

VARNVILLE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

March 12, 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, Town Attorney, Kevin Brown, and Secretary to the Mayor and Council, Amy Roberts.

Among the general population in attendance were Libby Murdaugh (Hampton School District One), Lin Laffitte (American Red Cross), Peola Butler, Jessie Wright, Brenda Willis, Billy Henderson, and Joann Harris.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Shaffer. The invocation was given by Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith and the Pledge of Allegiance followed.

Mayor Shaffer presented the minutes from the council meeting held on February 13, 2012 for approval. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith asked that an amendment be made to the minutes as Fire Chief Dobie Hiers presented his report later than scheduled during the meeting. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith made a motion that the amended minutes be accepted for approval and Councilman Smith seconded the motion. All members were in favor. Mayor Shaffer presented the minutes from a special council meeting held on February 24, 2012. A motion was made by Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith that the minutes be accepted for approval and Councilman Major seconded the motion. All members were in favor.

(II)

Introduction and/or requests of visitors

Mayor Shaffer welcomed the visitors and recognized those who had signed up to address the council – Libby Murdaugh, Lin Laffitte, and Peola Butler.

Libby Murdaugh, Chairman of the Board for Hampton School District One, thanked the council for their dedication to the school district. Mrs. Murdaugh stated that several schools within the district had received awards – Red Carpet School Award, Palmetto Gold Award, Palmetto Silver Award, and the Showcase Award for Excellence. She reported that despite decreased funding, there is an academic gain within the district and no employees have been laid off.

Mrs. Murdaugh informed the council that construction on the new North District Middle School is progressing well with the support of the voters. Students will be able to move in the partially completed facility after Christmas. Construction is expected to be complete by the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year.

Mrs. Murdaugh gave a statistical report of the three schools in Hampton School District One that are located in Varnville. Currently Varnville Elementary has 342 students, North District Middle School has 374 students, and Wade Hampton High School has 708 students.

Mrs. Murdaugh was proud to announce that three students from Hampton School District One had recently been recognized by Health Occupation Students of America (HOSA). Bibiana Loza was awarded a \$1,000 scholarship to Converse College. Kala Bishop and Heather Pyles earned 1st place in the state in the EMT competition.

Mrs. Murdaugh asked the council to please help spread the good news about all the positive things happening in Hampton School District One and thanked the council for their time. Mayor Shaffer thanked Mrs. Murdaugh for her presentation and the statistics.

Lin Laffitte from The American Red Cross thanked the council for opening Varnville Town Hall to serve as a satellite office for the American Red Cross. She reported that since July 2011, the Red Cross had responded to 14 fires in Hampton County and helped 44 victims, with 4 of those fires and 12 victims from Varnville.

Mrs. Laffitte informed the council that she is working to get a CPR instruction course here in Varnville. She also reported that the Low Country Red Cross will be the pilot program to adopt the National Guard Armories in Hampton, Walterboro, and Orangeburg. The goal of the program is to let the National Guard know that the Red Cross is here to serve military families. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith asked Mrs. Laffitte if the program would also reach out to veterans. Mrs. Laffitte assured the council that the Red Cross provides services to all military families – retired and active. She then asked the council to help spread the word about all services provided by the Red Cross.

Mrs. Laffitte thanked the council for proclaiming March as American Red Cross Month. Mayor Shaffer then read the proclamation. A motion was made by mayor Pro-Tem Griffith to accept the proclamation for approval and the motion was seconded by Councilman Campbell. All members were in favor.

Peola Butler addressed the council concerning why she cannot build a house at 274 Live Oak Street in Varnville. Ms. Butler has been previously denied a building permit and water and sewage at that location. Mayor Shaffer informed Ms. Butler and the council that the zoning district in which the property is located is governed under a safety and zoning ordinance that was passed in July 2002. Because the property is located near the airport, there are height restrictions that will not allow Ms. Butler to build a house there. A second reading of the aforementioned ordinance was passed in December 2002. The FAA zoning ordinance has been passed by Hampton County, the Town of Hampton, and the Town of Varnville. Mayor Shaffer told Ms. Butler that the public policy was not in her benefit; however, the policy did benefit the community as a whole.

