

Aiken City Council Minutes

October 13, 2003

WORK SESSION

Present: Mayor Cavanaugh, Councilmembers Clyburn, Cuning, Price, Smith, Sprawls and Vaughters.

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Gary Smith, Bill Huggins, Larry Morris, Glenn Parker, Richard Pearce, Sara Ridout, Philip Lord of the Aiken Standard, Josh Gelinas of the Augusta Chronicle, and about 15 citizens.

Mayor Cavanaugh called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M. He stated Council had four items that they would like to discuss in the work session.

DEMOLITION

Laurens Street NW
Robbins, Royal
Condominiums
Richland Avenue W. 204
Richland Avenue W. 208
Johnson, Russell
City Billiards
Residential

Mr. LeDuc stated Council discussed about five months ago a project on Laurens Street NW at the location of the theaters. He said Taylor Garnett and Zipper Robbins would like to remove the theater buildings and replace them with townhomes on the back and commercial on Laurens Street. They are in the midst of removing the asbestos from the building. The demolition will then happen shortly.

Mr. LeDuc stated there is a request for removal of another structure in the downtown area to construct two apartments. He said Russell and Janice Johnson are asking for the city's help in the removal of a small building and the concrete slab between buildings located at 204 and 208 Richland Avenue W. This property is directly east of the City Billiards property. Facing Richland is a cyclone fence and in the back is a concrete block storage building. The Johnsons would like to remove this building and construct two residential units in a two story building, with the first floor facing Richland Avenue being used as commercial space. A copy of the proposed rendering was given to Council for review. The city's Public Works Department has reviewed this location and has the ability to haul the material to the landfill similar to what we have agreed to do for the theater off of Laurens Street. Because of the proximity of the two adjoining buildings, Mr. Johnson will need to have a professional demolition contractor remove this building and load it into city trucks. The front of the proposed new building will be in line with the other buildings on Richland Avenue and will not be set back in its current location. Eventually the Johnsons may consider a similar arrangement with the adjoining building, which they currently use for a framing operation with commercial on the front. The Johnsons are seeking Council's permission to have the city crews haul the debris from this building to a landfill site.

Council reviewed the proposed plans and briefly discussed the proposed building and the proposed use. The general feeling of Council was that the proposed building would certainly be an improvement in the area. It was pointed out that the existing building at the corner of Richland and Newberry would stay as it is at the present time. In the future the Johnsons long range plan is to possibly build a building in front of the present building on the corner.

Councilman Cuning stated he was in favor of the proposed project, but suggested that a certain amount be included in the next budget allocated to support such projects so there would be some control over how many such projects the city could do.

Mr. LeDuc pointed out this work is done between projects, and the only out of pocket cost to the city is the gas to travel to the landfill.

After discussion Council's feeling was that it seemed to be a great improvement to that area and to the downtown, and they had no objections to the city hauling the debris from the building to a landfill site.

LOCKE LANE

Demolition Hart, Deborah

Mr. LeDuc stated that earlier this spring the city removed a condemned structure on Locke Lane under the city's health, nuisance and unsafe structure codes. The homeowner involuntarily had the structure removed and was not involved in our demolition program. Because it was an involuntary removal the cost for this removal is typically placed as a lien and billed to the owner. The demolition cost was \$7,450.75, mainly due to the amount of asbestos that had to be removed from the structure. The land on which the structure was located is appraised at \$5,000. The owner was sent several bills to pay the demolition cost and, knowing that the land cost was less than the billing, decided to deed the property at no cost to the adjoining neighbor, Deborah Hart. When an outstanding bill is unpaid on property a lien is placed on the property, and it is added to our tax sales list and eventually purchased by another person, or the city becomes the owner of the property. This process generally takes several years and involves at a minimum several hundred dollars worth of cost for advertisement, research and preparation. When Deborah Hart acquired the property her attorney's title search disclosed a clear title because the city had no liens on the property at that time. She is willing to work with the city and pay us the \$5,000 appraised value for the property if the city is willing to eliminate the lien. This is a very unusual situation and, in almost all cases, the city eventually becomes the owner of the property and at best is able to sell it at or near the appraised value. To avoid the complications and expenses involved in the tax sale, we are recommending that the city consider eliminating the lien on this property and sell it to Deborah Hart at the \$5,000 appraised cost. Her goal is to expand her current home onto a portion of this property. If City Council agrees with this solution, we will add this item to our next agenda. The City will have a loss on the property, but the loss will not be as great a loss if instead, the City kept the property and went through a tax sale, a lien process, or court process.

