

Aiken City Council Minutes

WORK SESSION

January 19, 2016

Present: Mayor Osbon, Councilmembers Dewar, Ebner, Homoki, and Price.

Absent: Councilmembers Diggs and Merry.

Others Present: John Klimm, Stuart Bedenbaugh, Gary Smith, Sara Ridout, George Grinton, Tommy Paradise, Jerry Waters, and Maayan Schechter of the Aiken Standard.

Mayor Osbon called the work session to order at 5:00 P.M. He said there are several items that he would like for Council to discuss at this work session. He said he just expected discussion on the items at this meeting and did not expect to solve all the problems at this meeting as the items require a lot of thought to set a path forward.

Mayor Osbon stated Council has a lot of things that need to be considered, and he would like to suggest that Council work through committees and trust one another on the committees and have the committees come forward to Council with recommendations for solutions. With committees Council can be working on more than one path at the time. He said he had talked with Mr. Smith about forming Committees and Council has the authority to do that without changing any ordinances.

ANNEXATION POLICY

Mayor Osbon stated since Mr. Smith has to leave the meeting early he would like for Mr. Smith, City Attorney, and Council to talk about the city's annexation policy. He felt that it is important that Council have an establish annexation policy as he felt Council will be receiving more annexation requests. He felt there should be set procedures that can be followed when considering annexations.

Mr. Gary Smith, City Attorney, stated there are different views of annexation versus utility service. He pointed out that the current request before Council from Mr. Jerry Waters is an annexation request of 102 acres on Whiskey Road at Talatha Church Road because of the contiguity of the property. He pointed out that Mr. James Bouknight had argued against the annexation. He pointed out that the judge ruled in the case that the Department of Transportation did not contest the annexation within the 90 day contesting period. Mr. Smith pointed out that the city annexed Whiskey Road and the Department of Transportation did not contest the annexation in 90 days. He said to him the city has annexed Whiskey Road to Talatha Church Road since SCDOT did not contest the annexation within the time period. He said the annexation of Whiskey Road gives the city the ability to annex the Talatha Oaks Subdivision if Council desires to do so. He said a question is, if someone were to challenge the annexation, would the annexation prevail. He pointed out properties had been annexed along Hitchcock Parkway as that roadway had been annexed to the city some time ago. He said he believes that the city could annex the property Mr. Waters has requested on Whiskey Road at Talatha Church Road since it is contiguous to the city, but it might be challenged.

Mr. Smith pointed out another question has been the impact of the annexation and the service agreement for the South Meadows Subdivision that Mr. Jerry Waters signed when he came to the city and requested water and utility services. He pointed out that if property is annexed before it is developed there is only one signature on the annexation agreement, which is the developer or owner of the property being annexed. When property is annexed under an annexation agreement the city agrees to provide utility services in exchange for their agreeing to annex the property once it is contiguous to the city. By the time the city is contiguous to the property it has been developed and hundreds of lots have been sold to individuals. So instead of having one owner who was the developer at the time the agreement was signed, there are many owners and they are

required by state law to sign the annexation petition. He said that was the process the city went through with the annexation of properties in Gem Lakes Subdivision, with a petition signed by the individual property owners in the subdivision. He read from the annexation and new service agreement document. "At any future time should any part of the property become contiguous to the city limits of the City of Aiken, all then current owners of the entire parcels of the property shall cause the property to be annexed into the City of Aiken. Owner (in this case Jerry Waters for South Meadows) understands that to accomplish this annexation the then current owners of the properties must petition for annexation of the property in accordance with the annexation laws of the State of South Carolina. Owners agree that the final acceptance of any such petition rests upon the affirmative vote of the Council of the City of Aiken." Mr. Smith stated even if every property owner in the subdivision signed the petition for annexation, City Council has the right to deny annexation. Mr. Smith continued to review sections of the agreement. He pointed out that the city has the right to stop utility services if the owners of the property in the subdivision violate the agreement.

