



Minutes
City Council Work Session
June 4th, 2024
6:30pm

Baldwin Municipal Courtroom, 155 Willingham Avenue, Baldwin, GA 30511

Mayor Stephanie Almagno, Council Member Erik Keith, Council Member Joseph Satterfield, Council Member Kerri Davis, Council Member Maarten Venter, and Council Member Alice Venter were all in attendance.

Call Meeting to Order

Mayor Stephanie Almagno called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

Public Hearing

FY2025 Budget

Legal Counsel Jack Samuels opened the public hearing for Fiscal Year 2025 budget at 6:32 pm.

Randy Lewallen of 400 Wilbanks Street shared concerns about the proposal to increase property taxes, especially for seniors frequently having a single income. Lewallen suggested Council consider a 1-2% sales tax increase.

Council member Alice Venter responded, stating that she had spoken with a state legislator from another district about options they had pursued to freeze property values for seniors. Venter also stated regarding increasing sales tax (SPLOST), elected officials cannot advocate for SPLOST, but the funds are invaluable for capital improvement projects. The County would have to put SPLOST on a ballot, citizens would vote in order for it to pass, and then the cities would meet to discuss how the funds are divided.

Debbie Satterfield of 153 Chandler Street also shared her concern about property taxes for seniors.

Jo McLendon of 140 Banks Ridge Drive stated while she appreciates what the CAO has done for the City and that she may deserve a raise, she didn't understand the justification for a 10% salary increase as well as a 2.5% COLA. Ms. McLendon said she would appreciate if Council were to reconsider the percentage increase.

Mayor Almagno responded by stating that Council's ultimate goal is to create a budget that matches the actual costs to run a city. After bringing all public safety positions (fire, police, public works) on par with other cities in pay, equipment, and training, the CAO position is the final component to bring the salary to market value. Almagno stated that she did not foresee further salary increases down the road, and that this increase will still bring the CAO salary under the midline of the wage study.

While not relevant to the FY2025 budget hearing, Council heard a complaint from Micah Zack and Elizabeth Cansler of 196 Dilmus Court about Code Compliance. Zack and Cansler disagreed with Baldwin Code Compliance's appearance and methods of approaching them about their car parked in the road.

Council member Alice Venter stated that having cars parked on the street does present an issue if public safety vehicles are not able to respond to calls. Mayor Almagno requested that Zack and Cansler provide their contact information and Woodmaster would follow up with them.

Lewallen also requested clarification on the proposed increase in franchise fees. Woodmaster explained that franchise taxes are assessed to different utilities, and it is not a fee that the City establishes. The increase is due to an expectation that additional utility companies will be coming to Baldwin.

Jack Samuels opened the floor again for those to address the budget. No one came forward. The public hearing was closed at 7:05 pm.

Council opened the floor for general public comment.

Jack Sharpshair of 1100 Chandler Heights Circle provided some history of his work with former Mayor Joe Elam about resolving problems involving the Habersham County landfill. Sharpshair would like the City to be involved in gathering people to meet and discuss either a program or ad campaign with local children to encourage residents to make more effort in recycling.

Old Business

1. CAO Contract

Mayor Almagno reviewed the updated CAO contract which had been provided to Council via email prior to the meeting. The contract eliminates last year's supplemental, eliminates PTO as approved by Council at the May 13th council meeting, and includes the proposed 10% increase and 2.5% COLA. Mayor Almagno asked Council if they had any additional comments regarding the contract.

Council member Maarten Venter apologized for having to leave the meeting early due to prior obligation but made the statement that if the CAO were to step away from the position, the City would not be able to fill the position if compensation is below market value.

Venter also said that as he publicly stated before, he will not vote for another millage rate increase. He thanked all residents who attended the meeting for their participation.

Council member Maarten Venter left the meeting at 7:26 pm.