Council discussed the matter and felt that in this situation selling the property to Deborah Hart was the best thing to do considering the circumstances and the costs involved for court costs and the time involved. It was pointed out that this is a one time situation and it is appropriate to sell this property to the neighbor.

Councilwoman Vaughters stated in a recent discussion at an Old Aiken Master Plan meeting, the committee talked about lots that the city owns at various locations, and their feeling was that in some areas these lots owned by the city could be used to possibly create some green space in neighborhoods to enhance the surrounding neighborhood, rather than building houses on every lot.

With the consensus of Council to sell the property to Ms. Hart, Mr. LeDuc stated the matter would be on the next agenda for Council's action.

CITY COUNCIL

Meeting Time

Mr. LeDuc stated Councilmember Smith recently asked if Council could start the Council meetings earlier in the evening. A poll of all the Councilmembers was taken and the general consensus was to start the worksessions as early as 5:30 with the Council meeting starting at either 6:30 or 7 p.m. Since most worksessions last from one hour to an hour and a half, it was suggested that if Council would like to start the meetings earlier that they consider having the official starting of the Council meeting at 7 p.m. Should Council desire to start the meetings at an earlier time an ordinance would need to be approved by Council and a public hearing held before we can implement a change. He

pointed out that at some recent meetings some people who were present and wanted to speak on an issue left because of the lateness of the meeting before the item was considered.

After discussion by Council the consensus was that the official starting time for the regular Council meeting be moved to 7 P.M. and work sessions would vary from 5:30 p.m. to as late as 6:30 p.m. depending on the number of items. The item will be placed on the next agenda for Council's official consideration.

SALES TAX

Projects Referendum

Mr. LeDuc stated that in November 2000 the voters approved a one cent sales tax, assuming revenue would be coming in at an anticipated rate over a seven year period. More revenue than anticipated has been generated and the projects will be fully funded by the end of 2005. At that time, the County will need to determine whether or not to place a referendum on the ballot in November, 2004 for approval by the voters listing new projects to be supported by the one cent sales tax. City staff has reviewed some of the possible projects that could be funded under this tax, and we would like to discuss these projects in anticipation of the proposed referendum with City Council at a special worksession, so we can get further direction on the needs for our community. We could either hold this meeting on an off Monday night, or in the morning as Council has done with other worksessions.

After discussion Council decided to meet on Tuesday, October 21, 2003, at 7:30 a.m.

HORSEPLAY

Mr. LeDuc pointed out that Mr. Bill Reynolds, Chairman for the Horseplay, had given Council copies of some brochures which had been prepared for the Horseplay program. It was pointed out that the brochures were at the Welcome Centers. Council commended Mr. Reynolds for the great work that had been done on the Horseplay program.

HITCHCOCK SHOPPING CENTER

Silver Bluff Road Kroger

Councilwoman Vaughters pointed out that there had been articles in the newspaper about Kroger moving to the Heritage Shopping Center at the location of the old Dullards at Whiskey and Pine Log Road. She stated she was concerned about the Hitchcock Shopping Center and all the empty stores such as Kroger, K-Mart and Goody's, and wondered if there was something that could be done to encourage businesses to come to that shopping center.

Councilman Cuning stated he felt there would be a redevelopment plan for that shopping center. He said he felt the market forces would take care of the center. He did point out that the ingress and egress at the shopping center were very bad and needed to be improved. He said there are many residential areas around that shopping center.

Mr. LeDuc stated the staff would try to contact the owners and talk to them. He pointed out there are a lot of parking spaces in that center which are not used and were never used. He said under the new regulations not as much parking is required and the space could be used for outparcels to provide more development and use of the area.