The City Council of the City of Harlem, Georgia met for a Quarterly Work Session on Friday, June 9, 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.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Whitaker at 8:35 a.m.

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

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

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Fire Department – Chief Tripp Lonergan and Assistant Chief Kevin Stokes:
- **Mutual Aid Agreement – Columbia County - Action Item:** City Manager Moore stated she spoke with Chief Lonergan on the Mutual Aid Agreement with Columbia County; Chief Lonergan has reviewed the Agreement. The Agreement is for the renewal of what is already in place for Mutual Aid with Columbia County. The Agreement is from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2028. Councilmember Thigpen made the motion to approve the Mutual Aid Agreement with Columbia County; 2nd by Mayor Pro tem Stokes. The motion carried with Councilmembers Bellavance, Reeves, Stokes, and Thigpen voting in the affirmative.

- **Personnel – Pay, ESI EAP Benefit:** Chief Lonergan explained as of May 26th the fire department has a firefighter position open. The position has been advertised with entry level pay; one application has been received since May 26th. Chief Lonergan stated at entry level pay they will be looking at a base entry level first year firefighter. They are looking for someone who has experience and will be able to work by themselves. Councilmember Thigpen stated he is familiar with the city’s pay rates and the pay rates in the surrounding areas; the city is competitive with entry level pay; they all are about the same. Councilmember Thigpen explained if the Chief would like to bring someone in that has experience, their credentials can be justified to move them up lateral on the pay grade; discussion of the pay scale should be between the chief, the employee, and the city manager. City Manager Moore explained the budget is based on the entry level position; she asked if the fire department is willing to cut back in other areas of the budget. City Manager Moore stated the money in the budget was placed in for the third firefighter position to start mid-year. Assistant Chief Stokes stated the firefighter position that needs to be filled should not be considered at entry level. Assistant Chief Stokes explained this firefighter will need to be able to work by themselves, be able to drive the trucks, run fire and medical calls, and basically operate as a department officer. Assistant Chief Stokes pulled the pay rates for surrounding areas for comparison; running fire only, entry level - Grovetown is $16.53 hr., Columbia County is $16.51, Greene County is $17.38. Chief Lonergan feels like something needs to be done to help with the recruitment of filling the positions for the fire department. Mayor Pro tem Stokes is concerned that four volunteer firefighters could
DISCUSSION ITEMS (cont’d):

Fire Department – Chief Tripp Lonergan and Assistant Chief Kevin Stokes (cont’d):

- **Fire Department – Chief Tripp Lonergan and Assistant Chief Kevin Stokes (cont’d):**
  - retire any day. Chief Lonergan stated it will take an entry level firefighter approximately a year of training before they can be left by themselves. Assistant Chief Stokes mentioned the way the station looks, and the cleanliness of the station is because of Robert Smith; he believes with the experience, the time with the city, the job he has done and the commitment he shows it might be time to consider changing Robert Smiths rank to retain him.

- **ESI EAP Benefits:** Assistant Chief Stokes reached out to EAP (Employee Assistance Program) provider for a quote for the employee assistance benefit program. The quote is $2,500 that will cover up to fifty employees and their families for the year and a flat rate of $3,000 to cover 50-100 employees. The city would pay for the program and the employees would have access to the program. The ESI EAP Employee Development Program includes training in compliance and professional and personal development. The program would help employees with counseling, guidance, and assistance for professional or personal issues. Assistant Chief Stokes stated there might be other assistance programs out there, he reached out to EAP because that is who Columbia County uses. The consensus of the council is for the program.

- **Vehicles – Replacement of Rescue/Wildland:** Chief Lonergan reported the fire department would like to surplus two vehicles and replace them with a mini pumper truck. The estimate for a mini pumper is $350,000. Rescue 1 is a 2005 vehicle and is having a lot of maintenance issues due to age and the other vehicle is the Wildland truck. Wildland was purchased from the 1033 program. A lot of work has been done on it as well. The mini pumper is a smaller vehicle, it would have a pump, hoses, medical supply compartments and will be able to get an ISO credit for the vehicle. The mini pumper will enable the department to go to areas where they cannot get a fire truck down. Assistant Chief Stokes stated they have talked with different dealers and the mini pumpers are not prevalent on the secondhand market. Also, when the new engine arrives the department does not have anywhere to place it, there are no bays available. The plan being proposed is to take Rescue 1 and Wildland out of the fleet, this will leave one bay open. Discussion was given on the ambulance being at Station 2. Chief Lonergan commented on the paving of the floor at Fire Station 1; he does not feel like he was out of line when he spoke with the owner of the company. He stated there were several places on the floor that were in question and Chief Lonergan was trying to get the best job for the city. The owner of the company was asked to fix the imperfections on the floor and provide the warranty to the city; now the paint on the floor is coming up in different areas. City Manager Moore has attempted to contact the owner regarding the issues.

