



CITY OF CHARLESTON

City Council Meeting

January 9, 2024

Meeting Minutes

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order by Mayor Jackie Whiteside at 6:30 PM. Councilman Rick Toon, Councilman Philip Halter, Councilwoman Monica Goodin, Councilman Clark Dugan, City Manager Greg Luehmann, City Attorney Tabatha Graham, City Clerk Ali Morris, and the Chief of the Department of Public Safety, Robert Hearn Jr. were present. Officer Tyler Babb and Officer Curtis Arnold were also present.

Consideration of Prior Meeting Minutes: Mayor Whiteside asked if everyone had a chance to read over the prior meeting minutes. Councilman Toon asked if there was an update on the Hazard Mitigation data collection and Chief Hearn Jr. replied no, there was no update as of yet, but he emailed them again. Toon then asked if there was an update on the fire truck that needed repair. Chief Hearn Jr. said it was near completion. Toon then asked how many trucks the city currently had in operation. Chief Hearn Jr. replied there are four trucks operating, but we are waiting on the ladder truck to be repaired. No one had any further questions or comments. Councilman Toon made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 12, 2023, meeting. Councilman Halter seconded the motion. All were in favor. None were opposed. The motion passed and the minutes were approved.

Report of City Business: City Manager, Greg Luehmann, began his report by stating that he met with Salvador Mundragon from the Missouri Department of Conservation to discuss various grants for conservation including stocking both ponds with fish and possibly planting some wildflowers and trees near the walking trail and park. The city manager said Mundragon was a good contact to make for the city and hopes he is able to assist us. Councilman Halter asked about lighting the walking trail. Mr. Luehmann replied that they are currently looking into that, but the Byrds had previously suggested it to be a "dusk to dawn" walking trail. Councilwoman Goodin asked if grants were available to be able to clean up/plant wildflowers at the highway exits. She noted there is a big trash problem at both exits which creates an eyesore. Councilman Halter said unfortunately that property around the exits is all state owned and it is difficult to get permission from them for the city to even mow those areas. Goodin then asked how other cities are able to keep those areas clean and plant flowers. Councilman Halter replied he was not sure, but we could look into it and agreed those areas do look bad. It was agreed that MODOT would be contacted for further information.

Mr. Luehmann then explained he had been working with Mr. Mike Mueller on a proposal for adding color and plants to the downtown area and plans to meet with him again next month to discuss further.

The city manager also mentioned that he attended a meeting with CHARM and Main Street Connection for two nights in which they discussed potential improvements to the overall downtown area.

Mr. Luehmann explained that he met with Marcie Lawson from the Sikeston Regional Chamber and Area Economic Development Corporation, and they discussed working together with the possibility of sharing an employee for area economic development.

The city manager then mentioned that we finalized the health insurance for the next year, with David Hickman of HIC insurance as they were the best option and also a St. Francis plan.

Mr. Luehmann explained that a citizen stopped by City Hall with a concern about lack of lighting on Hunter Street. He then rode with David Harris to check out the area and they agreed there needed to be a more powerful light there. Luehmann also mentioned that the additional lights in Charles Williams Park have seemed to help reduce vandalism.

The deficiencies noted after the inspection of the dog kennel were addressed. Councilman Halter asked how many kennels they anticipate on installing. Mr. Luehmann explained they plan on having sixteen (16), but they can add or subtract as they go.

Mr. Luehmann mentioned that he met with the Chamber of Commerce and that the MOU was signed between their treasurer and the city. The Chamber requested that the park remain open until 7PM during the Dogwood Azalea Festival to attract more visitors to stay longer.

Councilman Halter asked if it was discussed for the Chamber to help cover the cost of having city personnel present during the festival since the city has to pay the Public Works employees overtime for assisting. Mr. Luehmann said it was not discussed.

A conference call was attended by the city manager and David Harris to discuss the progress on the lead inventory inspections with Christy Wilson from Horner Shifrin. Councilman Halter asked if they had reported finding any lead pipes thus far. Mr. Luehmann said they have not found any yet, but they have yet to inspect the goosenecks and that is where the issues will likely be.

The city manager mentioned that he also met with Mr. Mike Mueller to discuss interest in putting a bid in for the landscaping in front of City Hall. Mr. Mueller generously planted some plants within the big pot on the front porch already and another company has started making progress in the flower beds.

The water plant upgrade is complete other than some switches that had to be ordered. This will conclude the project provided by the ARPA grant.

Visu-Sewer is still running some pipes, which will complete our contract with them. There is however a possibility of more grant money to eventually proceed with the lining. Councilman

Halter mentioned that David Harris typically budgets to complete some lining work each year regardless of grant funding.

There have been numerous complaints about the Exit 12 project. They plan on using a diamond grinder once they get further along to help smooth out the area.

