City of Freeport

REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

January 12, 2021 9:00 AM
Council Chambers, Freeport City Hall

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

Staff Members Present: City Manager Charlie Simmons, City Clerk Malani Robinson, City Attorney Clay Adkinson, Planning Director Latilda Hughes- Neel, Finance Officer Sara Bowers, Billing Manager Debbie Roberts, Parks Director Travis Digges, Water Supervisor Larry Tuggle, Sewer Supervisor Robert Fawcett, Engineer Alex Rouchaleau, City Planner Adam Williams

1. Meeting Called to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 AM by Mayor Barley in the Council Chambers of Freeport City Hall.

2. Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance

The invocation was given by Councilman Farris, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

3. Jake Barley-Requesting Adjustment To Utility Bill

Jake Barley and his wife Christina approached the Council to dispute a water bill that had a usage of over 63,00 gallons for the previous billing cycle. Mr. Barley informed the Council that the property that accrued this high usage was vacant, and after doing diligent research, he did not find any leaks and the security footage presented no foul play. Mrs. Barley noted that there is always water usage on the property despite it being vacant and believes it to be a meter issue. Billing Manager Roberts informed the Council that this account was red flagged due to an abnormal surge in usage, a tech was sent out to verify the high read, however it was too late for a usage

report. Billing Manager Roberts explained the policy and encouraged the Barley's to get an accuracy test to which they refused. Councilman Martin asked for clarification on the accuracy test and all it entails. Water Supervisor Tuggle explained to the Council that the accuracy test took a total of 3 weeks to complete with a $120 upfront cost. If the issue is found to be with the meter, then the $120 fee is refunded to the customer. City Manager Simmons informed the Council that City staff was abiding by the policy guidelines set in place by the Council, therefore they would need to make the final decision on the matter. Mr. Barley stressed that there was no way possible for such a high usage to occur to which Mrs. Barley noted that once each year they experience a spike in the water bill. Councilwoman Green questioned the logic behind their refusal of the accuracy test, noting that it could possibly remedy the situation. Councilwoman Green continued by offering alternative solutions that aligned with the policy. Mrs. Barley noted that she and her husband did not want to pay the $120 fee to have the accuracy test conducted, she encouraged the Council to review previous bills for justifications in the once-a-year spike. Councilwoman Brannon expressed her sympathy for the situation, noting that the Council cannot deviate from the policy, thus she encouraged the accuracy test. Councilwoman Green made a motion to deny the Barley's request. Mayor Barley encouraged the couple to meet with Billing Manager Roberts for further assistance moving forward.

Moved by: Councilwoman Green
Seconded by: Councilwoman Brannon

To DENY the Barley's request for a bill adjustment.

A roll call vote was ordered, and the vote was as follows:

Councilman Farris: aye

Councilman Martin: aye

Councilwoman Haffner: aye

Councilwoman Brannon: aye

Councilwoman Green: aye

Carried

4. Recognition of Guests

None.

5. Consent Agenda

a. Revenue and Expenditure Report

b. Bills

c. City Council Meeting Minutes- December 8, 2020

Councilwoman Green noted that with the previous City Clerk she requested that all votes be displayed in the roll call format, however it has not since been done. Councilwoman Haffner expressed that she had also noticed this and would like as much detail as possible in the minutes. City Clerk Robinson informed the Council that she was recently informed that the Council would like the votes to be written in the roll call format and would do so moving forward. Councilwoman Green acknowledged City Clerk Robinson's good work with the minutes and encouraged her to revise the previous minutes to clarify votes for members in the community. City Clerk Robinson expressed her concerns in ability to do so without a visual recording of the previous meetings. City Manager Simmons informed the Council that he would assist City Clerk Robinson with identifying voices on past audio recordings. City Attorney Adkinson inserted legal counsel to assist the Council in approving items on the Consent Agenda.

6. Public Comment on Consent Agenda

None.

7. Approval of Consent Agenda

Moved by: Councilwoman Green
Seconded by: Councilwoman Haffner

To APPROVE Tab 2 and Tab 3 of the Consent Agenda.

A roll call vote was ordered, and the vote was as follows:

Councilman Farris: aye

Councilman Martin: aye

Councilwoman Haffner: aye

Councilwoman Brannon: aye

Councilwoman Green: aye

Carried

8. Consideration of Additions/Deletions to Agenda

None.

