

Council Meeting
September 8, 2020

Members Present: Mayor Buddy Duke, members Terry McClain, Greg Paige, Walter Cowart, Vivian Sharpe 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 Greg Paige made a motion to approve the minutes of August 17, 2020 as presented. Councilman McClain seconded with all in favor.

Public Hearing (FY2020-2021 Budget): Councilman Paige made a motion to enter into a public hearing to gain input on the proposed FY2020-2021 budget. Councilman Cowart seconded. All were in favor. City Manager John Flythe advised the overall total proposed budget is \$29,216,600. There is a net increase in the general fund budget of \$926,875 above last year's budget. He noted next year's budget includes performing \$1.5M in street resurfacing. The loan for this project will be paid back over a 3-year period utilizing SPLOST proceeds and DOT funds. According to our engineer, a total of approximately \$5M would be needed to resurface all roads that qualified for resurfacing. The total water fund budget is down by \$16,325; while the sewer budget is increased by \$36,000. The electric fund budget is increased by \$2,467,300. While we have an increase in revenues in this fund, we also have an increase in the cost of expenses to purchase additional power. There is a decrease in the gas fund budget of \$96,775 as compared to last year's. He noted we ran a gas line to Lenox last year and expected one of those customers to come on-line at that time; however, it will be this year before they come onto our system. There is a slight decrease in the tax millage rate as it will be 6.387, as compared to 6.389 last year. He further noted there has been no utility increases since 2011. The gas rates have actually been down to customers due to the overall decrease in natural gas rates across the country. He noted that the general fund operating budget is \$8,863,150 and of that amount, property taxes generate \$893,750 which is only about 10% of that total budget. He stated that within the last couple of years we have added a downtown development director, community development director who has been heavy into housing rehab and a marshal's position to be proactive in the community, all of which are included in the general fund. This year's budget also includes the annual investment of \$208,900 into the new medical facility.

Mrs. Altheia Paige spoke during the public hearing stating that she wants to see community policing and she didn't see it included in the budget. She also asked if de-escalating training is included in the budget. Chief Chad Castleberry advised Mrs. Paige that officers have been receiving this training since it was mandated by the governor which was 3 or 4 years ago. They receive it on an annual basis. As far as community policing, this is a philosophy, not a budgeted item. Mr. Flythe stated this is something that would be implemented administratively. She then stated that as far as road paving being two years out,

we have streets and roads that are in horrible shape. Mr. Fythe advised we have been paving approximately \$500,000 worth each year. The roads are evaluated and ranked by the engineer according to need. We will be paving 3-years' worth of roads in the proposed budget. She also noted there are big pot holes on different streets and they wash out when they get filled back in. Mr. Flythe stated the \$1.5M to be spent on resurfacing will help greatly in this area. She then questioned the number of employees in the administrative department and the consultants. She asked if we had consultants that took on other jobs, if we had someone to leave that position, and then they went on to a different job, do we pay for their insurance? Mr. Flythe stated that no, we've had several people retire this past year and some that went to different jobs, but we didn't continue providing them with insurance. We also have a part-time consultant that continues to do work for us, but he isn't provided with insurance. She asked if it would be fair if she came back to him with a name at a later date to which he replied, yes, that would be fine. There was no further input and the public hearing was declared closed.

Ord. #20-08: This ordinance, establishing the ad valorem tax rate for 2020 at 6.387 mills, was read for the first time.

Public Hearing (Adel Industrial Development Authority Annexation): Councilman Paige made a motion to enter into public hearing to gain input on the annexation and rezoning application filed by the Adel Industrial Development Authority for 171.03 acres of property located on south Hwy 41 and located south of Fausett Road, west of Southern Railway, east of I-75 and land of Otis Fausett Jr. and north of South Ga Motor & Sports. The request is to annex the property into the City of Adel as well as rezone from Agricultural (AU) to Heavy Industrial (HI). Councilwoman Sharpe seconded. There were no opposing votes. It was noted that a total of 15 minutes would be allowed for each side (speaking for and speaking against) to address the council.

Mr. Craig Whitlock, CEO of Renewable Biomass Group (RBG), attended the meeting by virtual teleconferencing and stated that he would like to clear up any concerns regarding the proposed project. He had five points that he wanted to address and included (1) that wood bio-mass is an unclean and non-renewable source - He stated that if it is responsibly managed it is clean and renewable. He noted they have external audits conducted throughout the processes including construction and ramp-up. Certifications are rendered. (2) Use of only scraps and waste – they consider them sawmill residuals. At best, a tree that has fallen can only be used at 60%. They take the residuals, that is the source used to make up the finished products used for industrial purposes in Europe and Asia. There is no clear-cutting of forests. (3) Job creation – looking at hiring no less than 64 personnel upon commencement. During ramp-up it will be 70 during commercial level. Will be a handful of indirect jobs they require such as transportation. They will have 24/7 hour operations at some level, to manage equipment or move product at the facility. Job creation is critical as they will be hiring people from the Adel area. (4) Health concerns – They are going to process wood products on site and will conform to all state and federal regulations adhering to emissions, while adhering to OSHA requirements. Employees will be trained-up in safe practices, etc. (5) Community support – they received a significant amount of interest from the southeast and zeroed in on Georgia, with the past 3 or 4 years being on Cook County. They have expectations to grow and mature in a responsible way. Employment is one of the key means to supporting the community. He noted there is no perfect renewable solution. Whether it be wind,

solar, hydroelectric or wood pellets. Wood pellets is a means to reduce greenhouse gases, carbon emissions. Each one has issues. He noted how he watched the steel industry in Pennsylvania where his father worked go from a thriving industry to seeing steel mills become relics in the 1980's. He watched people go from employment to unemployment and those associated struggles because there was a divestment instead of an investment in that community. Community support starts by investing in the area. Adel is a strong community and they look forward to participating in the growth of the community.

