

**February 24, 2025**

The Eastman City Council met in a regularly scheduled meeting on the above date at 6:00 p.m. The following members were present: Sebrina Williams, Graham Snyder, Debra Sheffield, and Dwayne Burney, who came in 15 minutes late. Others present were City Attorney Rita Llop, City Manager Spencer Barron, Police Chief Billy Cooper, Fire Chief Derl Maxwell, City Clerk April Sheffield, Assistant City Manager Dayna Winslette, City Inspector Jack White, and Department Head Wynnon Pittman. Other city employees present were Officer Josh King and Gerald Fordham. Present from the community were Allen Long, Marlan Eller, Ryan Wells, and Charlotte Hopkins.

The meeting was called to order by Councilor Snyder.

The invocation was given by Manager Barron.

Pledge of Allegiance.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA:**

**On a motion from Councilor Williams and seconded by Councilor Sheffield, the agenda was unanimously amended to add #11: DDA Road Closure, and #12: RFP for City Limits Boundary Research and Survey. The amended agenda was unanimously approved on a motion from Councilor Sheffield and seconded by Councilor Williams.**

**APPROVE MINUTES:**

**A motion was made by Councilor Williams and seconded by Councilor Sheffield to approve the minutes of the February 10, 2025, regular meeting. Motion was approved unanimously.**

**NO UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

**NEW BUSINESS:**

**APPROVE BILLS:**

**On a motion from Councilor Sheffield and seconded by Councilor Williams, the bills for February 11 – 24, 2025, were unanimously approved.**

**ACCEPTANCE OF CONGO LANE & CONNECTOR:**

Attorney Llop explained that in August 2024, an intergovernmental agreement was signed with Dodge County in order to take over Congo Lane and Connector. The city and the county have previously shared responsibility for the roads. A new survey has been conducted and is currently being filed. Upon acceptance, the city will sign a deed for ownership to be transferred from the county to the city. Councilor Snyder asked for clarification that the city would now have access to both sides of the road's rights-of-way. He also states that the county had mentioned that they were already planning to pave Congo. Manager Barron also clarified that this is the road only, not anyone's residential property. **On a motion from Councilor Williams and seconded by Councilor Sheffield, Congo Lane and Connector was unanimously accepted from the county.**

**FIRST READING OF ORDINANCE TO ANNEX IN CONGO LANE & CONNECTOR:**

Attorney Llop explains that the city will need to annex the most recently accepted roads to be considered within the city limits. This annexation will be done the same way as others. Tonight is the first reading. A letter will be sent to the county for their decision and then the city will have a second reading in order to pass. **The first reading was unanimously approved on a motion from Councilor Sheffield and seconded by Councilor Williams.**

**ARTS GUILD REQUEST:**

The Arts Guild sent a request for the City of Eastman to be a \$1000 banner sponsor. The city has not done this in the past even though there is a banner currently hanging in the theater. Three years ago, there was a \$200 donation that was probably for a table for an event. Upon Councilor Snyder asking if it was allocated in the budget, the answer was no. Snyder then asks how it would be paid for if approved. Manager Barron states that it would not be SPLOST eligible so it would have to come out of the General Fund. Barron feels that the city has already put a roof on the building and repaired the air conditioning. Perhaps the Arts Guild would just consider hanging our banner for those contributions. **Councilor Snyder proposes to table the decision until another date. Councilor Sheffield agrees. A unanimous vote was made.**

**HB581 RESOLUTION:**

Councilor Snyder reminds everyone that the three required hearings were held about considering the possibility of opting out of the bill. Good collaborative discussions were held with the county. Snyder admits there is some difficulty in understanding all facets of the bill. It is very complex. Each interpretation is a little different. Manager Barron agrees. The bill was created with good intentions but there are so many unknowns. He is hoping for some tweaking to the bill. The FLOST portion of the bill is only available if no other city or the county opts out. Two other cities have already opted out, so the FLOST is no longer an option. Snyder does not care to bind the city into such a contract that there is currently no option to get out of. Snyder says he wants to opt out. Councilor Williams makes a motion to opt out with the resolution and Councilor Sheffield seconds. Another unanimous vote was made.