Mr. Klimm pointed out that the city does not have an annexation policy. There should be a policy which tells staff what the intentions of Council are for annexations. He said there are options in the annexation agreement. He pointed out if we are going to annex in the future, and we have some opportunities right away, he would rather deal with the owner/developer, one individual, than to deal with 350 families in the future.

In answer to some Council questions, Mr. Smith pointed out that Talatha Oaks, Jerry Waters subdivision, could be annexed as it is contiguous to Whiskey Road which is in the city. South Meadows Subdivision is adjacent to Talatha Oaks which could also be annexed. He pointed out that to annex South Meadows 100% of the property owners have to sign the annexation petition or Council could use the 75% - 75% annexation method. In that method 75% of the property owners owning 75% of the assessed value of the property could sign an annexation petition and all of the subdivision could be annexed. Mr. Smith pointed out that in Gem Lakes Council did not want to force people to annex and left donut holes in the area. Mr. Smith pointed out that in the South Meadows Subdivision the annexation agreement is on all the titles for the purchase of the property in South Meadows so the property owners knew about the possibility of being annexed. It was pointed out that Talatha Oaks could be annexed without annexing South Meadows, as Talatha Oaks is contiguous to the city by Whiskey Road.

Councilman Ebner pointed out that the roads in South Meadows are not in the best condition. He felt the city should consider the financial side when considering annexation. Mr. Grinton pointed out that South Meadows is supposed to be on the County paving list. There was a question that if the property were annexed would the County pave the roads in South Meadows as they have money that has been marked for this maintenance and the city would not.

Mr. Klimm stated this points out that the city should have an annexation policy that is not only philosophical, but is financially good for the city and under what circumstances does it make sense to annex. That should be part of the policy so that in the future when this comes up it either meets the criteria for annexation or not based on the policy adopted by Council. He said his recommendation would be that if Council is going to choose a subcommittee structure to study items, then he would recommend that the matter regarding annexations be studied by the committee and a recommendation made to Council. He pointed out that other cities in South Carolina probably have an annexation policy.

Councilwoman Price pointed out that other cities do have annexation policies. She pointed out that in Aiken we have a lot of donut holes which hurt the city as a whole. She pointed out it is difficult to know what areas are in the city. Council has not forced anyone to annex to the city. She felt we need to look at other models to find out how they are incorporating areas in donut holes. She pointed out that there are areas outside the city within walking distance of the downtown area. She pointed out these people use the city roads and gets the benefit of some city services.

Mr. Klimm stated another related legal question is what happens if a subdivision is annexed that is serviced by either another water district or another fire district.

Mr. Smith reviewed the matters involved in annexing areas served by other water districts or fire districts. He said this matter came up with the last Woodside annexation. He said that tract of land was within the Silver Bluff Fire Department's service area. The City had to work with the Silver Bluff Fire Department and the County to get the fire service district redrawn to allow the area to be serviced by the City of Aiken. He said there would be the same situation with the Talatha Oaks Subdivision. Presently there are no houses or development on this property. Once the city annexes the property the state law allows the city to serve that area with fire service.

Mr. Smith stated water would be different. The Talatha Oaks property is within the New Ellenton Commission of Public Works water district. He said the area for water service was agreed upon by Council years ago. The New Ellenton Commission of Public Works can provide water to Talatha Oaks, but they cannot provide sewer service. Mr. Smith stated if annexed the City of Aiken would provide sewer service, garbage pickup and fire service. It was pointed out that we have that situation in Fox Haven.

Mr. Klimm pointed out that this points out the lack of an annexation policy. There is a lack of a policy in terms of how we will approach areas that are presently being served by others. He said we need a policy. He said staff had met with New Ellenton, and we want to have a good relationship with our neighbors, but we need a policy.

Councilman Homoki asked about donut holes and if annexations in the future would not allow donut holes. Mr. Smith pointed out there are two ways to annex property in the State of South Carolina. One way is every property owner of 100% of the assessed value of the land that is being annexed has to sign the annexation petition. He pointed out that in the Gem Lakes annexation the city did not get 100% of the people to sign the petition for annexation. Council allowed those who did not sign the petition to remain outside the city, which created donut holes in Gem Lakes. He said Gem Lakes is an example of how the 75% - 75% process could have worked to bring in all the properties in an area in Gem Lakes. He said that is a policy decision for Council to make.

