DeFuniak Springs City Council
Meeting Minutes
Council Chambers
January 13, 2025

1. Call to Order

Mayor Bob Campbell called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

Present: Mayor Bob Campbell; Councilmember Josh Sconiers (Seat 2); Councilmember Amy Heavilin (Seat 3); Councilmember Glen Harrison (Seat 4); Councilmember Anthony Vallée (Seat 5).

Absent: Mayor Pro-Tempore Todd Bierbaum (Seat 1).

Also, present were City Manager Koby Townsend, City Attorney Clay Adkinson, Finance Director Steven Rausch, and City Clerk Rafael Ali.

2. CONSENT AGENDA
A. Additions/Deletions to the Consent Agenda
B. Approval of the Consent Agenda

A motion was made to approve the consent agenda by Councilmember Vallee and seconded by Councilmember Sconiers; the motion passed without objection.

3. REGULAR AGENDA
A. Additions/Deletions to the Regular Agenda
B. Approval of the Regular Agenda

A motion was made to approve the regular agenda by Councilmember Vallee and seconded by Councilmember Sconiers; the motion passed without objection.

C. City Manager K. Townsend
1. Cash Handling Policy

Mr. Townsend presented on the Cash Handling Policy.

Mr. Townsend stated that there have been two different theft incidents occurring in the city recently.

Mrs. Heavilin stated that she thinks there are a couple of places where we can strengthen the policy.

Mrs. Heavilin stated that she can bring back language.

Mr. Sconiers stated that he likes that the City Manager is pursuing this.

Mayor Campbell stated that there won't be a motion on this until the next meeting.

2. Life Enrichment Senior Center

Mr. Townsend presented on the Life Enrichment Senior Center.

Mr. Vallee stated that he would like this item to return as a proposal at the next City Council meeting, including a potential agreement with Tri-County and Walton County.

Mr. Vallee emphasized that the Senior Center is an important part of the community.

Mr. Vallee explained that a continuing partnership with the city would provide the Senior Center with resources it has not had in the past due to limited staff.

Mr. Vallee commended the director for doing an excellent job of bringing the community together and ensuring that seniors are well cared for.

Mr. Vallee noted the urgency of the issue due to staffing shortages at the Senior Center.

Mr. Vallee expressed a desire to understand the potential costs of supporting the Senior Center.

Mr. Vallee added that while he does not want to overcommit, he wants to better understand the ramifications of such support.

Mr. Sconiers stated that he would like the City Manager to bring back a proposal on how the city can assist and what funding opportunities are available.

Mr. Sconiers highlighted that this is an opportunity for the city to care for an important group in the community.

Mr. Sconiers also emphasized that this program helps ensure seniors remain active.

Mayor Campbell mentioned that Crestview admires the work being done in DeFuniak Springs with the Senior Center and would like to replicate it.

Mayor Campbell stressed the importance of collaborating with the county and Tri-County, and said the conversation would continue with the council in upcoming meetings.

Mr. Harrison acknowledged the importance of the issue and assured that they would work on finding a solution to keep the program running.

Mrs. Heavilin stated that she believes an employee at the Senior Center was penalized due to a flaw in the process and should be reinstated.

Mrs. Heavilin asked Mr. Townsend to see if they could reconsider their decision regarding the employee.

Mr. Vallee stated that there should be at least an interim director for the Senior Center.

Mrs. Heavilin asked Mr. Adkinson if there was anything that could be done to reinstate the employee.

Mr. Adkinson explained that it is the center's policy and discretion on how to proceed. He added that this issue should be addressed with direction for future actions.

Mr. Townsend will meet with Paul and the county to bring back a proposal to the council.

Mr. Vallee pointed out that the Senior Center has important upcoming timelines.

Mr. Vallee noted that lack of communication could erode the community that has been built around the Senior Center.

Mayor Campbell stated that they would revisit the issue in two weeks and develop a solid plan.

