

**September 23, 2024**

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, Mark Peacock, and Debra Sheffield. Others present were City Manager Spencer Barron, City Clerk April Sheffield, City Attorney Rita Llop, City Inspector Jack White, Assistant Manager Dayna Winslette, acting Fire Chief Derl Maxwell, and Police Chief Billy Cooper. Audience members included Commissioner Sharon Cobb Flanagan, Loraine and Ellery Aguayo, Paula McCain, EM Harrington III, Jack & Linda Burnham, Debbie Bryant, John Battle, and David and Ebony Ward II.

Invocation was given by Councilor Peacock.

Pledge of Allegiance.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA:**

**On a motion from Councilor Peacock and a motion from Councilor Sheffield, the agenda was unanimously approved.**

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

**On a motion from Councilor Williams and a second from Councilor Sheffield, the minutes of the September 12, 2024, meeting were unanimously approved.**

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

**2024 MILLAGE RATE HEARING:**

Property owner Debbie Bryant came forward to speak. Bryant expressed her concerns over the large percentage of increase in millage rate. The rate should have been raised in increments and definitely not after the large raise of water bills. She felt that the people should be able to vote on it. She also commented that it should have run in the paper and the city should have gone around and told people. She just found out by word of mouth today. Ms. Bryant was assure that all state requirements were met by posting in the paper 7 days before each hearing. Notice could also be found on our website, front of building, and on social media. Snyder responded with that the minimum for Eastman is just not enough anymore. We deserve more than just adequate fire and police protection.

Linda Burnham stepped forward to address the perspective of hiring more people instead of eliminating positions. She mentioned that some people at city hall could be cut out because there aren't many people coming in there. She mentioned seeing a work crew out with a few people working and more just watching. Why can't the city cut those employees out and be able to hire for police and fire and not increase taxes? Councilor Peacock states that is only a snapshot of what might be happening. She may be unaware of the before and after. He also informs her that Eastman, even after the increase, we will still have the lowest millage rate around. She thinks that the taxes are being increased because of people moving out of the city and into the county. She disagrees and says that people are still moving to Eastman. Councilor Snyder agrees that people may be coming to the community but not necessarily moving into Eastman. Yes, the number of people here have dropped significantly. We have got to find a way to get people here. We also have to have top quality infrastructure and superior police and fire protection. People are going to want access to initiatives that will enhance their quality of life. That requires money and taxes will need to be raised. Burnham accuses them of making excuses.

Jack Burnham approaches to comment on being disappointed in not fighting hard enough to get a bigger percentage of the SPLOST money. When the water bills were raised, fire and police fees were added. Where did that money go? He asked how did the city get in such low economic position? Councilor Peacock states that they cannot answer for the decisions made by previous councils and can't change the past. They can only move forward from this point. As discussed in previous hearings, the fees were added to make things balance for this year. The taxes will be to help move forward.

Ms. Bryant comes back up to disagree about people moving outside of the city because there are 3 new businesses on Main Street right now. She proceeds to complain about the county bill having tripled in the last 2 years. And now the city is. She also complains about the liquor stores being in town when they should have been put in the county. Councilor Snyder reminds her that it was a referendum that was voted on and approved by the citizens.

Mr. Burnham asks if the county amount will decrease because the city is raising theirs? This isn't fair to those who pay both taxes. Snyder says they did have a 15% increase last year. Councilor Peacock let everyone know that there are some new tax opportunities coming later this year and both city and county representatives plan to attend the training.

There were no more comments.

#### **APPROVE**

**Councilor Snyder calls for a motion to approve the proposed 2024 millage rate of 9.55. Councilor Peacock made the motion and Councilor Williams gave a second. All members approved.**

#### **GOODY'S BIDS:**

We received 3 separate bids in relation to the Goody's building. One from Ms. Carolyn Mincey for the cost of \$2000, one from Pridefam Business Ventures DBA as Badcock, Matthew Pridemore for \$252,000 and the last from Mr. Ronald Bacello, owner of Hot Diggity Dog LLC. In this one, he is asked that he would pay the \$250,000 but is subject to requirements that he first sell his business in another area.

#### **EXECUTIVE SESSION: PERSONNEL & PROPERTY MATTERS:**

**On a motion from Councilor Peacock and seconded by Councilor Sheffield, it was unanimously voted to move into executive session. (Council, Manager, Clerk, and Attorney exit room.)**

**(All re-enter the room.) On a motion from Councilor Peacock and seconded by Councilor Sheffield, it was unanimously approved to enter back into regular session.**

**Councilor Snyder asks for a motion to accept the bid from Pridefam Business Ventures in the amount of \$252,00. This would be contingent upon an agreement drawn up by Attorney Llop. Councilor Peacock makes and motion with a second from Councilor Williams and all approved.**

#### **NEW BUSINESS:**

#### **APPROVAL OF MONTHLY BILLS:**

**On a motion from Councilor Sheffield and seconded by Councilor Williams, the monthly bills for September 13 – 23, 2024, were unanimously approved.**

**DAVID WARD II, 12<sup>TH</sup> AVENUE SPEED HUMP:**

Mr. Ward approached with a request for a speed hump to be placed at the intersection of 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Pine. There is a problem of people running the stop signs there even though it is a 4-way stop. He has called the police, and they have come and been able to write some citations. Inspector White is not in favor of the hump because of the 4 stop signs already on that stretch of road. Councilor Snyder agrees that Mr. Ward has done his part and getting almost everyone on 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue to sign the required petition. He has several kids and is worried about their safety. Manager Barron states that often one the humps are put down; traffic actually diverts from that area because they don't like them. Chief Cooper does agree with it being a problem in that area. He isn't in favor of the humps, but they do work. Councilor Peacock does remind everyone that they are removable, they aren't permanent. **On a motion from Councilor Peacock and seconded by Councilor Sheffield, the speed hump was unanimously approved.**

