

Called Council Meeting
September 26, 2023

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

Others Present: City Manager Mark Barber, City Clerk Rhonda Rowe, members of staff, the public and press.

Invocation was given by Councilman McClain.

Pledge of Allegiance

FY 2023-2024 Budget: Mayor Duke stated that a public hearing was conducted on September 19, 2023 to review the proposed fiscal year 2023-2024 budget. The proposed city wide budget includes capital expenditures of \$6,632,366, operating expenditures of \$29,356,084, debt service expenditures of \$429,921 and disbursements to other funds expenditures of \$2,720,773. The proposed budget is balanced according to State of Georgia code requirements.

Included in the proposed budget is a ten (10) percent Cost of Living Adjustment for employees as well as two (2) new positions, an animal control officer, and a finance director. Additionally, there is no millage rate increase proposed in the recommended fiscal year 2024 budget.

Mayor Duke asked if there were any questions from the council. Councilwoman Hayes stated she was still not pleased with the amount given to Jim Battle Park. Looking at the Code of Ethics it says “all government of right originates with the people, is founded upon their will only and is instituted solely for the good of the whole. Another part says “a public officer should strive to further the general welfare and not seek to use public office in order to improve his or her own private standing to any greater extent than that enjoyed by the members of the public at large”. She added that Jim Battle is nothing; we’ve seen it and you know it can be better. \$110,000 is simply just not enough. Mr. Barber replied that he wasn’t sure if the officer being referred to is himself; she stated she was talking about the whole council. He stated that he felt he had given Jim Battle more attention his seven months here than there’s been given in years past. He continues to work and Councilwoman Hayes and he have had several meetings about it so its not like he’s ignored it. Secondly, there’s \$288,000 in the budget for Jim Battle; the match they’ve talked about plus the grant that he feels comfortable we are going to get. You take our match, plus the grant of \$178,000 and add them together so that’s what we’re going to have; so there’s more than even the \$200K you spoke of earlier from SPLOST. There’s more than that as a start. Again, he felt this is a good start for some of the projects from the list she had provided from the meeting held back in February. There is more than the amount she just stated in the budget for Jim Battle Park. There were no further comments or questions. Councilman Greene made a motion to adopt the fiscal year 2023-2024 budget as presented. Councilman McClain seconded. The decision was unanimous.

Staff Comments:

Mark Barber – Mr. Barber expressed his appreciation to the council for giving him the opportunity to change up some of the budget ways and added that he can't let the night go by without thanking the department heads for everything they do in putting this budget together. We're going to continue to improve this to make sure you've got the numbers you need to make those knowledgeable decisions. It was his first budget here, so thank you very much.

Council Comments:

Mayor Duke - expressed his appreciation for the work done to put the budget together.

Councilwoman Hayes - Stated she still has not received a utility bill and several people in her neighborhood have not. She was advised they were mailed out Monday instead of the end of the prior week; however, the due date was moved back accordingly as well. She confirmed the bill would be itemized as far as the \$400 credit, etc. Mr. Barber stated the \$400 credit is provided on the bill as well as any delinquent balance. You will also see the 24 month payment plan amount that has been added as a line item to your current amount, if applicable.

There was no further business and the meeting was adjourned.

Rhonda P. Rowe, City Clerk

Luther L. Duke III, Mayor