Mr. Luehmann concluded his report by mentioning the solar eclipse coming up in April. He noted that Ms. Sherry Austin volunteered to help plan and form a committee and he said he would like to discuss it further with her this week.

The city manager then asked if there were any questions regarding the updated budget numbers. No one had any questions.

He also mentioned that a couple of city CDs matured in December, and he was able to get an increase on the interest rate from 2.5% to 5.0%, both as thirteen (13) month specials.

The list of bills paid in the month of December exceeding \$5,000 was acknowledged, along with the public works report and police report. Mr. Luehmann mentioned that there had just recently been 4-5 break-ins to vehicles around the area of Commercial Street and for people to be aware.

Councilwoman Goodin said that she has noticed that a lot of residents are no longer leaving their porch lights on at night and she asked if there was a way to encourage people to keep their lights on to prevent theft or attempted break-ins. The city manager mentioned that we could possibly put a message on the water bills to help promote keeping lights on at night.

Old Business: The first item on the agenda under old business was an update on potential ordinance for vacant buildings. City Attorney, Tabatha Graham informed the council that she had looked into the sample of the ordinance given at the previous council meeting and noticed that it was provided for a charter form of government and with over one million inhabitants. Mr. Kenny Hulshof spoke up and said he also noticed that. Mrs. Graham said she needed a little more time to investigate before proceeding with an ordinance.

The second item on the agenda under old business was an update on a potential tax abatement ordinance. At this time, Mr. Kenny Hulshof stood up to give the update and stated that in order to use the tool of the Section 353, the city has to redevelop corporation by statute by ordinance similar to creating the Historical Preservation Commission, but as a for-profit entity. Part of the development process is to determine "blighted" areas. Mr. Hulshof explained that whatever the city declares blighted, is blighted. This may only be a handful of properties on a map, or it may be a large section of town. Mr. Hulshof used the Russell Hotel as an example to demonstrate. Once an area is deemed blighted and one declares to be part of the redevelopment plan, the deed is given up as sort of a collateral on a loan. The deed is given back with improvements being made for the next ten or so years with the property tax being frozen at the amount it was purchased for.

Councilman Halter asked if the entire city could be considered "blighted" because there are multiple areas all over town that would most likely qualify. Mr. Hulshof said a survey of buildings could be done to determine the percentage of the area that would qualify such as a percentage of those with roof damage, broken windows, and trash accumulation. It could

possibly include a large percentage of the city limits. Mayor Whiteside asked if we could possibly do a survey of the businesses first, and then do residential areas. Mr. Hulshof explained that we would need to declare the blighted areas and explain how we came to that opinion of the areas declared in order to put it on the ballot.

Councilman Toon wanted to clarify that the commission needs to be “for profit”. Mr. Hulshof replied yes, it needs to be for profit as the city cannot do this on its own as a municipality.

Councilman Dugan explained that he understood the process to be that a corporation is given the deed to a property as collateral and then a “lien release” is given once improvements have been made.

Councilman Toon asked what the next step would be for the city to get this moving. Mr. Hulshof explained that the city could possibly hold a “study session” in which experts on the topic are contacted to come in. The City Attorney suggested a committee be set up to hold a discussion once some experts are contacted and questions would be generated beforehand so that they are prepared in advance.

New Business: There were no items on the agenda under new business.

Recognition of Visitors: Cece Rodgers, Sherry Austin, Tiffany Shankle, Sheila Shankle, Mike Mueller, Talisha Mays, Jeff Sams, and Kenny Hulshof were all present.

Cece Rodgers spoke up from the audience and introduced herself and said she lives on Carver Street and a murder happened near her apartment on New Years Day. She stated that she was wondering about cameras and streetlights in that area because the street light closest to her has not worked since she lived there. Ms. Rodgers said there have been shootings right around her kitchen window every summer. Councilman Halter suggested to Ms. Rodgers to get the pole number off the street light pole and to call Ameren to let them know it is out. Councilman Dugan stated that he is on the Housing Authority Board and just came from a meeting and that the cameras are working and the footage from the time around the shooting has been turned over to the state police.

Sheila Shankle spoke up and stated that she recently noticed that there are no streetlights on the East end of Marshall Street. Councilman Halter suggested for the city manager to speak to David Harris about the lighting issue.

At this time, Mayor Whiteside asked if any more visitors had anything to say. No one spoke up.

Adjourn: Councilman Toon made a motion to adjourn the regular meeting and go into closed session. Councilman Goodin seconded the motion. The regular meeting was adjourned, and a five-minute intermission was taken before going into closed session to discuss personnel.

ATTEST:

Ali Marist
City Clerk

Jackie White
Presiding Officer

Ali Marist
City Clerk

Jackie White
Mayor