #22-03: This ordinance, establishing the 2022 ad valorem tax rate at 6.000 mills or \$6.00 per \$1000 of assessed property value, was read for the first time. Mr. Flythe noted this rate is a rollback from the previous rate of 6.387 mills. Since valuations increased, we are proposing to adopt the rollback rate, so it will be a neutral effect on the taxpayers.

Alcohol License (Gunny's Ale House): The council was presented with an alcohol license application from Gunny's Ale House, to be located at 1221 W. 4<sup>th</sup> Street. Andrell Durden, owner of Gunny's Ale House, was present and stated it will be a full service restaurant. He plans to open next month or early November. He noted that he retired from the service as a senior gunny, hence being where the name originated. It will be a high end sports bar serving Hawaiian and New Orleans style food. Seating capacity will be 135. He will be selling more food than alcohol. His restaurant will be similar to the franchise known as Miller's Ale House. Councilman Green made a motion to approve the license. Councilman Paige seconded. All were in favor.

Year-End Budget Adjustments: The council was presented with year-end budget adjustments for FY20-21. The net adjustments total a decrease of \$2,308,875 from the original budgeted amount in the general fund. The revised budgeted expenses are as follows:

Mayor/Council	-	\$ 150,675
Attorney	-	\$ 6,500
Election	-	\$ 250
General	-	\$ 607,400
Parks	-	\$ 4,850
Downtown Dev Auth	-	\$ 108,400
Community Development	-	\$ 69,150
Special Appropriations	-	\$ 208,900
Police	-	\$2,207,000
Judge		\$ 20,975
Animal Control	-	\$ 70,050
Fire		\$1,234,500
Volunteer Fire	-	\$ 58,350
Inspection	-	\$ 74,025
Street		\$ 737,950
Sanitation	-	\$1,072,850
Shop	-	\$ 131,250

The budget adjustments also include the establishment of revenues and expenditures in the amount of \$1800.00 in the confiscated assets fund. Councilman Cowart made a motion to approve the revised budget allocations. Councilman Greene seconded. The decision was unanimous.

Penalty Clause: City manager John Flythe advised the council that the indication at the council work session on August 24<sup>th</sup> was to remove the penalty clause so that no penalty is charged as long as the customer pays at least one bill per 30 days. Penalties and reconnect fees will only apply if a customer is disconnected for non-payment. Additionally, the customer must pay their oldest bill first. Councilman Greene made a motion to approve the above as presented. Councilman McClain second. Members Greene, McClain and Cowart voted in favor. Members Paige and Hayes opposed.

Mary Hayes: Ms. Hayes addressed the council, thanking them for what they do. She wanted to make sure she understands the plan with the utility bills so she will know. The issue with the utilities has been a big disappointment to her and several others. Her intent is to speak on behalf of the older people. It is difficult for her, being on a fixed income. There is no way you can pay an \$800 bill with a \$1200 income and eat and survive. Most don't understand. I'm going to get 2 bills per month and have to pay 1 within 30 days. Because she does automatic withdrawal, she hasn't paid much attention. It's fine with her but she wanted to give examples of how hard that is. Her medical bills were \$100,000 per month. If it had not been for grants, indigent care and other help, she couldn't be standing here. She asked "Do you think what you have decided on behalf of what we're doing was the right decision? We didn't know what we were going to be faced with". She asked, "Mr. McClain, do you feel that was right"? Ground

turkey has went from \$3.59 to \$5.98. My light bill has doubled. Everything is rising. We need you to make things better for us. Councilman Hayes stated, "Yes, we work for you, you don't work for us".

Jetta Taylor – Ms. Taylor came before the council with concerns of the water readings for the November and December 2021 dates. She stated the usage was 12,000 gallons for one month with only two adults and an infant in the home. There was no way they could use 12,000 gallons. They do not water the lawn, wash cars or have a pool. The next month the usage was 8,000 gallons. Nothing in the home has changed. The usage then goes back down to 5000 and 4000 gallons in the upcoming months of 2022. They have an occasional 6000 gallons of usage. If it was leaking in November and December, wouldn't it still be leaking today? Additionally, how can you explain usage to me from 11 months ago. She's been told the billing system and usage system are separate, couldn't it be incorrect? Is it possible the data could be switched. Anything that is manmade can be broken. She was told by Mr. Flythe that the council usually doesn't adjust bills. The council indicates it usually doesn't come before them. The issue is accuracy on her water bill. The SGRC let the city know in January 2020 and then in May 2021 they would be disconnecting on August 31<sup>st</sup>. She is asking the city to consider adjusting her bill. If the bills are correct, they usually show your usage. For December, there is no recording of 12,000 gallons. If my stuff is correct, my bill is wrong. The eleventh month is recorded. If the bill can't be wrong, the meter can't be wrong, but I'm looking at a bill you sent me. I'm asking you to adjust my bill. Mayor Duke advised they would get back with her. She asked, when will you respond? She then asked for the copies of emails back that she had provided to the council, stating that things go missing around here.

