

Aiken City Council Minutes

March 10, 2003

WORKSESSION

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

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Bill Huggins, Gary Smith, Glenn Parker, Richard Pearce, Sara Ridout, Mark Gibbons of the Aiken Standard, Josh Gelinas of the Augusta Chronicle and 11 citizens.

Mayor Cavanaugh called the meeting to order at 6:45 P.M. He stated Council needed to discuss three items in the work session.

CABLEVISIONFranchiseAssignmentCable TVNorthland CableSouthland Cable, LLCG-Force

Mr. LeDuc stated in January the City received notification from Northland Cable that they intended to sell their operation to G-Force, which has now been renamed Southland Cable, LLC. At that time Gary Smith sent a letter with a number of questions concerning this transfer. Their response and subsequent correspondence has been given to Council for review. Gary Smith gave us the background of the franchise agreement, which was originally approved on June 29, 1993, and the transfer of this agreement to Northland in 1997. It is Southland's intention to honor all the verbal agreements that are currently in effect between the City and Northland, and they have now given this to the City in writing. Currently the City is getting cable TV in all city buildings. The City has Channel 4 network, and Northland has worked well with the City in running cable so the City will have a direct fiber optic link from building to building, which was accomplished last year. They also stated that the current manager from Northland will remain with the system to manage it on a day to day basis. According to Mr. Smith, the City is limited on what changes can be made when a company is asking to have their franchise transferred to another company. First reading of an ordinance to transfer the cable franchise is on the agenda for this meeting. The law allows Council 120 days to make this transfer, and, if Council wants to look at any possible modifications, we do have time to review them. If Council does not feel comfortable with the first reading of this ordinance at this meeting, we can remove it from the agenda and add it to the next agenda on March 24, 2003, as a first reading. Northland has already asked Aiken County to approve the transfer. Mr. LeDuc said Mr. Lee Johnson was present to answer any questions.

Mr. Lee Johnson, a Division Vice President of Northland Communications, stated he was present asking for Council's permission to transfer the franchise to Southland Cable. He said Northland would remain the operations management for the cablevision. He said they have a management agreement with G-Force, or Southland. He said the relations with the city and for the fiber net work will continue. He said the reason for the transfer was money. He said they needed additional capital to make some expansion in the area. He said presently he did not expect a change in the rates for cablevision. He said the rates are reviewed once a year, and possibly the rates may increase next year. He said they are hoping to have internet access available to cable subscribers.

Council discussed the request, asking questions about the transfer. There were no objections from Councilmembers to proceeding with first reading of the ordinance at the regular meeting.

BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Recreation Commission

Mr. LeDuc stated at this year's Horizons Glenn Parker discussed with Council the development of a Parks and Recreation Commission. Based on this discussion, Council made this one of the goals for this year. Proposed by-laws for the Parks and Recreation Commission have been developed, and Glenn Parker has made some suggestions concerning this new commission. The Commission would be involved in offering input on future development, program fees, promotion, and operation and recommend to staff and Council how to improve the department as needed. It would be an advisory commission. It is envisioned they would be meeting once a month, with each Councilmember selecting a member and two youth members selected at large. If Council agrees with the by-laws, this item will be placed on the March 24, 2003, agenda. It would be a nine member Commission.

Council discussed the proposed Commission. After discussion it was pointed out there is a Parks Commission and this one is proposed to be called a Parks and Recreation Commission. It was suggested that the proposed committee be called Recreation Commission. There was concern about how the students would be selected and how long they would serve. It was pointed out there are two high schools plus private schools and home schools. It was also pointed out consideration had been given to appointing 10th or 11th graders because of the proposed two year terms. Councilwoman Price pointed out the school population is so large that possibly more students should be appointed. She considered the service as an educational opportunity. She suggested possibly appointing four students, with two being voting members and two non-voting. Possibly the non-voting members could serve when other students rotate off. Council suggested that the Recreation staff make suggestions for the student appointments, and that there be four students, with two being voting members and two being alternates.

