

The Franklin City Council held a called meeting on Monday, October 6, 2008 at 7:00 p.m. in Council Chambers, 207 W. Second Avenue.

Council members in attendance: James P. Councill, III, Mayor, Raystine Johnson, Vice Mayor, Barry Cheatham, Benny Burgess, Rosa Lawrence, Mary Hilliard and Mark Fetherolf. ABSENT: none.

Staff in attendance: June Fleming, Interim City Manager, H. Taylor Williams, IV, City Attorney, Russ Pace, Director of Public Works, Frank Davis, Director of Parks and Recreation, Steve Watson, Jimmy Gray and Lin Darden of Public Works, Chad Edwards, Deputy Director of Public Works, Amanda Jarratt, Deputy Director of Community Development, Donald Goodwin, Director of Community Development, Dexter Trump, Director of Power & Light, Rich Fatooh of Power & Light, Phil Sherman of Community Development, Beth Reavis, Director of Social Services, Vince Holt, Director of Fire & Rescue, Mark Carr, Deputy Director of Fire & Rescue, Carolyn Joyner, Personnel Manager, Joe Ann Faulk of Finance, Phil Hardison, Chief of Police, Debra Adams and Wydia Kearney of Social Services and Erin Turner, Executive Assistant.

Others in attendance: Dan Howe, Downtown Franklin Association Director, Connie Burgess, Director of Smart Beginnings-Western Tidewater, Dinah Babb, Treasurer and Brenda Rickman, Commissioner of the Revenue.

### **Invocation**

Mayor Councill offered the invocation.

June Fleming, Interim City Manager, stated that she and the City staff were prepared to answer questions relating to the current budget. The City has already made tremendous cuts with freezing positions, stricter staff policies relating to cell phones, gas cards and take home vehicles and other ways of reducing spending. There is no room left in the budget for fine tuned adjustments. Council needs to advise how much money they want to cut from the budget and staff will do so, but it will come in the form of programs and services being cut.

Mayor Council stated that the schools were also in need of money, as well as public safety and economic development.

### **Citizens' Time**

**Dr. Robert Edwards.** The economic recession is affecting all levels of government, including the City. Council needs to aware of that when deciding the real estate tax rate.

**Everett Williams.** 117 Kings Lane. Mr. Williams advised that more state cuts are planned and 40% of the City's budget is state and federal money. Mr. Williams recommended setting the tax rate at 79 cents.

**Bev Rabil.** 115 Southampton Road. The schools are in need of money due to a shortfall of funds from the state. The schools were expecting 1260 students to enroll this year, but only had 1205 to enroll, which created a budget shortfall of \$250,000.

**Bill Scarboro.** 208 Homestead Road. Mr. Scarboro has three sons that enjoy the Franklin School system because it allows them to learn about themselves and to be taught by great teachers. The schools are in desperate need of funding and need Council's assistance because they don't know where else they can cut funds.

**Holt Livesay.** Mr. Livesay recommended a 77 cent tax rate.

**Mary Turner.** Mrs. Turner stated that she has lived in Franklin her entire life and was aware of the City's needs and the school's needs, but Council needed to consider the citizens of Franklin who can't afford to pay taxes.

**Jim Hart.** 1416 Clay Street. Mr. Hart suggested that Council look at the City's budget like a business and make necessary cuts. The heating season is just around the corner and the current economy is going to take a toll on those on a fixed income. Mr. Hart further suggested that the City consider shared services with Southampton County or possibly eliminate trash pick up and open dumpsites. Mr. Hart stressed the need to maintain public safety, emergency services and the school system.

**Thomas Council.** 425 Bracy Street. Mr. Council questioned City Council's \$250,000 budget and asked that Council cut as much as possible and divide those savings between the Police Department and Parks and Recreation. Housing is a huge issue in our City and Pretlow Industrial Park is not generating any new jobs or income. Mr. Council requested that the reassessment be re-done to reflect the downfall of the economy.

**Bobby Tyler.** 112 Queens Lane. Mr. Tyler stated that the reassessment was flawed as one piece of his property increased by 400%. He suggested that Council vote to keep the tax rate as low as possible and conduct the necessary research to revert back to town status.

Discussion followed by members of Council and citizens regarding the legal issue of reverting back to town status and the possibility of re-doing the reassessment. It was determined that the reassessments could not be re-done prior to issuing tax bills.

Councilwoman Lawrence commended Chief Hardison for the incident on Washington Street. She understood that there were 5 arrests made and no officers injured.

Mayor Council stated that it was hard to make cuts in the City budget, but would appreciate more input from the citizens. He suggested various ways to make cuts, but those cuts would result in bigger problems, such as having all of the employees to take a pay cut or reducing staff or departments. Council had been working with an engineer that was looking at flood gates to protect the City in the event of another flood, but there was no money in the budget for that project at this time.

Vice Mayor Johnson stated that she wanted to clarify issues regarding the Housing Authority. The Housing Authority is funded specifically by the federal government and receives no funding from the City. The Langston Street project has been completed. STOP and Woodmasters now own the houses. All of the budget and information related to the Housing Authority is available to the public at any time.

Councilman Burgess asked that the citizens talk to staff and Council to suggest creative ways to cut money, but still maintain the same level of service to the citizens. It is easy to say cut the budget, but how do you still maintain the programs and services?

Vice Mayor Johnson commended Chief Hardison and the Police Department for all of their hard work lately in dealing with the increase in criminal activity. She stated that crime affects us all because businesses look at our crime rate when considering whether to move or open a business in our area.

Jim Hart stated to Council that he appreciated Council allowing the citizens to speak up and discuss the budget with the City Council.

Discussion was held regarding the paving of Armory Drive. VDOT has provided matching funds. The City can back out of the agreement, but there will be consequences, and they can push the project back until 2010, but the cost of the project would certainly increase by that time. The project must be done at some time so the issue is when to do it.

### **Adjournment**

There being no further business, on motion duly made, seconded and unanimously adopted the meeting was adjourned at 9:45 P.M. The vote on this motion was as follows: AYE: Mr. Cheatham, Mr. Burgess, Mrs. Lawrence, Ms. Johnson, Mrs. Hilliard, Mr. Fetherolf and Mr. Council.

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Mayor

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Clerk to City Council