



120 North Essa Street, Lake Park, Georgia 31636
City Hall 229-559-7470
Fax 229-559-7499

City of Lake Park
Regular Council Meeting Minutes
January 7, 2025
6:00 pm

Members present were Mayor Jena Sandlin, Council Member Michelle Lane, Council Member Busby Courson, Council Member Oscar Griffith and Council Member Carl Spano

Staff Present: City Clerk Lisa Johnson, Police Chief Ed Yarbrough, Maintenance Technician Kaleb Rogers

Others Present: City Attorney Rob Plumb

Mayor Jena Sandlin called the meeting to order.

Mayor Jena Sandlin led the invocation.

Mayor Jena Sandlin led the pledge.

Minutes: Mayor Sandlin called for the review and approval of the Minutes. Council Member Michelle Lane made a motion to approve the Minutes of the December 3, 2024, Budget Hearing of December 19, 2024 December 27, 2024 Called Meeting. Council Member Carl Spano seconded the motion. The motion passed 3-0, with Council Member Oscar Griffith abstaining on the grounds that he was not present for these meetings.

Mayor Sandlin called for Citizens who have concerns they would like to bring to the Council's attention. She reminded residents that time was limited to three minutes and asked them to state their name, address and concern at the podium.

CITIZENS' CONCERNS:

- Bob Wilbers – 360 Back Forty Dr – reported that the base stone for the Veteran's Memorial is already at the site, and the main stone will be inspected on Friday. There are 3 names already carved: John H Wilburs, George Peterson and Clint Slocumb.
- Susan Keckley – 315 4-H Club Rd – Asked for an update on the proposals for engineers. City Clerk Lisa Johnson responded that the deadline for the proposals was the following week, and the scoring would be done at that time. Council Member Carl Spano added that as soon as the weather warms up the repaving on Sevilla Springs Circle would commence.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS/DEPARTMENT HEADS:

Fire Department: Fire Chief Matt Ryan

- Gave monthly call report

- Requested Class A shirts for the firefighters at a cost of \$40 each; there are currently 11 firefighters
- Requested internet change for the station; Southern Fibernet has been unstable since Hurricane Helene. City Clerk Lisa Johnson stated that the Work Order for Southern Fibernet was called in the previous week when Chief Ryan reported the problem to City Hall.
- Requested the purchase of a CAD system at an initial cost of \$1,425 and a yearly cost of \$299 for maintenance.
- Mayor Sandlin called for discussion on the requested items. Council Member Griffith asked what the cost for the iPads would be; Chief Ryan responded that he doesn't have that cost yet but would need internet service for them. Council Member Spano asked where in the Fire budget the money for this would come from; Chief Ryan stated that he would need to look at that, as he didn't have the budget in front of him. Mr. Spano offered Chief Ryan his copy. Chief Ryan stated that he would need more time to review. Council Member Spano asked him to meet with the City Clerk to determine where the money would come from, and Council could revisit at a future time. Council Member Griffith asked where he could get the money for the uniform shirts; Chief Ryan responded that he could pull that amount from Training pay. Council Member Spano and Chief Ryan briefly discussed the budget for Night Training Pay and Communications. Chief Ryan will meet with the City Clerk to determine if and where he has the money in his budget for his requests.

