

Commission Meeting Minutes
May 2, 2023
5:30 pm

Mayor Scott Roberts said before we begin the official meeting of the Starke City Commission there will be a time of voluntary prayer. Those willing to do so are asked to stand and Commissioner Redding will lead us in prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor Roberts called the meeting to order at 5:31 pm.

This meeting was the first regular meeting of the month. Members attending included Mayor Scott Roberts, Commissioner Janice D. Mortimer, Commissioner Danny Nugent, Commissioner Andy Redding and Commissioner Shannon Smith. Also present were Executive Assistant Cathy Bradley, City Clerk Jimmy Crosby, Deputy Clerk Lisa Heeder, Finance Director James Hughes, Police Chief Jeff Johnson, Attorney Clay Martin, City Manager Drew Mullins and Fire Chief Gary Wise.

Mayor Roberts asked if there were any additions or deletions to the agenda. There were none. Mayor Roberts entertained a motion to approve the agenda. Commissioner Mortimer made a motion. It was seconded by Commissioner Nugent. The motion passed 5-0.

Mayor Roberts entertained a motion to approve the consent agenda. The consent agenda consisted of the minutes of the April 18, 2023 Commission Meeting, the minutes of the April 27, 2023 Special Commission Meeting and the commissioner bill review. Commissioner Redding said he has a couple of questions about the bills. Commissioner Smith made a motion to approve the consent agenda for discussion. It was seconded by Commissioner Redding. Commissioner Redding asked Mr. Mullins about the \$900,000 bill. Mr. Mullins said it was for the wastewater treatment plant upgrade. Commissioner Redding asked about the police department roof and if it has been completed. Chief Johnson said yes. Commissioner Redding said the bill was for \$199,000. Assistant Chief of Police Barry Warren said it came in under budget. Commissioner Redding asked about the loan from Community State Bank and interest with a balance of \$78,872. Mr. Mullins said it is for interim financing for the wastewater treatment plant. Commissioner Redding asked about \$15,000 for Inspired Technologies and if it was recurring. Mr. Mullins said it was for switching over from ENS to Inspired Technologies. Mr. Hughes said it could have been for the server. Commissioner Redding asked if it is going to be reoccurring. Mr. Hughes said it is not recurring. The motion passed 5-0.

Mayor Roberts asked for emergency items. There were none.

Mayor Roberts asked for old business. There was none.

Mayor Roberts read the statement for citizen requests "The City of Starke welcomes you to this meeting. This time is set aside for our citizens and general public to address the city

commission. This is not a question or answer time. It is not a political forum, nor is it a time for personal accusations or derogatory remarks to or about city personnel. If you would like to address the commission, please complete a form, come to the podium when you are called, speak into the microphone and state your name and address for the record. Please also limit your comments to not more than three minutes. Your participation is welcomed.” Carolyn Spooner came forward and stated her address as 1116 Calvary Street in Starke. She thanked the board, the city clerk and the city manager for the good working relationship between the city and the county. Mrs. Spooner said they had an Earth Day Program with Head Start in her district. She said some of the children have never met the commissioners. Mrs. Spooner asked the commissioners to go over, introduce themselves and do story time. She said funding is based on visitors who come to see them. Mrs. Spooner asked law enforcement to address the issue of substance abuse. She expressed concern about the use of fentanyl because of a death in the community. Mrs. Spooner asked that law enforcement be funded so they can address the issue. Mayor Roberts asked what time for story time. Mrs. Spooner said around 9:00 am or 10:00 am. She said there will be a National Day of Prayer Thursday at 6:30 at the Church of God by Faith.

