

Regular Council Meeting

June 6, 2023

Meeting called to order by Mayor Harley at 6:00 pm.

Invocation given by Councilman Armijo.
Pledge of Allegiance led by Councilman Evans.
Welcome extended to all by Mayor Harley.

Present were Mayor John R. Harley, Councilman Robert D. Bird, Jr., Councilman Justin Wright, Councilman J. Micheal Evans, Councilman Edward Armijo and City Attorney Rebecca Tydings.

Public Comments

None

Adoption of Minutes: Motion made by Councilman Bird to adopt both sets of minutes as written; seconded by Councilman Wright. Motion carried.

- May 2, 2023
- May 16, 2023 Council Work Session

Old Business

None

New Business

Proclamation Rolling Thunder, Inc.: Councilman Armijo read proclamation and presented it to Kristin Moriarty and members of Rolling Thunder. Ms. Moriarty thanked Mayor and Council; the City of Centerville has supported the organization for multiple years. More than a just a flag, means so much to families that they are not forgotten. On Memorial Day went to Andersonville and a MIA from Augusta, Georgia was accounted for, 72 years later, fought in Korean War, possibly medal of honor recipient. This was a heart driven journey and a true honor to be a part of the ceremony. Thanked Mayor and Council again.

Update Literacy Program (Centerville Elementary) - Kathy Hart, Chairman of Literacy Program, Rotary Club: Mayor Harley mentioned he had spoken with Mrs. Hart and invited her to meeting to talk about the Rotary Club, Literacy Program at Centerville Elementary. Mrs. Hart stated Read United is an initiative of United Way of Central Georgia to address literacy challenges facing Central Georgia. The volunteers help children increase their reading literacy and become a positive influence in the child's life, thus improving the overall health and wellness of our community. Informed all that Centerville Rotary Club partners with United Way of Central Georgia. They have been a blessing, when Rotary Club wanted to start this up with Centerville Elementary School, they came in and trained members.

Learning to read is critical in the early years of childhood because of the shift that occurs in the schools when the child enters grade four. From kindergarten to third grade, a child "learns to read". When the child enters grade four, the child "reads to learn". If a child does not know how to read, this will shape their futures in a negative way. All children must learn to read.

The program focuses on grades 1-3 learning how to read. Houston County is a little better off than some other counties a little better than 50%. Many factors contribute to children being left behind; lower income school zones, poverty broken homes. Drug addiction and parents who have adult literacy issues. The rotary club offers GED scholarships which provide 48 testing scholarships every year, \$160.00 to take the test, try to help those who cannot afford it. Also, they donate books with words of encouragement to Centerville Elementary students and present to library. Also, the club contributes \$400 each year to the Museum of Aviation for STEM program. This program started in 2018 in Centerville, this program is being used by other entities to help get kids ready for the 4th grade. You want a community that is work force ready, particularly ready when RAFB is one of the biggest employers, “reading is the key to our success”. Waylon Smith with Read United began the literacy program. Will continue to move forward with program. Encouraged everyone to express gratitude for the program and will continue to keep on working with program. Go twice a week and have different volunteer that goes and reads with kids most of the school day. 16-17 rotary volunteers each week.

Motion made by Councilman Wright to move agenda items 6&7 to items 5&6; seconded by Councilman Bird. Motion carried.

Discussion-Reductions to Proposed Budget: Councilman Wright glad to have tonight to have some feedback, mentioned documents in packet for review. A couple of items to discuss, original budget amounted to a 12% increase as opposed to last year budget, over 1 million dollars, might not be current since there have been some discussions about revising budget. Read the following from the City of Centerville Code of Ordinance:

Section: 2-404 (d) Action by City Council on Budget

“the city council shall not make any appropriations in excess of any estimated revenue, except to provide for an actual emergency threatening the health, property, or lives, safety or general welfare of the inhabitants of the city, which emergency shall be declared by the affirmative vote of three members of the council”.