New Business

2. FY25 Appointed Positions

Woodmaster reviewed the positions for annual appointment by the Council as required by the City Charter and the proposed appointments for FY2025:

- City Attorney – Dale “Bubba” Samuels, The Samuels Firm
- City Auditor – Morris & Waters
- City Clerk – Erin Gathercoal
- City Engineer – Fletcher Holliday, Engineering Management, Inc.
- City Judge – Robert Sneed
- City Solicitor – Teresa DiPonzio, The Samuels Firm

Mayor Pro Tempore is also an appointed position but must be decided by Council. Woodmaster requested that Council discuss and be ready to appoint the Mayor Pro Tem on Monday.

Council had no further questions and was in consensus to vote at Monday’s meeting.

3. Banks County Hazard Mitigation Plan

Woodmaster explained that the Banks County Hazard Mitigation Plan had been approved by GEMA and FEMA, and that discussions began two years ago. The Hazard Mitigation Plan provides Banks County cities to access funding during crises and declared emergencies based on what is in the plan. For example, if the governor were to declare a state of emergency, funding becomes available but only for items included in the plan. Now that the plan has been approved, each of the Banks County cities, including Baldwin, will sign by resolution.

Council had no further questions and was in consensus to vote at Monday’s meeting.

Announcements

- a. The Mayor’s Reading Club kickoff event will be this Friday, from 11 am – 12:30 pm at the Baldwin Farmers’ Market at 110 Airport Road. We will officially open our brand new Little Free Library, provide FREE Kona Ice and games to all children present, and welcome the Pop Up Rolling Library for their first of many visits every Friday this summer! We encourage all residents to check out or return books, or even get a free PINES library card that day!
- b. The next reFRESH Market is this Saturday from 11:00 am – 3:00 pm at Baldwin City Hall. Shop fruits & veggies, honey, fresh eggs, and other goods from local farmers and vendors. If you are interested in a FREE space to sell your product, contact John at City Hall for more information or visit www.cityofbaldwin.org for a vendor application.

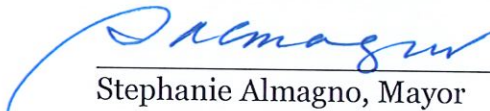
- c. The 2nd Annual Baldwin Water War is on June 15th from 2:30 – 4:30 pm at Mitchell Gailey Park! Bring your water guns and a towel to beat the heat! Sign up today at City Hall, via the Facebook event, or email baldwinevents@cityofbaldwin.org.
- d. City Offices will be closed June 19th in observance of Juneteenth.
- e. Join us for the next installment of Movies in the Market on June 28th at 8:30 p.m.. Bring your lawn chairs and blankets and join us for a FREE night of fun at the Farmers' Market located at 110 Airport Road. This month we will be showing *The Goonies*. Concessions are available, with all proceeds going to Shop with a Hero.

While "The Goonies" is considered a classic family movie by many and maintains a rating of PG ("Parental Guidance Suggested – Some material may not be suitable for children") from the Motion Picture Association, this movie contains content (including language) that may be considered more fitting for a PG-13 rating per modern standards. The City of Baldwin encourages parents to research films to determine whether or not their own child should attend and view.

- f. Council Member Joseph Satterfield announced his resignation from his Council post due to his recent marriage and desire to move out of state to be with his wife. His final meeting will be the July 29th council meeting and he encouraged citizens to qualify for Post 2 in August.

Adjournment

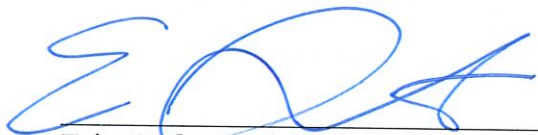
Action: A motion was made by Erik Keith to adjourn the meeting with a second by Joseph Satterfield. Motion Carried 4-0 at 7:38 pm.



 Stephanie Almagno, Mayor

6/10/2024

 Date Approved by Council



 Erin Gathercoal, City Clerk