Councilman Homoki stated then it is up to Council as to whether we allow donut holes. He said if we get 75% of the property owners owning 75% of the assessed value of the property in an area, the whole area could be annexed and not leave donut holes. Mr. Smith pointed out that the Planning Department staff used to spend a lot of time looking at properties in the city where the 75% - 75% process could be used to bring properties into the city.

Councilman Dewar pointed out that the city is not aggressive as far as annexing properties, but that can be a part of what a committee could discuss in formulating an annexation policy.

Councilman Ebner pointed out that the city has to look at all situations to see if there is a value to the city and to the citizens to annex property. Some annexations could be costly to the city.

Councilwoman Price pointed out that there are some donut holes near the downtown area. She said we are talking about annexation and an economic base and that base may have a negative impact on the city. She said there are some donut holes where there is no code enforcement and that causes the whole area to decline. She said neighboring properties may want to rehab their property, but the donut holes have no code enforcement and the properties are declining. Other municipalities have mapped areas and listed the positive and negative of the areas. Council reviews that to determine how they should strategically plan for these areas.

Mr. Smith stated he wanted to mention one other thing to Council. He pointed out the area where a Krispy Kreme is proposed to locate. We are concerned about the sewer line as there are things that have gotten in the way of the process moving forward. He said if

we annex the property we are almost telling them we will provide city services. The reason they want to be in the city is to receive sewer service. At this time, however, we cannot say when we will have the easement signed to run the sewer line. He said he would like for Council to think about condemnation, especially with the Whiskey Road issues. He said he had talked to Jim Meggs, the attorney who had talked to Council about Gem Lakes. Mr. Meggs would be glad to come and speak with staff to try to understand what the issues are, and then come to Council with some recommendation. The sense of Council was that should be done.

Councilwoman Price stated this points out that there needs to be a more coordinated annexation process which shows what can or cannot be done.

Councilman Dewar pointed out that Council also has to consider the economics of annexations. He said there needs to be an analysis and a basis on which to evaluate whether property should be annexed. He said we have no way of knowing what the city is spending to support Woodside, Houndslake, the north side, or any part of town.

Mr. Klimm stated in the last half hour Council has hit on how complex the issue is, and we will not be well served until we get through these needs and come up with a policy.

Councilwoman Price pointed out that for years we have not provided sufficient staff to do the work that needs to be done in the city. We talk about operating lean, but we can't do all the things that need to be done without more staff. Councilman Ebner pointed out that certain areas are staffed, but not others and that has been an issue for him. It was pointed out that Council has to get the policy for annexation in place to help staff know the process and be able to do their job efficiently.

Councilman Ebner stated we presently have the issue of annexation of Talatha Oaks, the TD Bank and Ladd Britt properties. He said we cannot approve the agreements without providing services. He said that these are issues at the next Council meeting.

Mr. Klimm stated staff can be helpful in finding model or best practices around South Carolina and some thought, especially in the area of financial analysis, whether annexation makes sense. However, in the end there is a political decision that needs to be made by the elected officials. He said the staff can only go so far, then Council has to make a policy decision. It was pointed out that the issues had been discussed, including donut holes, annexation, providing water, fire service, and the policy of providing services in areas served by others. All these things need to be decided in the policy.

Mayor Osbon stated Council had done a good job of identifying a lot of areas on which there needs to be a policy. He said he likes the idea of looking at other cities to see what they do, and staff checking with others to come back with some ideas. He said these matters are not a one meeting fix.

UPDATE ON EASEMENT PROCESS

Krispy Kreme

Ladd Britt Property

Whiskey Road Development

Councilman Ebner pointed out that Council has to address the issue of second reading of the ordinance to annex the Ladd Britt property at the next Council meeting. He said the Krispy Kreme project is a critical issue now to the discussion Council is having. He said the same service issues will be created just down the road. If the services cannot be provided Council needs to consider taking the matter off the agenda. He said if the matter is delayed, they may walk away and find another place. He asked about the status of the easement process.