Police Department: Chief Ed Yarbrough

- Presented activity report.
- Reported that the new Charger is up and running.
- Reported that the Department had exceeded the budget for Fines and Forfeitures revenues in 2024
- Reported that the Department had a new part-time employee, now that the Department has a car for the part-time use; he is a full-time officer with Remerton Police Department and would be a good addition.
- Reported that the old Charger is having the police markings removed and would then be placed up for sale/bid.
- Noted that he had had a last-minute request for an additional computer for vehicles, explaining that a new computer for his car had not been ordered due to financial constraints, but the one that he had been using had finally needed to be replaced. He stated that there is enough money in his Capital Outlay budget to cover the cost. Council Member Oscar Griffith made a motion to approve the purchase of the new Dell laptop at a cost of \$1,813.21. Council Member Carl Spano seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0.
- Asked for Council to clarify the level of detail they wanted for the monthly reports.
- Council Member Oscar Griffith asked how the input of citations was going; Chief Yarbrough stated that everything was going well; he further explained that the State had a limit on the percentage of fines collected that could be speeding tickets and the majority of the tickets written were for expired tag, expired driver's license or no driver's license and very few were speeding tickets. He stated that he wanted to keep the Council updated on things like this, as he is aware that the Council hears from members of the public and would like them to have the information needed to respond. He briefly mentioned recent comments posted on Facebook regarding a traffic stop, which Council Member Courson had contacted him about. Council Member Courson stated that the comment had stated that the officer had been rude; he had viewed the body camera footage and found that the stop was actually "the nicest traffic stop he had ever seen", concluding that the apparent problem was that the driver had received a ticket, and not the demeanor of the officer.

- Stated that after meeting with the judge, solicitor and Probation Officer, the originally agreed-on date and time would not work, and new dates had been submitted for approval. Council Member Spano made a motion to approve the revised Court Schedule of the second Tuesday in the month at 3:00 pm. Council Member Courson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0.
- City Clerk Lisa Johnson noted that pertaining to Council Member Griffith's question regarding the inputting of citations, she had spoken to Court Clerk Melissa Morey and citations were still being entered manually, as Tyler has been unable so far to correct all the issues occurring when they are pulled in electronically. All state reports are current.

Maintenance/Public Works Department: Kaleb Rogers

- Presented activity report.
- Reported that out of warranty meters are being replaced
- Reported that the contractor has completed the Lead Service Line project
- Reported that the Christmas decorations are up
- Reported that the hurricane debris at the Cemetery has been cleaned up
- Reported that the Department has been replacing street signs and stop signs that were damaged or lost in the hurricane
- Reported that the fountain at Tom's Pond is repaired and Thomas Aquatics will be moving it back into place when the winds die down
- Council Member Spano asked for the results of the Lead Service Line inventory showed any lead lines; City Clerk Lisa Johnson responded that while the written report has not been received, the contractor has stated that everything is up to code.

Administration: City Clerk Lisa Johnson

- Presented the Administration report, stating that she had included a "Year in Review"
- Reported that Admin staff are working on end-of-year reports
- Reported that the 2024 LMIG project will begin as soon as weather permits
- Reported that Engineering Proposals are due, and the selection will allow the City to begin to address some of the larger engineering needs, such as drainage
- Reported that the new LMIG applications due date is coming up, and projects are being sought
- Reported that HB 581 passed in November, information was sent with the Council packets; Council will need to decide whether they will opt in or opt out of this change to the Homestead Exemption; if opting out, the City will need to hold three public hearings and sign a Resolution, which must be submitted to the State by March 1.
- Stated that the City would need to discuss goals for the next 5-6 years in preparation for the SPLOST referendum that would be coming up this year. She stated that she had begun speaking with Department Heads about their goals and recommended that the Council review the Comprehensive Plan in preparation for these discussions.
- Council Member Griffith asked if Ashbritt had made their final pickup for hurricane debris. The Clerk responded that they were still picking up, but the deadline for putting debris by the side of the road was January 6, as this would help them schedule. Council Member Griffith noted that Samaritan's Purse was still working to help people with the cleanup and asked how that would be handled. Mrs. Johnson explained that they had a list and would pick up debris from any of those properties once the cleanup was complete. Mayor Sandlin reiterated that Ashbritt would NOT pick up tin or other demolition debris.

Financial Reports

- Reported that the City had finished the year well within budget and had an outstanding balance of \$768,000 for debris removal, which is reimbursable through FEMA. The final invoices have not yet been received. The City has applied for expedited funding through FEMA, but this cannot be processed until those final invoices have been received.
- Reported that all departments had finished the year within their budgets, excepting Fire and Police, both of which were a little bit over, but were within the Department of Audit and Accounts acceptable guidelines. Mrs. Johnson explained that as part of the Fiscal Year close, the Administration staff would be double-checking to make sure that all coding is correct, given that there had been a software conversion in 2024. Mrs. Johnson reported that the accountants are scheduled to begin the audit process in the week of March 17. She asked if there were any questions regarding the Financial Reports. There being none, Mayor Sandlin called for approval of the Financial Reports.
- Council Member Michelle Lane made a motion to approve the unaudited Financial Reports for December 2024. Council Member Busby Courson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0.

