

## MINUTES

### **City Council Meeting Monday, February 2, 2026 – 6:00 p.m.**

**Call to Order:** Mayor Campbell called the meeting to order at approximately 6:00 p.m.

**Opening:** Councilmember Hall gave the invocation, and Mayor Campbell led the City Council in the Pledge of Allegiance.

#### **Roll Call**

**City Council Members:** Mayor Bruce Campbell, Councilmember Bruner, Councilmember Figiel, Councilmember Gwyn Hall, Councilmember Richard Lassiter, Councilmember Natalyn Morris, and Councilmember Debbie Ruiz.

**Staff Members:** Rhonda Ferrell-Bowles, City Manager; James P. Gerard, City Attorney; Gil Ballard, Police Chief; Cliff Ducey, Parks and Recreation Director; Carlos Naverez, Planning Director; Tonya Roper, Clerk of Council; and Andrew Guzman, IT Tech.

**Formal Public Comment:** Eddie Puckett, P & S Affordable Housing LLC, requests to address the City Council regarding the street repair and repaving of Daniel Avenue.

Given no comments, Mayor Campbell moved to next the item for formal public comment.

Don Bethune, resident of Garden City, Georgia requests to address the City Council to discuss the importance and process of applying for CHIP and CDBG grants.

Mr. Bethune stated what was heard in the pre-agenda session goes hand in hand with the request. He said he gives kudos to the Mayor and Council for looking at partnering with the County on a grant for housing which is to be commendable and is sorely needed. Mr. Bethune stated he is not an expert on grants but knows a little something about grants from having conversation with Council, and because of the grants we have gotten in the past; we could possibly get these grants in the future.

Mr. Bethune stated the Police, Fire, and Recreation Departments do a good job in getting grants and these grants make the departments better. The grants lighten the burdens of the city to give the departments some of the things they need. The City has received small grants for landscaping on Dean Forest Road, a grant for landscaping on Burnsed Boulevard, and a DCA grant to rehab the water and sewer lines in Rossignol Hill as well as a prior grant from DCA to build the current senior center in Garden City.

Mr. Bethune continued by saying former City Manager Brian Johnson recognized the need for better housing and applied through the DCA for a new initiative program in Georgia Community Housing. The first meeting held in the city's conference room was filled to capacity. The meeting included attorneys, realtors, bankers, and pastors along with DCA. Upon a presentation by the City, DCA

recognized the city to proceed to the next step in becoming a certified member of this new program; this was the very beginning of the Garden City Housing team. After several meetings, participation was reduced to two council members, one staff member and several residents. Although there were lots of good ideas, the main thing lacking was money – the team struggled in the beginning. With the City not taking a lead role; the Garden City Housing team was born. The first task was to get the team recognized as a nonprofit. The team was able to accomplish this task with the pro-bono help of the City Attorney to direct the team through the process in forming the Garden City Housing team.

Mr. Bethune stated a lot of projects were completed in Garden City, we were able to raise funds and actually bought lots and those lots were donated to Habitat for Humanity. The city partnered with Habitat for Humanity on a particular grant and were able to get the grant due to the city contributing infrastructure and the Mayor writing a letter in support of the effort. As the housing team moved forward, there was the application for a CHIP grant through DCA and the housing team received a grant in the amount of \$300,000 – with this grant a new house was built, there were renovations of a number of homes; and the team was able to do a project in all five districts in Garden City.

Mr. Bethune continued by stating as time moved on, some of the board members felt they needed to step back from the program; therefore, the board had a new leadership team to come on, and the new leadership team started to work on different projects. The new leadership team applied for grants with DCA, as we had done previously. The new leadership was awarded a \$400,000 grant and a letter of recommendation was provided by me for that grant. The city offered some financial assistance by not charging for inspections. The new leadership's plan was to work on six houses – five houses in Rossignol Hill and one in Chatham Villa. We were going to spend \$66,000 on each house but as they progressed on the second house, the grant was revoked and in addition to that, the housing team became inactive; therefore, losing their certification as a GIHC community.