Mayor Roberts called for the city manager budget presentation. He asked that all questions be held until the end of the presentation. Mr. Mullins said he presents the budget and finance provides the numbers. He said the general fund is comprised of police, fire, parks and rec, zoning, finance and the commission budget. Mr. Mullins said at the last budget meeting the commission directed them to have the utility budget be the central force of everything so that is the approach he took on the general fund. He said the transportation fund has a couple of projects with restricted reserves at \$2,740,000, revenues at \$450,000 and expenditures at negative \$225,000. Mr. Mullins said the general fund is 80% enterprise fund and transportation, 15% public safety and 5% all other governmental services. He said there is \$3,800,000 in total revenue, property taxes, local option taxes, municipal revenue sharing, utility taxes, other general fund revenue and \$500,000 in transfers. Mr. Mullins said that all other governmental services assumptions include a 5% pay increase and a performance and competitive pay increase of 5%. He said employee insurance, liability insurance and retirement are all going up. Mr. Mullins said last year’s fire budget was \$1,600,000. He said the pay is different from other employees following FSLA standards based on 2786 hours. Mr. Mullins said there are three 24-hour shifts with part-time employees filling in to cover when someone is off. He said what he is proposing for this year is \$1,044,474. Mr. Mullins said some of the expenses and staffing expenses need to be consolidated and negotiated down with the union. He said some of the services the union asks for is why the budget is presented this way. Mr. Mullins said we have a mutual aid agreement with the county who went full-time three years ago and city residents pay city and county taxes so we are paying for two services. He said the police department assumptions are a pay increase of 5% because we didn’t want to treat any department

differently, an employee health insurance increase of 15%, a liability insurance increase of 7% and a retirement increase of 5%. Mr. Mullins asked Chief Johnson to speak. Chief Johnson said last year's projections if we stay within budget are \$2,080,613. After coming to the utility meeting with the council and hearing their concerns we realize that we need to make some cuts. He said his responsibility was \$500,000 and he almost got there. Chief Johnson said his budget for 2024 is \$1,596,345 which is about \$484,000 or 23% less. Mr. Mullins said let's just recap. With the utility budget in mind and all governmental services that left \$2,700,000 total for public safety. He said that's \$1,750,000 for the police department, \$1,050,050 for the fire department, total expenses of \$4,300,000 and total revenues of \$4,300,000. Mr. Mullins said this is the most critical part of the enterprise fund. He said 2024 projections with a \$19,000,000 budget and a transfer of \$500,000 and net income of \$500,000. Mr. Mullins said the 2025 projections of \$14,387,750 and \$14,375,000 in expenses for a net income of \$12,750. He said the 2026 projections of a net loss of \$409,113 and 2027 projections of net loss of \$843,445. Mr. Mullins said the general fund looks pretty rough too with 2024 projecting a loss of \$1,000,000, 2025 a loss of \$1,596,250, 2026 a deficit of \$1,723,655 and 2027 \$1,841,453 if you keep funding the same way you are funding now. He said with the proposed cuts this year there would be no deficit but a balanced budget. Mr. Mullins said next year that goes down to negative \$566,250, the next year negative \$661,870 and the next year negative \$748,726 in the general fund. He said let's talk about what this current year's budget does. He said this budget is based on the actual true numbers. Mr. Mullins said you asked for a reduction in the transfer amount down to \$500,000. He said he has done that and the general fund is funded and balanced and the critical needs for the enterprise fund are met. Mr. Mullins said that is all he has. Mayor Roberts asked for questions. Commissioner Nugent thanked the city manager, the city clerk and the finance department for the work they've done and the police department and fire department for making the needed cuts. Commissioner Mortimer thanked everyone for the hard work put into the task. She said since she has been on the board, this is the first time they have been able to look at a budget and see it trued up. Commissioner Mortimer asked if the fire department budget included the fire truck. Mr. Mullins said yes, it is the \$62,000 loan expense. Commission Redding asked where this puts us for staffing the fire department. Mr. Mullins said this is the bottom-line number and will be negotiated with the union. He said he has talked with Fire Chief Wise and told him that this is the number they need to work with. Mr. Mullins said he does not know the full details right now because it will be negotiated in the contract. Commissioner Redding asked if we will have a lesser level of service than they have right now. Mr. Mullins said there will be a decrease in staffing. Commissioner Redding said the current NFPA standard is two in and two out and the Code of Federal Regulations has requirements for it. He said we know we have the county and an MOU but we are set up with a department that can act alone and the reason it was set up that way is because we didn't always have the Bradford County Fire Department. Commissioner Redding said we have to look at infrastructure and the

