

**February 8, 2024**

The Eastman City Council met in a called meeting on the above date at 5:00 p.m. The following members were present: Sebrina Williams, Graham Snyder, Debra Sheffield, Mark Peacock, and Jermayne Hamilton. Others present were City Manager Spencer Barron, City Clerk April Sheffield, City Attorney Rita Llop, City Inspector Jack White, Administrative Assistant Dayna Winslette, and Department Heads Wynnon Pittman and Paul McCranie. Also in attendance were Fire Chief Scotty Whitten, Police Chief Billy Cooper, Investigator Josh Roberson, and Officer Nick Hulette. Audience members included Blake and Mark Studstill, Todd Yates (Ryland), County Manager Conner Bearden, Jesse Bearden, Tim McCain and Greg Vierra, Commissioner Sharon Cobb Flanagan and Mario Matos, Mitchell Coffee, James and Lori Wilcox, and Roy Grenade.

The meeting was called to order by Councilor Snyder.

Invocation was given by Councilor Peacock.

Pledge of Allegiance.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA:**

**The decision was made to move the Executive Session from the end of the meeting to the beginning of the meeting. This was unanimously approved on a motion from Councilor Peacock and seconded by Councilor Sheffield. Also, a public safety fee/stormwater management fee is added to item #6, park fee/limb & leaf fee. This was unanimously approved on a motion from Councilor Williams and seconded by Councilor Peacock.**

**EXECUTIVE SESSION:**

**On a motion from Councilor Peacock and seconded by Councilor Sheffield, it was unanimously approved to move into executive session to discuss property, personnel, and legal matters. (Members entered into executive session.)**

**(Members entered back into council chambers.) On a motion from Councilor Peacock and seconded by Councilor Hamilton, it was unanimously approved to come out of executive session and into regular meeting.**

**NEW BUSINESS:**

**JAMES WILCOX:**

James Wilcox from 417 Foster Street came before the council to discuss property he purchased at 32 Sage Circle. Upon purchasing the property, he noticed there were 2 water meters on the property. He has been trying to get this issue straightened out since 11/23/23. After speaking to the former property owners, he has discovered that the septic tank is on his property, and someone for the house next door came across his property and is also hooked to the tank. Two houses, one tank. He approached the neighbor about trying to come to an agreement. They solved the issue between them, and the neighbor is disconnected now. Now, the water also goes across his property and connects to the neighbor's house and has been this way for the last 7 years. He approached the neighbor about needing the meter for himself. On 01/30/24, he came to city hall about putting the meter in his name and paid the deposit. Due to a misunderstanding, the clerk said he could go ahead and run a line from that meter to his house now. So he proceeded to lock the meter until he could get the line and fittings to run service to his house. Mr. Wilcox was then told that he could not touch or tap into the meter because of the new outside water policy that was passed the previous year. He understood and now plans to dig a well. He was given his deposit back. The problem is that he wants to put a building on his own property, but it will be over the neighbor's line running to that meter. If something happens, why should he have to

move his building for them to fix the line? Spence mentions that the law states that he cannot mess with the line that is currently there. Everyone has met out there trying to remedy the situation. There is not a good solution to the problem. City Manager Barron and Councilor Snyder discuss that this seems to be more of a civil matter, and he may need to take it to a judge. Attorney Llop agrees that it is between Mr. Wilcox and the neighbor, not the city. Mr. Wilcox has tried to solve it with the neighbor. He has even given him to stuff to do it and he want. The council reminds Mr. Wilcox that the neighbor is not allowed to tap into the meter or change where lines run into and out of the meter. That will violate the outside water policy. Councilor Snyder stops discussion because of time and suggests going before a judge. Magistrate has already stepped back from the situation and so it will more than likely go to Superior Court. After a judgement is given, then the council will see what needs to be done.

**RYLAND, COMMERCIAL DUMPSTERS:**

Todd Yates, owner of Ryland Environmental, states that all of the other cities that they are contract with are exclusive with the residential and the front load dumpsters. It tends to be revenue for the city. When asked, Todd stated that he was willing to amend the current residential contract for the front load dumpsters to be added and run concurrent with the present contract for the remaining four years. Discussion with Attorney Llop decided the need to implement an ordinance to require all business within the city of Eastman to utilize all city contracted services. She will have the ordinance prepared to present at the next meeting. **Chairman Snyder asked for a motion to amend the ordinance to require all businesses to use only city contracted solid waste services. The motion was made by Councilor Peacock and seconded by Councilor Hamilton and carried unanimous.**

**CLOCK PROJECT, SHARON COBB FLANAGAN:**

Sharon Cobb Flanagan and Mario Matos have been planning something for the triangle area at Oak and College Streets. They have written approval from GDOT. They are requesting the council's approval also. It is a beautification project broken down into 2 phases. First phase, which has been approved, involves the triangle area and a water feature that may be a dry water feature. It may be dry sometimes, but it will have some lighting. It will also include a clock that stands in the center area and will include the word Eastman and established 1871. Chairman Snyder thinks it is a wonderful idea and agrees that that section needs some revitalization. Councilor Peacock agrees and coming together shows a commonality between the city, county, and others. Mario states that they want this project to be 100% community based. Sharon reminds the council that they are not asking the city or the county for any money, just the utilization of that space. Councilor Peacock mentions that GDOT has approved to look at changing the direction of traffic there in the yield space. Attorney Llop suggests getting a copy of GDOT's approval to put on file. Councilor Hamilton wants copies of the blueprints. Discussion was had and since the city doesn't technically own the property, everyone consented with their blessing.

