

MINUTES

City Council Meeting Monday, April 17, 2023 – 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 let the City Council in the pledge of allegiance to the flag.

Roll Call

Council Members: Mayor Bruce Campbell, Mayor Pro-tem Marcia Daniel, Councilmember Gwyn Hall, Councilmember Richard Lassiter, Councilmember Natalyn Morris, Councilmember Debbie Ruiz, and Councilmember Kim Tice.

Staff Members: Scott Robider, City Manager; James P. Gerard, City Attorney; Rhonda Ferrell-Bowles, Finance Director/Clerk of Council; Cliff Ducey, Recreation Director; Yolanda Irizzary, HR Director; Jon Bayer, Water Operations Manager; Cliff Davis, Public Works Manager; Mike Dick, Fire Chief; Gil Ballard, Chief of Police, and Chris Snider, Systems Administrator.

Informal Public Comment: Mayor Campbell opened the floor to receive public comment. There were no speakers.

City Council Minutes: Councilmember Tice motioned to approve the minutes from the April 3rd pre-agenda session and city council meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Daniel and passed without opposition.

Items for Consideration

Resolution – Final Subdivision (CenterPoint – Dean Forest Rd): The Clerk of Council read the heading of a resolution of the Mayor and Council of Garden City, Georgia, approving the final subdivision map for the subdivision of a 252.7-acre tract located at 2450-2505 Dean Forest Road into eight (8) proposed lots owned by CenterPoint Dean Forest LLC.

Councilmember Ruiz motioned to adopt the resolution. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Tice and passed without opposition.

Resolution, CHA Master Agreement (New Gym Complex): The Clerk of Council read the heading of a resolution authorizing the City Manager to negotiate, for subsequent approval by the City Council, a master agreement, including a cost budget and time schedule, with CHA Consulting, Inc., to provide architectural and engineering services for the planning, design, permitting, and bid selection, and construction administration for the new multi-purpose recreation complex on the city-owned Haynes Elementary School site off of US Highway 80.

Councilmember Lassiter motioned to adopt the resolution. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Ruiz and passed without opposition.

Resolution, BOE Intergovernmental Agreement (Stadium & Gym Athletic Facilities): The Clerk of Council a resolution authorizing the Mayor and Council of Garden City, Georgia, to enter into a second amended and restated Intergovernmental Agreement with the Board of Public Education for the City of Savannah and County of Chatham to facilitate, through the purchase of the City's land and real property improvements constituting the Garden City Stadium and Gymnasium Athletic Facilities, the redevelopment of the Board's Groves High School Facility located on Priscilla D. Thomas Way to a multi-school campus consisting of a K-8 facility, high school, stadium and athletic fields; further authorizing the Mayor and Council to enter into an additional Intergovernmental Agreement with the Board of Public Education for the City of Savannah and County of Chatham providing the City temporary use of the gymnasium, adjoining office space, and athletic fields at the Board's Lower Woodville-Tompkins Campus until June 30, 2025, by which time the City will have acquired and opened a new recreational facilities of its own; to authorize the Mayor to execute both agreements.

Councilmember Ruiz made a motion to adopt the resolution. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Hall and passed without opposition.

Resolution, Police Department Salaries: The Clerk of Council read the heading of a resolution to increase the minimum starting salary/pay rate for entry-level police officers and to authorize salary/pay increases of Two (\$2.00) dollars per hour for all currently employed police officers holding positions higher than entry-level.

The City Manager stated that he strongly urges that you approve this request.

Councilmember Morris stated that she wanted to ensure that this is not just putting money out there, and there are other reasons or things behind us not being able to retain the current police staff that we have or attract officers. She said to me that putting the money out there would work well with trying to attract new officers. She said she wanted to ensure that those officers receiving the retaining incentive know we appreciate them. She said that most of the time when people leave, they aren't leaving the company; they are leaving managers. She said I know that if we don't have the right number of officers, morale can be down, and I don't want to see anyone get hurt. She said I fully support it, but I want to ensure everything is on the up and up as far as the police department is concerned and that no other underlying issues are going on in the department.

The City Manager stated that in the conversations that he has had with officers is that there were no managerial concerns. He said that the profession is in crisis right now, and we have officers leaving and going to places like Gulfstream, the Ports, and other places that are paying more money. He said that money is not the answer, but it does help us to control what is going on.

Councilmember Lassiter stated that he received two calls while he was away last week at training. One was from a former police officer and a current officer, and it's quite the opposite of what the City Manager stated. The officer still with us said they are scared to talk to their superiors about how they feel for fear of retaliation. He said I don't want to say the word "bully," but that is the word the officer used. We as a Council need to look deeper into this instead of just sweeping this under the rug. The officer that left said that was one of the reasons he left. The office said that it wasn't about the money. He said the officer said that officers are leaving because of the lack of

management, the fear of retaliation, and favoritism within the department. He said that is what I was told. He said I would have said this in the pre-agenda session, but I was late.

The City Attorney stated that there is a protocol in our personnel manual where if an employee has a complaint or grievance and they don't feel they can report it to their supervisor, they can report it to the Human Resources Director. The Human Resources Director will investigate the charge, and everything is confidential. There will be findings coming back from the investigation. He said that is the process we have in place. Councilmember Lassiter said the officers understand that, but it doesn't help. The City Attorney said well, that is what we got, and it's got to be used.

