



CITY OF OAK HILL MINUTES

City Council Meeting – May 8, 2023

The regular monthly meeting of the Oak Hill City Council was held on May 8, 2023, in the Council Chambers at Oak Hill City Hall at 5:30 p.m.

Call to Order

Mayor Wright called the meeting to order at approximately 5:30 p.m.

A moment of silence was observed to honor William Thomas Louisos, Sr. He was a lifetime public servant who served twenty-two years as an elected member of the West Virginia House of Delegates.

Roll Call

City Clerk Ronda Falk called the roll, and a quorum was present.

PRESENT

Mayor Daniel E. Wright

Ward 1 Councilmembers

Diana Janney

David Perry

Ward 2 Councilmembers

Ronald Stephen Hayslette

Charles Smallwood, Jr.

ABSENT

Council-at-Large Tom Oxley

Councilmember Christa Hodges

Councilmember Benitez Jackson

Invocation

Pastor Doug Holley, Virginia St. Baptist Church led the invocation.

Pledge of Allegiance

Councilmember Janney led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Reading and Approval of Minutes

Motion- Accept the minutes as being presented.

Motion made by Councilmember Perry. Seconded by Councilmember Janney.

No Discussion. The motion was unanimous. 4-0.

Treasurer's Report

Motion- Accept the Treasurer's Report as presented.

Motion made by Councilmember Perry. Seconded by Councilmember Janney.

No Discussion. The motion was unanimous. 4-0.

Correspondence

The clerk read a thank you note from Steve Vaynes acknowledging his Spirit of Oak Hill Award.

Councilmember Perry requested a re-ordering of the agenda in order to accommodate reports from the Department of Highways Engineer James (Jim) Moore, Beautification Committee, and a former board of education member Marion Tanner to talk about the Energy Express Program. Also, it was requested the Minden community residents be able to address their concerns regarding the removal of the Minden Bridge at the same time. There were no objections; the agenda was re-ordered.

5. Request for the Minden Bridge to be Replaced

Engineer James Moore apologized for failing to inform the city and the Minden community of the decision to remove the bridge. He expressed regrets in not providing a media release explaining the reason for the removal. He clarified the removal of the bridge was due to it being in critical condition, and added they would have closed the bridge regardless. He explained the bridge was built around 1950; the last major rebuild was in 1983. Due to the critical nature of the past few inspections, it was being inspected on a six-month evaluation cycle. The last inspection was in Dec. 2022. The first abutment was in poor condition to the point the concrete was spalling and there was very little stone abutment holding the rocks together and the steel beams were no longer sitting on the abutment. The steel beams suffered 20 to 40 Percent section loss with some of it being completely perforated. The cost to replace the bridge is approximately \$300,000 to \$500,000. They also looked at the FEMA Floodplain maps and saw very little difference between the flood plain at the bridge and the other bridge one thousand feet upstream. The bridge upstream is in good condition, rates well, and provided good access to the area ninety-nine percent of the time.

Discussion: Council acknowledged Mr. Moore's explanation concerning the bridge removal and requested the Department of Highways take into consideration why the community was upset. The council received pictures of the condition of the bridge and requested the entire bridge report be made available. The council expressed all factors were not considered. For example, tourism, evacuation during flooding, school buses use this bridge, the bridge was higher than the one upstream, and the post office being less accessible.

The engineer informed the Council the State of West Virginia has over 7000 bridges and District #9 has approximately 650 with Fayette County having 300 bridges. He reported there is a bridge evaluation program at the district level for smaller structures and these are prioritized as funding becomes available. The council advocated for consideration to be given to replace the bridge.

Minden Residents Comments

Mr. Darrell Thomas inquired about funding to replace the bridge. He expressed citizens were more vulnerable due to the removal of the bridge. He described the time it would take to get a vehicle out of the flood area and walk back. He noted the bridge was vital to the community.

Mr. Oather Jones had pictures from the 2001 flood; he stated you could not depend on the bridge upstream because it washes out. The area has poor drainage and water backs up. The bridge recently removed was the only way out. In the absence of the bridge he would have been forced to walk across the mountain into Sanger and this is something a lot of the residents are unable to do. The council requested Mr. Jones to share his pictures with the engineer.

Mr. Elmer Roles communicated Mr. Perry had conveyed a lot of the issues he was concerned about. He, too, expressed this bridge was the main bridge used during flooding because the bridge upstream floods quickly and frequently. He described the difficulty in getting access to the post office location.

