

Commission Meeting Minutes
July 2, 2024
5:30 pm

Mayor Roberts said before we begin the official meeting of the City of Starke Commission. There'll be a time of voluntary prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. Those willing to do so are asked to stand and Commissioner Nugent will lead us in a prayer followed by the Pledge.

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

This was the first regular meeting of the month. Members in attendance 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, Interim Fire Chief Jason Clemons, Operations Director Jimmy Crosby, Deputy Clerk Lisa Heeder and City Manager Drew Mullins.

Mayor Roberts asked for any additions or deletions to the agenda. Mr. Mullins asked to add Resolution Number 2024-43 under him. Mayor Roberts entertained a motion to approve the agenda. Commissioner Redding made a motion to approve. It was seconded by Commissioner Smith. The motion passed 5-0.

Mayor Roberts entertained a motion to approve the consent agenda. Commissioner Mortimer made a motion to approve the consent agenda. It was seconded by Commissioner Nugent. The motion passed 5-0.

Mayor Roberts said 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 public forum, nor is it 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. Mayor Roberts said I have two forms right now. The first up is Alvin Hunter. Mr. Hunter stated address as 455 West Pratt Street. Before I get started, you need to know I'm speaking for myself, not for the American Legion, even though I am an officer in the American Legion. I first all want to apologize to this board for the last meeting I attended. I kind of stirred the pot a little bit. There were some people in the audience that didn't represent themselves too well and at no time did I mean to anger Mr. Crosby or anybody here. Sometimes I get passionate for what I believe in, which you have seen over and over and over again but when I'm wrong, I'll admit that I am wrong. The issue at that time was moving the Veteran's Park and how much money we were going to get from the city to do so. Mr. Crosby was able to come up with the meeting minutes, which he provided me a copy of and I was wrong.

It was not voted on and I apologize for that as well. There is a statement in there, by the way, that says that Commissioner Redding committed \$100,000. It was in the same m

meeting that everybody was here when we were discussing it. I had no intention at all for it to get to that level, none whatsoever. I just wanted to voice my concerns. Mayor Roberts said thank you. Commissioner Mortimer said Mr. Hunter you were saying that this is the amount that you all are going to get. It's my understanding that if anything is done, then the city is going to do the work. The money is not going to go to the American Legion to move the monuments or the park. The city is going to expend the funds and do the work. Mr. Hunter said as a matter of record I was not speaking for the American Legion because they can't get involved with the politics. I was speaking for myself. Commissioner Redding said thank you, Mr. Hunter, for coming forward and just again to reiterate that we are fully committed to this mission and having a class act park that honors all veterans.

Mayor Roberts called for Bob Milner. Mr. Milner said you have on your proposed agenda tonight for second vote Ordinance 2024-14, specifically the duties of the city manager and the city clerk clarification. Let me say I'm in full support of that after having sat down with Mr. Crosby for a few minutes and read it thoroughly. In fact, I think it should have been done 30 years ago but I want to give you all the credit that you are due for doing it now, even though it's in the absence of an actual elected city clerk momentarily. Mr. Milner passed out a letter. What I ask you to do is read that later on tonight. It has nothing to do with the passage of the ordinance. It has to do with the implementation of a couple of aspects of it that I'd like for you to consider. Thank you.

Mayor Roberts said moving on to the public hearing. We have the reading of several ordinances here. We'll start off with Ordinance 2024-14. It's the second reading. Attorney Walker said this is Ordinance Number 2024-14, an ordinance of the City Commission of the City of Starke, Florida amending Chapter 2, Article III, Division 3 City Manager; removing the prohibition on the City Commissions or elected officials from being appointed to the City Manager position; removing all references to the Police Department; amending the City Manager's duties to include the supervision of the Finance Department; amending Chapter 2, Article 3, Division 4 City Clerk; amending the City Clerk's responsibilities by allowing for the Finance Director to oversee receipt of monies and issuing licenses and collect fees for the same; providing direction for the codification of this ordinance; repealing all ordinances in conflict; providing severability; and providing an effective date. The appropriate motion is to pass Ordinance Number 2024-14 as read by title. Mayor Roberts said you all have heard the second reading of Ordinance Number 2024-14. I would entertain a motion to approve the second reading of Ordinance Number 2024-14. Commissioner Mortimer made a motion that Ordinance Number 2024-14 be approved as read by title on second reading. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Redding. The motion passed 3-2. Commissioner Nugent and Commissioner Smith opposed the motion.