Councilmember Daniel asked what the difference in pay would be between an officer and an entry-level officer. She said if this is being used to recruit police officers, then why would entry-level officers not receive this? Do I understand you correctly?

The City Manager asked her if she was asking about the difference between entry-level pay and compression pay. He said this for anyone who is currently working and who is not a perspective. It would start from the entry-level officer and go up from there. He noted that new starting pay would be \$24.00, and current officers below \$24.00 would be adjusted to \$24.00 per hour. He stated that everyone else would receive a \$2.00 per hour increase, so there would be a separation between the new officer off the street with no experience and those currently working here.

Councilmember Daniel said I see and understand what you are talking about regarding salary, but this has become some sort of game with all the cities to see who can out pay the other. She said that if we pay this level, others are looking to jump above this level. The City Manager said that it doesn't stop. He said that every year there is a lower pool of people who want to do the job. So, the race is on to try to gather officers who want to do the job and then hold on to the officers that are working. He said this is not something that will stop. He said that's why I feel the appropriate mechanism is to budget an increase for the police department during the budget process and plus whatever else, such as merit. I really don't wish to return about this. I don't even think Chief Ballard wants to come here and say that we got to fix this problem immediately. If you budget for an increase for the police department and it's approved, we can exercise it at the appropriate time during the calendar year to remain competitive.

Councilmember Lassiter asked why so strong and urgent of a push for it now. The City Manager said that because we are going to have seven openings, and we have people who are leaving. This is about whatever you decide, but I cannot guarantee police services if I don't have people. He said the answer to recruiting and retaining people is to increase salaries.

Councilmember Hall said I appreciate what everyone is saying, but if we are going to protect our citizens the way we are supposed to, we need to give our police department the resources to pay the people to recruit officers. He said we do not want to be here six months or a year from now, and we had the opportunity to give them the resources, and something deadly happens within our city because we don't have backup officers. I know there is a concern about raises and increasing salaries, but we would not want our citizens to come back and say that we had the opportunity to

do it and didn't. We don't want to be here, and something happens and have citizens say it was because we didn't have enough police officers.

Councilmember Daniel said I would like to give them everything they want, but I'm like Councilmember Lassiter; I would rather wait until we discuss the budget and have it start in January instead of rushing this through. She said that I truly don't think that money will make that much difference, and we already offer everything we can to entice them to stay and recruit them to come. She said I don't want six months from now that we have to jump ahead of others that have jumped ahead of us. It's a bad situation, and there is only so much money.

Councilmember Lassiter asked the Finance Director if we are in a decent position. The Finance Director said that the City Manager asked me to amend the budget so we could do this. Councilmember Daniel asked if this means that you are going to have to borrow from Peter to pay Paul. The Finance Director said that means if the salaries run over at the end of the year, you will have to front the money for that overage. If he is down positions and he doesn't run over, then you should be fine.

The City Manager said that he could potentially be down seven officers. He said that this doesn't include the three officers that would be approved for the grant, but we haven't received word if we were approved for the grant. If the grant is approved, the salaries for the three officers would be paid for three years, but if I can't find people, then you will lose the grant, and then you will be down ten positions.

Councilmember Hall asked how many officers we currently have on patrol. The City Manager said I can't give you a definite number, but you are going to be three officers per shift for the entire city. Councilmember Hall asked how many you need, five or six per shift. The City Manager said five, but six would be better. He noted that Pooler has twelve per shift and Port Wentworth has eight per shift. He stated that we are trying to run a police department with three or four officers per shift for the entire city.

Councilmember Lassiter said what are they doing that we are not doing. The City Manager said the first thing is that they are paying more. That is what they are doing. Councilmember Lassiter said Port Wentworth and Garden City have about the same population, so what are they doing that we're not? Why are they able to retain and recruit officers, and we're not? That is the point that we need to find out. The City Manager stated that they have a competitive millage rate, so they can afford to pay salary increases for all their departments. So, once again, I will encourage you all that we are going to have to look at the millage rate. He said 3 mills only go so far. You can only fit so much into an \$11 million dollar budget. The City Manager said the second thing is that if they need something in Port Wentworth, Port Wentworth did 12% pay increases last year for their police department, and that was done in one day. He said I'm not suggesting that happen here, but that is what goes on in other cities. But we try to do it the right way. He said I don't have anything else to say about this. So, it's totally up to you with respect if you decide not to do that, then I put you on notice, and that is all I can do as a City Manager. Councilmember Lassiter said that kind of sounds like a threat. The City Manager said it isn't. That is reality. But the good news is that I am a police

officer, and I can always go back on the street and be city manager also. Councilmember Lassiter said if that is what you choose to do, then do it.

Mayor Campbell called for a motion. Councilmember Hall motioned to adopt the resolution. Councilmember Tice seconded the motion. Councilmember Daniel, Councilmember Hall, Councilmember Morris, Councilmember Ruiz, Councilmember Tice, and Mayor Campbell voted in favor, with Councilmember Lassiter opposed.

Resolution, Georgia Cities Week: The Clerk of Council read the heading of a resolution recognizing Georgia Cities Week, April 23-29, 2023, and encouraging all residents to support the celebration and corresponding activities.

Councilmember Ruiz motioned to adopt the resolution. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Tice and passed without opposition.

Transcribed & submitted by: The Clerk of Council

Accepted & approved by: The City Council on 5/1/23