

CITY OF BARNWELL, SOUTH CAROLINA

**MINUTES of the MEETING of BARNWELL CITY COUNCIL
July 17, 2023 – 5:30PM**

MEETING LOCATION:
130 Main Street, Barnwell, SC 29812

Barnwell City Council met in a special called meeting with Mayor Rivera presiding.

Councilmembers Present: Mayor Marcus Rivera, Mayor Pro Tem Peggy Kinlaw, and Councilmembers Louis Claytor, James Moody, Ryan Bragg and Ron Still

Councilmembers Absent: Councilmember Alicia Davis

Others Present: City Administrator Lynn McEwen, Clerk & Treasurer Kim Marie Vargo, City Attorney Thomas Boulware, and Police Chief Lamaz Robinson

Also present was Mr. Chris Johnson, employment attorney with Gignilliat, Savitz & Bettis LLP

Mr. Jonathan Vickery of the People Sentinel was also present.

CALL TO ORDER & PRAYER

Mayor Rivera called the regular meeting to order. Councilmember Kinlaw led in prayer.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE & CIVILITY PLEDGE

Council led the pledge of allegiance and the civility pledge.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Councilmember Moody made a motion to amend the agenda to add approval to donate \$300 to the girls' softball team. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Still and unanimously approved.

Councilmember Still made a motion to donate \$300 to the girls' softball team going to the World Series. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Moody and unanimously approved.

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**FIRST READING OF ORDINANCE 2023-10 “AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND
CHAPTER 24, ARTICLE III REFUSE SERVICE CHARGES, TO PROVIDE FOR AN
INCREASE IN GARBAGE COLLECTION RATES”**

Mayor Pro Tem Kinlaw made a motion to read the ordinance by title only. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Moody and unanimously approved. Administrator McEwen read the ordinance by title only. Councilmember Claytor made a motion to approve the first reading of Ordinance 2023-10. The motion was seconded by Councilman Moody. Councilmember Still stated that if all of these ordinances are approved and the paper plant comes back online, that we reevaluate the increases for a possible reduction in cost. Mayor Rivera stated that he was sure everyone could agree with that. The motion passed unanimously.

**FIRST READING OF ORDINANCE 2023-11 “AN ORDINANCE TO INCREASE
WATER RATES”**

Councilmember Still made a motion to read the ordinance by title only. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Bragg and unanimously approved. Administrator McEwen read the ordinance by title only. Councilmember Claytor made a motion to approve the first reading of Ordinance 2023-11. The motion was seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Kinlaw and unanimously approved.

**FIRST READING OF ORDINANCE 2023-12 “AN ORDINANCE TO INCREASE
SEWER RATES”**

Councilmember Still made a motion to read the ordinance by title only. The motion was seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Kinlaw and unanimously approved. Administrator McEwen read the ordinance by title only. Councilmember Sill made a motion to approve the first reading of Ordinance 2023-12. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Bragg and unanimously approved.

**FIRST READING OF ORDINANCE 2023-13 “TO RAISE REVENUE AND ADOPT A
BUDGET FOR THE CITY OF BARNWELL, SOUTH CAROLINA FOR THE FISCAL
YEAR ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2024”**

Councilmember Claytor made a motion to read the ordinance by title only. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Still and unanimously approved. Administrator McEwen read the ordinance by title only. Councilmember Claytor made a motion to approve the first reading of Ordinance 2023-13. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Bragg. Clerk & Treasurer Kim Vargo said the budget included monthly increases of \$2.00 per garbage cart, \$4.00 to base charge for water, and \$3.00 to base charge for sewer. It also includes an increase in the millage rate of 8%, 5.9 mills. This is the allowable increase based on the previous year’s increase in the consumer price index plus increase in population. This would bring the millage rate from 74.6 to

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80.5. Information was received this afternoon from the SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office, that due to the delayed release of the 2020 Census information, they are allowing a one-time millage adjustment of 4.76% in addition to the 8%. This will allow an increase in the millage of 9.5 mills, from 74.6 to 84.1. Since the City is restricted in the amount it can raise taxes, she believes that the City should also include the 4.76% increase. This will decrease the amount of the reserve transfer needed to balance the budget by \$46,800. The budget includes no raises and the elimination of one position in the street department that has been vacant. Information was given to Council on how these increases will impact citizens. Discussion followed.

Councilmember Still said that these are tough decisions that are necessary because of the closing of Cascades. He wanted to make sure that when and if the plant sells, that these increases to our citizens are reduced. He also stated that since we are asking the City employees to go without a cost of living pay increase and asking our citizens to pay more so we can continue to run the City, he is willing to forfeit his salary. Ms. Vargo stated that water and sewer rates have not been increased since October 2014. The state uses a Level of Effort formula to help determine the affordability of these services. They start to get concerned if the ratio is 2.0. The City's ratios including the increases are .94 for water and 1.17 for sewer. Mayor Rivera asked how much the City is absorbing costs for garbage collection. During the current year the contractor increased their costs, but the City did not pass the increase to the citizens. Ms. Vargo said that for this budget the City would have to absorb a loss of \$33,800 for direct expenses without the \$2 per month increase. The increase will allow the City to cover direct costs and put approximately \$15,000 toward indirect costs. Administrator McEwen informed Council that we may have to get a general obligation bond to finish the construction of the new fire station. Mayor Rivera said he thought it was important for the Council and citizens to understand that this is a business and with the cost of living and other costs increasing, the City also has to increase costs.

Councilmember Still reiterated that the main reason we are in this situation is due to the closing of a business and if we get back to where we were by a business revenue perspective, he would like to see some of the costs reduced. Mayor Rivera said that if we do not have someone come in to fill the void from Cascades and revenues stay where they are, we might not only have to cut vacant positions but cut positions that are currently staffed. Councilmember Claytor stated that as much as he dislikes it, we really need to go with the higher millage rate, so we do not set ourselves up for failure in the future. Councilmember Claytor made a motion to approve the first reading of Ordinance 2023-13 with the amendment to include an increase in millage rate to 84.1 mills. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Bragg and unanimously approved.

EXECUTIVE SESSION: PERSONNEL MATTERS AND TO RECEIVE LEGAL ADVICE REGARDING THE PERSONNEL MATTER

Councilmember Claytor made a motion to go into executive session for personnel matters and to receive legal advice on personnel matters. The motion was seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Kinlaw and unanimously approved.

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Mayor Rivera declared the council was out of executive session.

ADJOURN

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Submitted by:



Kim Marie Vargo, Clerk & Treasurer