**FIREWORKS TAX GRANT:**

Assistant Manager Winslette came forward to explain. The Georgia Firefighters Stand and Training Council collect tax funds from the sale of fireworks throughout the state and put it back into grants. We have an opportunity to apply for funding for the fire department to help us purchase items to maintain our compliance and also maintain or improve our ISO rating. Chief Maxwell has acquired quotes for some equipment to outfit the new firetruck that is coming in later this year. Also, some of the equipment on Engines 7 & 8 is antiquated and in need of replacement. The equipment quote is \$23,959.18. We would be asking for 90% of that total and we would have a 10% match of \$2,395.92. Ms. Winslette just needs the Council's permission to move forward. Councilor Snyder verifies that these are firm numbers. **The match was unanimously approved on a motion from Councilor Sheffield and seconded by Councilor Williams.**

**HURRICAN HELENE OBLIGATED FUNDS:**

Ms. Winslette also outlined the expected hurricane funds. It was approved by FEMA through GEMA for Dodge County and its cities to receive some relief money in accordance with damage from Hurricane Helene. There was an extensive collection of data gathered in reference to debris removal citywide, all emergency protective measures done, and management costs for the grant writer to gather and submit the information. \$92,800.25 has been obligated as reimbursement to us. Just over \$84,000 of that would go back to the general fund and about \$8,700 would go to the water fund based on what was turned in and what it applied to. That covers the contract work needed for a big tree, equipment used during that time, overtime labor costs, and materials used such as fuels, sandbags, etc. FEMA has already obligated the funds. GEMA still must sign off on it. After that, payment should be received within 4 – 6 weeks.

**FIRST READING OF AIRPORT GUIDELINES ORDINANCE:**

This is the ordinance that will mimic what the county has already passed. It will have certain stipulations in it. If you try to construct something over 200 feet within 3 to 5 miles of the airport. This is to make sure that there is nothing to interfere with the flight path or approach to the runway. A building permit

will only be issued if those certain conditions are met. **The first reading of this ordinance was unanimously approved on a motion from Councilor Burney and seconded by Councilor Sheffield.**

**FIREWORKS:**

Chief Maxwell secured two quotes for the fireworks this year. Santore, who we have used in the past, was \$16,000 but reduced to \$14,000 due to the longevity as a customer. This would be a duration of approximately 20 minutes, manually hand-fired from 4-5 people. We did have some issues last year with them. There are still some items to be resolved there. The second quote was received from Freedom Fireworks. They are out of East Dublin, Georgia, not Florida. Ryan Wells approaches to give his summary. They have been in the fireworks business and shooting professional shows for about 10 years. They don't design their racks to have any 'black sky' time during the shows. The fireworks are done electronically instead of hand-firing. The shooters work for them, not contracted out. All guys are certified and hold a license to shoot. His guys also have their hazmat certification, etc. to transport and will deliver the fireworks on the day of. They don't require the city to store them. Eastman is not required to do anything. Freedom will also do the spot checks and cleanup afterwards. They will come the next day to double check and for \$300 will clean up all of the little debris also. The cost is up because of the 10% tariff on things coming out of China. 90% of the fireworks are coming from China and the other from Mexico. Mr. Wells did not push the increase on their quote because Eastman would be new customers. If an agreement can be reached, it will help in the long term by reducing the overall price by being able to order for the next 3 years at a time. This would be for 3 one-year contracts that don't have to be renewed if the city isn't satisfied. He asks the Council to do their diligence and call their references and ask around. They have done several shows around including Hazlehurst, Morrow, Macon Bacon, FCA, Augusta, etc. They have the capacity to shoot 10 shows in one day without struggling. They offer a guarantee. If you don't like the show, don't pay for it. Offered in the contract is a rebate. If something doesn't work or fire, you don't pay for it. He would be able to provide a full 3-D rendering of the show before it is ever shot. It can be synced to music or radio station. Chief Maxwell reiterates that he is not satisfied with how things were handled by Santore last year. Manager Barron states that Santore did the city well for many years but last year turned out to be a disaster and he urges for consideration to use another company this year. Councilor Snyder is willing to give Freedom a try. Councilor Burney has seen their work at a ballgame and was impressed. **Councilor Burney makes a motion to go ahead with Freedom Fireworks at the cost of \$14,500 for a 24–28-minute show on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025, with having over 4,500 shots fired. Councilor Williams seconds the motion with a unanimous approval.**