Charles Hillman: Mr. Hillman stated he was here about the same situation. When I open the bill up, I put it to the side. Eight to nine months ago, everybody was wearing masks. People were in the hospitals because of COVID. Expenses went up for everyone. People have been rewarded. The city has been. It's something you can't see. I'm a disabled person. You try to get help. How do I have a \$300 bill every month. People are being held accountable for something they couldn't control. He doesn't have a problem with his light bill, but shouldn't it be a fair light bill? We pray for everyone to help us. These people will never catch it up. Wouldn't it be fair to give everyone a fresh start and take this away? Income didn't go up for people. I am fine with whatever you recommend. He's asking to look at his bill. Let's start over and stop beating each other up. What would Jesus do? You've got people receiving income 1 and 2 times per month and working people. He's asking to consider, it's not right. If the light bill is \$700 and you get a \$1200 check, how are we going to catch it up? You need to be working with people.

Chris Martin: Mr. Martin addressed the council stating that one issue he looks at is why they don't have a choice as to who we want to provide power to us? That's like moving to Adel but telling me I can only shop at Piggly Wiggly. The price per kilowatt should also be on the light bill. If Councilwoman Hayes' and Councilman Paige's amount is on the bill, they should be able to compare. You shouldn't monopolize. They should have a choice with Colquitt EMC and Georgia Power. If Adel's rates are so low, they'll come back to Adel. I would like to have a choice as to who I buy power from. Everybody else around the coast has a choice. If everybody is making freeze cups, people are going to buy from the lowest. Let us choose who we want to deal with and the price. We are backed into a corner.

Dr. Treva Gear – Dr. Gear, representing the Concerned Citizens of Cook County, appeared before the council stating that they made recommendations at the request of Mr. Flythe. However, they were not directly involved in the planning process. They were not active participants in the process and will not be a scapegoat for failed leadership for the city council and city government for doing what was needed to forgo and prevent this crisis with citizens being burdened with 8 months of bills and then moving forward not getting a current bill now. She stated to Mr. Flythe that she knew that what he done was done in good faith; however, those were not his statements in the newspaper. She then addressed the recommendations that she had presented, which included:

- (1) Earmarking American Rescue Plan funds to cover all eight months of delayed bills for all residents or part of those bills for at least four months. What is the American Rescue Plan funding? The same funding that Councilwoman Hayes just asked about that is unaccounted for that could possibly be misappropriated. Where are they supposed to go? There was infrastructure money that could be dedicated to paying off people's utility bills. That's not against the law if the federal government sent you all that money to be disbursed, especially to our most vulnerable citizens, seniors, people that live in poverty. That money could have been used for that. Why wasn't it used?
- (2) Asked that they provide the total of the four remaining months and allow the residents to finance that. If you finance 4 months or whatever, it could be financed at no interest rate and the people allowed to pay it back over 12 months.
- (3) Another offer was to start billing residents for the current billed month to date for 2022 and provide the total cost of the 8 delayed bills, which nobody has. People asking how much do I owe in total. We are not able to get that information. That a problem, why? What kind of magic math is being used?
- (4) Place a moratorium on cut-offs for people who have paid something on one of those 8 month billing periods. What you have said today is that people's utilities could still be cut off. As Mr. Hillman says, we're going to still be 8 months behind.
- (5) Publicly share the formula used to calculate the delayed 8 months of bills. Like Mr. Martin said, how much are we being charged per kilowatt hour? That's inequity in itself. We smell inequality and inequity in all of this.
- (6) We need to hold a town hall meeting, just like we held a public hearing here. It obviously wasn't a public hearing, none of us got to speak. I didn't know what the budget was supposed to look like, no one has a copy. A public hearing is supposed to be a public hearing. We're asking that you hold a town hall; however, we know 2 council members are in the process of doing that.

I say that to say this, if we are going to take care of the least of these, and you are truly serving the people, as it has been stated by the four people before me, why didn't you go to the people, why didn't you think of the least of these? You can do whatever you choose because we know it's been done. You have avoided certain ordinances and ignored those. State laws have been ignored. Why are we going to go with, "well, we can't help the people, cause that's against the law". What can you do? Make it happen people. We are depending on you. If you want to talk about these recommendations, we'll be happy to sit down and discuss with you and do what's right for the people. We ask just not for your ear, but we ask for your action today.

Executive Session: Councilman Paige made a motion to enter into executive session to discuss a personnel matter. Councilman McClain seconded. All were in favor. Following executive session, the meeting was re-opened.

Blockstream: City Manager John Flythe advised that on August 31<sup>st</sup>, Blockstream called and advised they did not want to be totally disconnected, but they were not going to run their units. The reason being because the projected cost of the September bill was over 14 cents per kilowatt. There are several locations in Georgia that have been cut off because of the rate. He noted that the energy prices are dictated by the cost of natural gas. Natural gas in this country is expected to go to over 18 cents per unit. It's more than 4 times what it cost a year ago. He noted that the current administration's energy policy, selling natural gas offshore, is making the prices go up in the United States. This is affecting more than just Blockstream in Adel. When the price goes down, they are stating they will start back up.

Retirement of City Manager: Mr. Flythe advised that he has provided the council with notice of his retirement at the end of the year, as of January 1, 2023. We've got a few details to work out. Mayor Duke stated that we will be taking applications through October 7<sup>th</sup> and then move through the hiring process; hopefully will have someone named by January 1<sup>st</sup>. Mayor Duke stated it has been a wonderful tenure. Mr. Flythe thanked everyone for allowing him to work with them. "It has been a pure pleasure". Councilman Greene thanked John for all his hard work.

There was no further business and the meeting was adjourned.

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Rhonda P. Rowe, City Clerk

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John H. Flythe, City Manager

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