Chief Lonergan and Assistant Chief Stokes left the meeting at 9:51 a.m.

**Development Updates – David Jenkins – Residential/Commercial:** Community Development Director David Jenkins gave a brief update on the residential developments:

- **Cornerstone Creek Subdivision:** Construction in Cornerstone Creek IV continues. Cornerstone Creek IV has ninety-five lots, and ten homes have been built so far. Mayor Whitaker asked if an HOA (Homeowners Association) will be formed when Cornerstone Creek IV is completed; Mr. Jenkins replied they can form a HOA, but the city cannot make them. Cornerstone Creek I and II
DISCUSSION ITEMS (cont’d):

Development Updates – David Jenkins – Residential/Commercial (cont’d):

- has chosen not to form an HOA, Cornerstone Creek III can form an HOA now. Each phase of Cornerstone Creek subdivision can have its own HOA. There are areas in Cornerstone Creek III the city owns and maintains; the city does not own or maintain areas in Section I and II of Cornerstone.
- Hickory Woods Subdivision: There have been twenty-three permits issued for Hickory Woods subdivision to date. There will be 110 homes in the Hickory Woods subdivision; they are on the rate to construct or permit out the entire subdivision by the end of this year.
- Bowdre Street Townhomes: Bowdre Street Townhomes, now known as Harlem Town Center, LLC, construction entrance is being installed. This development could be finished by September of this year.
- Heritage Ridge Townhomes – North Louisville Street: Staff mailed letters to remind the developer of the timetable with the city. A water line will need to be moved; this could cause issues with stormwater and erosion.
- Van Keuren Property – Appling Harlem Highway: There has been some boundary work done for the upcoming subdivision. The developers are working on the availability of the sewer system and working with FEMA on building a bridge across Euchee Creek.
- Georgia Vitrified Townhomes: Staff has reached out to the developers for the Georgia Vitrified Townhomes; they want the city to guarantee sewer, the sewer is up to Columbia County.
- Log Creek Property – Clary Cut Road: There have been no updates for this property.

Mr. Jenkins gave an update on the commercial properties:

- Heritage Ridge Commercial Property, N. Louisville Street – Richard Curry: The water line will have to be moved before construction can begin on the commercial development. They want to start with the commercial property first.
- J Harlem Auto Property – 370 West Milledgeville Road: A prospective company is looking at the property at 370 W. Milledgeville Road. Staff were contacted by the realtor, the company site designer, and the company appraiser. For a commercial site to go on the property it will require a Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition and rebuilding.
- Dollar General Plus: The new Dollar General Plus business on East Milledgeville Road has opened.
- Larry Prather Property – East Milledgeville Road: Mr. Prather has contacted staff with plans for a development on East Milledgeville Road. Staff had a conversation with GDOT regarding the entrance of this property and 200 East Milledgeville Road.
- Al Stevenson – 200 East Milledgeville Road: Recently Mr. Stevenson has cleared the lot at 200 East Milledgeville Road for insurance purposes. Staff had a conversation with Mr. Stevenson regarding Mr. Stevenson placing an Oil Change business on the lot. Staff had conversations with GDOT regarding an intersection for this property and the Prather property across the road from 200 E. Milledgeville Road. Mr. Stevenson should be coming back with a site plan for where Verdery Street will be realigned for an intersection. GDOT has come back with site distances where they would like to see the realignment of the Verdery Street intersection. Mr. Stevenson has discussed a land swap with the city for the portion of Verdery Street close to his property.
DISCUSSION ITEMS (cont’d):

**Development Updates – David Jenkins – Residential/Commercial (cont’d):**

- **Appling Harlem Highway:** Mr. Jenkins has started reviewing the area near Harlem High School on Appling Harlem Highway for future development. Mr. Jenkins asked Council to think about what type of development they would like to see for this area.

- **Durst Property – 275 West Milledgeville Road:** Mr. Jenkins reported an easement is needed for the sewer line for the Durst property at 275 West Milledgeville Road. The sewer line runs on the property south of the Durst Property, 270 Church Street. Columbia County is requesting a separate sewer tap for both properties; the current sewer line is a shared line. Mr. Jenkins stated he is waiting for an appraisal for the sewer line easement. City Attorney Nelson stated Mr. Jenkins has done everything if a condemnation has to be done for the easement.

- **Storage Building - 355 West Milledgeville Road:** Mr. Jenkins stated the developer for the storage buildings is working with GDOT on getting permission for any overflow of the detention pond in front of the property to go onto the state highway.