Mayor Roberts said moving on to Ordinance 2024-15. Attorney Walker said Mr. Mayor, this is an ordinance of the City of Starke, Florida, calling for a referendum question to be placed before the qualified electors of the City of Starke at the next general election which is scheduled for Tuesday, November 5, 2024; providing charter referendum

questions determining whether to adopt the proposed amendments to the charter for the City of Starke; providing for the full text of the proposed amended charter for the City of Starke; providing for requisite ballot language; providing for repeal of all conflicting ordinances; providing for severability and providing an effective date. The appropriate motion is to pass ordinance number 2024-15 upon its reading by title. Mayor Roberts said we've had the second reading of Ordinance 2024-15. I would entertain a motion. Commissioner Smith made a motion to approve Ordinance Number 2024-15. It was seconded by Commissioner Redding. The motion passed 5-0.

Mayor Roberts said going down to Ordinance Number 2024-17. This is the first reading. Attorney Walker said Mr. Mayor, this is an ordinance pertaining to the water and wastewater service within the City of Starke; establishing the schedule of water and wastewater rates and charges of the City of Starke repealing all ordinances in conflict; providing for severability; and providing for an effective date. The appropriate motion is to pass Ordinance Number 2024-17 upon its reading by title only. Mayor Roberts said you all heard the reading of Ordinance 2024-17 as the first reading. I would entertain a motion to approve 2024-17. Commissioner Mortimer made a motion to approve Ordinance 2024-17 on first reading. It was seconded by Commissioner Smith. Mayor Roberts asked if there is any further discussion. Mr. Mullins said Mr. Mayor, I just want to clarify one thing. This is a real requirement from USDA back in 2019. The commission actually moved forward with the project. They committed at the time to raise rates. If you remember last year, we put a pause on that. We used ARA funds to give relief to the citizens. This is to go ahead and further enact what was promised. Mayor Roberts said okay. Commissioner Nugent said I know we talked about this when we did the project. We said we would do it every other year because of the impact it has on citizens and we adjusted that we got calculations and we did all that but it was every other year and here the paperwork you did here you put in here every year and it shall be increased by 5% each year. That's not what we had said originally, you go back to your notes and whatever you want to back up, but that's not what we said. I just want to let you know that. Mr. Mullins said the minutes from the September 2019 meeting, Mary Gavin had come here, the Commission first passed this and asked, I believe it was actually you, Commissioner would ask how much this is going to cost the citizens. At the time Mary Gavin said \$45. If you take into account the inflation of today, that \$45 now turned into \$55. We're still eight, eight and a half, nine years away from actually getting to that point. We're at \$19 of the \$45. So, if it's every other year, that's not going to make it. That's the problem we're in. This has to be done to establish our reserves to pay for the loan. The loan itself is 10.1 million dollars. Commissioner Nugent said but to answer your question on reserves, if this project would have done in the proper time frame, and not had hold ups and changes after the project initially started, we would have more money reserves to keep them from spending more money out pocket, even though there's grants out there, so that's the money we had to keep putting out there that could have went towards the 10 million we borrowed. So, I don't think a lot of that should be a burden every time we did a five or 10% and we can't always burden the citizens some of that's our responsibility to manage our departments better which falls under you as I'm not saying