**BID OUT KING STREET SIDEWALKS:**

This concerns the sidewalks on both sides of King Street between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenues with Roy's on one side and the Leave it Better Park on the other. The project would include repairing and replacing 1500 sq ft of sidewalk, as well as adding some 637 sq ft of new, and then adding another 1180 sq ft. for some transition padding. The transition pad would be in front of the park itself. A separate bid would be done for the steps in front of Roy's. Jack proposes putting a slight ramp going to the second step and then adding a 70 ft guard rail. **On a motion from Councilor Hamilton and a second from Councilor Sheffield, it was unanimously approved to move forward with taking bids for both sidewalk projects.**

**BID SECURITY SYSTEM FOR CITY HALL/PROPERTIES:**

The City Hall building is over 40 years old and does not even have a working smoke detector in it. Of course, there are no cameras or alarm systems in it nor across the road at the shop. City Manager Barron proposes to pursue bids for a system here at City Hall and at the city barn. **On a motion from Councilor Peacock and seconded by Councilor Hamilton, it was unanimously approved to proceed and look into security systems.**

**PARK FEE/LIMB & LEAF FEE/PUBLIC SAFETY FEE/STORMWATER FEE:**

City Manager Barron states that the city is trying to put money into a park which was the old Boy's and Girl's Club. It would be one city park and centrally located. To do that, he wants the city council to ask for \$2-3 to be put on everyone's water bill. It will take time to build up the money to do the repairs that are need. He also plans to utilize SPLOST as much as possible.

Chairman Snyder points out that the stormwater management fee will be to help maintain our current stormwater system, curbs, and gutters. He has received numerous complaints from citizens about them being clogged. This fee would be a vital component to help keep our streets and roadways safe. CM Barron stated that 80% of the drains are clogged up and our 4 street workers cannot keep up.

Chairman Snyder addresses the limb and leaf fee by stating that they are trying to acquire land in the future to be able to handle it all in house. Barron states that over the years we have used various methods from mulching, burying, or paying private contractors. We are paying someone else to do something that the city themselves should be doing. The long-term goal from this fee would hopefully allow us to completely take this over ourselves.

The public safety fee is in relation to police and fire protection. This would be for all entities covered under the current service delivery strategy. Barron clarifies that the park, limb and leaf, and stormwater fee will not apply to anyone outside of the city. Snyder says the total fee will be \$20, and broken down as \$10 for public safety, and between \$2.50 and \$3.50 for each of the other fees. Barron states that the only other alternative is to approximately double the millage rate this year or next year. Councilor Peacock states that the millage rate would not include everyone that should contribute. The millage rate only effects the property owner, not the renters or the hundreds of residences in the county that we provide fire and police services to. Peacock states that the fee is the fairest way and provide upkeep to all of the current areas. Fire Chief Whitten gives a statement on the failure to maintain the 5-mile coverage area if the fee is not passed. The ISO rating would rise and cause their insurance to skyrocket, possibly double. Barron stated that 39% of the fire budget went to answering calls in the county last year. In exchange for that, we don't pay for inmates at the jail. We will need to negotiate the service delivery strategy.

County Manager Bearden asks the council what mechanism they have in place to make sure the fees are paid. Barron states that the city attorneys have said we could cut their water off. Bearden says they looked at doing something similar with the power company. They were told you could not cut power off for failure to pay the fee. Barron pointed out the power has different regulations than water. Mr. Bearden, in his opinion, does not feel this is legal and requests the council to look into it further. He does agree that the antiquated negotiations of the service delivery strategy do need to be brought to the table. Dodge County fire has improved and will hopefully help the ISO rating from jumping to high. **On a motion from Councilor Peacock and seconded by Councilor Hamilton, the park fee, limb & leaf fee, public safety fee, and stormwater fee was passed unanimously.** Chairman Snyder stated that we would send a letter out to the public letting them know about the fees and that they would be starting as of March 1.

**WATER ANTENNA REPLACEMENT FEE:**

Department head Wynnon Pittman presents a policy concerning the antennas on the newly installed meters. Since December they have already had to go back and install three and that is costing the city money. He recommends putting a policy in place that on the first occurrence of damage to the antenna, the city will replace it at no cost to the customer. On any occurrence after that, the city will charge the customer \$150 for replacement. Chairman Snyder specifies that those are the transmitters that are on top of each meter box. Councilor Peacock asks how much it costs the city for the antenna. Pittman states that each one costs around \$78 for the part only. All replacements will be documented. **On a motion from Councilor Sheffield and a second from Councilor Hamilton, the council unanimously voted for the policy.**

**BLIGHT ORDINANCE:**

Attorney Llop has presented an ordinance that she has doctored with additions and some deletions. Chairman Snyder has read the draft and is pleased with the changes. City Manager Barron states that the Blight Ordinance will cover overgrown vegetation, dilapidated houses, infested areas. We will be looking at buildings that don't meet the code standards. It is 19 pages of rules that our code officer will be able to cite and fine for. Attorney Llop says that this ordinance will also cover a nuisance procedure. It may be a little duplicate of what we already have but it is all inclusive. There is a blight tax near the end. We will be able to tax property (double the millage rate) if it is not remediated. It authorizes us to do that and then decrease when the property is remediated. There is a time frame stated for remediation. The ordinance has been needed for quite a while. **On a motion from Councilor Peacock and a second from Councilor Sheffield, it was unanimously voted to proceed with adopting the blight ordinance.**

**ADJOURNMENT:**

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

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**CHAIRMAN**

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**CITY CLERK**