Mr. Vallee acknowledged that Tri-County and Walton County have been great partners.

JB Hillard, a citizen of DeFuniak Springs, stated that a 60-day notice is required for any party to withdraw from the agreement.

Mr. Hillard also stressed that there should be clear communication with the Senior Center's 400+ members.

Mr. Hillard mentioned that someone should communicate these details to the members.

Mr. Hillard stated that the Senior Center should not be run by volunteers alone.

Mr. Sconiers asked if Tri-County could use the Senior Center's email account for communication.

Mayor Campbell thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

Susan Bakalo, a citizen of DeFuniak Springs, expressed that the Senior Center team is strong and works together through both good times and bad.

Mrs. Bakalo assured the group that she would continue to be involved, regardless of her employment status, and would work to keep everyone informed.

Mayor Campbell called for a five-minute recess.

3. Old City Hall Property - Discussion & Direction

Mr. Townsend presented on the Old City Hall property.

Mr. Townsend stated that he seeks the council's direction on how they would like to proceed with the property.

Mr. Sconiers asked if there is anything legally preventing the council from entertaining this new offer.

Mr. Adkinson replied that there is nothing legally preventing the council from considering this offer, but he does have some comments regarding it.

Mr. Sconiers asked what objections Mr. Adkinson had.

Mr. Adkinson explained that the closing would need to take place in Florida, since it is a Florida closing. He also noted that the responsibilities for closing costs should be clarified, as they are not clear in the current offer. Additionally, when it is written as vague as this, they might try to make the city pay the documentary stamps, even though the city is tax-exempt.

Mr. Adkinson mentioned that the biggest issue is with paragraph 17, which indicates that the seller is responsible for paying 5% of the closing costs.

Mr. Adkinson also stated that he does not have concerns about 1031 exchanges.

Mr. Sconiers asked if it would be appropriate for Mr. Townsend to reach out and address these issues.

Mr. Adkinson responded that it is up to the council to make that decision.

Mayor Campbell invited Park Mote to the podium.

Mr. Mote stated that the closing location does not bother him. He also confirmed that they will cover the documentary stamps and that he is open to negotiating the broker fee.

Mr. Mote added that he has visited city hall and the council had not raised these concerns previously.

Mr. Vallee stated that this is a matter of whether the council wants to reduce the sale price.

Mrs. Heavilin expressed interest in discussing the possibility of what would happen if the city keeps the property.

Mr. Vallee stated that there have been many decisions made regarding the use of the old timber building. He acknowledged that while the property is an asset, the city has another great asset in its possession.

Mr. Vallee asked if the $93,750 is for the 5% commission.

Mr. Townsend confirmed that it is.

Mayor Campbell noted that once the building is sold, the city will no longer need to pay for its maintenance, and that it is not generating any revenue. He added that by selling the property, the city will benefit from utilities and tax advantages.

Mayor Campbell acknowledged that he would like to see a higher price for the property, but understands why the price is lower.

Mayor Campbell also pointed out that once the property is sold, it could become a very attractive location.

Mrs. Heavilin asked if the city has ever considered renting out the building.

Mr. Townsend replied that if the council is interested in pursuing this, he can look into a ground lease for the property.

Mrs. Heavilin asked if the Mayor's statement about the maintenance costs is accurate.

Mr. Townsend confirmed that the city is still maintaining the building.

Mrs. Heavilin stated that she would like to explore what the building could become if rented out. She also expressed that she does not want to see a price reduction.

Mr. Townsend stated that he will follow the direction of the five council members, but he does not believe the city should get into the property management business due to liability concerns.

Mr. Townsend emphasized that a ground lease might be the best option, if anything.

Mr. Vallee mentioned that the city would need to prepare the property for use if a ground lease were pursued. He also acknowledged Mrs. Heavilin's perspective.

Mayor Campbell stated that the building is not ADA-compliant, and getting it up to standard would require funding. He also noted that the building is older and located at a prime corner of the city.