it's your fault, but you've got that responsibility now and you need to make it work. You can't keep asking citizens for more money. Commissioner Mortimer said yes, so Mr. Manager if my memory serves me correct when Mrs. Gavin did come and I do remember the meetings and the discussions that we had so because of our requirement or need or both to do a new facility we have no choice in order to keep that funding viable. We have to do this and I thought that we had discussed you know a way to get to where we need to be because until we actually get to where we needed to be we are still in jeopardy. So, my question is if we don't keep kicking the can down the road like we've been doing for years and years and years, which is why we're so far behind the eight ball what happens. What is the jeopardy that we're facing. Mr. Mullins said the city literally goes broke trying to pay for this loan. I mean, you're looking at half a million dollars a year. It was actually \$376,000 per year just for the 10.1. Commissioner Mortimer said right. Mr. Mullins said and that \$10.1 million has never changed from the beginning of this project. The only thing that has changed and has increased is the grant funding. Commissioner Mortimer said right. Mr. Mullins said it went from \$10.1 million in loan and over \$6 million in grants from \$16 million in the project to now \$27 million. Commissioner Mortimer said in grants. Grants means we don't have to pay it back. Mr. Mullins said it is not a burden to the tax-payers. Commissioner Mortimer said I understand. Mr. Mullins said that has always been a burden, it has always been the cost, that's what they see, that's what the Commission approved. Actually, that's where the rates come in and what those rates actually do is establishes both payments and reserves to properly fund the city and properly fund the equipment needed. Commissioner Smith said at the time when we did get into this project with our calculations, the city was actually losing money in the water and sewer business. Basically, that's what we're doing. Commissioner Mortimer said good point. Commissioner Smith said so, at that point, we had to adjust to control the inventory and the money going in and out so we're making money again, not subsidizing everybody's water. So that's another point as well. Commissioner Nugent said we did do a graph. I haven't seen it in a long time. You said we got \$27 million in grants. Mr. Mullins said we got 10.1 in a loan. The total project is \$27 million. \$10.1 of that is loans. Commissioner Nugent said okay, that's what I thought. I thought you said we had 27 million. I said now it's at \$37 million. If you look at that this project was supposed to been done completed years before that but hold ups getting paperwork done and administrative stuff and, and stuff that our department is responsible for that's why this drug out so far, or we wouldn't be paying so much it should already be operational. Commissioner Mortimer said there were no delays on our part. Mayor Roberts said now, I don't need to reiterate we said some good points here. The project hasn't changed. The overrun came from the cost of everything going up over the years and to come back and mention that it's a mismanagement of the department is so far off. I don't even know where to begin with that. The project ran over because of the cost of everything doubling and tripling. It has nothing to do with delays. This is the same project that we were under DEP sanctions to get stuff started and changed and that was before my time and the commission was wise enough to get this project started and we're just finishing up as far as what was started back then. Nothing's changed. No money has been spent that we weren't supposed to spend or anything like that. We're trying to pay

for the upgrades that we're supposed to have. Also pay, as Commissioner Smith said, for something that was already running in the deficit. So, I don't think it has anything to do with anyone watching their departments and having something to do with the mismanagement of money. I want to make that clear. Mr. Mullins said Mr. Mayor, if I could add one other point to this. So, in 2022, about August of 2022, when bids actually came in, the project was supposed to be \$21 million at that point. So, because of the cost of inflation, as the mayor just said, there was an extra delta of \$6.3 million dollars. You all approved that the USDA actually went out and sought those funds, asked Washington DC for those funds. They brought back \$6.3 million. Another 6.3 in grants, but again, this is required under USDA. Mayor Roberts said required under the law. Where are we at on this. Commissioner Mortimer said we have a motion and a second. Mayor Roberts said okay, we have a motion and a second. Commissioner Redding said my bill went up 400% this month, but I'm addressing that with my wife. The flowers are pretty though. Mayor Roberts said all right, we have a motion and a second. No further discussion. All in favor say aye. Commissioner Smith, Commissioner Mortimer and Commissioner Redding said aye. Commissioner Nugent said nay. The motion passed 4 -1.