Mayor Shaffer suggested to Ms. Butler that she petition the town planning commission. He informed her that he had filled out the appropriate form for her to take to the commission. He also suggested that maybe she could sell the property. Ms. Butler agreed that she would be willing to sell it. Councilman Tuten suggested that Hampton County could buy the property. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith advised Ms. Butler to let her attorney sell the property for her. Kevin Brown, attorney for the Town of Varnville, advised the council not to offer any more advice to Ms. Butler.

(III)

Financial report

Mayor Shaffer presented the financial report in the absence of a town clerk. In February 2012, the town had an income of \$148,178.52 and expenditures of \$81,987.35 with a net gain of \$66,191.17. Water Works had an income of \$83,151.80 and expenditures of \$43,757.10 with a net gain of \$39,394.70. Mayor Shaffer reported that there is \$74,207.84 in the reserve fund. He also reported a year-to-date business license revenue of \$18,822.10.

(IV)

Unfinished Business

Mayor Shaffer read the second reading of the Varnville Comprehensive Plan. A motion was made by Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith for the plan to be adopted. Councilman Major seconded the motion. All members were in favor.

Mayor Shaffer read the second reading of Ordinance No. 2012-01 to set the compensation of the mayor and council members. Councilman Campbell made a motion to adopt the ordinance. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith seconded the motion. All members were in favor.

Mayor Shaffer read the second reading of Ordinance No. 2012-02 to amend Town Code Section 2-199 to reflect the adoption of the new employee handbook. A motion was made by Councilman Tuten to adopt the new updated handbook. Councilman Smith seconded the motion. All members were in favor. Mayor Shaffer asked each council member to sign a cover sheet for the new handbook.

The first readings of the aforementioned ordinances in unison with a resolution passing the new employee handbook occurred on February 24, 2012 at a special town council meeting.

(V)

Reports of Department Heads and Committees

Police Department: Police Chief Tyrone Smith reported that crime had risen from January 2012 to February 2012. There were 28 incidents and 14 arrests in February versus 21 incidents and 7 arrests in January.

Chief Smith informed the council that the Varnville Police Department in conjunction with Hampton School District One would like to start a program called Operation Stop the Violence. This program will target at risk juveniles. The Varnville Police Department will meet with the juveniles on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month at 4:00 PM at the Ginn Street Ball Park to discuss topics such as bullying, gangs, alcohol and drug abuse, violence, etc. The Police Department will be recruiting teachers and coaches from the school district to volunteer their time as mentors.

Chief Smith requested permission from council for him and Renee Bennett to be allowed to attend a Municipal Court Administration Association Seminar in Columbia, SC on April 12, 2012 at a cost of \$75 per person. Council Tuten made a motion to grant permission and Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith seconded the motion. All members were in favor.

Fire Department: In the absence of Fire Chief Dobie Hiers, Mayor Shaffer presented the February 2012 report from the fire department. There were 20 calls in Varnville with 8 inside the town limits.

Department of Public Works: Director of Public Works, Bobby Edwards, reported that there were approximately 65 tons of garbage and 5 tons of limbs, leaves, and debris taken to the landfill in February 2012. Councilman Smith asked Mr. Edwards about the status of the limb grinder. Mr. Edwards stated that he had recently ridden around town with Councilman Tuten and they did not find enough big limbs to warrant the use of the grinder.

Mr. Edwards informed the council that there will be a sanitary survey on March 29, 2012.

Clerk Treasurer's Office: In the absence of a clerk, Mayor Shaffer reported that all bills have been paid and caught up for February 2012.

Mayor's Office: Mayor Shaffer introduced Amy Roberts, Secretary to the Mayor and Council. He presented the council with a copy of her job description. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith welcomed Mrs. Roberts aboard.

Mayor Shaffer announced that Scotsman Ice Systems donated an ice machine to the town and it had already been installed by Bobby Edwards. The mayor expects that the ice machine will save the town money during the summer months as employees who work outside will be have the ice at their disposal.

On behalf of Renee Bennett, Mayor Shaffer requested that Mrs. Bennett be allowed to attend a Business License Officials Association Seminar at the Spring Training Institute in Columbia, SC on April 10, 2102 at a cost of \$65.00. Councilman Campbell made a motion to grant Mrs. Bennett's request. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith seconded the motion. All members were in favor.

