The City Council of the City of Harlem, Georgia met for a Quarterly Work Session on Friday, February 24, 2023, at Harlem City Hall at 8:30 a.m. with Mayor Roxanne Whitaker presiding.

Present: COUNCIL: Mayor Roxanne Whitaker, Mayor Pro tem Gregg Stokes, Councilmember Daniel Bellavance, Councilmember Al Reeves, and Councilmember John Thigpen; STAFF: City Manager Debra Moore, City Clerk Leona Holley, and City Attorney Adam Nelson; MEDIA: Stephanie Hill, The Augusta Press.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Whitaker at 8:30 a.m. Mayor Whitaker asked to please remember Joe Green, a Harlem business owner and father of Alison Couch.

The Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance was given and led by City Attorney Nelson.

Approval of the Agenda: Mayor Pro tem Stokes made the motion to approve the Agenda as presented; 2nd by Councilmember Thigpen. The motion carried with Councilmembers Bellavance, Stokes, and Thigpen voting in the affirmative. Councilmember Reeves joined the meeting at 8:33 a.m.

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Annexation: Yes or No? Mayor Whitaker asked council if they want to pursue annexation or not. She said there are a few people from outside the city limits that has inquired about annexing their property into the city. One of the properties is approximately seven hundred acres. Mayor Whitaker stated she hasn’t decided if she is for or against annexation of the properties. Councilmember Thigpen stated he is not interested in annexing property into the city. The more properties that are annexed into the city will require more police, fire, and public works personnel; he thinks it is more of a cost than a benefit at this time. Councilmember Bellavance stated he doesn’t think it will be a benefit unless it is commercial property; it will be more taxing on the infrastructure. Mayor Pro tem Stokes has not decided if he is for annexation or against. He asked are we comfortable with the county doing something with the properties on the edge of our city limits. Councilmember Reeves stated growth is coming; we will have to look at hiring personnel regardless. Mayor Whitaker has concerns on the negotiation for LOST. Mayor Whitaker stated we need to look at this and be open minded when it comes to annexation of the properties.

Harlem Civic Center: Mayor Whitaker reported in January the Harlem Arts Council came to the council meeting asking for variances on what they can do in the Civic Center building. Councilmember Thigpen explained at the council meeting the Harlem Arts Council (HAC) stated they are not paying rent or utilities; they are charging for their services, selling art items, and making a percentage off the items that are sold, yet they still come to the city wanting support. Councilmember Thigpen thinks the city needs to take back control of the Civic Center and use the building where it will benefit the citizens and recommend that we give them to December 31st. If they decide to leave, look at what we want to do with the Civic Center that will benefit the city.

Mayor Whitaker stated she would hate to see the Arts Council leave Harlem. People that enjoys art needs a place to go and they have people of all ages visits the Arts Council. They are unique to Harlem. Mayor
DISCUSSION ITEMS (cont’d):

**Harlem Civic Center (cont’d):** Whitaker asked for the Arts Council to send a copy of their budget to explain where the money they are collecting is used for.

City Attorney Nelson explained when the building was deeded in 1974 by Martine Walton it indicated the grantee by acceptance of the deed of a gift will have covenants. A bronze plaque would be placed on the building indicating the name of the building, to attach a building, and to use half of the building for a library and the remaining of the building to be used for city offices. City Attorney Nelson explained during the last administration the building was named a library annex, this was in connection with the construction of the new library. During that time the agreement for the Arts Council came into effect. The Arts Council is using half of the building and the other half is used as the City of Harlem’s Civic Center.

Mayor Pro tem Stokes asked what is the upkeep cost for the Civic Center; City Manager Moore stated there is nothing specific in the budget for the Civic Center building. Prior administration had the Senior Center, Civic Center and Headstart all to come out of Community Services. City Manager Moore stated looking at the past years utilities bills for the Civic Center it was approximately $5,000 for the year. If anyone was to rent the back of the building, the rent is supposed to come to the city. Mayor Pro tem Stokes stated the utilities at least needs to be covered. Councilmember Thigpen stated he is fine if the Arts Council wants to pay a monthly rent or upkeep of the building on a month-to-month basis.