Mayor Roberts said moving on to Resolution 2024-43. Attorney Walker said Mr. Mayor, this is a resolution of the City of Starke, Florida approving that certain agreement between the city and Gavin Consulting, LLC for professional consulting services to assist in the preparation, compiling, organizing, negotiating services associated with developing a funding package that can be considered for federal funding by USDA; recognizing the authority of the mayor to execute and bind the city to said agreement; recognizing the authority of the vice-mayor to execute and bind the city to said agreement in the absence of the mayor; directing the mayor or vice-mayor as appropriate, to execute and bind the city to said agreement; repealing all prior resolutions in conflict and providing an effective date. The appropriate motion is to pass Resolution 2024-43 upon its reading by title. Mr. Mullins said as we stated earlier, Ms. Gavin has been at the beginning of this project. She retired from USDA, so her expertise is extremely valuable. The grant loan provides for a fiscal agent. Ms. Gavin has been doing all of this for no cost. There's been some issues with USDA that we believe with her expertise she can absolutely assist. So that's why we were asking for this to be passed tonight. Commissioner Mortimer made a motion that Resolution 2024-43 be approved as read by title. It was seconded by Commissioner Nugent. Commissioner Redding said if I understood it correctly, this is built into the grant. So, I just want to make sure that's clarified. Mr. Mullins said correct. The motion passed 5-0.

Mr. Mullins said Jason Clemons has been serving as the interim fire chief, but he's going to step up to the fire chief role full time. Commissioner Mortimer said congratulations. Commissioner Redding asked for a picture with Fire Chief Clemons.

Mayor Roberts asked for the attorney report. Attorney Walker had nothing further.

Mayor Roberts called for the commissioner's reports.

Commissioner Nugent said I just want to mention that the League of Cities is in Palatka this month.

Commissioner Smith said try to stay cool out there.

Commissioner Mortimer said I was just hoping that Michael Heeder would have been here to give us an update on the 4th of July festivities but he's probably stretched thin but everybody have a happy and safe 4th of July.

Commissioner Redding said I took a ride by Thomas Street the other day things are moving forward there. That plan is looking like it's going to come together well. Also, the playground at RJE is looking great. We have the Splash Bash Thursday, Friday and Saturday and I believe the city participated in the fireworks or part of that so we're looking forward to that. In my area I've had some citizens since we had nine inches of rain last week who would like to address those ditch issues and then some of the cul-de-sacs on the paving out there. Everything's good. I appreciate all you guys work. I've been to a few public meetings at other venues recently and I just want to brag on our team and our staff and our managers. As a commission we are here to legislate and put things in place to give our people the latitude to do the job which they're qualified to do and you guys are doing a good job in my opinion so keep doing great things and move forward.

Commissioner Mortimer said Commissioner Redding just said something that I had on my notes. I want to commend this board because I've been serving on the City of Starke Commission for a number of years and although we don't always agree on everything, which is good, because we're not robots but we have made some tremendous strides towards moving this city forward in a lot of ways and a lot of the credit goes to the staff. A lot of it goes to this board for setting policies in place and then stepping back and allowing people to do their job. We're not micromanagers we're part-time people here but for our staff it's a full-time job. The city government works better when we keep our hands out of it. The people that have the expertise to run this city every day, they do that. Overall, I think we're in a great place and I really am very optimistic about the future of our city. This is the best place to live where I was born and raised and I'm just excited for the future. I want to say thank you to the staff to all of our staff, please share this with the line staff, especially because these people work hard every day. They go out there and they do what they need to do to make sure that this city functions and they can do that without our interference. So, thank you guys.

Mayor Roberts said well said. One thing I may have mentioned in meetings past but hurricane season actually started back on the 1st of June goes to November. I do know we have had extensive tree trimming. Is it still going on. Mr. Mullins said they just wrapped this up. Mayor Roberts said little stuff like that goes a long way. I can just tell you. I'm sure there'll be a limb on something but I can tell you with the amount they have been doing its going to be a benefit during hurricane season. I appreciate you getting that done. The other thing is we've gotten a letter from the fire union to sit down and negotiate. So as mayor, I'll take that task on and get a committee together. I just want to

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again congratulate Fire Chief Clemons. It is well deserved. I appreciate you taking that on.

Mayor Roberts entertained a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Redding made a motion to adjourn. It was seconded by Commissioner Mortimer.