**RESCHEDULE OCTOBER 14 MEETING:**

Due to October 14, 2024, being a holiday and the city hall is closed, there is a need to reschedule the first meeting of the month. **After discussion and a motion from Councilor Williams and seconded by Councilor Peacock, it was unanimously approved to move the meeting to Wednesday, October 16, 2024, at 6 PM.**

**MUSIC ON MAIN ROAD CLOSURE:**

Paula McCain from the Chamber of Commerce comes forward to request road closures of both sides of Main Street from 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue to 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. She has already approached several of the merchants about the event. Some of them are planning to do some of their own thing that day. There will be a mini-Comic Con, Hot Diggity Dogs is planning some sort of contest. With the merchants starting their events a little earlier, 11:00 AM is the requested time for the closure. Their events will start around 12 or 1 and Music on Main actually starts at 2 PM. The event ends at 10 and will need a little time for cleanup. The kids section may have to go at 3<sup>rd</sup> and Main if the Goody's building is sold by then. If not, they may be able to free up that end if the area isn't needed. Paula has promised to get signs up and notify the merchants of the upcoming event and road closures. Many do not like it, but it can help bring some business downtown on that day. The council sends apologies to those.

Loraine Aguayo asks about being able to take plastic cups of alcohol outside of her business on that day. All remember that being included in the newly adopted ordinance but can't remember the exact wording for a special event permit. She will get with the city about getting the proper permissions.

**On a motion from Councilor Sheffield and seconded by Councilor Williams, it was unanimously approved to shut down both sides of Main Street from 5<sup>th</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue from 11 AM to 11 PM on Saturday, October 19, 2024.**

**APPROVE 2025 BUDGET:**

The required public hearing has taken place. The council have talked extensively about this budget and tried to find every cost savings available. **On a motion from Councilor Peacock and seconded by Councilor Sheffield, the proposed 2025 Budget has been approved.**

**ACCEPT GAP GRANT:**

Assistant City Manager Dayna Winslette's job is mostly compiled of grant writing. She had her first big win this past week. GEMA and Homeland Security have a gap grant specifically for gang activity prosecution. We have been awarded \$57,400 to specifically install 12 different cameras to be installed in areas where we have high crime related to gang, drug activity, or criminal activity. It includes the cameras and weather and dust enclosure with fans, their license, a video recorder, smart switch, all that good stuff in the grant we also included. The only required cost for the city would be for internet connectivity and the electricity expenses. If one of them goes down, we can decide whether to replace it or not. Rita has gone through the agreement. It's mostly us doing a couple reports. There's no resolution required. We just have to present it for acceptance so that we can send them the signed agreement and move forward with purchasing and getting. When asked, Chief Cooper said he would access to these cameras in order for investigatory purposes. They should be able to go back and review something if a crime happens and it will help with investigations. Also, there's the tilt and zoom option to put them somewhere we can move them around remotely to how we want. **On a motion from Councilor Peacock and a second from Councilor Sheffield, the GAP grant was unanimously accepted.** Also, a thanks goes out to Kirk Smith with GEMA for his tremendous help with this grant.

**ZONING ORDINANCE REVISION:**

Attorney Llop presents this change by adding a new high density, multiple family, which also can include single family Residential District. It will be called R3 under multiple family residential district. It also adopts a table with the dimensions required for the lot for the property and for the building and residential structure. There is a resolution with a draft ordinance attached to it. When you sign the resolution, we'll send it to P&Z for their consideration. They'll hold a public hearing on that so they can make changes to the draft and or suggest something else to you when it returns. Inspector White says we've had a lot of concerns about being able to use multi-family housing townhouses in certain areas of town. This is the best way to resolve those issues by creating this new zone where we can do all of it in one area, which is what developers are asking for. It will allow us to move forward with being able to offer more housing at reasonable prices.

**On a motion from Councilor Williams and seconded by Councilor Sheffield, the zoning resolution was unanimously approved.**

**CITY MANAGER'S REPORT:**

The Pine Drive GEFA project is moving forward at a snail's pace. They've ran into obstacle after obstacle that they didn't plan for. We're doing everything we can to get those streets opened back up. Also want to remind everyone that the NAACP is having its scholarship banquet. It's going to be October 5th, 2024, at 5:00 PM. You can see Mr. John Battle or another member if you'd like tickets.

**OTHER BUSINESS FROM COUNCIL:**

Councilor Peacock thanks those city workers that are working extremely hard, Dayna and the office staff. It's been brought up about people seeing other city workers possibly standing around. Please note that when we have workers doing things, there's a safety factor. We can't have someone in a hole without a couple of people standing there watching them in case that hole falls in and caves. It is the same way with putting things up on these lights. You have to have people there for safety. Just don't make the assumption and think that people are not working. Sometimes you're working even though you're not working. So just take that in consideration when you see these ladies and

gentlemen who work for the city. They work extremely hard and we're very thankful and appreciative of each and every one of them.

Councilor Snyder just wants to say thank you to Brandon Brisco and his crew for fixing some of these potholes. Thank you for all your hard work. Thank you for Wynnon, and Jack, and all the other guys and ladies that work for the city. Thank you for all you do. I know it's hard, especially when you have to deal with more complaints than you do praise. So thank you for what you do, and you know we will have your back 100% of the way. So thank you for everything.

**On a motion from Councilor Peacock and seconded by Councilor Sheffield, the meeting was adjourned.**

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COUNCIL CHAIRMAN

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CITY CLERK