It’s also worth noting that we should see increased revenues from new home developments being completed over the next few years, but that is not a guarantee, and it could be 2-3 years before we realize any of those funds. This problem is magnified by the fact that our current revenue includes three significant outside sources:

- **ARPA-\$566,000**
 - o The ARPA money is gone after this year.
- **Water/Sewer-\$555,000**
 - o Transfer funds-common practice.
- **General Fund-\$255,000**

If the (3) projected revenues are used in this FY 2023-2024 budget then that still leaves approximately \$300,000 shortfall. If the approved tax increase had been approved, even if added in with tax assessment still about 300,000 over budget. Part of the discussion will be millage rate; tax rate and greater problem is a budget where expenditures exceed revenues.

Understand on May 30, Mayor and Councilman Armijo (budget committee) called a meeting with all department heads. During the course of this meeting, it was asked of the department heads to explain and justify budget requests a second time. Found out just last night that during that meeting Mayor and Councilman Armijo asked Director of Economics Bryant to use information from department heads and put together a presentation for tonight. Councilman Wright stated he did not request this and stressed this puts Mrs. Bryant in an awkward position, as if she was lobbying for these increases. Mentioned the memo again that he had provided last

week with proposed reductions in expenditures. Stressed his position is still to put forward a balanced budget, we are required by law as listed in the Code of Ordinances. In his opinion, it appears that the budget process was a little backwards. It was approached by deciding how much we wanted to spend instead of the other way around. It is my opinion that the economy is on shaky ground and to pass a budget this large is a little dubious. If this budget is passed, mathematically, by law, would compel a tax rate increase. Puts us in a difficult position. Stated that he does not believe the budget should be used to state that we need to increase taxes (raise the millage rate). All items are important, but with the projected revenue, not all are urgent.

It is up to Mayor and Council to determine what is urgent and what can wait. We can and should wait for the current economy to settle down. Also mentioned that changes will come on the national level with the upcoming Presidential election. Stated that he hopes for a spirited discussion; there are some things we should look at before moving forward adoption of the budget. Mentioned conversation he had with Mayor Harley, adding Mayor Harley stated we could pass budget as it stands and amend later if necessary. Have never seen ours or another government adopt a budget and then amend it by decreasing.

Mayor Harley responded in saying the budget committee doesn't make any decisions, only presents a proposed budget. Mayor and Council make the decision of adopting budget. Looked at all departments budget separately and then look at the total before looking at cutting from requested budget items. Provided a copy of millage rate history for review, stating that last year against his advice, adopted the roll back rate, 1.6 mill lower. Have a 5-year budget plan, showing need for more police and fire. Future growth, we have hundreds of homes being built in the city, have to plan ahead. Have to be ready.

Councilman Armijo stated had a difficult time listening, felt Councilman Wright was misleading the public. It is public knowledge that there is a schedule out there when budget committee meets. To suggest that the budget committee-me, called meeting with department heads is not part of the budget process, is a false. It is part of the schedule.

The first thing that was stated a few weeks ago was that the Mayor and I were approving everything that was brought before budget committee; false. In previous years the department heads came to the meeting, they were informed to stay as close to current budget or even less, if possible. The committee wanted to know what requirements you have – needs not wants. The city is growing, needs for larger departments, people, equipment and the infrastructure of the city needs to grow and has grown. Not saying the limit is the sky, this is a logical process.

Plan on having a planning committee in January after budget to discuss further what the vision is with the City of Centerville. What is that we need to keep the city going? The idea that we want to spend the money and ask for justification later, anyone in their right mind knows that doesn't do that, we don't want to do that, city does not run like that. The purpose of the meeting was to explain where each department is, this was the intention. This was not to discuss millage rate, haven't laid out the plan. Trust me, the last thing anyone wants to do is to be reckless, this is not what we want to do. The common thing heard from Councilman Wright is that he wants to leave everything the same, not grow, stated he wants to wait.