enterprise fund and towards growth and managing it so it is most beneficial to the citizens. He asked what happens in two, four or ten years when there are 15,000 people in Starke. If we don't have a fire department, we may need two or three stations to support Starke. He said if only two people show up to a fire they will have to sit and wait. Commissioner Redding said these are things to consider. He said the next question is for Chief. He asked with this budget cut where does it leave him with staffing. Chief Johnson said he will be losing two positions. Commissioner Redding asked how many FTEs he has now. Chief Johnson said 16. Commissioner Redding asked Chief Johnson if he was able to get an organizational chart together. Chief Johnson said no he has not. He said he could tell him or show him. Commissioner Redding said he was going through the budget and trying find the reductions. He said payroll taxes, salaries and pension reductions would be around \$280,000. Chief Johnson said two positions would be around \$65,000 each with benefits. Commissioner Redding said he is good right now. Mayor Roberts called for Commissioner Smith. Commissioner Smith said the long-term solution is probably not something the board wants to look at but they should. He said it is a tough thing to ask but it is something he would like the board to consider. Commissioner Smith said he would like the sheriff to come in and do a presentation on merging the police department with the county. He said he thinks that is a long-term solution that the board should explore. He said that is all for him. Mayor Roberts said he would like to commend all the work that has gone into this. He said we do try to plan for the future but with the budget cuts that they are asking for they are making up for the past. He wishes they didn't have to cut and there are four other people that don't want to either, but the bottom line is we don't have the money. Mayor Roberts said he is not for cutting services, but he knows where we need to go. He said just like Commissioner Redding said we don't know where we are going to be in the future. Mayor Roberts said he doesn't know who is going to be here, but adjustments can be made just like we have to make adjustments now. He said the decisions weren't made in the past but now they have to be made. He said he is not into cutting fire or police, but his responsibility is to be fiscally responsible and each department head is responsible. He said everyone up here is thinking about the personnel involved. He asked if anyone had anything else to add. No one did. Mayor Roberts said they have been presented with a balanced budget. He said as far as asking the sheriff to come down to talk about consolidation the police chief is an elected position and the charter has to be changed to do away with the police chief. Mayor Roberts said he would like to get it on the agenda and have a referendum to see what the people want to do with the police department. He said we can't make that call. Mayor Roberts said he believes that position comes up in two years. Chief Johnson said 2025. He said if we put it on the agenda for 2024 there is one more year in that position. Mayor Roberts said if the people want to make that change it would take a year to do the transition. Chief Johnson said maybe a little longer than that. Mayor Roberts said that is something we would have to address if the referendum passes. He asked the pleasure of the board on the balanced budget. Commissioner

