



**CITY COUNCIL:**  
Amanda Green/Seat 1  
Elizabeth Brannon/Seat 2  
Eddie Farris/Seat 3  
Mark Martin/Seat 4  
Elizabeth Haffner/At Large

**MAYOR:**  
Russ Barley  
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**City of Freeport**  
**REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**  
**City Hall Council Chambers**  
**September 8, 2020 9:00am**

**1. Meeting Called to Order**

-The September 8, 2020 City of Freeport City Regular City Council Meeting was called to Order at 9:00AM by Mayor Russ Barley. The meeting was held in the City Hall Council Chambers in Freeport, Florida.

Council Members Present: Mayor Russ Barley, Councilwoman Elizabeth Brannon, Councilwoman Amanda Green, Councilwoman Elizabeth Heffner, Councilman Eddie Farris, and Councilman Mark Martin.

Staff Present: City Attorney Clay Adkinson, City Planning Director Latilda Hughes-Neel, Finance Officer Sara Bowers, Utility Billing Manager Debbie Roberts, Parks and Recreation Director Travis Digges, Water Supervisor Larry Taggle, City Clerk Malani Robinson, City Manager Charlie Simmons, Alex Rouchaleau, and Joyce Sunday.

**2. Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance**

-The invocation was given by Councilman Farris followed by the pledge of allegiance.

**3. Recognition of Guests**

**4. Consent Agenda**

- a. Bills (Tab 1)
- b. Minutes August 25, 2020 Blight Workshop (Tab 2)
- c. Minutes August 27, 2020 City Council Meeting (Tab 3)



**5. Public Comment on Consent Agenda**

**6. Approval of Consent Agenda**

-COUNCIL ACTION: Motioned by: Councilman Farris. Seconded by: Councilwoman Haffner. All ayes; motion carried.

**7. Consideration of Additions/Deletions to the Agenda**

**8. Approval of Agenda with Additions/Deletions**

**9. Staff Reports**

**a. Water**

**b. Sewer**

**c. Parks/Projects**

**i. Extension of Park Hours until 8PM**

-Parks Director Digges sought the Council's approval of extending the park hours until 8PM. Being that sundown is at 7PM due to the upcoming seasonal changes, Parks Director Digges suggested giving an extra hour to assist with the activities being held throughout the parks. Councilwoman Haffner asked if there would be an additional extension once daylight savings time begins, to which Parks Director Digges explained that it was an option he would revisit

**d. City Manager**

**i. Commercial Rates (Tab 4)**

-City Manager Simmons presented charts to the Council which illustrated the old, current, and suggested commercial rates being applied to a utility bill. City Manager Simmons emphasized the necessity for the city to move in a positive direction by acting on increasing the commercial rates, otherwise the City would be faced with the same dilemma next year with the outcome of the new rate study. Councilwoman Haffner asked for clarity on the charts and noted that a 115% increase is excessive in her



opinion, viewing it as the city trying to make up for the past by not enacting an increase sooner. City Manager Simmons assured the Council that the suggested rate was not an act of making up for the past, but a reflection of the cover cost needed to offer the water and sewer services to the city. Councilwoman Haffner noted that the City should consider increasing the rates over a period of a few years to catch up to the current rate. City Manager Simmons remarked that the proposed rate was fair based on expenses and was a step for the Council to review. Councilman Farris cautioned that reducing the rate any lower would put the city back where it started from and would only prolong the backlash of increased commercial rates. Councilwoman Brannon expressed her dissatisfaction of doubling the rates however she understood the reasoning of it, therefore she felt the proposed rate was a reasonable compromise. City Attorney Adkinson reminded the Council that the City was using a lot of financing and grant money from RD and SRF Projects, that could demand to see the rate studies and the current rates. City Attorney Adkinson cautioned that the City must be able to justify the current rates in comparison to the rate study; fortunately, the financiers are only requesting that the interest be paid off therefore they would only need to see that the City is in a position to pay off the debt. Furthering the discussion City Attorney Adkinson warned that the City's current rate could interfere with future loans and grants once they realize that the City is charging 200% less than recommended. Councilman Farris noted that there was too much at stake for the Council to backtrack on its decision and that the City should move forward with the proposed rate.



COUNCIL ACTION: Motioned by: Councilman Farris.  
Seconded by Councilman Martin. All ayes: motion carried.

e. **City Clerk**

f. **Finance**

i. **Budget Amendment #7 (Tab 5)**

-Finance Advisor Bowers presented the FlexNet amendment from the last meeting seeking approval for the budget change.

COUNCIL ACTION: Motioned by: Councilwoman Brannon. Seconded by: Councilwoman Haffner. All ayes: motion carried.

g. **Billing**

h. **Planning**

i. **Legal**

j. **Engineering**

- Engineer Rouchaleau began by updating the Council on several projects the city was currently undertaking:

- Received comments back from DOT about the proposed 331 Landscaping.
- Working with the Planning Department in submitting the Safe Route to School Phase 2 application, should have finished this week.
- West Bay Loop the proposal Lift Station and Forest Main Extension, currently reviewing concept plans
- East Bay Loop water main construction is underway, currently installing pipes.
- Washington Street resurfacing and storm water improvements are out for bid. September 15, 2020 is when he expects bids, had two good contractors who reached out.



