

## MINUTES OF THE CITY OF HULL MAYOR AND COUNCIL

October 24, 2019

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Paul Walton. Those in attendance in addition to the Mayor were the Clerk, and council members Brian Koepnick Yvonne Davenport, John Barber and, Marilyn Walton. Attorney Graham was also present.

A moment of silent prayer followed the pledge of allegiance.

Prior to beginning the meeting Mayor Walton welcomed members of the Hull Volunteer Fire Department, Former Mayor Paul Elkins and former Council Member, Becky Elkins, Margie Richards from the Madison County Journal and others present at the meeting.

The October Agenda and September minutes which had been provided prior to the meeting were approved after a motion by John Barber and a second by Brian Kopenick.

The Clerk then read the General and SPLOST account financial reports which were approved after a motion by Yvonne Davenport and a second by John Barber.

Prior to continuing with the meeting Mayor Walton presented former fire chief, Donny Evans, with a plaque from the City of Hull recognizing him for his years of service to the City and the Fire Department. Additionally, Mayor Walton, unveiled and presented the new City of Hull Flag which he had designed with input from the Council.

Mayor Walton spoke to the plans the City has to construct a new city hall and the financial aspects of that and that going forward the financial arrangements between Mayor and Council and the Fire Department may have to change. The hope is that as the City grows there will be more funding available for the Fire Department.

The meeting then continued with a time for discussion between the Mayor and Council and the Hull Volunteer Fire Department. There were several matters on the agenda that at been requested by the fire department to be discussed with Mayor and Council. Mayor Walton began by stating that he and Chief Jason Austin had spoken several times over the last few months and had agreed that there was a need for a meeting between Mayor and Council so that the Mayor and Council and the Fire Department could reach some mutual understandings and move forward to work together.

The discussion began with Chief Austin asking for information as to how the proposed new city hall will affect the Kitchen, BBQ pit and storage area that was built by the Fire Department but is actually situated on City Land and continued funding for the fire department by the City. There was also some discussion about the City conveying the land where the current fire department is located from the City to the Hull HVFD. Mr. Larry Hart a long time member of the fire department and a member of Civic Club along with Frank Edwards provided some history of his understanding of a prior agreement between the Fire Department and the Civic Club wherein members of the fire department provided work on the Civic Club Building and paid for upgrades

and repairs with the understanding that the land where the current fire station is located would be deeded to the fire department. The Clerk was then recognized who was able to provide some insight into why the land was titled in the City's name and some history between the Fire Department and Mayor and Council by reading an excerpt from the September 19, 2011, council meeting ( a copy of which is attached to these minutes for reference). Attorney Graham also provided some documents obtained from the deed records further clarifying the conveyance of the land into the Civic Club and the Civic Club's conveyance of a portion of that property into the City as well as a Quit Claim Deed from the Patton Estate releasing a reversionary clause contained in the original deed. Members of the Fire Department expressed concern about being able to make sure that the fire department building would be there for the long term for those coming along in the future. Mayor Walton assured the department that the City was not looking to do anything to interfere with that. Jeff Hendrix from the Fire Department asked about a possible extension to the 30 year lease currently in place which was done to coincide with the 30 year loan obtained by the Fire Department to build the building which has now been paid off. This lease had been required to enable the fire department to get a loan since they did not own the land where the building would be located. Attorney Graham advised that the lease could be modified to extend it provided both the Fire Department and Mayor and Council were in agreement to do so. There was some further discussion about why the Fire Department was so concerned with actually owning the property as long as they had a lease. Further discussion took place with council member Brian Koepnick expressing his opinion that he felt like the Fire Department should own the land. Yakia Lawson who was a visitor to the meeting expressed her concern with the City conveying the land to the Fire Department based upon the information contained in the September 2011 meeting previously read and the moral and ethical obligations of Mayor and Council. There was a suggestion made that it might be advisable to speak again with members of the Patton Estate to see if there are still strong feelings about the City transferring the property to the Fire Department since some time had passed. Mayor Walton expressed that he was open to pursuing a conveyance to the fire department under certain conditions.