Howard McClain, a member of the Adel Industrial Development Authority, spoke in favor of the application stating they brought the petition for the annexation and is here tonight asking the property to be annexed into the City of Adel and zoned Heavy Industrial. He stated that in the area where the property is located is south of the main population of the City of Adel. It begins on Hwy 41 south of Fausett Rd to the boundary of the race track. The AIDA has been purchasing property on South Hwy 41 and asking for rezoning for many years. There are no residents in the immediate area; they are not buying property in the center of town. They are trying to stay away from residential areas. City Manager John Flythe stated before any decision is made, the application has to go through the planning & zoning commission. That board gave a unanimous decision in favor of the annexation and rezoning. Councilman McClain asked if this property joins other property already annexed and zoning HI. He was advised that it does. Howard McClain also stated that rail is very important to this company as they will be using the railroad heavily for transportation.

Lisa Collins, executive director of the Cook County Economic Development Commission, spoke in favor of the application. She stated this project will be monumental for Adel and its citizens. She stated she has been working with Mr. Whitlock for an extended period of time and Mr. Whitlock believes God has called him to come here and she does too. She cannot recommend anymore more highly than what she has witnessed with Mr. Whitlock. Mr. Whitlock added that he would like to meet with anyone who might be opposed to the project.

Miriam Jones spoke in opposition stating that she grew up here and is concerned. She is asking the council to vote no because "we need to breathe". The facility will release 800 tons of pollution every year that includes particles that can lead to health issues, including heart disease, asthma and COPD. Neighbors of other wood pellet companies have complained. There have been complaints of dust, soot and smoke. She noted toxic and cancer causing contaminants that are released into the air; furthermore, Adel does not have an emergency room to care for those suffering. We want jobs but not something that will make us sick. She reminded the council that they are elected to serve and asked that they "don't sell us out over 50-70 jobs". She is asking to let them breathe.

Pastor Phil Morris, Jr. spoke in opposition on behalf of concerned citizens. He noted that a train problem already exists and will be exemplified with this facility. At a current facility on Old Quitman Road people are late or don't get to eat lunch at all because of the train. Traffic gets backed up and if you have an emergency, you can't get out. Additional trucks will emit gases, etc. into the atmosphere. This is not what Cook County needs. This is a 500,000-ton operation with 250 trucks per day, 1 truck every 6 minutes. He stated that 100,000 trucks in every direction will mess up the roads even more. He

asked the elected officials to vote no. He thanked Mr. Whitlock for trying to do something but stated this is not it.

Sharon Locklear spoke against the application stating that in order to run this operation, they will need whole trees. The air permit states that whole trees will be used. It could affect several surrounding towns. These type of facilities has negatively affected us all the way to the coast. It is not possible to replace at the rate they will be taken down. We can't let these companies kill our trees and make us sick to make money in Europe. We will be left with another Del-Cook and Sierra Pine.

Treva Gear stated that she grew up in Cook County and requested a no vote. She noted a comment made in Georgia Trend magazine that included the statement "when we landed in Georgia....it stood out because of the people". She stated to Mr. Whitlock "you don't know the people of Adel". He does know the demographics are right to shove this down our lungs without resistance. Wood pellet companies like to find cities like Adel with at least a 25% population of people of color and just the right level of poverty, with people needing jobs. Adel is an environmental injustice area as a result of the African American population of over 50%. Locating this plant in Adel would be an environmental injustice. She stated the application for rezoning is secretive and does not pass the smell test. The planning has been going on for three years without consideration for the citizens. If it was such a great idea, why have all the details been hidden, even from the zoning board? We need jobs, but not at the expense of the environment and public health. Our community has been heavily impacted by COVID-19, and don't know the extent of the impact, but we do know about the pollutants caused by pellet plants. Del-Cook is an unresolved plant that still has an open case with the EPD for corrective action that has not been taken of since year 2000. Many residents on 9th Street have been diagnosed with cancer. We're still battling this. On 5th Street, there is a major pollution going on right now in the old shirt factory area. People complain of the smell and can't sit on their porches. There are propane tanks to show this. Adel can't bear the brunt of another pollution source. African Americans have been negatively impacted. They are a target for this type of plant. She is asking the leaders to please not sell them out. We want industries that build, not break us. Please vote no for the rezoning. She then asked what tax incentives or tax abatements have been given from us? She has heard Europe gives a lot of subsidies to these plants. Howard McClain stated we are not giving them anything and there is no such thing as tax abatement in the state of Georgia, but because the Adel Industrial Development Authority is a non-taxable entity, then the property that we own is not taxable. So, if this business happens, while it is in business for the first 10 years, there would be no taxes because the property would still be in the AIDA's name. Title to the project would not be transferred until 10 years after they locate. There won't be anything else. As far as something from Europe, he doesn't know anything about that. She stated they do give subsidies in Europe because this is a big market over there.

Ron Tiveron asked the officials to vote no. He realizes they are looking at it as a monetary thing but asked if they had taken a look at it from a human nature? As you know, I'm already dealing with Blockstream next to me and the noise level, for which we still haven't made any progress. He asked if they would be grinding material to make the pellets on site and if they are, will it be in a sound proof building so the noise level can be held to a minimum? He realized they are claiming they will only be working 5 days a week, do you have that in writing? He is asking they vote no against the project.

The public hearing was then closed.

Ord. #20-06: This ordinance, annexing property of the Adel Industrial Development Authority, was read for the first time.

Ord. #20-07: This ordinance, rezoning property of the Adel Industrial Development Authority, was read for the first time.

There was no further business and the meeting was adjourned.

Rhonda P. Rowe, City Clerk

Luther L. Duke III, Mayor
