



Minutes
City Council Work Session
March 7th, 2023
6:30pm

Baldwin Courtroom, 155 Willingham Avenue, Baldwin, GA 30511

Acting Mayor Alice Venter, Council Member Larry Lewallen, 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 6:30 pm.

Economic Development Discussion (max. 20 minutes)

Woodmaster updated Council that two potential developers had spoken with her about property on Highway 365. Woodmaster recommended the Highway 365 Committee meet, revisit the Highway Business zoning district, and create an overlay for the highway for economic focus. The committee agreed to meet the following week.

Acting Mayor Alice Venter stated the biggest focus on Highway 365 needs to be safety. There has been a drastic increase in accidents and fatalities due to the increase in both regular and commercial traffic, and while economic development is the goal, keeping drivers safe is most important.

Council Member Maarten Venter requested an update on current Highway 365 developments. Woodmaster stated that the liquor store is underway and is still projected to open this summer, the daycare center plans are being reviewed, and the gas station is permitted, but they have not yet begun construction.

Public Hearing

Old Business

1. PTO Buy Out Program Amendment

Woodmaster presented an amendment to the PTO Buy Out Program, which was implemented this year. The policy originally stated that an employee must meet three qualifications in order to take advantage of the program: a) more than 60 hours in accrued leave remain after the request is completed, b) has been employed with the City for at least two years, and c) are not actively in a performance improvement program or received a less than satisfactory review in the prior six months. This amendment would add a clause allowing an employee to take advantage of the program due to an unforeseeable emergency resulting in severe financial hardships. These circumstances include a sudden illness or accident of employee/spouse/dependent, funeral expenses, or similar events beyond the employee's control, and will not require the normal three qualifiers. Supporting documentation will be required in order for the employee to use the paid time off that they have accrued in such extraordinary circumstances.

Council was in consensus to bring this forward at the next council meeting.

New Business

Council was in consensus to change the order of the agenda, moving the Habersham County Board of Health Memorandum of Agreement to item two and the K-9 Unit to item three.

2. Habersham County Board of Health Memorandum of Agreement

Woodmaster presented with Council with a Memorandum of Agreement with the Habersham County Board of Health. Whenever the Board of Health is providing services to an employee, they must bring the attached Authorization to Receive Services. While it is rare that the City of Baldwin has sent someone to the Health Department, this is a state mandated agreement, acknowledging the City is in a services-rendered relationship with the Habersham County Board of Health. They are still working on the fee schedule, but Council will see it prior to voting.

Council was in consensus to bring this forward at the next council meeting, provided that the fee schedule has been received.

3. K-9 Unit

Acting Mayor Venter gave a brief history on the topic of Baldwin and a K-9 unit. Former Police Chief Branyon brought the idea forward at a City retreat, but it was not attainable at the time. Due to Baldwin not currently having animal control services, a citizen dropped off a stray dog (Nikos) at the Police Department and Venter took him in. Multiple attempts have been made to find an owner with no results.

Captain Justin Ferguson, who is K-9 Handler Certified, gave a presentation on the history of dogs in law enforcement and the uses, needs, and benefits for a K-9 unit, even for a city as small as Baldwin.

Initial training for a K-9 involves multiple steps: Bonding/Basic obedience (Nikos' current stage), heavy obedience, narcotics detection, narcotics detection certification, tracking/apprehension, tracking/apprehension certification. Nikos will live with his handler, which at this time is proposed to be Ferguson. Per Baldwin PD policy, a handler must sign a three-year contract.

From a financial standpoint, the startup cost for FY23 would be \$5,157, including training equipment and outfitting a police vehicle with a kennel and a heat alarm system, which would alert the handler and protect the animal if the vehicle were to get too hot. Nikos and his handler could train either at Hall County Sheriff's Office (at a cost of \$580) or Chatham County's Sheriff's Office (at a cost of \$1,540). GMA offers K-9 mortality insurance, and Baldwin's liability coverage would not increase at all because of it. Items and supplies worth \$2,500 have already been donated by local businesses and citizens.

The cost to continue running a K-9 Unit would be approximately \$3,200 to \$5,000 per year. The cost will vary year to year due to other equipment that will need to be purchased, but are not immediate needs, or certain licenses will only need to be renewed biannually. Costs would increase for a particular year if either

a new handler takes over or if a new dog is purchased. Ferguson also provided a cost analysis of future costs up to five years.

When asked, Ferguson did say that one of the drawbacks of a K-9 Unit is that it can be difficult to take a dog with no training whatsoever like Nikos and get the dog trained up to standards, especially when there are no other dogs in the unit to train with. However, it is doable and frequently successful, as one of Ferguson's previous K-9's in previous employment was rescued from a shelter and trained.

While City Attorney Bubba Samuels has not reviewed the entire policy, he is on board with the idea of implementing a K-9 unit for Baldwin. Samuels will be reaching out to another entity with a similar program.

Woodmaster recommended paying the startup cost from Public Safety Funds. Currently there are significant funds from public safety tied to the vehicle lease program. Woodmaster, however, is confident that the money will be available for the next fiscal year, with the note that this program would be built into the police department's budget as a separate subcategory and having the necessary \$3,200 to \$5,000 to maintain the program on hand.

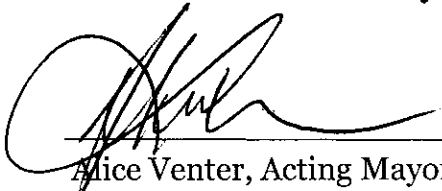
Council was in consensus to bring this forward to the next meeting.

Announcements

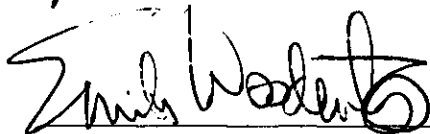
- a. Baldwin Clean Up Day is Saturday, April 22nd at 9:00 am! Join us in celebrating Earth Day by cleaning up Baldwin roads. Free T-shirt and lunch provided for pre-registered participants!

Adjournment

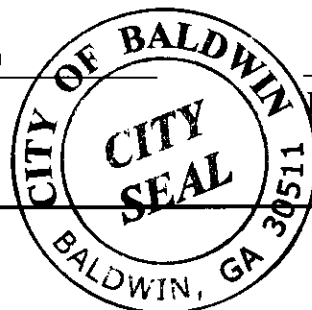
Action: A motion was made by Theron Ayers to adjourn the meeting with a second by Maarten Venter. Motion Carried 4-0 at 7:58 pm.



Alice Venter, Acting Mayor



Emily Woodmaster, CAO



3/13/2023

Date Approved by Council