

CITY OF CORNELIA
MINUTES OF MEETING
November 7, 2023

The Cornelia City Commission met in a Workshop Session on Tuesday, November 7, 2023, at 5 PM in the Cornelia Municipal Building Conference Room, 181 Larkin Street, Cornelia, GA. Mayor, John Borrow, called the meeting to order and the following Commissioners were present: Tony Cook, Janice Griggs, Mark Reed, and Don Bagwell. Also, present: City Attorney, Steve Campbell, City Manager, Donald Anderson, Finance Director, Melanie Chandler, and City Clerk, Debbie Turner.

Mayor Borrow opened the meeting at 5 PM, he explained that item number 11 in reference to the Pan Handling Ordinance needs to be removed from the agenda. City Attorney, Steve Campbell said that he needs to look into it further. City Manager Anderson went over the changes made to the proposed budget. In the General Fund \$7,800 was increased for Court Services and the Police Department increased by \$3,000 for the new car striping. In the Water/Sewer Fund Public Works was decreased by \$10,000 for repairs to the shop gates which were repaired in October with an approval vote. The Wastewater Plant increased by \$40,000 for Clarifier repairs and \$3,000 was added to the Water Plant for computer software. Mr. Anderson explained that he added \$371,000 to the ARPA Budget for the Downtown Entertainment Project. The SPLOST budget was increased for the Downtown Parking Lot and the Main St. crosswalk was added to the 2024 Paving project. New Servers for software upgrades are included in the \$361,000 so \$50,000 has been removed for this project. Commissioner Reed asked about the Hotel/Motel Tax and if the Chamber could promote Cornelia more? City Manager Anderson explained that the money must be spent in a certain way. He suggested they ask the Chamber President when she gives her quarterly report about promoting Cornelia more. They discussed the millage rate and how it has not been raised in over 17 years. The other items on the agenda were discussed.

The workshop adjourned at 5:40

Debbie Turner, City Clerk

John Borrow, Mayor

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The Cornelia City Commission met in Regular Session on Tuesday, November 7, 2023, at 6 PM in the Cornelia Municipal Building Conference Room, 181 Larkin Street, Cornelia, GA. Mayor, John Borrow, called the meeting to order and the following Commissioners were present: Tony Cook, Janice Griggs, Mark Reed, and Don Bagwell. Also, present: City Attorney, Steve Campbell, Finance Director, Melanie Chandler, City Manager, Donald Anderson, and City Clerk, Debbie Turner.

Commissioner Bagwell gave the invocation and Commissioner Cook led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commissioner Reed made the motion to Approve the Agenda removing Item 11, seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Approved 4 - 0

Commissioner Bagwell made the motion to approve the October 10th minutes with the correction of a misspelled name, seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Approved 4 - 0

City Manager Donald Anderson presented his monthly report: Mr. Anderson said that following the October commission meeting the bench that was dedicated to Mrs. Tutt has been placed near the Big Red Apple temporarily. Hopefully it will move back to its original location soon. Mr. Anderson reported that we received notice that our Vibrant Communities grant application has been approved and he is working with Norfolk Southern to obtain a permit to paint the mural on the Underpass. Ms. Davenport is working on a final design to present for your approval, she is also planning Community Outreach events to get the public's input. Mr. Anderson said the Dog Park was vandalized a few weeks ago and the damage was the concrete caps on the knee wall near the pavilion. Public works was able to repair it until we can get a price to replace the caps. Our police department is investigating and has encouraged anyone with information to call the tip line. Mr. Anderson stated that we received notice from the Department of Community Affairs that our Plans First designation has been renewed for another 3 years. His report is made an integral part of the minutes.

Public Forum:

Keith Herndon came forward to ask about curb side recycling, Mayor Borrow said that he does not think that it is possible at this time, and we do have a recycling center he can use. Mr. Herndon asked if we

were prepared for an EMP (electromagnetic pulse)? Mayor Borrow said that we would not be prepared for that, he said he does not think any city is prepared for it. Mr. Herndon also wanted to know if his trash that was taken to the landfill is separated. Mayor Borrow stated No it is not.