**Police Department – Chief Lewis – Administrative Personnel:** Chief Lewis requested adding a part-time administrative person to help the Records/Court Clerk. Chief Lewis stated Records Clerk Deborah James is overloaded due to increase in cases and having to go to Columbia County jail to help with 48-hour hearings; there are times she has to go to the jail on the weekends to help with the 48-hour hearings as well. Chief Lewis stated there needs to be an additional person in the office to help answer calls and to wait on people. City Manager Moore received emails from Judge Gary Beddingfield and City Prosecutor Robert Sussman stating they believe there is a need for additional personnel to help Ms. James due to the growing size of the court calendar each month and her other daily duties. Discussion was given on Ms. James duties, and what her duties are for the 48-hour hearings. Manager Moore asked if the other Records/Court Clerks reported to the jail for the 48-hour hearings; Chief Lewis responded they did not do as well as it should have been done. Councilmember Thigpen asked if there is a reason the arresting officers would not be at court; Chief Lewis replied if the officers do not have a case they do not have to be in attendance if the officers are at Superior Court or if they are on vacation the officer does not have to be there. Councilmember Thigpen commented on the City’s Prosecutors statement that if the arresting officer is not in court, he will have to dismiss the case or reduce the ticket fines. Councilmember Reeves asked Chief Lewis to make sure the officers are in attendance for court.

City Manager Moore reported the Police Department will be purchasing three Dodge Chargers from Thomson Motor Centre to be purchased with the current 2017-2022 SPLOST funds. The price is approximately $38,000 per vehicle; this does not include outfitting the vehicles. The Crown Vic’s will be surplused.

Chief Lewis left the meeting at 10:40 a.m.

**Harlem Civic Center Usage:** Mayor Whitaker stated people are interested in purchasing the Civic Center or leasing the building. City Attorney Nelson explained the Harlem Civic Center was deeded to the city in 1974, at that time there was a provision in the deed stating the city would place a plaque on the building for Mr. Walton and for the building to be used as a library. City Attorney Nelson stated the language of the
DISCUSSION ITEMS (cont’d):

**Harlem Civic Center Usage (cont’d):** was a covenant, under Georgia law a covenant that is over 20 years old is not enforceable. After 1994, the city legally owns the property. There was a discussion on having an appraisal of the property and leasing or selling the property. City Attorney Nelson explained the council needs to determine if they want to place the property out for bid or proposals, or transfer ownership of the property to the URA (Urban Redevelopment Agency). The council directed City Manager Moore to schedule an appraisal of the property.

**City Gateway Signage – Update:** City Manager Moore gave an update on the City Gateway signage. The following are the quotes that have been received to update the City Gateway signage:

- **Nelson Signs:** $4,050.00 ea. – Five 5x8 Sandblasted Sign w/custom matched paint - $20,250.00; includes labor
- **Brick & Mortar:** $3,781.80 – Maner Building Supply
- **Labor for Brick Installation:** $2,700.00 ea. $13,500.00 Raymond Johnson
  - $3,000.00 ea. $15,000.00 Malcolm Frails

Total Cost: $37,531.80 (Raymond Johnson) $39,031.80 (Malcolm Frails)

The proposed funding is to come from the General Fund-Capital Project Account or ARP-SLFRF funds. There was discussion on the design of the signs with a changeable portion for informational purposes.

**San Saba Property:** Councilmember Bellavance and Reeves commented on the city purchasing the San Saba property for the possibility of moving Public Works to the property. It was also discussed if the city purchased the property, selling a portion of the property for development. Councilmember Reeves suggested offering to purchase the property for $700,000 to $750,000. The cost to purchase the property, demolition of the building and removal of asbestos is approximately $2.2 million.

**Harlem City Park:** Mayor Whitaker and City Manager Moore met with Commissioner Alison Couch regarding the City Park. City Manager Moore stated the 2023-2028 proposed SPLOST the county set aside $500,000 for upgrades to the city park; after the upgrades it has been said the city park would be turned back over to the city. Currently the agreement between the city and the county is that the county maintains the park in exchange for them scheduling games through the Recreation Department. The county cost for maintenance, personnel and electricity is approximately $40,000. Mayor Pro tem Stokes asked how the lights at the park are maintained; the lights are possibly on a timer or manually turned on and off. Mayor Whitaker stated on June 28th herself, Ms. Moore and Public Works Director Robert Fields are to meet with Commissioner Couch and engineers of the recreation department to do a walk-through of the park to see what needs to be upgraded or repaired before any decision is made to turn it back over to the city. Councilmember Thigpen stated he is not opposed to taking the city park back over, but there will be a cost; the city will have to maintain the park, the Senior Center, the Headstart Building and the new park. Mayor Pro tem Stokes stated when traveling softball/baseball teams comes to town to use the city park, there will be more people coming into Harlem and visiting the local businesses, this could be an
DISCUSSION ITEMS (cont’d):