Mr. Grinton stated he could give Council an update on where we are in obtaining the sewer easement. Mr. Smith has been in touch with the lawyer for the property owner of the NTB property. They have listed some things they want. He said we need to make

sure that they understand the city has already obtained an agreement from the NTB, Tire Kingdom. Tire Kingdom has agreed that this easement would not conflict with their business. He felt the property owner is negotiating for a price. He said the City was trying to give them the impression that having the sewer line available would enhance the value of their property and ask them to grant the easement without financial exchange. However, they may be asking for payment for the easement. He said an appraisal is being done and should be done by the end of January to give a value for the easement. That will then have to be presented to the owner for their consideration. In answer to a question the Tire Kingdom will not connect to the sewer line until such time as they want to. If their septic tank fails they would want to connect to the sewer line. The fee that others would pay for connecting to the sewer line is \$20,000.

Mr. Grinton stated the change we made was that we also wanted to do a storm water connection. He said the property owners would like for the city to accept their storm water so they don't have to create any detention on their property and it be absorbed in George's Pond. However, because of problems that are downstream of George's Pond, the County would not allow the city to make changes to the outlet. Basically from the State road water will still show up through there and then on down to where the problem is, but it will be conveyed through a pipe. We have not changed the storm water flow, therefore we have not aggravated the problem downstream. He said that is a disappointment to the developers. He said it is very similar to what Starbucks did. The city provided them with detention because we had the big retention pond at Walmart that could accept the flow, and they contributed \$46,000 plus a fence.

Councilman Dewar expressed concern about looking after the city's finances on some of these arrangements. He was concerned about someone charging us for an easement when we are doing something good for them is hard to understand.

Mr. Grinton stated the only other option he has is to ask for condemnation. Then we would still end up paying fair market value. Whether we condemn or not, we would end up paying fair market value. Mr. Grinton pointed out that we have come down on the price for the overall project. It was \$80,000+ and now we are down to \$54,000. He said we have been able to get an agreement from TD Bank and some others to go on their property. That changed taking trees down so that eliminated a lot of the cost. However, he will have to add back a cost for the easement across the Tire Kingdom property. Councilman Ebner pointed out that condemnation takes about two years and runs about \$25,000 in legal fees.

After discussion the general consensus of Council was to leave the item regarding the Ladd Britt property on the agenda. The matter was raised because the city cannot provide what we are promising to provide. Councilman Ebner felt they should be notified ahead of time that the city cannot approve the item because the city cannot legally provide the service. It was felt the city could not promise a service that we can't provide.

Mayor Osbon stated Council had discussed the Whiskey Road development. He asked if there were any questions about the annexation of the Mundy property. It was pointed out that the question was that the Traffic Report was not available for the Planning Commission. It was felt it is a good project. At the meeting there was just one objection which concerned the left turn lane on Powderhouse Road and traffic backing up on that road.

Whiskey Road Traffic

Mayor Osbon pointed out an issue on the Whiskey Road development is the traffic issues. He stated a number of studies had been done on Whiskey Road traffic. He pointed out that the City had partnered with the County for a traffic study of the Whiskey Road Corridor. He said there are some things that need to happen as far as relieving traffic on Whiskey from Dougherty Road. He felt Council should move forward and not wait until the next Krispy Kreme comes in to start addressing these issues. He felt we need to be more aggressive as far as addressing the traffic issues. He said he would like

for the City Manager to come up with some of the ideas from the studies that have already been done whether they be connector roads or other solutions and bring that to Council so Council can set priorities and work on addressing the traffic issues. He pointed out that all the solutions come with a price tag. The matter comes up with every business that wants to come here and locate on the south side. He asked that staff look at the suggestions for addressing the traffic issues and set priorities and bring that to Council for approval. He said Council has to make the decision as to whether they are willing to fund and do the things that are recommended or just put the studies on the shelf.

