

VARNVILLE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

November 13, 2012 @ 7:00 PM

(I)

Call to Order

Officials present were Mayor Nathaniel “Nat” A. Shaffer, Mayor Pro-Tem Lloyd “Tootie” Griffith, Jr., Councilmen Ralph Smith, Henry Tuten, H. Alexander Campbell, Adam Major, and Ronald Williams, Police Chief Tyrone Smith, Public Works Director, Robert “Bobby” Edwards, Fire Chief Dobie Hiers, Town Attorney, Kevin Brown, and Secretary to the Mayor and Council, Amy Roberts.

Among the general population in attendance were Brenda Willis, Linda Cooler, Hattie Cooler, Shelia Carter, Becky Shaffer, Parker Shaffer, Banks Shaffer, NelliBeth Shaffer, Officer Marion Chambers, James Stanley, Alzena Rollins, Sandra Sanders, Bryson Cleland, and Michael DeWitt, Hampton County Guardian.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Shaffer. The invocation was given by Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith and the Pledge of Allegiance followed. Amy Roberts gave the FOIA Compliance Report stating that the meeting agenda was faxed to all media outlets and posted outside the town hall on November 8, 2012.

Mayor Shaffer presented the minutes from the council meeting held on October 8, 2012 and Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith made a motion that the minutes be accepted for approval. Councilman Smith seconded the motion. All members were in favor.

(II)

Introduction and/or requests of visitors

Mayor Shaffer acknowledged the general public in attendance.

(III)

Financial report

Mayor Shaffer presented a simple written financial report. He informed the council that the decrease shown in the Enterprise Fund in October was actually an increase. Mayor Shaffer stated that there was a large unexpected expense in the Enterprise Fund in November of \$26,750 for a CSX permit for the water looping project. There was a transfer of \$62,807 from the Enterprise Fund to the General Fund. The largest expense from the General Fund in November was the \$30,000 annual payment on the fire truck. Councilman Williams made a motion to accept the simple financial report as information only. Councilman Tuten seconded the motion. All members were in favor.

(IV)

Unfinished Business

Mayor Shaffer called for a motion to table the first reading of Ordinance No. 2012-04 to raise rates for garbage, refuse, and solid waste. The mayor stated that more time is needed to determine whether the \$2.50 proposed increase will be enough to sustain the town for several years. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith made a motion to table the first reading and Councilman Campbell seconded the motion. All members were in favor. Mayor Shaffer gave the second reading of Ordinance No. 2012-05 to authorize the Municipal Association of South Carolina to act as the municipal agent for purposes of distributing to municipalities the municipal broker's tax collected by the South Carolina Department of Insurance. Councilman Major made a motion to adopt the ordinance and Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith seconded the motion. All members were in favor. The mayor gave the second reading of Ordinance No. 2012-06 which is a comprehensive animal/dog control ordinance. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith made a motion to adopt the ordinance and Councilman Campbell seconded the motion. All members were in favor.

(V)

Reports of Department Heads and Committees

Police Department: Police Chief Tyrone Smith stated that there have been a lot of burglaries in Varnville in the past few weeks mainly involving bad juveniles. Recently three juveniles were arrested for burglary and sent to the Department of Juvenile Justice in Columbia. One adult was arrested on burglary charges and is being detained in the Hampton County Detention Center. Some of the stolen property has been retrieved. Chief Smith stated that several crime victims were present in council chambers and they had concerns about the lack of a curfew in Varnville. The council then gave Linda Cooler the opportunity to express her concerns on behalf of the citizens who had been victimized. Ms. Cooler first thanked Chief Smith for all the things he has done for the citizens of Varnville. Then she stated that someone threw a rock through a large picture window at her home on October 29, 2012. Ms. Cooler also informed the council that several juveniles had been hanging around on the street corners in the early hours of the morning, targeting seniors such as her own mother, and ringing doorbells and tapping on windows. Ms. Cooler acknowledged Sandra Sanders whose house has been robbed twice in recent weeks. Then Ms. Cooler pleaded with the council to enforce a curfew to get juveniles off the street at a decent hour. Mayor Shaffer told Ms. Cooler that Varnville had enforced a curfew back around 2003-2004; however the curfew was not included in the updated code of ordinances in 2009. He assured Ms. Cooler that a new curfew ordinance would be invoked after research. Chief Smith stated that we would do everything possible to help concerned citizens organize a neighborhood crime watch. Councilman Williams suggested that we have a public meeting. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith thanked Ms. Cooler for coming to the council meeting and speaking up.

