

REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING
August 3, 2009

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Hartwell City Council was held Monday, August 3, 2009 at 7:00 p.m. in Council Chambers of City Hall, 500 E. Howell Street. All members were present except Councilmember Jim Evans. The meeting was called to order by Mayor Matt Beasley, who also delivered the invocation. Following the invocation, everyone present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Hearing no additions or corrections to the minutes of the July 6, 2009 meeting, the minutes were approved upon motion by Councilman Little, seconded by Councilmember Mayfield and carried unanimously.

Mayor Beasley announced that there were still school kids who did not have school supplies or backpacks. He stated that anyone willing to donate supplies could drop them off at city hall and the Police Chief would be happy to get them to the children.

Mr. Bret Thurmond of Armentrout Roebuck Matheny Engineering Firm updated Mayor and Council on watershed assessment. He summarized data collected in evaluating current water quality conditions in the City's wastewater service area. Mr. Thurmond explained that the monitoring is conducted as part of the compliance with requirements with the City's NPDES Sewer System Discharge Permit.

Mr. Jim McMullan, Chairman of Hart County Board of Assessors, updated Mayor and Council on the process of property re-evaluation. Mr. McMullan reported that the Board of Assessors had a commitment to the Hart County Board of Commissioners to have the draft tax digest by November 1, 2009. He further explained in detail that the Board of Assessors would be accepting appointments from taxpayers beginning December 15 and onward regarding explanations of their property values.

Councilwoman Mayfield moved to table the second reading of Animal Control Ordinance No. 2009-04 for further review in a work session. Motion was seconded by Councilman Little and carried unanimously. It was the consensus of Council to hold a work session on Monday, August 10, 2009 at 4:00 p.m. at city hall to continue review of the proposed Animal Control Ordinance.

Due to the Labor Day holiday being the first Monday in September, Councilwoman Mayfield moved to hold the next regularly scheduled Council meeting on Tuesday, September 8, 2009 at 7:00 p.m. Motion was seconded by Councilman Gordon and carried unanimously.

Following the second reading of Ordinance No. 2009-05 regarding cable rights-of-way, a motion was made by Councilman Hicks to adopt the Ordinance. Motion was seconded by Councilwoman Mayfield and carried unanimously.

Mayor and Council heard the first reading of Ordinance No. 2009-06, establishing due compensation from telephone companies.

A motion was made by Councilman Hicks, seconded by Councilwoman Mayfield and carried unanimously to authorize approval of alcohol beverage license for Downtown Café as requested by Sharif H. Farhan.

In discussing the upcoming municipal general election, Mayor Beasley urged Council to begin discussions with the County regarding consolidation of services. He referred to heavy state regulations in the election process, and felt it may be time to consolidate efforts with the County for holding municipal elections, especially since the County uses the electronic voting machines and the City still uses the old hand lever (Shoup) voting machines. City Manager David Aldrich concurred with the Mayor, stating that he felt the County Probate Judge would prefer that an Election Board be established to conduct elections, whereby the County and City would each pay a portion of election costs. A motion was made by Councilman Hicks to authorize the City Manager to officially open negotiations with the County for consolidation of election services. Motion was seconded by Councilwoman Mayfield and carried unanimously.

A motion was made Councilman Little, seconded by Councilwoman Mayfield and carried unanimously to appoint Jean Turner as Election Superintendent and Barbara Norman as Absentee Ballot Clerk in the upcoming November election.

A motion was made by Councilman Hicks, seconded by Councilwoman Mayfield and carried unanimously to approve a permit for the annual Life Chain as requested by Hart Life Crisis Pregnancy Center. The event is scheduled for October 4, 2009 from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. in front of Northeast Georgia Bank on East Franklin Street.

A motion was made by Councilman Little to approve a request for a boot drive by the Hartwell Fire Department on the town square on Saturday, September 5, 2009 to collect funds for the Muscular Dystrophy Association. Motion was seconded by Councilman Hicks and carried unanimously.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Mayfield to approve a request from the Hartwell Pilot Club for the annual Depot Day festival to be held November 7, 2009 on Depot Street. Motion was seconded by Councilman Little and carried unanimously.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Mayfield to accept the appointment of Mr. Jerry Wright to serve on the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Ms. Cindy Carter who has moved out of the area. Motion was seconded by Councilman Little and carried unanimously.

Mayor Beasley directed attention to concerns over pay increases, criminal background checks, and drug testing regarding elected officials. He asked if there was any interest from Council in keeping the compensation for elected officials the same or separating the compensation from the insurance benefits, or increasing compensation for Mayor and Council. Councilwoman Mayfield stated that after 30 years on Council, she was in favor of a pay increase. Councilman Little stated that he was not in favor of an increase in pay. Following considerable discussion, it was the consensus of Council to have the City Manager look at steps required for an increase in compensation for elected officials, and review the previous pay rate study conducted by the University of Georgia.

As discussion ensued regarding unpaid Council work sessions and paid called meetings, Mayor Beasley stated that he didn't like called meetings unless it was an emergency situation. Following discussion, a motion was made by Councilwoman Mayfield to consider the work session scheduled for August 10th as a called meeting to discuss the animal control ordinance and consider elected official's compensation. Following further discussion, the motion was amended by Councilwoman Mayfield, as well as the second to the motion by Councilman Hicks, to state that the called meeting on August 10th would be held to discuss the animal control ordinance only. Motion carried 3 to 2, with Councilmembers Gordon and Little opposing, and Councilmembers Hicks, Mayfield, and Senkbeil voting in favor of the motion.

In discussing the legality of background checks and drug testing of elected officials, a motion was made by Councilman Little to authorize the City manager to investigate the legality of criminal background testing and drug testing of elected officials after they are elected. Motion was seconded by Councilman Hicks and carried unanimously.

The City Manager reported that the meter change-out project conducted by Johnson Controls was approximately 98% complete.

Speaking on behalf of the City Hall Building Committee, Councilman David Little reported that once the committee had a master plan for the proposed new city hall, it would be shared with the full Council.

Councilman Hicks expressed concern over the closing of cabins at Hart State Park, as well as other buildings in the park being completely gutted and staff relocated elsewhere. It had been understood that the park would be closed temporarily, but Councilman Hicks stated the closure did not appear to be temporary. He further stated that other parks in the state were doing financially worse than the Hart State Park, and the City needed to object. A motion was made by Councilman Hicks to have the City Manager verify the closing of the cabins and other buildings within the park with citizens living near the park, and also send letters to the Governor, Lt. Governor, and Department of Natural Resources Director, expressing dissatisfaction in closing the park. Motion was seconded by Councilwoman Mayfield and carried unanimously.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jean Turner
City Clerk