Councilwoman Price stated we have become experts at being reactive and not proactive. She said the traffic issues require a plan, and you have to have someone to develop a plan. Mr. Grinton stated we would hire a consultant to do the work. She said we need to be proactive and hire the people who need to work with that.

Mr. Klimm stated the argument we have read about over the last several weeks in the newspapers and that we are facing now is an issue that exists in most other communities nationally. He said you have a road that is popular and you have a conflict with people saying on the one hand the city should implement a moratorium and stop development until the day comes that we fix the problem and then we should allow growth to continue. On the other side we have people saying that business is great and that we should allow as much as possible and let the private sector rule the day. He said that is what the community debate is about. What usually happens is that you don't have a responsible Council saying we know we have a problem and we have got to fix it. He said that is the issue on Whiskey Road. On one hand you hear people saying the city is anti-business. On the other hand, you have this business and that business going in, and you have death by 1,000 cuts. He said we will wake up one day and Whiskey Road will be a parking lot and people are going to want to know why we did not fix the problem over the last 10 years when we knew we had a problem. He said it seems that this Council wants a different approach and he applauds them for that. He said we need to fix the problem. With that comes a huge responsibility to get the job done. He said we have a problem now so he can't imagine what it will be like in 10 years. Denying the problem exists will not make it go away. He said it will be painful to come up with the solution and even more important to come up with the financing to do the work so many times nothing gets done and the problem becomes bigger and people complain about us not fixing the problem when we had the ability to fix it. He pointed out that there are some fixes that are still doable, and we do not have to take massive properties by eminent domain and knock buildings down to build roads. There are actually some solutions and options available to correct the problem. He said, however, it will take a real commitment. He said many times the choices are that people just blindly let growth go or institute a moratorium and kill business.

Councilwoman Price pointed out that it would be a mistake for the city to start picking and choosing and determining what businesses we want or do not want without a clearly thought out plan. She pointed out that the west, east and north sides of town want development. Presently it is popular to go south because that is where the traffic is. She felt we have not done a good job with the marketing strategy for the economic development and growth for the other areas.

Councilman Dewar pointed out the businesses go where the money is. He said what he is hearing unfortunately is let's not stop development. Let's keep on going. We will keep on going because we are not going to say no to anybody. He pointed out that is death by 1,000 cuts. He pointed out that every traffic report he has looked at since he has been on Council just says they will add so many trips. He pointed out that the project on Owens Street will add 500 trips to one of the busiest intersections at Whiskey and Dougherty. He said Council is to consider this project at the next meeting. He was concerned about the traffic impact in this area. He said we have to start somewhere. We have to make some decisions if we want to deal with the traffic issue on Whiskey Road. He also pointed out the Talatha Oaks project will be 350 homes and that will increase traffic on Whiskey Road. He noted the Aiken Mall and felt that the developers will have some plans for the Mall. He also pointed out that the owners of the land behind Cracker Barrel want to develop that property which is a big piece of undeveloped land. He said there

are alternative ways of dealing with Whiskey Road. He said we need to find a traffic expert. He also pointed out that SC Department of Transportation and the County are also a part of the Whiskey Road traffic issue.

Councilman Ebner pointed out that in the past we have not gotten the right people to work on the problems. He pointed out the storm water issue and the amount of water we have to deal with on Whiskey Road. He noted that the amount of water flow had increased three times the amount from six years ago. He felt getting the right people is very important to get the right calculations. He said the numbers were not right in the past. He said you have to look at the whole basin for the water flow. He said the traffic flow is the same kind of issue. He encouraged Council to be sure to allow the City Manager to get the right people to do the work.

Mr. Klimm pointed out that Whiskey Road is Anywhere USA. There are Whiskey Roads by the thousands. The solution to Whiskey Road is not rocket science. There are only so many things you can do. One reason we have not done anything is that we have not identified a revenue source. When we get to a point where we are committed to look for solutions, there are only so many things you can do to improve traffic. He said the solution is not complex from a traffic stand point, but storm water issues do add to the complexity. He said there are only so many things you can do.