FEES

Fire Fees

Outside City Fees

Mr. LeDuc stated that at this year's Horizons Councilman Cunning had suggested that the city review the fire fees for property outside the city. Currently we have two types of fees. One fee is for properties covered by our Fire Department, but who do not have city water. They are in more rural areas or are served water by another provider like College Acres. Each of those homes is charged \$75 per year, and we recommend no change. All other customers outside the city who receive a water bill are charged based on their assessed property value. For residential property, the minimum monthly bill is \$10 for the first \$20,000 of valuation, with a \$.20 per \$1,000 charge thereafter. Businesses meanwhile are charged starting at \$9.50 per month for a \$20,000 property and are incrementally increased by \$.50 for every \$10,000 in value thereafter. The last rate increase the city had was on July 1, 1994, or nine years ago, and the Consumer Price Index during that period has increased by 23%. Our current billing is approximately \$990,000 per year. At a 10% rate increase we would receive approximately an additional \$100,000. We have listed several possible scenarios and what this would mean to a typical homeowner with increases to \$.22, \$.25, and \$.28 per \$1,000, keeping the base rate at \$10,000 for a \$20,000 unit. For a \$75,000 valued home the current rate is \$21.00 per month. Increasing the fee to \$.25 per \$1,000 over \$10,000 would increase the bill to \$23.75, or approximately a 10% increase. We have also shown increases for business at a rate of 5%, 10%, and 25%. Although the Consumer Price Index since 1994 has increased by over 20% we feel that a 10% rate increase this year and another 10% rate increase possibly two years from now would be sufficient to cover our costs over that period of time. Although you would not be voting on this at this time, we would like to have an indication from Council as to what fees you would recommend, so we could allocate this revenue as we prepare this year's budget.

In the discussion it was pointed out the City will be building another sub-station on the south side and many of the customers will be outside the city. With the sub-station a new fire truck will be needed and four persons to cover the station. Councilmembers felt that the city protects many people outside the city and that a 10% increase could be justified.

It was also felt that the \$75 fee for customers not on city water should also be increased to \$100.

Mr. Chris Randall, Chukker Creek, stated he felt there are people in the coverage area who are not on city water that are not being billed for fire service. He said he had not been paying the fire fee until just recently, when he discovered that he should be paying, but had not been billed for the service.

Mr. LeDuc stated the staff would check on this matter to be sure the city is billing all customers.

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REGULAR MEETING

March 10, 2003

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

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Bill Huggins, Gary Smith, Ed Evans, Glenn Parker, Anita Lilly, Pete Frommer, Larry Morris, Richard Pearce, Sara Ridout, Mark Gibbons of the Aiken Standard, and 20 citizens.

Mayor Cavanaugh called the meeting to order at 7:35 P.M.. Councilwoman Price led in prayer, which was followed by the pledge of allegiance to the flag.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mayor Cavanaugh stated Council needed to approve the agenda. Councilman Smith moved, seconded by Councilman Sprawls and unanimously approved, that the agenda be approved as presented.

MINUTES

The minutes of the work session and regular meeting of February 24, 2003 and the joint work session of Council and the Planning Commission of February 25, 2003, were considered for approval. Councilman Smith moved that the minutes of February 24, 2003 be approved as written and that the minutes of February 25, 2003, be approved as corrected. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Vaughters and unanimously approved.

RECOGNITION

Boy Scouts
Troop 146

Mayor Cavanaugh recognized Troop 146 of the Boy Scouts who were present at the meeting.

PRESENTATION

Award
Character Award
Linton, Kathy
Mack, Mamie

Mayor Cavanaugh stated Council would like to make two presentations for Character Awards.

Mr. LeDuc stated over the last several years, City Council selected as one of their top goals the continued development of the City as a Community of Character. Again this year this goal was listed as a priority for our city. Several months ago, the City asked our community to nominate individuals whom they felt were deserving of the Citizen of