



Agenda

City Council Meeting

October 23rd, 2023

6:30pm

Baldwin Courtroom, 155 Willingham Avenue, Baldwin, GA 30511

Acting Mayor Alice Venter, Council Member Erik Keith, Council Member Theron Ayers, Council Member Stephanie Almagno, and Council Member Maarten Venter were all in attendance.

Call Meeting to Order

Acting Mayor Alice Venter called the meeting to order at 6:32 pm.

Invocation and Pledge

Consent Agenda

- a. Approval of Minutes: Council Meeting 10/10/2023.

Action: A motion was made by Theron Ayers to approve the minutes for the October 10th, 2023 council meeting with a second by Stephanie Almagno. Motion Carried 4-0.

Citizen Comments

Tom Whitney of 189 Crooked Pine Trail addressed Council regarding the proposed millage rate collecting additional revenue over the needed budget and if it were possible to achieve a “net zero budget.” He also proposed the idea of doubling the senior property tax exemption.

Acting Mayor Venter stated that changes to tax exemptions take time, but further senior exemptions could be pursued. CAO Emily Woodmaster addressed Mr. Whitney’s comments on the budget, stating that there is an increase in collections by rolling back the millage rate 100%, but that there is no percentage increase for the taxpayer. With the increase in collections, however, Woodmaster recommended restricting the extra collections to offsetting the budget next year.

Action: A motion was made by Stephanie Almagno to amend the agenda to move Old Business items to New Business, and to add item #3: Consideration/Approval of Purchase of Ground Penetrating Radar and item #4 Consideration/Approval of Purchase WTP Meter with a second by Maarten Venter. Motion Carried 4-0.

Public Hearings

Reports

Public Works – Scott Barnhart

Public Works Director Scott Barnhart presented a report on current and upcoming public works projects, highlights, and concerns (see attached report).

Old Business

New Business

1. Consideration/Approval of 1st Reading of Precision Digital SUP Ordinance
#2023-10132Z

Woodmaster recapped Precision Digital's application for a zoning special use permit for their property purchased from the Habersham County Development Authority. Baldwin's 2006 Zoning Ordinance does not contemplate Precision Digital's business type, so the special use permit would allow a data center, cryptocurrency mining, and high-performance computing in this district. There has been concern expressed by citizens that such a business would be an auditory nuisance to residents, but sawmills, welding shops, and truck terminals are also allowed in this zoning. This property is also adjacent to the county airport with no residential properties surrounding the proposed site. Comparing Precision Digital to other allowed types of business that would be considered "noisy," it would be considered allowed by right.

Council Member Maarten Venter briefly stepped out of the room and returned at 7:09 pm.

Woodmaster stated that one of the developer's requests for the special use permit is to have a maximum decibel level of 100 decibels to be measured at the property line. The City's current noise ordinance does not have a decibel requirement, but the developer requested the limit to be able to address any complaints and to ensure he remains a good community partner.

Council Member Maarten Venter referenced his decades of work in data centers, and that while inside the centers can be loud, the noise would not be substantial at the distances of the residential homes.

The City would be allowed to measure decibels and issue citations at will if the permit were to have the maximum decibel condition. Without the condition, however, the City would have no jurisdiction to handle complaints because of the ambiguity of the noise ordinance. Council was in consensus that the 100-decibel limit should be a condition for the permit.

Legal counsel had no concerns. The public hearing for this ordinance will be held on November 6th, and the second reading is anticipated for November 13th.

Action: A motion was made by Theron Ayers to approve the 1st reading of Ordinance #2023-10132Z, with specified conditions, with a second by Maarten Venter. Motion Carried 4-0.

2. Consideration/Approval of Wrecker Policy

Woodmaster stated that the City passed an ordinance for wrecker rotation in 2009 (last modified in 2012), and that there are some updates to consider to best provide service to those in the city.

Police Chief Chris Jones addressed Council and explained wrecker rotation procedure and how wreckers are used on a daily basis by Baldwin PD, Georgia State Patrol, and the Sheriff's Office for abandoned vehicles, accidents, DUIs, etc.

Acting Mayor Venter stepped out of the room at 7:43 pm and returned at 7:44 pm.

Chief Jones created a protocol and recommended maintaining the current three wrecker services. The rotation starts in alphabetical order and runs one week at a time to prevent preferential treatment. Chief Jones would conduct inspections of each service himself, ensuring they have appropriate liability insurance coverage, a secure impound lot, and all of the necessary equipment. Jones stated that he would meet with all three companies (owners or representatives) at once to prevent miscommunication and to ensure all of them meet Baldwin's criteria and to discuss a maximum rate to prevent price gouging.

Woodmaster stated that if Council so desired, the City could post an RFP every three years, as is done with Baldwin's engineering firm or auditors. She recommended Council solidify the wrecker policy before the end of the calendar year.

Council was in consensus to discuss the wrecker policy further at the work session. No formal action was taken.

3. Consideration/Approval of Purchase of Ground Penetrating Radar

Barnhart presented a request for the purchase of a ground penetrating radar to be used to locate water and sewer lines that are not mapped or cannot be located with current equipment. The radar would also help public works locate leaking waterlines and provide the depth of the line. The cost is \$16,407.42 for a new radar with a one-year parts and labor warranty, with an expected delivery of 30 days upon Council approval. The cost would be funded out of Banks County 2017 SPLOST.

Action: A motion was made by Stephanie Almagno to approve the purchase of a ground penetrating radar, not to exceed \$16,500 and to be paid from Banks County 2017 SPLOST, with a second by Theron Ayers. Motion Carried 4-0.

4. Consideration/Approval of Water Treatment Plant Meter

City Engineer Fletcher Holliday presented a request for a replacement meter installed at the water treatment plant that flows to the J Warren booster station. This meter measures the difference of water used between Baldwin and Demorest, allows for annual calibration of the meter, and will help with the City's water audit score. The cost of the meter is \$6,695. This is a budgeted expense but requires Council approval as it exceeds the \$5,000 limit.

Action: A motion was made by Maarten Venter to approve the purchase of a water treatment plant transmission meter, not to exceed \$6,700, with a second by Stephanie Almagno. Motion Carried 4-0.


Executive Session

Announcements

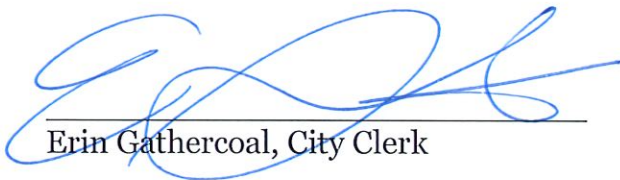
- a. Thank you to everyone who attended our Movies In the Market series, which will resume in the spring! If you have a movie suggestion for our spring series, please message our Facebook or email baldwinevents@cityofbaldwin.org!
- b. Thank you to everyone who participated in our Sixth Annual Fall Festival!
- c. Join us for a family-friendly watch party of the Florida/Georgia game on October 28th, hosted by Life Church at 110 Church Street. Tailgating starts at 2:00 pm and kickoff at 3:30 pm inside the sanctuary! Alcohol is prohibited at this event.

Adjournment

Action: A motion was made by Theron Ayers to adjourn the meeting with a second by Maarten Venter. Motion Carried 4-0 at 8:13 pm.


Stephanie Almagno, Mayor

11/13/2023
Date Approved by Council


Erin Gathercoal, City Clerk