Councilwoman Price pointed out that the key issue, if we are going to do the things that are needed to advance our city, deals with finances. She asked if Council is brave enough to do what is necessary to finance and fund the issues that we have concerns about. She said it will take a lot of money.

Councilman Ebner pointed out that in two years the matter of the Capital Projects Sales Tax will come up and that could be \$35 to \$40 million. We need a 10 year program and funnel the money to the issues Council has been talking about. He said we have to be able to sell it to the people. Councilwoman Price pointed out that will help, but it will take more than that to address the issues.

Councilman Dewar pointed out there was a study done in 2006 by Clemson University, and they pointed out that transportation was a major project and X amount was needed to address the issue. He said Council was not willing at the time to do anything extra. They were hoping that the Capital Projects Sales Tax would put a dent in it so they would not have to raise taxes. He said for 20 years we have had the idea that we can't raise taxes, but unfortunately that has put us in a bad situation.

Mr. Klimm pointed out that in the Executive Summary of the report they made one major point that they could confirm the level of need in infrastructure. They suggested in 2006 that we undertake more analysis so we could understand our infrastructure needs more. He stated regarding infrastructure, there is the need to spend millions to correct our road system and build some new roads. Then there is a need at the same time to spend millions to fix the infrastructure that we have. He said we have kicked the can down the road in both instances. He said we have not built the infrastructure necessary to meet the future demands and at the same time we have not been maintaining the infrastructure that we have. He said this will take discipline, and it has to be a plan that is feasible. People don't like taxes so we have to put a plan together that the citizens will support.

Councilwoman Price pointed out that the citizens have to be a part of this matter. They have to understand how the structure works and the issues that we are having with infrastructure, water and sewer, and roads. Councilman Dewar stated he felt the water and sewer issue people will understand as most people have had a water leak in their neighborhood.

Councilman Dewar pointed out that presently we are looking at possibly widening University Parkway. He wondered if that was the best place to put the money that had been set aside in CPST III for transportation. He wondered if that was the best place to be spending that money today considering the other issues in town.

Mr. Klimm stated we are discussing a new commitment, but it is not just on the part of staff. It is also on the part of City Council. He said Council needs to roll up their sleeves and commit. He said it is easy to do what has been done in the past and kick the can. He said every one of the issues on the agenda needs to be addressed. He said he has sensed in talking to Council individually that the stars are aligning and Council is understanding that these are tough things that we have to address.

Councilman Dewar stated these are political discussions, and the only way to find out how to resolve a political discussion is to call for the vote. He said we need to put people on the record as saying they want to solve the problem or they are not interested. He said for staff to give Council the options and they will vote.

Councilman Homoki pointed out that Council is going to have to see in the out years how we increase the revenue. No matter what Council decides additional revenue will be needed to take care of the issues. The upcoming CPST will have to have a great percentage go towards infrastructure rather than other smaller projects. We will also have to look at other potential ways to save money.

Councilman Dewar pointed out that we have to know what the demand is before we can work on it. He said it will be high enough that we will have to increase taxes. He said revenue is from the people. We have the Capital Projects Sales Tax and could borrow to a certain point, and we could get revenue from a millage rate increase.

Mr. Klimm stated we have to answer the question as to whether we are spending money wisely. Now that we know that we have to spend money on infrastructure, the question is whether we can tell the taxpayers that we are running an efficient operation and we are funding the highest priorities. He said Council has to answer that. He said he wants to present a budget that poses that question. He said there is nothing he can do to suggest that we can fund all of the infrastructure needs within the budget. We do have a responsibility to the taxpayers to look at how we are spending money to see whether cost savings could be made. He said he wants to spend a lot of time in this year's budgetary process to at least be able to report that we did not take anything for granted and everything was considered in the process.