9. Approval of Agenda with Additions/Deletions

None

10. Staff Reports

a. Water

b. Sewer

c. Parks

1. Parks Update

Parks Director Digges updated the Council on the following items in the Parks Department:

- The shades at the Sports Complex playground have been installed.
- The Boat Ramp additions at Marsh Landing have been completed.
- The baseball net canopy has been installed.
- The pool area will be the next focus of the Parks Department with plans to update the bathroom area and to add more seating.

d. City Manager

1. FY 2021-22 Legislative Appropriations Projects

City Manager Simmons introduced Liberty Partners, who would be giving a presentation on the 2021-22 Legislative Appropriation Projects selected by the City. Mrs. Jennifer Green of Liberty Partners opened the presentation by expressing gratitude for City Manager Simmons responsive and punctual work relationship, which has allowed them to better gauge the needs of the City. Mrs. Green noted that they have since hired a director of grants management, which is included in their fees, to scour for any funding that may be of use for future projects for the City. Councilman Martin wanted verification from City Manager Simmons and the City's engineer that they were confident in the selection of the four projects being the priority. City Manager Simmons and Engineer Rouchaleau confirmed that they were confident in the projects selected, noting that the US 331 Project has been on the City's agenda for years, therefore they would break it down into segments for completion. Engineer Rouchaleau noted that the Lift Station Upgrades project was a necessity following the aftermath of the previous hurricane to keep the City prepared for disaster relief, commenting on the City being an ideal candidate for funds. Engineer Rouchaleau also remarked to the benefits of having South Jackson Street Roadway stormwater improvements, reminding the Council that it was a previous project that failed to get funding. The Community Center, according to Engineer Rouchaleau, was an ideal selection based on the diversity of funding the City could acquire for it. City Manager Simmons also noted that following a meeting with Senator Gainer, he became aware of the need for an incentive to convince residents to convert from a septic system to the City's public sewage system, noting a potential source of additional funds that the City could seek for the US 331 project. Councilwoman Green added that the City should network with County Commissioner Trey Nick regarding the water quality and septic systems, as the County was also tackling a similar project. Councilwoman Brannon also noted that County Commissioner McCormick was an additional person to work alongside. City Manager Simmons informed the Council that he had been conversing with the two commissioners regarding collaboration.

Mrs. Green noted that the focal point for pushing the City's project list would be Senator Gainer and Representative Drake through the legislative process. Mrs. Green began the Liberty Partners presentation by addressing the political advantages within the Florida House and Senate, informing the Council of key session dates and committee weeks for lobbying the Appropriations Projects list. The Liberty Partners presentation gave insight to new processes within the Legislature this year due to the Governor's plan to reduce inflation, noting the $93 billion budget cuts. Mr. Tim Parson of Liberty Partners took the floor to state his positive political prospects of securing the septic to sewer conversion funding, noting that Governor DeSantis has made this as a top priority. Mr. Parson continued by informing the Council on their proposed narrative to lobby for funding for the appropriation projects and opened the floor for questioning from the Council.

Engineer Rouchaleau informed the Council of the bid update with the treatment plant, noting that it had been approved by USDA; he informed the Council of key dates for re-advertisement and bid submissions. Engineer Rouchaleau projected that the work on the project would begin in March. Councilwoman Green inquired on how far down they would be able to get on U.S Highway 331 S. Engineer Rouchaleau presented the Council with a handout that presented plans for advancement down U.S Highway 331 S, broken down into segments, noting that they were likely to get more funding by breaking the project into smaller segments. City Manager Simmons informed the Council that Senator Gainer was a supporter of the vision of development for the City.

2. Sewer Operator

City Manager Simmons informed the Council that his goal is to hire a Class A Operator during developments of the old plant into the construction period of the new plant, that way they have a clear understanding of how the City is being put together. City Manager Simmons spoke on the importance of the City having forward thinking with new projects, noting why the ideal candidate would have water and sewer knowledge, would be beneficial for business, eventually turning into a Utilities Director. City Manager Simmons added that his research into the salary range for such a candidate ranged from $80,000-$100,000 and sought the Councils opinion. Councilwoman Brannon thanked Charlie for his progressive thinking and for bringing it to the Council's attention, noting her approval for finding that candidate soon. Councilman Farris remarked his favor in being proactive and hiring a candidate that can move the City forward. City Manager Simmons added that with the City being proactive, it looked good to future investors seeing them progress on their own, as opposed to seeking a handout. City Manager Simmons asked for a motion to move forward with looking for a Class A Operator.

Councilwoman Green wanted to discuss agreeing to a salary range for hiring a Class A Operator. City Manager Simmons noted that the salary range gave the City flexibility in finding the right person with all the experience and qualifications. City Manager Simmons informed that many of the candidates that would meet the requirements were local. City Attorney Adkinson added that an amended motion including the salary range was needed.

Councilwoman Green wanted to thank Sewer Supervisor Fawcett for all his hard work and for getting the City to this point in development. City Manager Simmons also commented on Sewer Supervisor Fawcett's work.

