



## **CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION**

**City Council Chambers**

**Tuesday, January 28, 2025 at 3:00 PM**

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### **MINUTES**

#### **Call to Order**

Mayor Becky S. Smith called the meeting to order.

#### **Members Present**

Mayor, Becky S. Smith, Council Members: Michael Brooks, Brenda Boyd, Brent Guffey, Nellie Floyd, Allen Hook and Donnie Griffin were all present. City Manager, Josh Ross and department heads were present as well. A quorum was present.

#### **Department Head Reports**

Bessemer City department heads gave reports on their department's status:

JoD Franklin, Parks and Recreation Director- Mr. Franklin addressed Council regarding youth sports and future city events. Last Thursday evening we had opening ceremonies for the youth basketball program. The BC Optimist Club has restarted its cheerleading program. Rock Gym has been packed with community members coming to support the Cheerleaders and basketball players. We have posted an open position, Event & Marketing Coordinator, on the city's website. Per the FY 2024-2025 budget, funding for this position would be available in January 2025. Mr. Franklin provided an updated event schedule for all city events. Currently, the April, May, and June 2025 Concert & Cruise – Ins have been cancelled as there was no funding for these in the budget. Per Mr. Franklin this concert series costs about \$5,000 to \$7,000 per series. City staff has plans to directly solicit additional sponsorship for the concert series for April – June 2025. The City did receive \$10,000 from CaroMont for city events. This funding will be used to sponsor the July 4<sup>th</sup> celebration in late June. Additionally, a light discussion was held about the Bessemer City Boys & Girls Club. In August 2024, the Boys & Girls Club had to vacate the city facility next to the Rock Gym, because of mold. Since then, Club participants have been housed at the Allan Farris Community Center (AFCC) and now the First Baptist Church. The Club had previously been in the city facility for over 25 years. Some years ago, the city offered the Club a chance to purchase some vacant land. However, Boys & Girls Club administrators declined to purchase. The Club is also in conversation with Gaston County Schools about renting a school facility in the afternoons. The city will continue to partner with the club to find a solution.

Diane Jenkins, Finance Director – Ms. Jenkins addressed Council regarding a new employee and natural gas fees. The City has hired a new Customer Service Representative, JoAnne Carn. Ms. Carn previously worked in a bank, and we hope to transition her to help with the city's accounting records. Year-end reporting has been completed, and we are beginning to work on beginning of the year finances. For the sustainability of the Natural Gas fund, City staff is requesting the approval of some additional fees for connection services. City staff would like for Council to review these additional fees and vote at a later date.

Jamie Ramsey, Director of Operations- Mr. Ramsey informed Council about the moving of a natural gas line on Oates Road. Currently, the city has a 6 inch gas pressure line in the curve on Oates Road. This line is on North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) right of way. The estimate to move the line is \$270,000. Preliminary conversations with NCDOT, have deemed that the city is responsible for paying and maintaining the line. However, city staff is looking through files to locate an easement. As this is primarily, a NCDOT project the City does not have this budget.

Tom Ellis, Director of Public Safety- Mr. Ellis addressed Council regarding police, fire, code enforcement, and the garage. Police calls are up and staff is staying pretty busy. The fire department has had over 69 fire calls and 21 medical assist calls in December 2025. We're seeing an uptick in calls in both departments. The Fire department was able to spread joy to some local families last Christmas through their community outreach program. City staff is working on a grant to apply for monies to replace fire equipment. The fire truck apparatus that had been in the shop for several months, is back up and running. Code Enforcement Officers, Don and David are working hard to tackle open code cases and bulk item pickup. Fleet Director, Wade and City Mechanic, Chris are working diligently to address vehicle recalls and maintenance on city equipment. They had to replace several exhaust pipes on some Ford vehicles. Chief Ellis was asked to look in to a nuisance complaint at 508 E. Pennsylvania Avenue.

Hydeia Hayes, City Clerk & Human Capital Director- Ms. Hayes addressed Council regarding board appointment applications and upcoming board trainings. NCLM City Vision will be on April 29-May 1<sup>st</sup> in Greenville, NC and a stormwater awareness session will be held in March 2025 in Gastonia. Ms. Hayes informed Board members to let her know if they'd like her to sign them up. Light discussion was held regarding board applications and the interview process. Mayor Smith tabled this discussion to the February 2025 planning retreat.

### **Ordinance Amending Zoning Map**

Council Member, Michael Brooks informed the Board that he tabled this item from the regular meeting earlier this month to allow Council more time to speak with the developer.

City Manager, Josh Ross informed the board that community meetings will now be required for proposed subdivisions to gauge community interest and discussions. Thus, the developer was required to hold a community meeting this past Saturday.