Old Business

- Mayor Sandlin asked the City Clerk to explain the question of the Mayor Pro Tem. Mrs. Johnson stated that it was noted in December that the Charter states that the Mayor Pro Tem is selected every other year, following City elections. As the City holds elections for their seats in consecutive years rather than every other year, this selection was not made at the beginning of 2024, when Mr. Griffith's term as Mayor Pro Tem would have ended. The question before the Council is how they would like to handle this at this time, since there is an election in this year. Council Member Oscar Griffith made a motion to appoint Council Member Busby Courson as the Mayor Pro Tem. Council Member Spano seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0.
- Mayor Sandlin called for discussion on the blue building. This building was damaged in the storm and was deteriorating before that. City Clerk Lisa Johnson clarified for the Council that the blue building housed not only records, but decorations for Christmas and Fourth of July, some items belonging to the Police Department, and several items that had been moved out of City Hall. Mayor Sandlin agreed that there was a little bit of everything in the building, and that this had been discussed several times and Council needed to look at this and make some decisions. Council Member Spano noted that the City would need to have someplace to store items when they are moved out, and that his preference would be to plan for something that could be repurposed as an office for maintenance. Council discussed options for replacement, and the method of removing the old one, including a metal building, wooden storage building. Mayor Sandlin asked if the blue building was too close to City Hall to burn, and suggested that if that was not an option, perhaps Maintenance could handle demolition. Council discussed the needs for a new building, including wiring, climate control, pouring the slab, and costs of the building itself. Council Member Courson noted that the ultimate cost might be as much as \$50-60,000, if not more. Council Member Courson asked if the insurance would cover any of the cost; Mrs. Johnson responded that the adjusters had inspected the building, but the report was not back yet.

New Business

- Mayor Sandlin stated that Justin Sandlin with the Chamber of Commerce had asked to speak to the Council regarding the Special Events budget and asked him to come forward. Mr. Sandlin briefly explained that he had written a letter to request a budget increase for Special Events and asked for

clarification on the structure of the budget. Mrs. Johnson explained that the Special Events budget was part of the General Fund budget, and that Capital Items could be allocated from SPLOST. Mr. Sandlin asked if the Council would like to set the date for the Fourth of July event. Council discussed whether to hold the event the Saturday before or the Saturday after. Council Member Spano asked why the event wouldn't be held on the Fourth, as that day is on a Friday this year. Mr. Sandlin explained that typically the date is not on the day itself, to avoid interference with personal plans. Mr. Sandlin will check to see what the County is doing and will revisit.

