City Open House, City of Harlem, Georgia
February 16, 2023
Public Safety Building

The City of Harlem held an Open House on Thursday, February 16, 2023, at 7:00 p.m. at the Public Safety Building with Mayor Roxanne Whitaker presiding.

Present: COUNCIL: Mayor Roxanne Whitaker, Mayor Pro tem Gregg Stokes, Councilmember Daniel Bellavance, and Councilmember John Thigpen; STAFF: City Manager Debra Moore, and City Clerk Leona Holley; ABSENT: Councilmember Al Reeves.

Mayor Whitaker thanked everyone for coming out to the Open House and hoped everyone had a chance to visit the Fire Station to see the new ladder truck. Mayor Whitaker reported the fire truck is a good addition to the fleet and thanked Fire Chief Lonergan on his vision for the fire department with the purchase of the ladder truck.

A presentation video of Harlem was played for the audience.

Mayor Whitaker stated this is an informal meeting to introduce the faces of Harlem, to let the citizens know who is running the city. Mayor Whitaker shared people have visited Harlem for the Christmas parade and festival. This past year was one of the best Christmas parades and festival that Harlem has had; the event was largely due to our city workers and to Meghan Foster the director of the Laurel & Hardy Museum. The fire and police departments helps with every parade to provide safety.

**Introduction of Department Heads/Directors:** Mayor, Council, and Department Heads introduced themselves and gave a brief description of their departments.

a. **Mayor and Council:**
   Roxanne Whitaker - Mayor  
   Gregg Stokes – Mayor Pro tem  
   Daniel Bellavance – Councilmember  
   John Thigpen - Councilmember  

b. **Administrative Department – City Hall:**
   Debra Moore – City Manager  
   Leona Holley – City Clerk  

c. **Community Development:**
   David Jenkins – Community Development Director  
   John Johnson – Building Inspector and Permits  
   Pam Nickles – Code Enforcement & Fire Marshal  

d. **Community Services:**
   Sabrina Threet – Senior Center Coordinator  

e. **Fire Department:**
   Tripp Lonergan - Fire Chief  

f. **Museum & Welcome Center:**
   Meghan Foster – Director  

g. **Police Department:**
   Robert Lewis – Police Chief  

h. **Public Works Department:**
   Robert Fields – Public Works Director
County Officials – District 4 Commissioner Alison Couch: Commissioner Couch gave a brief introduction of herself.

City SPLOST 2023-2028 Projects: Mayor Whitaker reported on the proposed 2023-2028 SPLOST Projects. Negotiation went well with Columbia County and the funds from the SPLOST will help fund recreation, transportation (roads/sidewalks), vehicles and equipment (police and fire department) and buildings (new public works building).

Mayor Whitaker reported on future growth of Harlem - The Walking Trails are almost complete; we are waiting on paperwork from GDOT. Cornerstone subdivision has started on their final phase. Hickory Woods subdivisions are hoping to break ground soon and there are three other property developments that will be coming soon. Three potential businesses are looking to open this year on New Street.

City Proposed Park: Mayor Whitaker stated the city is in the final process of signing the paperwork for the old North Harlem Elementary School property on N. Fairview Drive. The plan for this property is to have a Veteran’s Memorial Park, a park with pavilions, picnic tables, green space, playground area, pickleball courts, and disc golf. The existing football field will be used for football, soccer, or lacrosse and for all to enjoy. There is a need for quality-of-life areas for the citizens of Harlem. Mayor Whitaker asked if anyone has ideas on how to make the park better to please share, the plans have not been finalized.

Public Comments/Questions: Mayor Whitaker opened the floor for public comments or questions.

Mickey Lonergan – 450 Harlem Grovetown Road – Mr. Lonergan commented on the entrance signs for Harlem and asked how many people visits the Museum in a month. Mayor Whitaker replied the entrance signs will be discussed at the quarterly work session next Friday and someone is already looking at the signs to see how they can be repaired; approximately 400 people visits the Museum per month. Mr. Lonergan asked who the design engineer for the park was; Mayor Whitaker replied the design was done by John McClellan.

Mayor Whitaker shared upcoming events throughout the city. These events are not necessarily sponsored by the city; the HMA (Harlem Merchants Association) is a very busy organization and they are keeping things hopping downtown. On March 18th there will be a Shamrock and Roll festival in the library plaza with a golf cart parade. The library and the museum are having a night time Easter egg hunt at the library plaza on March 28th. If anyone would like to contribute glow in the dark eggs, the library or museum are taking donations. The library has a lot of activates going on. They have story time on Tuesdays for the children, the first Wednesday of the month they have the American Girl doll club, and on Saturday’s they have crafts to pick up and go. On April 8th the Swinging Medallions will be doing a concert in the plaza at the library. This is a free concert sponsored by five businesses, Coleman Construction, Defoor Realty, Horizon Motor Coach, Main Street Treats and Whitaker Electric. Any donations collected will be given to a charity. There will be a Jazz concert, Mimosas on Main, the Bloomin Arts Festival and movie night in the plaza this summer. Mayor Whitaker stated there is something for all ages.

Mayor Whitaker thanked everyone that works so hard for Harlem, thanked the businesses and thanked the residents for choosing to live in Harlem. The Open house closed at 7:50 p.m.
Respectfully submitted,

Leona H. Holley
City Clerk