Mr. Harrison stated that he believes the property is a prime piece of real estate in the city and emphasized the importance of what is placed in that corner.

Mr. Mote responded that if the state determines a $2 million cleanup cost, he would not proceed with the property.

Mr. Harrison inquired if, under the purchase agreement's 180-day examination period, the buyer has the right to terminate the agreement at their discretion.

Mr. Mote confirmed that this is correct.

Mr. Mote also raised the question of what would happen if the environmental issues are more serious than expected. He stated that at the end of the 180-day period, the decision to close on the property will be clear.

Mr. Adkinson asked Mr. Mote if he has any issues with the closing being in Florida. Mr. Mote replied that he does not.

Mrs. Heavilin asked if Mr. Mote would reduce the 5% commission. Mr. Mote replied that he is willing to reduce the price to $1,781,000.

Mr. Sconiers asked if he could propose a motion to clean up and incorporate everything that has been discussed.

A motion was made to approve entering into the contract with the changes made on the record including the purchase price reduction and the removal of the commission in exchange of the purchase price reduction by Councilmember Sconiers and seconded by Councilmember Vallee; the motion passed with Councilmember Heavilin voting nay.

Mr. Vallee stated that his only concern is with the reduction in price, but he is not going to oppose the motion because of that.

Mark Hamley stated that this is a key entry point in the city, and he wants to ensure that whatever is developed here is something that makes people proud.

Dan Cosson remarked that while the city has a lot of gas stations, there aren't enough things that enhance the quality of life in the city.

Mr. Townsend stated that Mr. Mote is the intermediary with whoever will own and develop the property.

Mr. Townsend explained that as long as the project meets the qualifications of the city's land development code, the city must respect property rights. However, the city can always communicate the public's and the council's wishes to the developers.

Mr. Vallee added that the city can influence how the property looks.

He further explained that one of the reasons the city is working on updating the land development code is to preserve the character of the area.

Mr. Vallee acknowledged that the process of updating the code is slow because it requires a lot of public input.

Mr. Vallee stated that the changes are slow on purpose.

4. Request for a Public Works/Utilities Director Position

Mr. Townsend presented a request for a Public Works/Utilities Director position.

Mr. Townsend clarified that he is not asking to change any existing positions.

He explained that he sees a need for a Public Works Director.

Mr. Sconiers asked which project needed to be postponed.

Mr. Townsend responded that the project in question was to redo the city's meter reading hardware and software.

He further explained that this project is not currently a priority and that he needs the necessary staff to properly monitor it.

A motion was made to approve the Public Works/Utilities Director position by Councilmember Vallee and seconded by Councilmember Sconiers; the motion passed without objection.

Mayor Campbell stated that he was surprised when the Public Works Director position was eliminated.

He mentioned that he thought it was a mistake to rely on three superintendents to handle all of that work.

Mrs. Heavilin expressed concerns about this request, stating that the previous manager believed it was necessary to have three superintendents in place.

Mrs. Heavilin added that she is concerned because the new position will require continued funding and the budget will increase every year.

Mr. Townsend clarified that there were no salary increases when the Public Works Director position was eliminated.

He explained that the superintendents did not receive a pay increase due to the absence of the Public Works Director.

Mayor Campbell stated that most of the superintendents had the qualifications to serve in their roles.

Mrs. Heavilin asked what additional projects the new Public Works Director would be responsible for.

Mr. Townsend responded that the city currently has three superintendents and one project manager.

He further explained that this new position is necessary because he is being pulled in multiple directions.

Mr. Townsend emphasized that while he is able to manage these responsibilities, having the new position will allow the city to function better.

Mr. Sconiers mentioned that the sewer plant continues to be a significant issue. He highlighted that inflow and outflow have been problematic. He also noted that there have been public discussions on how the city will fund these projects.

Mr. Sconiers stated that this new position will be crucial to resolving the issues related to wastewater and sewage.