Mr. Frank Ward stated the concrete was solid and there was no reason to remove the bridge. He has been a resident of Minden for sixty years and has witnessed the flooding. He stated the upstream bridge is in good shape. However, it floods every time it rains. He described his knowledge of bidding and the proper steps to acquire funding. He invited everyone to come and see what he is talking about the next time it rains.

Ms. Vickie Pizzino thanked Mr. Perry for his concerns for the children and buses. She talked about the evening traffic and stated the community needed the bridge replaced.

A petition was made available for the public to sign.

Motion – the council, mayor, and city manager sign a letter requesting the bridge be replaced and consideration be given for underwriting the replacement cost; the letter is to be sent to the Department of Highways Engineer Jim Moore.

Motion made by Councilmember Perry. Seconded by Councilmember Hayslette.

Roll Call Vote

Voting Yay: Councilmember Janney, Councilmember Perry, Councilmember Hayslette, and Councilmember Smallwood, Jr.

The motion was unanimous. 4-0.

The letter was previously prepared and read aloud to the council by the clerk.

Beautification Commission Report

Ms. Judy Lively updated the council on the projects they have been working on for the past several months. (1) They wanted to move forward with the Welcome to Oak Hill sign near the Pea Ridge exit. She consulted the city manager on getting a different sign company to make the sign. She contacted Farha Signs located in Beckley; they will be able to make the signs if the city can do the stonework. She sent a picture of the sign, location, and the size of the lot to Farha Signs for a quote. They are working on securing a location for a welcome sign going southbound. Ms. Lively acknowledged and thanked the council for voting to put the city logo on the water tank. This project that has been talked about for years has come to fruition. (2) The council was updated on the Metal Tree Project. Jamie Lester with Vandalia Bronze presented the design to the fabricator and was told the design was not safe; he would not be able to provide the 7 to 9 ft tree. He returned \$4000 of the \$5000 deposit. The commission requested the city workers hang the old yellow banners that were used in the beginning and the purple activity banners that were purchased several years ago. They have plans to paint and freshen up the parking lot by painting acorns and leaves in a pattern on the alleyways between Spirit and Truth Ministries and the Peterson's Clinic. As well as between the murals and Chase Bank. (3) Ms. Lively introduced an idea to have families decorate their benches along the rail trail at Christmas and have a competition. (4) She introduced another project relating to the old, rusted signs up and down Main Street. Most of them are in East End. They intend to approach the business owners and see if they would be willing to take them down. They have contacted a gentleman who has the equipment to remove the poles for an estimate. (5) The commission requested permission to decorate the new city hall because it is a focal point and they have a vision of what they want the city to look like.

The council invited the committee to consider cooperating with the Vo-tech, National Guard, or someone to clean up the Odd Fellows Cemetery.

Energy Express Program

Marion Tanner representing the Energy Express Advisory Board appeared before the council seeking volunteers to serve as role models for students this summer and when the children start back to school. It is a six-week read aloud program for 1st through 6th grade. They plan to have two sites: Valley Pre-K and New River Intermediate. This Energy Express program emphasizes the importance of reading; it improves reading skills through the arts, music, and other creative activities. Ms. Tanner invited the community to come in and read aloud to the students and listen to them read. A sign-up sheet was provided for anyone interested in being a volunteer. She encouraged the individuals who have volunteered to read to attend a read aloud orientation that is provided through Zoom.

Citizen's Comments

John Garvin questioned how the city was going to pay for the municipal building. He noted the city is paying \$11,537.90 every month on a 15-year term. He referred to Chapman Technical Group providing an estimation of \$2,045,400.00 for the renovations of the building to the Transition Committee. Mr. Garvin referenced the minutes concerning the Council's motion to research the cost of a new city hall, purchase of the former BB&T building and renovations and refurbish the current city hall. He called attention to the process of the decision to purchase the former bank building that was determined by the council and the Building Commission. He asked where the money was going to come from for the renovations. The council advised Mr. Garvin they would be happy to receive any questions in writing.