Mortimer said she would like to echo what the mayor said. She said we are at a critical point in the city financing and moving forward and making tremendous strides toward the future in improving our city for everyone. She said we are responsible for making the hard decisions and cutting positions is not something that anyone wants to do. She said we need to provide our citizens the services and at a level that they deserve. Commissioner Mortimer said she agrees if we are going to talk consolidation it should be across the board once the citizens tell them by referendum in what direction they want to go in. She said with that being said she would like to make a motion to approve the balanced budget that has been presented by the city manager. Mayor Roberts asked if there was a second. Attorney Martin said Florida statute lays out a procedure for approving a budget he asked if Commissioner Mortimer wants to use this for preparation of the budget. Commissioner Mortimer said yes and thank you. It was seconded by Commissioner Nugent. Mayor Roberts asked for additional comments. Commissioner Nugent said it is no secret he is not for consolidation and in the past the people voted to keep the police department. He said he thinks we have a fine police department and fire department. He said if the people vote for it they are the final decision. He said he does not believe we should give away our assets. Mayor Roberts said he does not believe anyone proposed that. Commissioner Smith asked Chief Johnson about a massive increase in budget one year. Chief Johnson said those numbers were not right. Commissioner Smith asked about the \$1,600,000 budget. He said basically you are cutting your budget back to three years ago. Chief Johnson said that was not correct. He said that was where they came up with the \$2,080,000 and as the mayor stated there were some problems with the budget. He said he is not going to throw someone under the bus. Chief Johnson said he explained to the manager, clerk and James that one of those years John-Paul added the entire price of the cars they bought but a USDA grant paid for 55% of them and John-Paul never backed that out. Commissioner Smith said for years the police department and the fire department were neck and neck. Chief Johnson said that included the COPS grant that they don't have anymore. Commissioner Redding said this budget is giving up assets especially when it comes to the fire department because there are going to be two people on shift instead of four. Commissioner Nugent said he is not saying they are giving up anything but streamlining and making it more efficient. He said he believes the departments can do the job with the cuts. Commissioner Smith said he is not in favor of the cuts for the fire department. He said it is going back 60 years and it is not a good decision. Mayor Roberts called for a vote. The motion passed 3-2. Commissioner Redding and Commissioner Smith opposed the motion. Mayor Roberts asked to put on the next agenda for the next official meeting that we discuss putting the referendum out on the police department. Commissioner Nugent said you are just going to put it on. Commissioner Mortimer said anyone can put something on the agenda. Mayor Roberts said he is putting it on the agenda so they can discuss it. Wilbur Waters asked if they voted 3-2 to approve the budget. Mayor Roberts said yes. Mr. Waters said the many years he sat on the board he did not realize that you cannot hear

in the lobby so maybe that needs to be corrected. He said this is going to come up on the next agenda. Mayor Roberts said the charter will be discussed. He said they will need to vote on it here to put it out. Mr. Waters thanked Mayor Roberts. Chief Johnson asked to clarify if it is a super majority to put it on the charter or just a majority. Mayor Roberts asked if that was for the people. Chief Johnson said the commission. Commissioner Smith said he would like to hear from the Sheriff before they finalize the budget. Commissioner Nugent said the citizens pay extra taxes for these services to the county and are being double taxed. Mayor Roberts said they don't. Attorney Martin said the way to pass the referendum would be through ordinance. Mayor Roberts asked if it was a super majority of the people. Attorney Martin said it is just a majority. Mayor Roberts said from what he's heard you want to put it on the agenda for the county fire and sheriff to make a proposal. Commissioner Redding and Commissioner Smith said yes. Commissioner Nugent said he does not think we need it. Commissioner Smith said we can't afford it. Commissioner Mortimer said she would like it to be on the agenda for discussion. Mayor Roberts said before we ask them. Commissioner Mortimer said yes. Commissioner Nugent said that is what he would like. Commissioner Smith and Commissioner Redding agreed. Mr. Waters asked if the discussion will be for the fire department and the police department. Mayor Roberts said yes.

Mayor Roberts asked for the City Clerk report. Clerk Crosby said he is pleased to announce that the \$400,000 funding for City Walk and the \$2,000,000 funding for the city and county water line project have been approved by the House and the Senate. He said they will have the items requested during this meeting on the agenda for the next meeting. Mayor Roberts expressed appreciation for the county's support of the water line project.

Mayor Roberts asked for the Police Chief Report. Chief Johnson said the roof is done and they are talking about what they can do with the rest of the funds. He said the overpass will be opened for east bound traffic in mid-May. Chief Johnson said a man fell out due to a massive heart attack and the fire department responded and administered aid.

Attorney Martin had nothing to report.

Commissioner Nugent said the Northeast Florida League of Cities dinner is the third Thursday of the month in Keystone Heights.

Commissioner Mortimer had nothing further.

Commissioner Redding had nothing further.

Commissioner Smith had nothing further.

Mayor Roberts had nothing further.

There being no further business Mayor Roberts asked for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Mortimer made a motion. It was seconded by Commissioner Smith. The meeting was adjourned at 6:25 pm.