ROAD SPECIFICATIONS

Mr. Klimm pointed out that he felt the Road Specifications issue is an easier issue. As we got into the quagmire about the Gem Lakes roads, people kept asking if the road specifications are sufficient. He said as we conclude the Gem Lakes road discussion, we need to answer the question that has been raised as to whether our Road Specifications are sufficient so we don't run into the same type of issue. He said we have well respected engineers—Rick Toole and Tilden Hilderbrand and George Grinton weighing in on this. He said they will either come back and say the specifications are comparatively similar to other cities in South Carolina or point out where they should be changed. He said when we do that we should be able to put that issue to bed.

Councilman Ebner stated what we have is a matter of enforcement, and he is anxious to see what they present to Council. He pointed out that SCDOT and the Interstate Highway System are just a tier above what the City of Aiken has.

Mayor Osbon pointed out that Mr. Hilderbrand and Mr. Toole are respected. If they come back with something that says we need to raise our standards or if the standards are sufficient, he will support them. He stated that they will make a report to Council on February 8, 2016.

Councilman Ebner pointed out that the standards cover infrastructure as well as roads. Mayor Osbon asked if that was in the scope of what they are to present to Council. Councilman Ebner stated it has to be because if you do not deal with the water, you don't deal with the roads.

Mr. Grinton stated basically they are talking about roads, and they are making the assumption that the compaction is made and that will not change.

Councilman Dewar pointed out that if Mr. Toole and Mr. Hilderbrand are coming in with recommended specifications, Mr. Grinton needs to be sure that we can live with them and enforce them as we don't want something like Gem Lakes to happen again.

Mr. Grinton responded the way it works now is that the Engineer of Record that the developer hires is responsible for the quality control and inspection of the work. The Engineer of Record certifies that everything has been installed per plan and specifications. He said if you have a good contractor you will have a good system and roads. That is true of any work that is being done.

Councilman Ebner stated that is very scary. He pointed out that the right person needs to figure out if we can handle the Talatha Oaks Subdivision and that area if it is annexed and whether the sewer line is large enough. Mr. Grinton stated we have required that David Banks, Mr. Waters' engineer, evaluate the path all the way from the origin point. It ends down in the Woodside lift station. They examined the entire path. There were three items to fix. He said the city required that the line be evaluated so we would not have a restriction at some point.

Mr. Jerry Waters then spoke regarding the evaluation. He pointed out before they evaluated the line they discovered a problem with the city sewer line that was installed in the 1980's that South Meadows tied into in 2000. Even though it was a 10 inch line, it was installed improperly by some contractor. He said on good faith they took it and the City Engineer at the time thought everything was okay. He pointed out that all of this proposed development was planned for many years ago. He said they placed a lift station there to pick up an extra 200 acres and size to do that. When they started the study they discovered there was a problem in the old sewer line at the Country Inn Hotel on Whiskey Road. To fix the problem he suggested to go around it and cut loose from the line. He said for South Meadows and the new project, he is proposing to cut that line loose and build a whole new force main on South Meadows. He said the owner and developer have both agreed to assist in correcting what is now a city problem serving South Meadows and in turn serve the new property. A new force main will be built all the way from South Meadows to Stratford Hall which is the nearest point that has excess capacity. Mr. Grinton pointed out that from that point it goes all the way by gravity through Woodside. Mr. Waters pointed out that it would be very expensive for the city to make repairs to the old line.

Councilman Ebner then asked out that if the renovation of the hotel on Laurens and Richland goes through in the downtown, has someone looked at the services needed if 60 rooms are added. He suggested that before they go too far we need to have the right person look at the services required by DHEC and the State to service the hotel. He felt it would be highly unlikely that we would have the supply and pressure that is needed to go up the height of the hotel. He felt the city needs to do a real engineering analysis of the line sizes in the downtown area to be sure there is enough water downtown to go up the height of the hotel. He said that needs to be on an agenda to request some money to look at that issue. He pointed out even if the hotel is approved by everyone, it can't be built without the utilities. He felt this is something that needs to be considered.