Review of Ordinances:

a) **Proposed Ordinance 2302 on Bricks:** Councilmember Thigpen stated he heard from Chairman Flick and Commissioner Speer of the Historic Preservation Commission concerning Ordinance 2302 painting of brick. Councilmember Thigpen explained when the historic district was formed in Harlem, the city ordinance mirrored the state ordinance. The state ordinance did not dictate paint color, even on bricks, if construction has met the guidelines with building materials it was approved. Once virgin brick is painted, it will have to continue to be painted. The Historic Preservation Commission has an issue with virgin brick being painted. Councilmember Thigpen stated there are times the only way to salvage virgin brick is to paint it. The paint will protect and preserve the building so it will last longer. He suggested to come up with a color palette to match the downtown area. City Manager Moore stated you cannot tell someone what color they must paint with or use; you can suggest a color. There was a historic palette of muted colors for historic districts. The virgin brick was the main concern of the HPC on regulating painting of virgin brick. City Manager Moore explained Ordinance 2302 was adding a definition of virgin brick for commercial property only, not residential and before any commercial properties can be painted it would need to go in front of the Historic Preservation for a Certificate of Appropriateness. In the proposed ordinance it is also designating a color palette for the bricks in the different commercial districts. Mayor Whitaker stated one of her objections of this ordinance is that most of the buildings downtown have been painted; there is not many buildings downtown that has not been painted. Mayor Whitaker stated she doesn’t have a problem setting up a color palette, or for the Historic Preservation Commission to issue a Certificate of Appropriateness, she has a problem with the Historic Preservation Commission saying you cannot ever paint virgin brick and don’t care about the painted brick. City Attorney Nelson explained generally the Historic Preservation does
DISCUSSION ITEMS (cont’d):


City Attorney Nelson stated just because a property is in the historic district, and it is brick, the city cannot require someone not to paint. City Attorney Nelson explained if someone comes forward and states they do not have a choice but to paint the brick because the wall is going to collapse. The city could offer a variance on the ordinance. This would be on a case-by-case basis. This ordinance is trying to figure out the best way to move forward with the colors. Sec. 108-271 in this ordinance is for the color palette on new construction in the commercial districts. Councilmember Bellavance would like to have guidelines on the colors for downtown.

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City Manager Moore explained the different color palette for the historic district. The consensus of Council is to leave Sec. 106-2 Definition of virgin brick, the brick color palette and to remove Sec. 106-50 (d) maintaining historic properties and buildings in Ordinance 2302.

Councilmember Thigpen stated the Historic Preservation Commission is asking for a current housing survey. They would like an updated list of buildings that are 50-years old or older and are looking at expanding the district. City Manager Moore stated the department has asked for the survey. In the past the survey has been taken out of the budget to balance the budget. For the survey to be done it could cost $20,000 - $30,000. Councilmember Bellavance stated we need to see about changing the designation of the age of the buildings. City Attorney Nelson explained there are other factors for the historic district, not just the age. The state definitions are the property has to be an outstanding example of a structure representative of its era, it is one of the few remaining examples or as past architectural style and it is a place or structure associated with an event or persons of historic or cultural significance to the city or state of Georgia.

Councilmember Thigpen stated when the Historic Preservation Commission was formed a committee went over the map of Harlem and made sure if met the criteria. City Attorney Nelson explained the Historic District guidelines. The consensus of the council was not in favor of the survey.

b) Proposed Ordinance Pertaining to Entertainment Venues: City Manager Moore reported she presented a proposed ordinance to Mayor Whitaker and Mayor Pro tem Stokes pertaining to entertainment venues to see if this is something council wants to put in place. It includes an ordinance and a multi-page application. City Manager Moore stated this ordinance is more for events that are inside. Most of the events so far are outside events.

Mayor Whitaker commented this ordinance will be adding cost to the businesses that are putting together the free concerts. This ordinance is proposing for every 50 patrons you would have a crowd manager, a second crowd manager would be required when attendance reaches 251 patron and an additional crowd manager be required for each additional increments of 250 patrons. This would be an additional extra cost to the businesses for security and public works. Mayor Whitaker
DISCUSSION ITEMS (cont’d)

Review of Ordinances (cont’d): commented if this ordinance goes into place, the concerts will stop due to the added cost.