Mr. Dajuan Savage of Five Holdings LLC addressed Mayor and Council regarding some developments made since the February 2025 regular meeting. Last Saturday the developer held a community meeting to meet and discuss the project with citizens. Mr. Savage feels that an agreement between his company and the community has been reached. Issues regarding tree barrier, noise, lighting, and a fence were discussed at this community meeting. Additionally, Mr. Savage informed the one citizen that her driveway would not be impacted.

Sheila King of 612 S. Skyland was recognized by Mayor Smith to speak on behalf of her mother, Dolly Adams. Per Mrs. King the items agreed on at the community meeting were not correctly stated here before the board today. She and her mother do not feel safe with the current plan and still feel that they have several unanswered questions.

City Manager, Josh Ross additionally informed that Board that they do not have to vote on this issue today. If they would like more time to disseminate the information and facts of this case. Council member, Allen Hook stated that he did not need additional time. It is part of City Council's authority to ensure the integrity of each community and value citizen feedback. Thus, he is not in favor of this project.

By motion of Allen Hook and unanimous vote, the ordinance regarding a zoning map amendment for property located at tax parcel #211801 (1.35 acres) from Neighborhood Residential (NR) to Neighborhood Residential Conditional District (NR-CD) to accommodate the development of 3 single-family homes was denied. This zoning map amendment was not adopted, as it was found to be inconsistent with the consistency plan and statement of reasonableness. The requested rezoning is not consistent with the Bessemer City Planning & Economic Development Comprehensive Land Use Vision.

### **Audit Presentation**

Tony Brewer, CPA addressed Council regarding the 2024 financial audit. Overall the City received a clean audit report. Mr. Brewer presented to Council specific indicators in the report. Mr. Brewer identified 2 Financial Performance Indicators (FPIC) of concern. The City is required to prepare correspondence to the Local Government Commission (LGC) within 60 days regarding these issues. The FPIC were as follows:

- FPIC 1. Quick Ratio – Water & Sewer
- FPIC 2. Unrestricted Cash Flow

Identified FPIC's were mainly contributed to budgetary timing issues.

### **Agreement for Installation of Utilities (Meritage Homes)**

City Staff informed the Board that a vote to approve the project happened at a previous meeting. However, staff is requesting approval for the City Manager to execute the contract on behalf of the City. This agreement is for Meritage Homes of the Carolina's Inc. natural gas installation in the Meritage Home subdivision. Meritage Homes of the Carolina's has agreed to pay for all necessary labor, materials, permits, engineering studies, engineering opinions, reports, and any and all related goods or services necessary to install the infrastructure required to furnish natural gas to each home in the Subdivision.

By motion of Brent Guffey and unanimous vote, the agreement for the installation of utility lines for Meritage homes was approved.

### **City Manager's Report**

Josh Ross, City Manager- Mr. Ross addressed Council regarding the following:

- The drug store bidding process is still underway. The City's most recent bid received was \$281,000. City staff has run this ad and the current bid to upset the process is \$295,100.
- City Hall Annex is still on the market for purchase. The goal is to sell this property and move the finance department back into City Hall and use the funds to construct the new fire station.
- City staff has been researching the purpose of alternate water and sewer rates for in and out of city customers. Currently, 70% of North Carolina municipalities charge some type of alternative rate. There is a draft resolution of intent that City staff would like for the board to review and vote on at a later date.
- Foundry Commercial has a tenant who occupies one-third of the building. This new tenant is believed to be a robotics company. City staff has reached out to the new business to coordinate a ribbon cutting to welcome the new business to the City.
- City Manager, Ross expressed his gratitude to all council members who attended Brad Kelly's services. Brad Kelly was a crucial person to city operations. City staff is working on ways to memorialize him. There have been many businesses and people organizing donations and fundraisers on his family's behalf. Currently, there is a Boston butt sale going on. Tickets for purchase are at Bob McDonald's.

### **Council General Discussion**

Mayor Smith opened the floor for Council general discussion. Mayor Smith led the discussion by commending City Manager, Josh Ross. Mr. Ross is working very hard to restore the city's financial situation. Mayor Smith also commended city department heads for their dedication and service to the city. Additionally, the city lost a long-time citizen on Sunday, Melba Kiser. Mrs. Kiser served many boards and will be missed. Council member, Allen Hook stated that he would like to see some consideration of reducing the outside city water and sewer rates to entice people on the front end to hook on to the Tryon water line. City Manager, Ross informed Mr. Hook that city staff is working on this and would like to pass a resolution of intent to allow the rate to be lowered once the Tryon waterline project is completed. Changing the rate before the completion of the project could affect general fund revenues up to \$50,000. Council member, Brenda Boyd inquired about a paving issues between 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> street by Tennessee Avenue. Additionally, electronic meters were discussed. These new meters helped Jamie Ramsey identify a water leak in two days, rather than waiting until the billing cycle was completed.

### **Adjourn**

Being no further business to come before the board, the meeting was adjourned at 5:26 PM by motion of Michael Brooks and unanimous vote.

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Becky S. Smith, Mayor

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Hydeia Y. Hayes, City Clerk