Mr. Bethune stated he is here to talk about rebranding housing and for Council to consider starting a housing program that is mainly driven by city staff with some involvement from the residents. To make this work, Council would try to get volunteers from within city staff to participate on this team and also include residents from Garden City. The next step would include having a representative from DCA to come to the city to become the facilitator to try to get the program started back again. This is important because DCA offers a number of different types of grants for housing, rehabilitation and building new houses.

Mr. Bethune said he wants to encourage Garden City to at least consider bringing back the program. CHIP grants range from \$400,000 to \$1.5 million and this is a source that the city could use to improve housing. There are also block grants that can be applied for; these grants go up to \$1.5 million dollars. Block grants are awarded annually. There are workforce housing grants; these grant awards go up to \$2.5 billion and are open and awarded on a quarterly basis. Mr. Bethune concluded by saying he would like to see the city pursue these possibilities as it would be a great service in helping a lot of the folks in Garden City that need it.

Councilmember Lassiter asked Mr. Bethune if he is planning to spearhead this project.

Mr. Bethune replied he would participate as he has a heartfelt desire for the residents of Garden City, and he believes this is a program that is needed. Mr. Bethune stated he would be a part of the project as a resident and suggested instead of it being called the housing team it would be the Garden City Housing Improvement Plan. He stated that cities along the coast do not apply for CHIP and Block grants like other cities. Mr. Bethune stated he and DCA are really bothered that four houses did not have their homes worked on from the last grant. DCA would love to give the city the grant to include those four residential houses that were not worked on.

Councilmember Lassiter stated Council was informed during Mr. Bethune's tenure that the city could not get involved with a housing initiative. Councilmember Lassiter asked Mr. Bethune if he has recently been in touch with DCA?

Mr. Bethune replied yes, he has recently been in contact with DCA because he had a question on the process, and this is why he came to Council to find out what the process involved with city staff participation and the rebranding of the program. He responded that the city could not get involved with the housing team because they were a 501c nonprofit. If the city contributes to one non-profit, then the city opens itself to other non-profits.

The City Attorney stated in the previous situation, a separate corporation was formed to apply for these grants and the city had nothing to do with the performance of the grants. The City Attorney further stated the Garden City Housing Team corporation applied for the grants and received them.

The City Attorney asked Mr. Bethune if he is proposing that the city applies for the grants and provides the manpower to do the work, to do the projects?

Mr. Bethune replied no, the city will only mimic other cities and other communities, and they work differently from the housing team in the past. All the city needs to do is form the group, the group does not go out and manually do labor. To be classified as a GICH, there are certain parameters that one must be – which is to ask for volunteers. It is important to have people on this committee from Planning & Zoning, Code, and Finance.

Mr. Bethune continued by stating, the city would be leading the effort but also bringing in residents for input. It does not require anything from a staff member to go out to physically do work. The meetings would be held during business hours and there may be classes that the committee would need to go through in order to be a certified community. There are a number of parameters and one of those is to attend training once a year, but it only takes one person from the team to get recertification.

Mr. Bethune said the recertification is important because the grants are awarded on points. On a CHIP grant, it's 100 points, on a Block grant it's 550 points. The original housing team applied for a \$500,000 grant and we missed getting the grant by 0.5 points. This was difficult because that amount of money would have improved housing in Garden City. Garden City would receive a point in the program for recognition as an alumnus but what we're not getting is a point for being a GICH community – it's all about the points, and that's why the city needs to go through the process to get recertified as a GICH community.

Councilmember Hall asked how many points are needed for the city to be certified and does the city need to form a housing authority to do this? Councilmember Hall said with the consideration of the previous history of the housing team, does the revoked grant hurt the cities' chances for the future?

Mr. Bethune replied that due to the demographics of Garden City, we scored very well on any CHIP grant or any Block grant, and this gives extra points. As far as a connection with the old Garden City Housing team, there is nothing there. However, when the grant was recalled, there was \$297,000 left on the grant – this amount did not get spent on those four remaining houses and this is one of the main reasons to see the city move forward.

Councilmember Ruiz asked why the grant was revoked.

Mr. Bethune replied I am just a resident and there was an article in the paper on March 27, 2024, where a lot of information was discussed. Mr. Bethune said you could look at that article. You could talk with the person that wrote the grant, or you could talk with DCA.