National politics will be here forever, will always be. This is not a political speech; we are elected to make decisions that are fair and equitable for the city and protect the citizens. Mentioned the food truck Friday, maxed out with people, they were enjoying what we had put on, and in order to do this must continue to grow and provide services. Growth is important, we would have not gotten the fire station, if we had not elected to vote to do so. It did cost us some money;

however, we have a safe place for our firefighters. Councilman Wright was not in favor to move forward, no, he wanted to wait. This is not a political speech; the city needs to take a look at it as a whole and to make decisions. Are we going to sit still or make rational decisions, taking everything into consideration? Budget committee will take everything into consideration. Before we pull out the big guns, don't put the cart before the horse, not how we do business. We are following the budget process/schedule, listening to our citizens about concerns, and staying within the requirements of the law. Do what we need to do to keep city moving forward, to provide for citizens. Ask all to put your trust in us, we are citizens too, live here and care about our city and citizens. Even though we may have difference of opinions, the discussions are still going to occur.

Councilman Wright stated he does not have a copy of the budget schedule and asked if it listed a meeting scheduled for May 30. Clarified that he did not state that Councilman Armijo called it, said that both Mayor Harley and Councilman Armijo did so, has the email. Did not mislead anybody, said several times this is completely appropriate. Did not say wanted to wait on the fire station – he just asked why there was an additional 1.3 million increase in the cost to build it. Asked the questions and got answers and proceeded. We are contemplating a lot of expenditures and hopes on these new housing developments - sincerely hope that these are built, which will be best for the city. The last time we saw a housing market like this was in 2005, 2006 and 2007, market tanked due to an economy just like this one. Developments sat uncompleted for 15 years. Asked if there are 100% of the current positions filled in the Police Department, Chief Duncan answered “no”. Asked Chief Jones if there are positions open in the Fire Department, Chief Jones, currently no open positions at this time. Nothing against Police Department, that work is a tough nut to crack in these times. Referenced an email received from the mayor proposing we pass budget as submitted and hold off implementing some of it until we review millage rate and modify as needed. Why pass this as written knowing it is more money than we can spend instead of passing with the money we have to spend and if necessary, can amend due to increased revenues and or emergencies. Why put it on the credit card now?

Mayor Harley stated that we have a balanced budget in a sense. Mentioned past practices re: revenues and millage rate. The millage rate continues to go down, down. We are getting back to where we were when I was elected as Mayor in 2009. Provided graph for comparison of millage rates for all to review. Councilman Wright has reviewed, adding that property values have risen tremendously. Mentioned ISO ratings, insurance companies generally don't recognize anything higher than a 3 ISO rating. Chief Jones stated some do and some don't. A 12% budget increase is off the charts, believe this is the biggest one that the city has ever had.

Councilman Evans, been on council 8 years, since 2015, have sat through the budget process. This city council has done a good job for our citizens, have been fiscally responsible and provide services for citizens. If you call 911 emergency responders show up. Not worried about national politics, serve the city. Any money on public safety whether on fire or police is well spent, want the community safe. Bottom line is this we are not talking housing market, service to citizens. Referenced his upcoming retirement, will have make adjustments based on income. Again, city council have been fiscally responsible, cannot cut back on services for the citizens, we are going to get through this and will provide a budget that will meet the citizens' needs. You can count on this and you can take it to the bank.

Councilman Wright asked if we pass this budget, can we do this. Mayor Harley said “yes”, however, he believes it would be a bad idea, stressed that the funds are available.

Performance Presentation: Councilman Wright made motion to table this item indefinitely, since it is listed under his name. Motion failed for lack of second.

Director of Economic Development Bryant provided a handout that provided information received by Municipal Court (data from last 2 years), Fire (calls with graph 4pgs. of incidents, rate of 100 a month), Police (no content-issues accessing data-Houston County) and Public Works (work orders), tried to separate out information. Mrs. Bryant provided brief summary of each department, highlighted information with comparison as provided. Copy attached and made part of official minutes.

Councilman Wright asked if we have Mutual Aid Agreements with county, good relationship. Chief Jones confirmed "yes", Houston County called for assistance last night. Councilman Wright inquired about the request to hire 2 more firefighters for FY 2024 fiscal year budget. Chief Jones stated this will provide 5 fire fighters on each shift, guaranteed 2 on rescue truck. Since 2008 only have had 4 per shift; calls have doubled.

Councilman Armijo thanked Shannon, wanted to get a picture of what we are committing to with the budget we are living with now, shows you there is growth and needs - everyone plays a part, thanked to department heads for information contributed.