Mr. Grinton pointed out that does get into some of the infrastructure needs that we have, just defining, understanding and knowing what we have because you can't feed the economic development of an area if you can't support it with the infrastructure. Mr. Grinton stated as it is today, the city would expect the developer to help answer those questions just like Mr. Waters hired David Banks to do an analysis of the sewer line for Talatha Oaks. That does get into resources and time. The City does not have the staff capability to provide the what ifs. He said another issue is how do we want the downtown to grow. Do we want to plan for three hotels, a convention center, etc. He said this does present an opportunity as the downtown has some of the oldest lines we have and as we are evaluating we need to look at what capacity and growth we want to have in the downtown.

COUNCIL COMMITTEES

Mayor Osbon stated he would like to pursue the idea of forming Council Committees to study some of the issues. He suggested possibly forming a Development Committee to consider annexations, and items that come through the Planning Commission. He said he would like for these issues to be studied by some members of Council before they are voted on by Council. A committee would not vote something up or down, but would make a recommendation and try to make things better before they came to the Council meeting. He stated he would suggest Councilman Ebner, as an engineer, Councilman Merry, as a developer, and Councilwoman Price to serve as Chair of a Development Committee.

Mayor Osbon stated his idea of Council Committees is that the committee would not be closed just to those who are members of the committee. The meetings would be advertised and open to all of Council and the public to see the committees work. He said he would like to see the committees work on some of the items being discussed. He stated the items do not have clear solutions or quick decisions. He suggested that within the next month the committees could start meeting. Perhaps a meeting could be before the Council meetings to be easier on staff or another Monday night. That would be left up to the members of the committee.

Mayor Osbon stated a second committee he would like to suggest is a Finance and Administration Committee that would deal with Public Safety and structure of finance. He asked that Councilmember Dewar chair the committee and that Councilmembers Homoki and Diggs serve on the committee. He suggested trying these two committees at first to see how it works and come back in six months and evaluate how committees are working. He said he would attend some of the committee meetings as an observer.

Councilman Dewar pointed out that a few years ago Council had a work session before every Council meeting to discuss matters. He thought Council may want to get back to something like that. He said he was not in favor of a pre-Council meeting and no decisions are made in work session—only discussion and ask questions for information. Mayor Osbon pointed out that a work session would be a good place to have a report from the Engineering Department, etc. Councilman Ebner stated having a work session before the Council meeting would give an opportunity for more citizens to be involved as they could come for the work session and then stay for the Council meeting. It was suggested that the work sessions could possibly be held in the Council Chambers around some tables. It was noted that it was good to have the person speaking to Council to be in front facing Council at the podium. Also, it has been good to bring in subject matter experts to speak to Council on various items to help Council make decisions. It was also suggested that expert retirees could possibly meet with a committee to discuss some of the committee issues. Mr. Klimm pointed out that where there may be a conversation that the general public would enjoy, possibly some of the committee meetings could be videoed, but he would not suggest that every meeting be videoed as we have to pay for the service.

Mayor Osbon stated he would like to bring up another topic. He pointed out that we are adding meetings for Council and demands on staff. He noted that when he got the agenda packet that there were verbatim minutes. He pointed out that we may be adding two more meetings per month for staff. He wondered since we have the meetings recorded, on You Tube, and Channel 4, if we could give direction to have the ordinary minutes from a meeting, but not verbatim minutes. He said if Council wants verbatim minutes he would make a motion that the city hire a stenographer because it is not fair to staff to require the verbatim minutes.

Councilman Dewar pointed out that we did not always have audio minutes available. He stated we now have audio minutes and video tapings of the meetings available. He said we probably need to improve the communication so the public knows how to find the recordings and video tapings of the meetings. He said having the audio and video makes a big difference as one can go back and see what was said at the meeting. Councilman

Ebner stated the verbatim was asked for a reason. In today's world we have the audio and You Tube which solves a lot of the issues in the past as one can go back and listen and hear the exact words. The general consensus of Council was that verbatim minutes were not necessary at this time.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:55 P.M.



Sara B. Ridout
City Clerk