He added that he believes the position is necessary for the city manager to help the city move forward.

Mrs. Heavilin asked who would report to the new Public Works Director.

Mr. Townsend answered that the three superintendents and the project manager would report to the Public Works Director.

Mrs. Heavilin asked if Mr. Townsend believes he could manage until the next budget cycle to implement the new position.

Mr. Townsend responded affirmatively.

Mrs. Heavilin then asked how much the water metering project would cost.

Mr. Townsend answered that it would cost $452,000.

Mrs. Heavilin asked how much it would cost to employ the new position.

Mr. Townsend replied that the salary range for the position would be between $125,000 and $155,000.

Mrs. Heavilin asked how much of that would come from the general fund.

Mr. Townsend explained that this year, it would be 100% funded by the water fund, and next year it would be split 50% from the general fund and 50% from utility funds.

Mr. Townsend also mentioned that the cemetery foreman had recently resigned, which will help offset the cost.

Mr. Vallee stated that the Public Works Director will assist with coordinating the water meter project.

He added that the Public Works Director will also help coordinate with different departments throughout the city.

Mrs. Henderson asked if the council is considering hiring an engineer for this position.

Mr. Townsend responded that it would depend on how much the city is willing to pay for the employee to perform those services.

Mr. Harrison stated that the city manager cannot manage Public Works issues while running all the different departments.

Mrs. Heavilin asked how many direct reports Mr. Townsend currently has.

Mr. Townsend answered that he currently has 12 direct reports.

Mr. Cosson asked if there is anyone in-house who has the ability to fill this position.

Mr. Townsend stated that the position will be open for anyone to apply.

5. Sun Lighting Electric Service Lift Station Upgrades Proposal

Mr. Townsend presented on Sun Lighting Electric Service Lift Station Upgrades Proposal.

A motion was made to approve the Sun Lighting Electric Service Lift Station Upgrades Proposal by Councilmember Sconiers and seconded by Councilmember Heavilin; Councilmember Sconiers withdrew his motion.

Mr. Harrison asked if Mr. Mott will install the equipment.

Mr. Townsend answered yes.

Mr. Harrison asked who does that for the city usually. Mr. Townsend answered that Jacobs.

Mrs. Heavilin asked if there can be language added that states market value for that we don't lose anything.

Mrs. Heavilin asked if there is an annual fee for the right of way.

Mr. Sconiers asked if this would be appropriate for staff direction.

Mr. Adkinson stated that a motion is appropriate.

Mr. Townsend stated that lift station 9 is not a issues rather than the manhole that needs to be raised.

Mayor Campbell asked if there is a cost for raising the manhole.

Mr. Townsend stated that Randall Holden was looking int that.

Mr. Sconiers stated that he is withdrawing his motion and to let staff come back with this item.

Mrs., Heavilin asked if staff can bring back the issues that lift station has had.

Mr. Townsend stated that the council seems to want him to go back and negation with the developer on this subject.

6. RFQ 2025-01-PW - Continuing Professional Engineering Consultant Services

Mr. Townsend presented on the RFQ 2025-01-PW - Continuing Professional Engineering Consultant Services.

A motion was made to approve the RFQ 2025-01-PW - Continuing Professional Engineering Consultant Services by Councilmember Heavilin and seconded by Councilmember Vallee; the motion passed without objection.

Mr. Townsend stated that we need to decided the review team and the interviews.

Mrs. Heavilin stated that she would like to be on that review team.

Mr. Harrison asked if we are going to have final approval.

Mr. Townsend answered yes.

A motion was made to have the City Council be the review team for the ranking and evaluation of the RFQs by Councilmember Heavilin and seconded by Councilmember Sconiers; the motion passed with Councilmember Harrison voting nay.

4. PUBLIC HEARING/ORDINANCES
A. Planning Director C. Wallace
1. 2nd Reading - 2025-SSA-02, Barry Katz, is requesting to amend the FLUM for property located on Hwy 331 S, just north of Myrtle Avenue

Mr. Adkinson swore in staff for the public hearing.