City Attorney Nelson stated this ordinance is looking towards future events. If an event is on city property, the city will have to be notified of what event will be taking place. The city cannot regulate the content of a private event; the conduct can be regulated. Mayor Pro tem Stokes understands the concept of the ordinance, but currently the city is not there yet. The consensus of council is not to put the ordinance in place.

City Gateway Signage: City Manager Moore reported on the rendition of the city’s entrance signs. To refurbish the signs, the estimate is $3,500 per sign; the estimate does not include the removal of the stucco. The estimate cost is refurbishing and repainting the signs. Councilmember Reeves suggested that City Manager Moore reach out to Malcolm Frails on removing the stucco or see if the public works department can take the stucco off the signs. Mayor Whitaker asked City Manager Moore to get a cost to remove the stucco from the signs; come back to council with the council. The consensus of council is they like the red and black design and to add “established 1870” to the design.

City of Civility Designation: Mayor Whitaker commented that she has attended a class on civility. Mayor Whitaker would like to adopt a Civility Resolution and pledge to become a City of Civility. The nine pillars of civility are: to be considerate of other’s opinions, manage emotions, a silent voice is not always a weak voice, be kind, actively listen, think about the impact, ask questions to learn, remember the acronym QTIP (Quit Taking It Personal) and have empathy.

Councilmember Thigpen commented he understands what this is and what it is trying to do. He believes council always act on the best interest of the city, they might not always agree, but he believes council respects each other and their beliefs. Councilmember Thigpen stated personally he doesn’t see a need for a Resolution for council. Councilmember Thigpen stated he will support this if the Mayor wants to adopt the Resolution. Mayor Whitaker stated this would give a semblance that no matter what or who sits on this council, we will respect each other, it is a pledge to each other.

Refunding of Volunteer Firefighter Dues: City Manager Moore reported a volunteer firefighter has asked to receive a refund for his firefighter’s dues. The volunteer firefighter has recently resigned, he has 12-years of service, and he is not planning on returning. To be vested with the pension plan he would have needed at least 15-years of service. It was found that if someone comes off the fire department and have no intention of returning, they can request to have their dues paid back. The city pays for the firefighter’s dues.

Councilmember Reeves commented that the firefighters and police vested pension time is different. He asked if we could talk with State Representative Barry Fleming on seeing if the pension time be changed. Mayor Whitaker commented that Senate Bill 16 is being proposed to require that each fireman or first responders be covered with a PTSD insurance policy at the expense of the municipalities. The cost would be $144 per year. The consensus of council has no issue refunding the dues.
DISCUSSION ITEMS (cont’d)

Refunding of Volunteer Firefighter Dues (cont’d): City Manager Moore reported on holiday pay for the departments. Currently holiday pay is based on the hours employees work. 40-hour employees receive 8-hours, police department works an 86-hour shift, they receive 12-hours, and the fire department works a 106-hour shift, they receive 24-hours if they work or 8-hours if they do not work. One full-time firefighter works a 96-hour shift, he receives 9-hour holiday pay. City Manager Moore asked council if they are interested in changing holiday pay for the police and fire departments. Discussion on holiday pay for different shifts on the police and fire department.

Proposed Purchases – ARPA Funding – FD: City Manager Moore reported a quote was provided by the fire department to redo the floors at Fire station 1 and 2. The amount that was budgeted was $70,000. The quote that came back recently is approximately $38,000 to redo the floors for both stations. The fire department is asking to use the difference of $32,000 to purchase the following:
  • Medical Supplies, Equipment and Training $7,500
  • Active Shooter Response Equipment $6,000
  • Vehicle Extrication & Leak/Spill Control Equipment $3,500
  • Personal Protective Equipment $2,500
  • Public Safety Building Parking Lot Overhaul $6,000
Total cost is $25,500. Discussion on why medical supplies and equipment are being asked for if they have no one that can administer medicine, airway equipment or start IV’s. Councilmember Thigpen explained the firefighters on the department are not DHR certified and there aren’t many firefighters on the department that are trained to start an IV or administer medicine. Councilmember Thigpen stated the Department of Public Health regulates what medications or intravenous equipment is needed.