Fire Department: Fire Chief Dobie Hiers stated that the Varnville Fire Department responded to 23 calls in the past month – 16 in the county and 7 within the town limits of Varnville. Chief Hiers also reported that he plans to resign from the Varnville Fire Department on December 31, 2012.

Department of Public Works: Public Works Director, Bobby Edwards, informed the council that there will be a pre-construction meeting for the lift station at Varnville Town Hall at 10:00 A.M. on Thursday, November 15, 2012.

Clerk Treasurer's Office: Nothing to report

Mayor's Office: Mayor Shaffer informed the council that the Estill Christmas Parade will be on Saturday, December 1, 2012 at 10:00 AM. The mayor presented a request from Amy Roberts, ADA Coordinator, to attend the South Carolina ADA Summit on December 13-14, 2012 at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center with a 2-day registration fee of \$120 plus hotel accommodations. Councilman Tuten made a motion to approve Amy's request and Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith seconded the motion. All members were in favor. Mayor Shaffer stated there would be a turkey (Thanksgiving) dinner for the Town of Varnville employees on Wednesday, November 21, 2012 at 12:00 PM. The mayor stated that he has looked at several new and used garbage trucks and is considering refurbishing the town's old garbage truck with a new engine; however he is still exploring options. Mayor Shaffer also announced the death of Mayor Rhoden's father but did not know the funeral arrangements.

(VI)

New Business

Mayor Shaffer presented the council with five business license requests - Timothy E. Simmons d/b/a Carolina Barbeque Company, LLC; James V. Sease, Jr. d/b/a S&S Disposal; Kimberly Vinson d/b/a Kimberly Vinson; Nathaniel A. Shaffer d/b/a Nathaniel "Nat" A. Shaffer, Coldwell Banker Affiliate; and Louis E. Davis d/b/a 3-D Transport. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith made a motion to approve all five business license applications and Councilman Smith seconded the motion. Mayor Shaffer abstained from voting. All other council members were in favor. Mayor Shaffer gave the first reading of Ordinance No. 2012-07 which is a local bidder preference ordinance. Councilman Tuten made a motion to table the first reading until the ordinance could be discussed further. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith seconded the motion. All members were in favor. Mayor Shaffer presented the council with a list of his personal property that he loaned to the town hall amidst the renovation of the mayor's office. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith made a motion to accept the list of personal property in the minutes as information only. Councilman Campbell seconded the motion. The mayor abstained from voting. All other members were in favor. Mayor Shaffer introduced newly hired Police Officer Marion Chambers to the council. Mayor Shaffer said that he thought Officer Chambers would be an asset to Varnville's Police