Jim Aleshire referenced the minutes from the 10th of January 2022. The motion carried 4-3 regarding the negotiation team entering into negotiations for the purchase of the bank. The team consisted of the building commission members, mayor, and the city manager. The team met with Owner Chuck Miller; it was an unofficial meeting due to all the owners not being in attendance. Mr. Aleshire alluded to Councilmember Perry disclosing he had contacted Steptoe and Johnson on how to proceed with the purchase of the former bank building. He noted a discrepancy that two council members were not on the negotiating team; he asserted they shouldn't have anything to do with the negotiations because as voting council members they would be voting for or against the purchase. Mr. Aleshire requested the name of the individuals who negotiated the purchase.

Unfinished Business

1. Review of Demolition Progress of Residential Structure Located at 30 Jordan St., Map 8A, Parcel 176, Owned by Jamie Adams & ETAL

The city manager briefed the council. They had reviewed this structure before; the owner applied for a demolition permit. However, the structure remains and has not been demolished. The owner will be notified that the city will remove the structure by using city labor. The city manager recommended the council approve the demolition.

Motion – Proceed with the demolition of the structure located at 30 Jordan St., Map 8A, Parcel 176, Owned by Jamie Adams & ETAL as the city manager has suggested.

Motion made by Councilmember Perry. Seconded by Councilmember Janney.

No Discussion.

The motion was unanimous. 4-0.

2. Bid Openings for Demolitions Under the REAP Program

- A. 301 Bond Ave., Map 16, Parcel 16, Owned by Cody and Sarah Donnally**
- B. 137 Broadway Ave., Map 7, Parcels 116 and 117, Owned by Dewayne Hopkins**
- C. 94 High St., Map 4, Parcel 90, Owned by Celia Puryear (Deceased) ETAL**

The city manager received and opened the sealed bids with the following results.

League Builders & Consultants	300 Silver Hill, Lester, WV 25865	Bid	Awarded
137 Broadway Ave.		\$6,250.00	
301 Bond Ave.		\$6,250.00	6,250.00
94 High St.		\$6,250.00	6,250.00
Reclaim Company LLC	200 8th St. Fairmont, WV 26554		
37 Broadway Ave.		12,750.00	
301 Bond Ave.		8,750.00	
94 High St.		9,750.00	
G&S Land Clearing and Excavation, LLC	23202 Kanawha Valley Rd Southside WV 25187		
37 Broadway Ave.		20,000.00	
301 Bond Ave.		17,000.00	
94 High St.		20,000.00	
Empire Salvage & Recycling, Inc.	PO Box 300 Bluefield, WV 24701		
137 Broadway Ave.		5,500.00	5,500.00
301 Bond Ave.		7,500.00	
94 High St.		6,500.00	

Discussion: League Builders was the low bidder for 301 Bond St. and 94 High St. and Empire Salvage was the low bidder for 137 Broadway. The council questioned Attorney File if the council could add the bids together and choose from the bids collectively rather than individually. The city manager advised the bidders were directed to submit their bids for each structure individually.

Motion – Accept the bid from League Builders and Consultants in the amount of \$6,250.00 to demolish the structure located at 301 Bond Ave., Map 16, Parcel 16, Owned by Cody and Sarah Donnally

Motion made by Councilmember Perry. Seconded by Councilmember Janney.

The motion was unanimous. 4-0.

Motion – Accept the bid from Empire Salvage & Recycling in the amount of \$5,500 to demolish the structure located at 137 Broadway Ave., Map 7, Parcels 116 and 117, Owned by Dewayne Hopkins

Motion made by Councilmember Perry. Seconded by Councilmember Janney.

No Discussion. The motion was unanimous. 4-0.

Motion – Accept the bid from League Builders and Consultants in the amount of \$6,250 to demolish the structure located at 94 High St., Map 4, Parcel 90, Owned by Celia Puryear (Deceased) ETAL

Motion made by Councilmember Perry. Seconded by Councilmember Janney.

No Discussion. The motion was unanimous. 4-0.

New Business

3. Appoint Poll Workers for June 13, 2023, Municipal Election

The clerk presented the list of the following poll workers for the council's approval.

- Edna Wriston
- Richard Roy
- Sally Shrewsberry
- Gail Treadway
- Carol Errington
- Debbie Persinger
- Susan Craun
- Mary Beaumont
- Bill Vest
- Clara Warner
- Barbara Goode
- Jack Booda

Most of the poll workers have worked in previous elections. In the clerk's communication with the Fayette County Clerks office it was reported they had exhausted all the possibilities for city poll workers to work the election. Therefore, not all poll workers live within the city limits.