- HB 581 – City Clerk Lisa Johnson explained that HB 581 was passed in the State law last year pending a referendum for a Constitutional amendment on the November ballot, which did pass. Its goal is to relieve some of the pressure from sharply increasing property values that everyone has been experiencing recently, Lake Park residents included. She stated that she had done a random check and noted that while there were many steep increases in Lake Park, the highest one that she had seen was \$118,000 increase in value. HB 581 establishes a Floating Homestead Exemption which would limit the assessed value for homesteaded properties to no more than the inflation index. This would not affect the actual increase in property values, only the value as assessed for tax purposes. The Bill provides a requirement that all properties in a jurisdiction be reassessed every three years at a maximum and also includes a provision for the implementation of a Floating Local Option Sales Tax (FLOST) to alleviate any lost revenue to cities and counties. The FLOST could only be imposed if the County and all Cities within the County adopted a Floating Homestead Exemption, whether that exemption is under HB 581 or a separately constructed exemption and would be subject to intergovernmental agreement and approval of the voters. If the City opts in to this new exemption, nothing will need to be done to approve; if the City chooses to opt out, three public hearings would be required, as well as a Resolution which would need to go the State not later than March 1. She has spoken with other entities in Lowndes County, and others are still reviewing what this all means before deciding. At the present time, none of the entities in Lowndes County have a floating homestead exemption already in place. The general feeling is that once each entity has had time to review, all should come together to discuss the best way forward for the whole, since any option for recovering lost revenues would require that all entities have a floating homestead of some kind. She stated that one consideration is that although some property taxes would increase by less, if a FLOST was implemented, then everyone would be paying more at the register to make up for the decrease in revenues. In the long run, commercial and non-homesteaded properties might be hit harder. In addition, if a city opts in, but the county opts out, it could result in two different assessed values for the same property on the tax bill. Mrs. Gloria Luke noted that she had seen in the paper that the school system was opting out. Mrs. Johnson replied that her understanding was that most of the school systems in the state were opting out, as there is a cap on the millage rate that the school systems can set. While raising the millage rate to be able to make up the budget remains an option for cities and counties, school systems could be faced with a shortfall that they could not stand.
- Council Member Busby Courson asked what the third request email from Deb Cox was about. City Clerk Lisa Johnson answered that the elections office had asked the jurisdictions how many Saturday voting days were desired for their jurisdictions during early voting in December; she had responded to the second request, but the two emails crisscrossed.
- Susan Keckley asked what the committee volunteer forms that were available with Council Packets were for and what openings there were for committee volunteers. Mrs. Johnson explained that the City had several committees, and she would have to check which ones still needed members, but she knew the Zoning Board needed to replace two members that had recently resigned their seats.

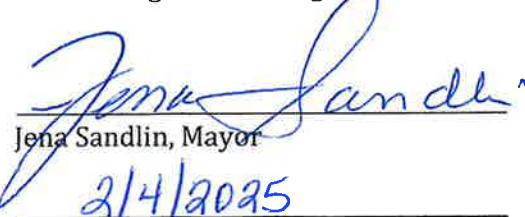
- Mayor Sandlin asked Council Member Courson to address the agenda item regarding the Maintenance position. Council Member Courson stated that the interview committee had interviewed four applicants, one of whom none thought would be a good fit, and the other three of which interviewed well, but two he felt had less experience than desired. Discussion was whether there should be more interviewed before moving into second interviews with the whole Council. Council Member Spano stated that he felt that second interviews should be conducted with the current finalists as soon as possible. Council Member Lane reminded Council that last time this was discussed, it was discussed that the Council would meet with the finalists on January 13th and asked if that was still an option. Council Member Griffith asked why he was not included in the interviews. City Clerk Lisa Johnson apologized, stating that she had not remembered that he wanted to be in attendance, but believed she had responded to his email with this question and given him the dates of the remaining interviews. Council Member Griffith stated that he agreed with Council Member Spano and there was no reason to wait; noting that when someone is looking for a job, it couldn't be prolonged indefinitely, further noting that considerations shouldn't be about whether you liked someone, but whether they were qualified for the job. Mayor Sandlin stated that as agreed, Council would hold a Called Meeting on January 13 at 6:00 for the purpose of conducting second interviews with candidates for the Maintenance position.

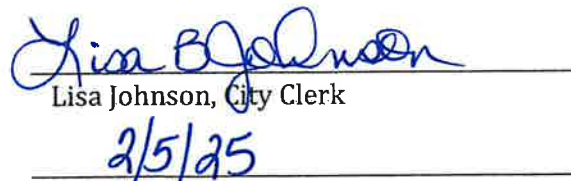
Council Member Michelle Lane made a motion to enter Executive Session to further discuss personnel. Council Member Busby Courson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0. Council entered Executive Session at 7:10pm.

Council Member Michelle Lane made a motion to reconvene Regular Session. Council Member Busby Courson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0. Council reconvened Regular Session at 7:30 pm. There was no action taken.

Council Member Carl Spano made a motion to adjourn. Council Member Busby Courson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0.

The next regular meeting will be on February 4, 2024 at 6:00 pm.


Jena Sandlin, Mayor
2/4/2025
Date


Lisa Johnson, City Clerk
2/5/25
Date

Seal