The City Attorney stated the city did not have any involvement with the grants at all – it was the corporation.

Councilmember Hall stated DCA will have a sour taste in their mouths because of the previous experience with the last leadership team and if the decision is made to proceed, a suggestion is to not affiliate the name of team with the city as people associated the Garden City Housing team with the city itself, and it was not the same business. In the future, the Garden City name should not be attached.

Mayor Campbell asked what the city's obligation and responsibility would be.

Mr. Bethune stated the obligation would be putting in for a grant ranging from \$400k to \$1.5 million dollars. He said that amount of money could be beneficial in improving housing in Garden City. The City could think about applying for the grants or looking into working with a grant administrator. If the city decides to go with a grant writer, then the city has to pay the initial application fee. On the grants that the housing team received, those initial fees were approximately \$4000; the cost of administering the grant is built into the grant.

Mr. Bethune finished by saying as you look at the water and sewer projects needed throughout Garden City, there's a lot of potential for Block grants and encourage the Mayor and Council to at least have a conversation about it.

**Informal Public Comment:** Shawanda Jeff, 74 Bazemore Avenue, stated as a resident we want to know what the letters represent and meanings are for the CHIP and CDBG grants. Mrs. Jeff said there was mentioning of the water and sewage by the previous speaker; and in our neighborhood we have three houses, a dentist office and a church on our block. The dentist office and the church has great draining from the front off of Highway 21; however, we are on a slant and some of the water that doesn't catch on Highway 21 drains back towards the street, it's a dead end street, and the water that backs up into our residence all the way up to the area that is supposed to be dredged out and

that's supposed to drain properly; we're not having that issue as there is a lot of flooding that is happening.

Mrs. Jeff said we are interested in knowing what the grants are and whether or not these grants have anything to do with the drainage. Mrs. Jeff stated she is a new resident, a neighbor who works for the Chatham County Board of Education is also a new resident, and there's a gentleman across the street who has been a long-time resident with issues but has received no results.

Mrs. Jeff stated she wanted to inquire and talk about the water drainage system. She continued by saying she has spoken with Public Works; the Director has come out and surveyed the area to determine that they can't do anything in front of the water meter because of it being private property but would be able to dredge and drain out to the area by the fence. She said at that time, the request was added to the list and was told the order was to be addressed in the order that requests were received. She finished by saying she sent an emailed yesterday and today to inquire about the timeline because the initial visit was in October and now it is February with the holiday season being over.

Mayor Campbell thanked Mrs. Jeff for her comments and stated Council will have a discussion, and staff will reach out regarding the request.

Given no additional comments, Mayor Campbell closed the section for informal public comments.

**City Council Minutes:** Councilmember Lassiter made a motion to approve the minutes of the 1/12/26 Workshop meeting and the 1/20/26 Pre-Agenda Session and City Council meeting minutes. Councilmember Morris seconded the motion; the motion passes with all voting in favor of the motion.

**Items for Consideration:**

**Resolution – Highway 80 and Alfred Street Easement Conveyance (Monument Sign):** The Clerk of Council read the heading of a resolution of the Mayor and Council of Garden City, Georgia requesting the Georgia State Properties Commission and the Georgia General Assembly to convey a perpetual easement upon the State Farmer's Market property at the intersection of U.S. Highway 80 and Alfred Street in Garden City, Georgia for the installation and maintenance of a municipal monument entrance and information sign for the city's newly constructed gymnasium and recreational complex; and for other related purposes.

Councilmember Hall made a motion to approve the resolution. Councilmember Morris seconded the motion; the motion passes with all voting in favor of the motion.

**Resolution – City Council Meeting Schedule Amendment:** The Clerk of Council read the heading of a resolution to amend the regular meeting schedule of the Garden City City Council; to eliminate the February 16, 2026, regular City Council meeting due to the President's Day holiday; and to establish a meeting of the City Council on February 17, 2026.

Councilmember Morris made a motion to approve the resolution. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Hall and passes with all voting in favor of the motion.

**Adjournment:** Councilmember Lassiter made a motion to adjourn at approximately 6:30pm. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Morris and passed without opposition.

*Transcribed & submitted by: The Clerk of Council*

*Accepted & approved by: The City Council on 2-17-26*