Motion – Accept the poll workers for the June 13th, 2023 Municipal Election as submitted by the city manager and clerk.

Motion made by Councilmember Perry. Seconded by Councilmember Janney.

Discussion: Councilmember Perry requested to strike the poll workers that do not live in the city limits. Due to difficulty in finding poll workers he withdrew his request. There was a request to add a part-time poll worker during early voting for breaks. But this part-time position was not budgeted. The early voting poll workers are the ballot commissioners Rita Booda and June Blake. The clerk informed the council a letter was mailed to the registered voters notifying them the voting location for ward 1 and ward 2 will be at the New River Intermediate School, and the VOTE sign will be moved in different locations throughout the city to remind individuals to vote..

The motion was unanimous. 4-0.

4. Purchase of the Truist Drive-Thru Branch Located at 201 Summerlee Ave.

The city manager offered Truist \$10,000 for the branch drive-thru facility located at 201 Summerlee Ave. and she received a counteroffer of \$75,000 with \$7,500 earnest money. If the counteroffer is not accepted, they will put it on the market.

Motion – Table this item.

Motion made by Councilmember Perry. Seconded by Councilmember Hayslette.

Discussion: The council reasoned what would be put there and what would you do with it if the building is torn down. The premise for the Sanitary Board to be moved to the drive-thru is an excellent idea. The counteroffer is a ridiculous price and there is no intent to take it up at a later date unless Truist comes back with an acceptance of the city's offer or a reasonable offer. **The motion was unanimous. 4-0.**

5. **Request for the Minden Bridge to be Replaced** (Item was discussed prior to citizen's comments)

6. **Commercial Building Structural Assessment Proposal**

Alison Ibarra shared the structural analysis partnership for commercial buildings with the council and requested the council consider the prospective of a potential business owner or someone moving into our area. She explained our buildings are in various states of repair and are being skipped by potential businesses because they do not know what they are up against. Ms. Ibarra proposed to make it easier for those prospective businesses considering one of buildings is to run a feasibility very quickly, rather than the guess method. It should generate more looks at commercial structures and the building owners will have a more realistic picture of what they can get for their building. Some of the buildings will be deteriorating to the point it doesn't make sense for private investments to come in anymore; these structures need to be identified as efficiently as possible for the business owners/building owners to figure out what their next steps might be. Ms. Ibarra suggested a partnership with Chapman Engineering Group, the city, and any interested commercial building owners inside the city limits. There are two levels of assessments: General assessment is about \$1000 and a more in-dept structural assessment would be offered for approximately \$2000. Ms. Ibarra is suggesting the city split the cost with the commercial building owner and put a time limit on the offer. This assessment could be requested through the city website.

Motion – Accept the recommendation of the Economic Development Director as presented with a sunset date. This is contingent upon the treasurer and city manager identifying the funds that would be available.

Motion made by Councilmember Perry. Seconded by Councilmember Janney.

Discussion: The council has a short discussion relating to Plateau Medical Center's non-profit status and the termination of the Plateau TIF funding.

The motion was unanimous. 4-0.

7. **Get to Know Your Oak Hill Fun Proposal**

Ms. Abarra's goal for this project is to expose city residents to Oak Hill businesses that offer service and activities geared toward enjoyment. The idea is to have residents feel more connected to our businesses and enjoy what the city has to offer. This will increase the sense of community between our businesses, city government, and residents. As well as providing businesses with an opportunity to increase their exposure to potential customers, generate income during a time period that would otherwise be slower. Ms. Ibarra recommended budgeting \$1200 a month for this program as an investment in our businesses. The city would host one event per month. Businesses interested in hosting an event would send an inquiry through the city website. Ms. Ibarra intends to work with

businesses to create an event and produce a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) prior to each event; she hopes to begin hosting events as early as June or July.

Motion – Approve this proposal based on \$1000 per month for a six-month period and at the conclusion of the sunset date the Economic Development Director will report to the council as to its success.

Motion made by Councilmember Perry. Seconded by Councilmember Smallwood, Jr.

Discussion: Ms. Ibarra expects to get the Oak Hill Business & Professional Association up and running by June. Business proprietors were offered a chance to speak on the proposition.

Information involving this program will be made available through social media, press releases, email and mailing addresses, and the Chamber of Commerce. Ms. Ibarra would like the business association take responsibility of deciding the monthly events.

The motion was unanimous. 4-0.