Mayor Shaffer reported that the Town of Varnville had received a \$4,000 Palmetto Pride Grant for the Blue Star Memorial Park contingent upon the Great American Clean-Up. The Magnolia

Club and possibly the American Legion has offered to provide support in the clean-up effort on Thursday, April 19, 2012 from 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM.

Mayor Shaffer reminded the council of the general election to be held on Tuesday, April 3, 2012. The Town of Varnville will have 3 council seats available. Running for those seats are Councilman Smith, Councilman Williams, Councilman Tuten, and newcomer, Erica Grubbs. Mayor Shaffer wished good luck to all the incumbents.

Mayor Shaffer informed the council that they can expect to see advertisements for Miss Varnville applicants soon. Also the Hampton County Watermelon Festival Committee has contacted the Town of Varnville about placing an advertisement. This item has already been budgeted. The theme for this year's Watermelon Festival is "Honoring Korean War Veterans." Councilman Major informed the council that he is a veteran of the Korean War.

(VI)

New Business

Mayor Shaffer stated that he and Police Chief Smith had discussed the need for code enforcement in the Town of Varnville and would like to appoint Officer Michael Smith as Town Code Enforcement Officer. Councilman Williams made a motion to approve the appointment and Councilman Major seconded the motion. All members were in favor. Officer Smith will be responsible for enforcing the dilapidated buildings code, the lot nuisance code, the signage code, and the roll carts code. He will be reading the codes, interpreting the codes, and issuing citations.

Council Tuten made a motion to nominate Mayor Shaffer as Low Country Regional Water Authority Alternate Commissioner. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith seconded the motion. All members were in favor. The Low Country Regional Water Authority meets on the last Tuesday of each month at 4:00 PM.

(VII)

Old Business

None

(VIII)

Executive Session

Councilman Smith made a motion that the council go into executive session. Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith seconded the motion. All members were in favor. After some discussion, the mayor was excused from executive session. When the council returned to council chambers, Councilman Major made a motion that the council come out of executive session. Councilman Campbell seconded the motion. All members were in favor. Mayor Shaffer announced a job opening in the Department of Public Works as Kenny Crapse resigned. Council Tuten recommended that this position be filled quickly. Mayor Shaffer stated that he terminated Clerk Treasurer, Christine Parker, on Monday, March 5, 2012 through his authority granted by the town code, and called

upon any opposition from the council. No council members opposed Mayor Shaffer's decision to terminate Ms. Parker. Mayor Shaffer then passed the gavel to Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith so that he may preside over the remainder of the council meeting. Councilman Tuten made a motion that Mayor Shaffer assumes additional duties of Clerk Treasurer (up to 30 hours per week, with additional pay of \$17.00 per hour, not to exceed 90 days) along with his mayoral duties. During the 90 day period, the position of Clerk Treasurer will be advertised and candidates will be interviewed until the vacancy is filled. Councilman Campbell seconded the motion. All members were in favor. Mayor Shaffer abstained from the vote and accepted the additional responsibility.

(IX)

Council members' concerns/comments

Councilman Smith had no comments.

Councilman Tuten thanked the council for their time of service together, as there are no more regular council meetings before the general election on Tuesday, April 3, 2012.

Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith stated that he is proud of the work the council has been doing and he hopes they continue to work together.

Mayor Shaffer stated that he appreciates the opportunity to continue to serve as mayor of Varnville. He thanked each of the council members for their support during the death of his father. Mayor Shaffer wished all incumbents the best of luck in the upcoming election.

Councilman Campbell wished all incumbents good luck in the upcoming election.

Councilman Major stated that he was glad that the council handles situations in business form. He wished all incumbents the best of luck in the upcoming election.

Councilman Williams stated that he has served on the council for 8 years. He asked the council to please continue the good work, if he did not get re-elected. Councilman Williams expressed the importance of the town's appearance and the enforcement of all town codes

(X)

Adjournment

Mayor Pro-Tem Griffith called for a motion to adjourn at 9:12 PM. Councilman Tuten made a motion to adjourn. Councilman Williams seconded the motion. All members were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Roberts
Secretary to Mayor and Council