Discussion on active shooter response equipment and vehicle extrication and leak/spill control equipment. Active shooter equipment is probably not needed; the fire EMT is going to stage the area if there was an active shooter. Last year some of the active shooter equipment was purchased through the regular budget. The fire department received vehicle extrication equipment when the department got the ladder truck.

The consensus of the council is to redo the parking area for the fire and police departments and then recess what the money needs to be designated too. Mayor Pro tem Stokes commented that the fire department is having records calls for the year.

FYE 12/31/2022 Financial Update: City Manager Moore reported on the fiscal year finances through 12/31/2022. City Manager Moore is finishing out February’s finances and will bring to council a Resolution in March for budget amendments. Georgia Power franchise fees has increased 5% from last year. City Manager Moore has received a quote on the city’s group insurance, and we are looking at a 4% increase; she had budget for an 10% increase. City Manager Moore explained the Civic Center, Headstart and the Senior Center falls under Community Services. The budget is over approximately $5,000 because of a repair to an AC unit.
DISCUSSION ITEMS (cont’d):

Break for lunch from 11:50 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

Other:

**City Park:** City Manager Moore reported there has been an agreement with Columbia County since 1999 for servicing the City Park. Mayor Whitaker stated Columbia County has added $500,000 to the SPLOST for explicit use over at the city park. Columbia County failed to mention if the city uses the $500,000, the city will get the park back. Columbia County is maintaining the cutting of the grass, the lighting of the fields, cleaning the restrooms and maintenance. This is a very costly endeavor in what the county has been doing. It has been said the county is going to give up the city park, and the city’s public works will have to start maintaining it along with the property at the old North Harlem Elementary school. Mayor Whitaker stated she does not know who is over the jurisdiction of how the $500,000 is to be used. After the city receives the funds for the park, the county will turn the park over to the city. City Manager Moore stated when council began talking about purchasing the old North Harlem Elementary School property, she had got estimates on the cost of maintaining the Gateway Park in Grovetown; it cost the county approximately $60,000 a year to maintain the park, that does not include salary. Discussion on cost for the two parks and personnel.

**West Forrest Street Property:** Mayor Pro tem Stokes asked if anything has been done with the city property on West Forrest Street and he believes it needs to be on the tax digest. City Manager Moore stated the city still owns the property; the property would have to go out to bid to sale the property. The septic tank for the property on corner of N. Fairview Dr. and W. Forrest St. is on the city property. City Attorney Nelson commented the property could be given to the URA to redevelop. URA could contract with a builder to have a house built on the property.

**Brewery– New Street:** Mayor Whitaker gave a brief update on the brewery. Mr. McCloud’s banker was finishing up with some quotes and an engineer was supposed to meet him at the property. The engineer never showed up.

**San Saba Property:** Mayor Whitaker commented that the San Saba property price has dropped considerably. The price is now $795,000.

**Downtown Landscape:** Mayor Pro tem Stokes commented the landscape downtown is looking good and asked if the cement planters can be replaced. City Manager Moore replied public works is looking to replace the planters with something more modern. Councilmember Reeves stated the landscaping looks very good and for them to be sure city hall is done.

**Oliver Hardy Festival:** City Manager Moore explained a property owner/business owner has approached Meghan Foster about having three free spaces for the Oliver Hardy Festival. In the past the policy was one free space per business downtown. City Manager Moore asked council if they were all right with her responding the businesses only get one free space, if they do not want to pay for the other two spaces,
DISCUSSION ITEMS (cont’d):

Other (cont’d):

**Oliver Hardy Festival (cont’d):** they will not get the spaces. Council consensus is one free space per business. Councilmember Reeves offered for the city to use the back of his property for the festival if it is needed.

With there being nothing further for discussion, Councilmember Bellavance made the motion to adjourn the meeting; 2nd by Mayor Pro tem Stokes. The motion carried with Councilmembers Bellavance, Reeves, Stokes, and Thigpen voting in the affirmative. The meeting adjourned at 1:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Leona H. Holley
City Clerk