There was more discussion on the history of the relationship between the Fire Department and the City and the different administrations and how the City has financially supported the Fire Department in the past and currently. Mayor Walton stated that City allowed the Fire Department to have their kitchen, BBQ pit and storage facility on City property without any compensation and that for a time the City had been inadvertently paying the gas bill for the Fire Department.

There was some further questions and discussion about whether or not the new city hall would impact the BBQ area and Mayor Walton advised that the preliminary plans do not include encroaching on that area.

Discussion continued with Frank Edwards expressing his concerns with how over the years the funding to the fire department had decreased and their expenses had increased.

Mayor Walton expressed his opinion that going forward everything should be documented, recorded and agreed upon.

Discussion continued from the Fire Department concerning the work done by the department at the Civic Club and the agreement by the Civic Club to donate the land to the department. Attorney Graham again attempted to explain title history on the land and the reasoning behind why the property was subdivided and conveyed by the Civic Club to the City rather than the fire department. Attorney Graham did indicate that the fire department could bring a legal action against the city in an attempt to obtain title to the property.

City council member Brian Koepnick expressed his desire that we work toward a solution that would work for all concerned. There is still concern for how the proposed new city hall will effect the BBQ area. Again it was expressed that preliminary plans for the new CH will not impact that area although it might impact the current storage area at City Hall. Frank Edwards expressed to Mayor and Council the time, effort and expense the fire department had put into the BBQ area and although this area is not included in the current lease with the department he would like to see this area remain for use by the department for their chicken BBQ fund raisers.

Ms. Lawson who had spoken earlier suggested that the City consider a long term (99 year) lease with the department. In her work she is familiar with grants, etc. and a long term lease is generally recognized as “an ownership interest” so far as obtaining grants, loans, etc.

In addition, the fire department’s concern with a cut in funding was a major issue going forward .

Mayor Walton continued to express to the department that it will be difficult for the city to continue to contribute at the same rate given the cost of the proposed new City Hall although his hope is that this can be re-visited as the City grows.

Chief Austin advised that the City of Hull has one of the best ISO ratings in the county however they will not be able to maintain this without proper funding and that this would affect the entire Hull fire district.

Council member Yvonne Davenport expressed that in her opinion there were two issues to consider that the current lease be modified to include the “kitchen, BBQ pit” area and that it be extended for an additional period of time and whether or not the fire department would move forward with a lawsuit.

Mayor Walton asked if it was possible to obtain a call log that would show how many calls were answered inside the City Limits. Chief Austin agreed to look into this but was not sure that the information was available and/or could be released. A suggestion was made by the Mayor contact the 911 Director, Mr. Baird. Mayor Walton indicated he was also going to request this information from Sheriff Moore.

Fire Department Treasurer Alan Lapczynski asked if the fire department could expect to receive a check in January. Mayor Walton stated that Mayor and Council would be discussing this at the November council meeting. Mayor Walton did inquire about other funds received by the Fire Department. The department currently receives funds from the county and will get additional funding if the SPLOST vote coming up in November passes.

Council member Brian Koepnick stated that he hoped that we could come together as a community and work together going forward.

Former Mayor Paul Elkins commented that the idea of annexation had been tossed around for years without any success because the City had no services to offer and no interest by non-city residents or businesses being annexed into the City. He hopes the current administration would have better luck but was not confident annexation would happen.

Council member Marilyn Walton did express that there had been some interest expressed recently.

Mayor Walton indicated that he would really like to hear from city residents on the issues being discussed. He asked for a show of hands of those in attendance who lived within the City limits. In addition to the Mayor and Council there were a few others present.

Mayor Walton again expressed thanks to former Chief Evans for his dedicated service and that he was always open to talk with the fire department. Mayor Walton also thanked Margie Richards from the MC Journal for being present. There being nothing further the meeting was adjourned after a motion by Brian Koepnick and a second by Marilyn Walton.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandra B. Pou  
Hull City Clerk