Councilman Evans thanked Mrs. Bryant and department heads.

Mayor stated he appreciates efforts in Police Department.

Public Hearing - FY 2024 Recommended Budget: Mayor Harley closed regular council meeting and opened public hearing at 7:18pm.

Susan Lemme, 219 Mason Drive, first thing wanted to say, have some concerns after listening to federal government passing their budget, increasing debt limit. Hope we never have to do this with city budget. Concerned about funds that are in this budget that may not be available in the future(AARPA), 2.9 in the AARPA funds, mentioned dollar amount in revenue funds. Seeking some clarification.

Councilman Wright corrected that there is \$ 500,000 is left over in AARPA funds that will not be available next year and going forward.

Revenue 2.4 million anticipated from property taxes, we are not that far apart. Mentioned about millage value and how fees are calculated for the property taxes.

Thanked Mayor and Council for rolling back millage rate last year. This year we have had a boom in real estate, if budget is higher, please consider somewhere in between the highest rate you could adopt and the low millage rate adopted last year. Can't spend money that we don't have, I can't do this at home. The money has to come from somewhere. Inflation has hit us all this year. Raises were granted for employees, they are deserving. As a tax payer likes to hear about what we are expecting out of this money, would like to know what we are going to do with this money, would accept a little more willingly if there was a slight increase. Please keep it on the low side, people that have been here for a long time, be more professional about it.

Consider good budgeting, evaluate every department what the needs are, researched some years ago, standards of police department. We are doing more with less sometimes, but do not have to jump up with a much higher millage rate, that doesn't equal budget, they are different. Senior exemption, at some point, would like to get her exemption when she is there (age 70). There needs to be a study to bring a referendum to the city placing senior exemption on the ballot. Spoke about SPLOST projects, will be addressing county with inquiries. Mr. Brumfield provided update on Wilson and Elberta Rd. projects. The largest increase that she saw was the social security has increased, as far as other expenses, mentioned, utilities and food cost. Stressing

again to keep this down on the inflation side. When making contracts with people, search those that do not increase cost of living, ex: 40% for dumpster fees, can't balance a budget on service and charge citizens for services. Make this a long-term solution, not just get it passed. Also ask for efficiency for services. Totally understand we have needs for services.

With no further comments offered, Mayor Harley closed public hearing and re-opened regular council meeting at 7:33pm.

Point of Information-Center Park Fence Installation: Councilman Wright/ Director of Economic Development Bryant discussed the need for a chain link fence, has come a point for safety concerns. Keep this a safe space. Fence will be installed considered as an emergency purchase; funds are available, park maintenance budget line item. Installation should be happening this week; a one-day project. No motion or action taken.

Comments from Council

Post 4 Councilman Armijo, thanked Rolling Thunder, thanked Mayor for bringing rotary club in tonight. The city is do a lot of great things in the community, thanked Shannon again for briefing, nothing wrong with sharing with community. Farmers Market was incredible had a great time, growing, yoga and Food Truck Friday, had a great time.

Post 3 Councilman Evans, no comment.

Post 2 Councilman Wright, no comment.

Post 1 Councilman Bird, echoed comments about Center Park, crowded at food truck Friday; people waiting in lines for food. The splash pad, so much of a success, all employees that have made this possible, thanked local community. Agree with majority of Ms. Lemme comments, majority, feel like employees are above and beyond what we can ask for, increase in compensation - do not feel like that get what they deserve, thanked here for coming out and made some good points. The millage rate issue will be addressed in the future. As far as budget goes, will be a wait and see. Everyone had good points some can be made a little more diplomatically, every now and then there may be a clash.

Mayor Harley, cannot do anything with millage rate until July when we receive county numbers (digest), this is when we start talking. Thanked all of the people coming out to the park, part of this was built by the SPLOST funds, everyone is welcome, get a lot of great comments. Mentioned Mayor of Warner Robins loves to bring her son to the splash pad.

Mayor Harley adjourned meeting at 7:42pm.

Mayor John R. Harley

Attest by City Clerk Krista Bedingfield

Date: _____