8. Memorandum of Understanding with New River Gorge Regional Development Authority concerning Needleseye Park

The city manager submitted the Memorandum of Understanding to the council and requested the council's approval. The New River Gorge Regional Development Authority (NRGRDA) has received a grant for Needleseye Park to put in a trail head and bike trail. The city has teamed up with them and will provide labor such as restrooms, sewer lines and extending the sewer lines; NRGRDA will provide the money and supplies. Attorney File has reviewed and approved the agreement.

Motion – Accept the Memorandum of Understanding with the New River Gorge Regional Development Authority.

Motion made by Councilmember Janney. Seconded by Councilmember Hayslette.

Discussion: There was a short discussion on the completion date. NRGRDA will need to secure an engineer for the project.

The motion was unanimous. 4-0.

6. Discussion with Possible Vape Store Ordinance / Suzanne Wood

Sue Wood, the Program Director for the Drug Free Communities Grant in Fayette County works with the Fayette Prevention Coalition to reduce alcohol and tobacco use among middle and high school students. Ms. Wood petitioned the council to consider if we are growing in a healthy direction economically and physically for our young people because the #1 product used by teens is vaping nicotine. Most addictions start in the youth's teen years. Schools are experiencing challenges with vaping: One in four youths are vaping and 90% of Fayette County Teen Court involves vaping on school property. The City of Oak Hill has the most vape stores and students. Currently, vape stores are 1/2 mile from a school and she recommends the city adopt an ordinance requiring any new vape stores be at least a 1/2 mile from a school and a half mile to a mile from each other. She submitted a copy of the City of Charleston's Vape Ordinance.

Motion – Table the matter until Council receives more information.

Motion made by Councilmember Hayslette. Seconded by Councilmember Perry.

Discussion: The council discussed the age a youth was allowed to enter a vape store and if the Ms. Wood had consulted with the Sheriff's Dept., State Police, and agencies representing the city, county, and state for their input. Youths can be given a ticket for tobacco use. Council recommended Ms. Wood provide the city manager with other sample ordinances and share the input of the agencies and police departments views.

Motion carried 3-1.

Voting Yaw: Councilmember Perry, Councilmember Hayslette, and Councilmember Smallwood, Jr.

Voting Nay: Councilmember Janney

Department Reports

- A. Police Dept.
- B. Fire Dept.
- C. City Manager
- D. Beautification Commission
- E. Code Enforcement
- F. Director of Economic Development
- G. MS4

Police and Fire Dept. There were no questions on the police and fire department reports.

City Manager Report. The city manager added to her report: Jacob McGuire built a flag retirement box for tattered flags as an Eagle Scout Project; it is placed in front of City Hall. She will set a meeting date for everyone to get together to start the community garden that will be located outside of City Hall.

Code Enforcement Report. There were two complaints for Code Enforcement. An abandoned house located at South Loop and Coleman Circle has high grass, trash, and rats. Also, the corner of Huff Street and 24th street have high grass that is level with the fence in places. Council noticed signs on telephone poles and asked if there was an ordinance against it.

MS4 Report. The city manager reminded everyone to keep the streams and waterways clean. The city fixed a sewer problem; it has drastically fixed the water flow going into the Minden Plant.

Council / Mayoral Comments (with possible action)

The mayor called for council comments and the following items were discussed:

- Request for a no parking sign and repainting the yellow curblines on the sidewalks on the corner of C&O Cleaners and the street corner next to Chase Bank.
- The deeds for Minden Park are ready.
- The city manager is in contact with FEMA in relation to how to use the Flood Plan money for the Minden area.
- Request for Street lights in Minden to begin at the split at McKinney and continue down to the bottom of Daily Hill.
- One side parking on Jones Ave.

- Recommendation for the city manager to review possible right or left side street parking on Thompson Ave. and report the findings at the next council meeting.
- Request for off street parking signs on the left side (right beyond the apartments) on Lee St. down to Rhodes St.
- Summer workers repainting the yellow curblines on the city streets.
- Wolf Creek Update involving Bluewater Development.

Future Agenda Items

There were no future agenda items.

Announcements

The next City Council meeting will be on June 12, 2023.
Early Voting will begin on May 31st and end on June 10th.

Adjournment

There was no further business. The mayor adjourned the meeting at approximately 7:10 p.m.

Ronda Falk, City Clerk

Daniel E. Wright, Mayor