City Manager Simmons updated the Council on several items:

- Blueberry Road new traffic panel had been installed to clock speeding; the direction of the panel will be changed periodically.
- City Manager Simmons is still working on an All-Stop with the County. On February 2, he will be meeting with DOT and the County to discuss the four-lane road that will be coming through the City, along with the possibility of new light locations. Traffic studies will need to be conducted on traffic flow throughout the City.
- City Clerk Robinson will be looking into recorded lines for City Hall phones to assist with customer service and options will be presented at the following meeting.
- The City Survey is now active on the City's website.
- The County and City Road Maintenance Agreement is being drafted and currently being worked on, hopefully by the next Council Meeting he can have it presented for review.
- City Attorney Adkinson, Supervisor of Elections Bobby Beasley, and Planning Director Hughes-Neel are working on redistricting for the City. They will weigh all options and present it to the Council.
- A forensic audit special meeting is needed to have the audit presented to the Council. City Manager Simmons would like to schedule the special meeting for the end of February and will pull dates and correspond with the auditor to set a date.

Councilwoman Haffner commented on her availability, Councilwoman Green inserted that members in the community have been inquiring about the audit and would prefer it to be held in the evening.

Councilwoman Green asked for clarity on the All-Stop, noting rumors she heard regarding it. Engineer Knauer presented the guidelines for installing an All-Stop,

noting the criteria for the warrant study. Engineer Knauer noted that the City currently lacked a warrant study, informing them that the fee to have one conducted would be $4,000, and that he felt it would not be a good investment for the City. Engineer Knauer informed the Council of issues that may arise by installing an All-Stop, noting that there are safety issues to consider validating the installation of it, such as speeding and pedestrian safety. Councilwoman Green thanked Engineer Knauer for clarity and sought legal counsel from City Attorney Adkinson on the matter. City Attorney Adkinson reminded the Council that they have the authority to regulate City streets, however it depended on the justification of factors that warrant a need for certain traffic regulations. Councilman Farris expressed his concern for public safety with speeding and pedestrians, acknowledging that actions are needed. City Manager Simmons remarked that he could shift radar systems to that area to regulate speeding.

Moved by: Councilman Martin
Seconded by: Councilwoman Brannon

To move forward with hiring a Class A Sewer Operator.

Amendment:

Moved by: Councilman Martin
Seconded by: Councilwoman Brannon

To hire a Class A Operator with the salary range of $80,000 -$100,000.

A roll call vote was ordered, and the vote was as follows:

Councilman Farris: aye

Councilman Martin: aye

Councilwoman Haffner: aye

Councilwoman Brannon: aye

Councilwoman Green: aye

Carried

e. City Clerk

f. Finance

g. Billing

h. Planning

1. Trails at Hammock Bay Final Plat

Planning Director Hughes-Neel presented the Trails at Hammock Bay Final Plat requesting approval.

Planning Director Hughes-Neel also introduced the new City Planner Adam Williams. City Planner Williams took the opportunity to greet the Council and thanked them for the position, noting that he was excited for his new venture with the City.

Moved by: Councilman Farris
Seconded by: Councilwoman Haffner

To APPROVE the Trails at Hammock Bay Final Plat.

A roll call vote was ordered, and the vote was as follows:

Councilman Farris: aye

Councilman Martin: aye

Councilwoman Haffner: aye

Councilwoman Brannon: aye

Councilwoman Green: aye

Carried

i. Legal

j. Engineering

11. Old Business

a. Pending Items

City Clerk Robinson noted that the Pending Items list was submitted for informational purposes for Council members. Councilwoman Green queried about the status of the Mainstreet Program. Planning Director Hughes-Neel informed the Council that due to COVID-19 and understaffing the Planning Facilities Committee has not had the opportunity to have meetings to move forward with the program. Planning Director Hughes-Neel noted that the process of the Mainstreet Program was very strenuous and required a lot of focus, noting that she would speak to City Manager Simmons about it. Planning Director Hughes-Neel also expressed that the downtown area, Highway 20, Madison Street, and Shipyard area should be the focus, she would present an update at the end of February.

Councilman Farris inquired about the status of the Education Reimbursement Program. Planning Director Hughes-Neel noted that all prior research conducted had been lost due

to the death of the staff member who was spearheading it, noting that she will redo the research to present to the Council.

12. New Business

a. Mayor Russ Barley

Mayor Barley informed the Council of two groundbreaking ceremonies invitations sent out by Superintendent Russel Hughes for Thursday afternoon at Freeport Elementary School and the Freeport Transportation Facility. Mayor Barley also reminded the Council that he would be traveling to Orlando to accept The City of The Year Award from a local veteran's group.

b. Councilwoman Brannon

c. Councilman Farris

d. Councilwoman Green

e. Councilwoman Haffner

f. Councilman Martin

13. Public Comment

Engineer Knauer wanted to commend City Manager Simmons on his forward thinking, expressing his excitement for the growth in departments to keep up with the increasing population. Engineer Knauer noted his excitement to advertise bids for the new sewer plant, highlighting that the new hire may potentially be the manager of that facility. Engineer Knauer informed the Council that a Utility Director will be needed in the future to manage the supply and demand for the growing population, cautioning about being behind on the development curve.

14. Adjournment

Mayor Barley motioned to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 10:24 AM.

Mayor

ATTEST:

City Clerk