Harlem City Park (cont’d): offset of the cost for the park. Discussion on tearing down the old green building, building another pavilion, installing new playground equipment, and jumping pad. Mayor Whitaker asked Council if they wanted to voluntarily take the city park back over or wait for the county to give it back to the city. Councilmember Thigpen stated he thinks the city should voluntarily take the park back over. Councilmember Reeves stated if the county was to give the park back right away, the city is not equipped at this time to take it over. Mayor Pro tem Stokes asked City Attorney Nelson if the county can say what the city will have to spend the $500,000 on. City Attorney Nelson responded if it were an expenditure of the county’s SPLOST allocation it would have to go parks; he would have to look at the ballot language to see what references to the SPLOST on how to be used.

Transportation Discussion – Crosswalks, Speed Limit, Sidewalk Expansions, Commercial Trucks:

• Crosswalks: There has been requests by citizens to have crosswalks with flashing lights in front of Monte Olivos Restaurant, Java House, and Hardees to IGA. City Attorney Fleming has spoken with GDOT. Another request needs to be sent to GDOT for the crosswalks with flashing lights.
• Speed Limit: After the paving of South Louisville Street the 25-mph speed limit sign close to Keener Street has been moved closer to Harlem Baptist Church, the sign needs to be moved back. City Manager Moore emailed the GDOT engineer that has worked with the city requesting the speed limit sign to be moved back; she has not received a response.
• Sidewalk Expansions: Request has come in for sidewalk expansions for the city. The areas that have been requested are: East Milledgeville Road close to the Housing Authority, North Fairview Drive, and South Louisville Street. Discussion on looking into a Federal Government Transportation Alternative Program Grant.
• Commercial Trucks: Discussion on placing more signage on Highway 221 North for the railroad crossing at Sawdust Road and Highway 78 West. Community Development Director David Jenkins has done everything to try to get Google to change the GPS routing systems for commercial trucks. Discussion on contacting GDOT to see if they could place signs out for the railroad.

City Manager Moore has reached out to GDOT on the transportation issues.

City Projects Update:

• Oliver Hardy Paving Improvements: The paving project for Oliver Hardy Court started this week. The project is expected to be completed by the middle of August.
• Harlem Rec Trail Phase II: Phase II of the walking trail was put on hold; this phase would be the paving and connection to the second section of the trail. The city could consider applying for a Recreation Trails Grant for Phase II in the future.
• N. Fairview Drive Park (Old North Harlem Elementary Property): Still waiting on the final contract from the Board of Education on the old North Harlem Elementary Property. There was discussion on personnel and equipment for the park and quality of life for Harlem. Discussion on a Veterans Memorial on the property. The funding of the park for quality of life would be through the funds from the sale of the water and sewer system.
**FYE 12/31/2023 Financial Update:** City Manager Moore presented to Council financial information on the General Fund FYE December 31, 2023 through the end of May. All the departments are within their budgets.

**Personnel Updates (Possible Executive Session):** Moved to Executive Session.

Mayor Pro tem Stokes made the motion to go into Executive Session; 2nd by Councilmember Thigpen. The motion carried with Councilmembers Bellavance, Reeves, Stokes, and Thigpen voting in the affirmative. Executive Session opened at 1:22 p.m.

Councilmember Thigpen made the motion to come out of Executive Session; 2nd by Mayor Pro tem Stokes. The motion carried with Councilmembers Reeves, Stokes, and Thigpen voting in the affirmative. Councilmember Bellavance left the meeting at 1:55 p.m. Executive Session closed at 2:15 p.m.

City Attorney Nelson reported that there were three Personnel matters discussed and one Litigation matter and no final action was taken.

Mayor Pro tem Stokes made the motion to authorize the Mayor to sign the Affidavit acknowledging this report; 2nd by Councilmember Thigpen. The motion carried with Councilmembers Reeves, Stokes, and Thigpen voting in the affirmative.

City Attorney Nelson left at 2:18pm; Councilmember Bellavance returned to the meeting at 2:18 p.m.

**Other:** Mayor Pro tem Stokes asked for Public Works to start coming up with a schedule for the grass cutting for the city. Councilmember Reeves commented whenever possible, for the city to try to use local businesses.

With there being nothing further for discussion Councilmember Thigpen 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 2:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Leona H. Holley  
City Clerk