- Barrier Free Park Phase 1 improvements are 90% complete, plans were approved by city and are going to run it through the grant awarders and place it out for bid. Will bring to next Council meeting for review.
- SRF Phase 1 Improvements should be wrapping up this month
- USDA Treatment Plant awaiting their comments, should have it revised and resubmitted by the end of the month
- Hammock Bay Rec Trails are completed and closing out the paperwork, awaiting reimbursement, sign should be coming in any day now.
- State Road 20 Beautification Grant- has already ordered the plants, has a conference call scheduled this week with the landscape architect.
- State Road 20 Forest Main and Jolly Bay Forest Main are complete.
- U.S 331 North Sewer and Water Improvements are under design

-City Manager Simmons noted that the City has a lot of projects underway being that it was still so small.

**i. Bear Creek Update**

-Engineer Cliff noted that the plans are 30% complete, there is another round of testing needed which should be completed by next week. City will be doing additional testing ,maintenance of traffic, for the drilling company. Dredge and fill permits for the Army Corp and DDP are expected to be submitted this week. Engineer Cliff also informed the Council of the box boulder and the 2016 FEMA Study which concluded that the box boulder was overtopped and not adequate.

**10. Old Business**



## 11. New Business

- a. Mayor Russ Barley
- b. Councilwoman Brannon

- i. **Private Property Rights**

-While assisting a client it was brought to Councilwoman Brannon's attention that the City of Freeport requires anyone who wants to open a water account with the city to bring in a leasing agreement. Councilwoman Brannon cautioned the Council to think about unintended consequences prior to correcting an issue quickly. Councilwoman Brannon suggested that the owner being present with an ID to fill out a form with the Billing Department, especially for those who do not have an actual lease. City Manager Simmons asked for clarity on Councilwoman Brannon's request so that staff could draw up a new procedure. Councilwoman Green expressed her concern on how it would work, referencing how other municipalities handle utilities. Councilwoman Haffner offered insight on how the process would work, noting that many people have verbal agreements with the owner or have the utilities included in their rent. City Attorney Adkinson advised the Council to go a step further by protecting the owner and tenant, if one of the parties decides to opt out of payments. City Attorney Adkinson noted that the owner of the property needed to verify that they would be the guarantor on the back end of the agreement with the utility payments, this would protect future tenants as well. City Attorney Adkinson recommended having a notary present to sign the agreement. Billing Manager Roberts noted that the billing department has been making exceptions to the policy by allowing out of state owners to email their ID, tenants name, and the start date of the agreement to get around



sending in a lease. Councilwoman Brannon referenced that the policy states otherwise and should be updated. Billing Manager Roberts agreed to update the policy and bring it to the next meeting.

**c. Councilman Farris**

**i. Future Fall Event**

-Councilman Farris noted that COVID-19 had put a lot of City events on hold, and several individuals in the community had expressed their concern. Councilman Farris expressed that once the pandemic subsided the City would be hosting events to bring the community back together. Councilwoman Green suggested doing a reverse event that such as a food drive or charity to bring the community together safely. Councilman Farris also suggested making the City more festively decorated around the holidays, to which he acknowledged the Mayor's efforts. Mayor Barley suggested updating old banners that were not in use for the upcoming holiday season.

**ii. 4th of July Fireworks**

-Believes the community has individuals who would willingly donate to hosting the event. Councilman Farris expressed his concern in not letting things slip through the cracks and to resume community engagement activities as soon things are safe. City Manager Simmons noted that prior to the pandemic the City was in the process of hosting its own 4<sup>th</sup> of July event and hosting a small carnival, however, once there was clearance, he would resume planning activities.

**d. Councilwoman Green**

**e. Councilwoman Haffner**

**f. Councilman Martin**

**12. Public Comment**

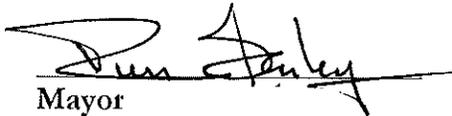


-Mr.Puckett a new resident of Freeport, shared his experience with renting out properties and having the tenants pay the utility bill with it still being in his name. Mr.Puckett then expressed his concerns with the City's planning noting that there needed to be more protection for residents from contractors, amidst growth in the City.

-City Attorney Adkinson noted that the City's website needed to make changes to the title of the evening's meeting, calling it a Public Hearing as opposed to a workshop.

### 13. Adjournment

-Councilman Farris made the motion to adjourn the meeting. The Mayor adjourned the meeting at 9:43AM.

  
Mayor

ATTEST

  
City Clerk