Department. Officer Chambers described himself as an aggressive officer who is ready to combat crime. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith made a motion to confirm the employment of Officer Chambers. Councilman Campbell seconded the motion. All members were in favor. Mayor Shaffer then introduced newly hired Streets and Sanitation employee, James “Jamie” Stanley. Mr. Stanley said that he is ready to do whatever it takes to get the job done. Mayor Shaffer noted that Mr. Stanley does have a Commercial Driver’s License. Councilman Tuten made a motion to confirm the employment of Mr. Stanley and Councilman Smith seconded the motion. All members were in favor. Mayor Shaffer gave the first reading of Ordinance No. 2012-08 to amend the town code with the order of proceedings to include the approval of the agenda at all town council meetings. Councilman Major made a motion to amend the town code. Councilman Smith seconded the motion. All members were in favor. Mayor Shaffer read a letter from Head Track Coaches at Wade Hampton High School, Rob and Myrriah Hanna, who were requesting permission to organize a 5K Run/Walk within the town limits of Varnville on December 8, 2012 at 9:00 AM. Mayor Shaffer stated that if approval was granted, he would issue a permit to the South Carolina Department of Transportation to close the secondary roads for the event. Councilman Campbell made a motion to honor the request and Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith seconded the motion. All members were in favor. The track coaches also asked the Town of Varnville for a \$150 sponsorship (to include the town’s logo on a t-shirt, a banner, etc.) for the 5K Run/Walk. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith made a motion to sponsor the track team with a \$150 donation. Councilman Major seconded the motion. All members were in favor. Mayor Shaffer read a letter from Mary Morris, President of the Hampton County Foster Parents Association, requesting permission to solicit funds at the traffic light in Varnville on November 17, 2012 and December 15, 2012 from 8:00 AM to 1:00 PM. Councilman Tuten made a motion to grant the request contingent upon Ms. Morris providing a financial report of how much funds are collected and where the funds will be distributed. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith seconded the motion. All members were in favor. Mayor Shaffer gave an update on the water looping project. The mayor stated that the lowest bid was \$322,839 from contractors in Lexington, SC and the second lowest bid was \$329,364 from local contractors who are located adjacent to the project site. Mayor Shaffer said that he fought hard and argued with URS that the local bidder should be awarded the contract because it would mean financial growth for our local economy and jobs for our citizens. In addition, the mayor said that he thought it is impossible for contractors to come all the way from Lexington and perform the job cheaper than local contractors. URS stated that the bidder’s preference must be in the contract and since it was not, the job was awarded to the lowest bidder. Mayor Shaffer stated that he signed all necessary paperwork in protest and noted that URS has not been nearly as accommodating as Thomas & Hutton.

(VII)

Old Business

None

(VIII)

Executive Session

Councilman Campbell made a motion at 8:08 PM to go into executive session to discuss a personnel matter regarding Fire Chief Dobie Hiers and a CDBG loan request from Midway Sunoco. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith seconded the motion. All members were in favor. After a brief discussion, Councilman Smith made a motion to come out of executive session at 8:45 PM. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith seconded the motion. All members were in favor. With reluctance, Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith made a motion to accept the December 31, 2012 resignation of Chief Hiers. Councilman Smith seconded the motion. All members were in favor. There was no discussion or action taken in public forum about the CDBG loan request from Midway Sunoco.

(IX)

Council members' concerns/comments

Councilman Williams stated that Varnville has a major issue with crime. He said he would like for us to be more connected with the public and aggressive in communicating with our youth. Councilman Williams also suggested that we make sure all overgrown lots are cleared as they play a role in crime.

Councilman Major had no comments.

Councilman Campbell said, "Charity begins at home and spreads abroad."

Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith stated that overgrown lots need to be cleared badly. He noted that we need to make an aggressive point in writing code enforcement letters to property owners to clean up their lots. If they do not comply, the town needs to clear the lots and bill the property owners. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith said, "This is our town and we should be proud of it!" Mayor Shaffer said that we may have to reassign the Code Enforcement Officer position from Lieutenant Smith (who is now our Student Resource Officer) to Officer Marion Chambers.

Councilman Tuten said that the LRWS is finally making progress and job descriptions have been posted. The tentative date for the LRWS to start operation is April 1, 2013. The LRWS plans to use QS/1 software for water bills and plans to hire Kevin Brown as their attorney. Councilman Tuten suggested that the Town of Varnville begin renting their backhoe to the citizens at a rate of \$75 per hour. He received much opposition from Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith who said the town would incur too much liability and citizens had other options for backhoe rental. Mayor Shaffer intervened and recommended the discussion be continued at a later date.

Councilman Smith said that SCE&G did a good job cleaning up a lot in front of his house. He said that Willie Rakes has a lot on Hampton Road that needs to be cleaned up.

(X)

Adjournment

Mayor Shaffer called for a motion to adjourn at 9:09 PM. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith made a motion and Councilman Campbell seconded the motion. All members were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Roberts
Secretary to Mayor and Council