Mr. Wallace presented on 2nd Reading - 2025-SSA-02, Barry Katz, is requesting to amend the FLUM for property.

A motion was made to hold 2nd Reading of 2025-SSA-02 by Councilmember Vallee and seconded by Councilmember Heavilin; the motion passed without objection.

2. 1st Reading - (2024-LDC-01) as it relates to creating a new Downtown Business District

Mr. Adkinson stated that he is not asking for a first reading tonight.

He explained that this will require a renumbering of the land development code.

Mr. Adkinson noted that they will bring it back at the next meeting for a full first reading.

Mr. Wallace mentioned that it will need to be scheduled for the first meeting in February due to advertising requirements.

B. Code Review and Land Use Committee
1. 1st Reading - Chapter 14 Nuisances and Hazards or Insanitary Conditions

Mr. Vallee presented on the 1st Reading - Chapter 14 Nuisances and Hazards or Insanitary Conditions.

Mr. Adkinson stated that this is for 1st reading.

A motion was made to hold 1st Reading of Chapter 14 Nuisances and Hazards or Insanitary Conditions by Councilmember Vallee and seconded by Councilmember Heavilin; the motion passed without objection.

5. REQUEST TO BE ON THE AGENDA
A. CRA Executive Director J. Ervin
1. Request approval to move forward with conceptual design of a Veterans Memorial at Chipley Park

Mr. Ervin presented on the Request approval to move forward with conceptual design of a Veterans Memorial at Chipley Park.

Mr. Ervin stated that this is very beginning of this.

A motion was made to approve to move forward with conceptual design of a Veterans Memorial at Chipley Park by Councilmember Sconiers and seconded by Councilmember Vallee; the motion passed without objection.

6. CITIZEN COMMENTS

Diana Pickett citizen of DeFuniak Springs stated that action needs to be taken regarding the Way property.

Mrs. Pickett expressed concern that the property is in distress.

Mr. Adkinson mentioned that the estate was opened on November 28, 2024.

Mr. Adkinson explained that the person representing the estate needs to address the liens associated with it.

Mrs. Pickett noted that there are three properties on Circle Drive in complete distress.

Mr. Adkinson clarified that the city has followed the appropriate steps within its code enforcement process.

Mrs. Henderson suggested that one of the properties could potentially be converted into a house museum.

Mrs. Henderson also provided an update on the National Historic Landmark nomination for the Chautauqua campus.

Mrs. Henderson asked the City Council for permission to meet with the City Attorney.

Mr. Adkinson requested that the Mayor inform him of which meetings they would like to schedule.

7. CITY ATTORNEY

Mr. Adkinson stated that council members must not use City letterhead when sending letters.

Mr. Harrison asked if we could get a template of the correct letter head council members can use.

Mr. Adkinson stated that he can provide examples.

Mr. Adkinson explained again that council members must not use the official letterhead.

8. LEGISLATIVE REQUESTS
A. Councilmember A. Vallee
1. CRA Board Nomination

Mr. Vallee presented on his CRA Board Nomination.

A motion was made to appoint Brute Campbell-Work to the CRA Board by Councilmember Heavilin and seconded by Councilmember Sconiers; the motion passed without objection.

9. EXECUTIVE COMMENTS

Mr. Townsend thanked staff for the their efforts during Christmas reflections.

10. COUNCIL COMMENTS

Mr. Harrison announced that Francis Jones, a Citizen of Defuniak Springs, celebrated her 107 birthday.

Mr. Vallee asked people to stay indoors during the cold weather and to take care of themselves.

11. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting Adjourned 7:45 PM.

Approved:

Bob Campbell, Mayor

ATTEST:

Minutes taken by Rafael Ali
City Clerk
Proper notice having been duly given

THE CITY OF DEFUNIAK SPRINGS
CORPORATE
SEAL
1901