**TAG READER:**

Chief Cooper came last February and got approval to purchase a tag reader in the amount of \$17,400. It was ordered and finally delivered in June. They have since had numerous issues with installation. The system has not been working properly, and the cameras have already had to be replaced. The software has not been working with GCIC either. Chief Cooper has repeatedly contacted the company to get things settled with no success. He called and had them come and get everything since no money had been exchanged yet. He has gone to a different company, Motorola, and got another quote. Other neighboring agencies have been using them and are very satisfied. He has two quotes: one for \$20,890 and the other for \$22,150 which includes a 3-year warranty vs the 1-year standard warranty. After year 1, there will be a licensing fee of \$1575 for the cameras. At year 4, there will be another charge of \$595 for Police Ware plate check. The plate check can be opted out. It not only runs the tag for insurance, etc. but it checks to see if the owner is wanted. It runs a valid driver's license query along with a picture. Councilor Snyder asks for a comparison price of the previous company. Cooper stated that it was also about \$1500 a year. Officer King speaks in favor of having some sort of system. He pulled a report from what little he was able to use the previous equipment. From January 13 through today, there was a total of 36 citations issued for no insurance, operating without a valid tag or expired. Only 9 of those

were hits from the reader itself. The others were from King manually entering the tags into GCIC from the pictures generated by the tag reader. Some of the traffic stops did come with other charges including marijuana charges, suspended charges. The fines written totaled \$23,020, even though citations are not the main goal. The goal behind the cameras is to ensure driver safety. The money generated will help pay for the system though. **Manager Barron suggests going ahead and getting the 3-year warranty option. In agreement, Councilor Burney made a motion, and Councilor Williams seconded the motion and earned a unanimous vote.**

**DDA ROAD CLOSURE:**

The Downtown Development Authority plans on having their ice-skating event and is requesting Main Street to be closed this coming Saturday, March 1, and the following Saturday, March 8, from 11 - 9 in front of the Magnolia Theater. Wynnon Pittman spoke in favor of the event and agreed to take responsibility for blocking the road off. They plan to leave both ends of the road open to accommodate the businesses. **A unanimous vote was taken on a motion from Councilor Sheffield and seconded by Councilor Williams.**

**RFP FOR CITY LIMITS BOUNDARY RESEARCH AND SURVEY:**

Manager Barron spoke on the recent copies of maps that the Regional Commission has developed for us. He and Chief Cooper had a chance to look over them and have already found some discrepancies in the city boundaries. There are so many maps that are different. He would like to put out an RFP to find someone to research and survey where the corporate boundaries actually lie. Attorney Llop and Barron will work together to draw up a draft and then run for at least a month. Councilor Snyder asks for the opportunity to get digital renderings. **It was a unanimous decision to move forward with a motion from Councilor Burney and seconded by Councilor Sheffield.**

**CITY MANAGER'S REPORT:**

He has not seen any evidence of the pavers being back in town. They have reached out to the engineers who are reaching out to the contractors for some answers. They have already passed the 50% deadline in December. The 100% deadline is in April. After discussions with Jack, once they get moving again, they should be able to finish in a couple of weeks.

Two new firemen have been hired, and they are still taking applications for police officers.

The I&I project is still moving right along. They are currently on Forest Lake Rd and Congo Lane.

He thanks the downtown businesses for putting up with them when they close the streets for downtown events. It is all in effort to grow the downtown area.

**NO OTHER BUSINESS FROM COUNCIL:**

**On a motion from Councilor Williams, a second from Councilor Burney, and a unanimous vote, the meeting was adjourned.**

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CHAIRMAN

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CITY CLERK