Brenda Garica came forward to ask about the proposed budget as well as the millage rate. She asked if we could cut the budget somewhere so that we could keep the millage rate the same. Ms. Garcia said she could pay her taxes but that someone on a fixed income might not be able to. Mayor Borrow said that Cornelia is the economic hub of Habersham and with the growth that we have seen we need more Police Officers and Firefighters. He said that everything is going up and we are all feeling that, but the budget has been cut as much as possible. City Manager, Donald Anderson said that he had already cut a million dollars out of the water/sewer and a million dollars out of the general fund. Mayor Borrow said that he knows people are on a fixed income and we also have people on our commission that are on a fixed income. He went on to say that we must look at where we are now and must address the current needs. Mr. Anderson explained that we have not raised taxes in over 17 years. He said that that part of the problem is that our millage rate is so that even with the increased tax base it does not generate much revenue. Mr. Anderson said that our tax digest grew by \$25 million last year, which accounted for \$215,000 worth of revenue. Mr. Anderson said that we are still operating with the same number of officers that we had in 1995 and with the growth of our city we need more officers; we have added over 300 residential units and with our commercial growth we cannot continue operating with only two officers per shift. Mayor Borrow said that he and Mr. Anderson have been working with the county on assessed values on some commercial spaces, he said that our taxes have gone up on residential but some of the massive commercial buildings have actually seen their value lowered. Mayor Borrow said that we hear you and your concerns.

Mr. Herndon came back to speak again about recycling, he said that he would like to see the county and the city recycle the trash. He wants the bottles and plastic separated out. Mayor Borrow said as for the city that is not a possibility right now and he doesn't know about the county.

Public Hearings: City Manager, Donald Anderson suggested that the Public Hearing be done before the Budget.

Mayor Borrow opened the Public Hearing on the Millage Rate and asked if anyone wanted to speak for or against it.

Millage Rate - City Manager, Anderson explained that with over 300 new residential units being built since 2019 our tax digest grew by \$25,306,698. With the current millage rate at 8.5 the revenue will increase be \$215,000. Mr. Anderson said that these units require more services but do not provide much revenue. He said that to continue the level of service our citizens expect and deserve he is requesting our millage rate be increased to 9.5. This would increase our revenue by \$250,000. With the state implementing a Homeowner Tax Relief Grant, providing a \$171 for each Cornelia Homeowner most will see a reduction in their taxes even with a 1 mill increase. Commissioner Cook asked if this was a one-time credit. Melanie Chandler, Finance Director said that yes, it is only a one-time credit. No one came forward and Mayor Borrow closed the Public Hearing.

Commissioner Bagwell made the motion to adopt the millage rate to 9.5, seconded by Commissioner Cook. Approved 4 -0

Old Business:

Proposed Budget for 2024 - City Manager Anderson said he has made some changes to the proposed budget. He said that with the rising costs of doing business we have tried to retain the level of services that our citizens are used to. The General fund budget is down from \$6,024,906 in 2023 to \$5,875,686 but even with the reduction the General Fund is still \$325,886 over the anticipated revenue of \$5,549,600. This is due in part to a reduction of \$609,000 in the amount of money transferred from other funds. To balance the budget, we will utilize \$325,886 from our fund balance. Mr. Anderson stated that the Water/Sewer budget is larger than the 2023 by \$1,395,591 and despite the increase the W/S budget only relies on \$431,960. However, the proposed budget does rely on a 3% increase in water and sewer fees. Mr. Anderson went over the ARPA fund and Hotel-Motel Tax Capital Fund. He also went over the SPLOST projects for 2024 as well as the Stormwater Projects for 2024. The proposed budget calls for the addition of 2 new police officers due to growth, he said that the Public Safety Director had requested 3 additional firefighters for growth as well. He said that those

positions were eliminated after considering the need for more Police Officers, he said that he felt this was more of a priority. Mr. Anderson is requesting a 2.5% cost of living as well as a 2.5% merit increase based on evaluations for each employee. The General fund will rely on transfers from the Hotel-Motel Tax funds of \$127,500 and Water/Sewer funds of \$1,000,000. Mr. Anderson also went over the noteworthy programs and projects. Mr. Anderson stated that the proposed budget is within the means of the city. Commissioner Cook made a motion to adopt the budget, seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Approved 4 - 0

Amendment to Chapter 12 of the Municipal Code: The ordinance was posted, and all 55 businesses have been contacted to let them know the city will be pumping the grease traps if adopted. The cost of the service will be added to their utility bill. Commissioner Reed made the motion to adopt the ordinance, seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Approved 4 - 0

Amendment to Chapter 40 of the Municipal Code - This ordinance was posted and has received no comments for or against. Commissioner Reed made the motion to adopt the ordinance, seconded by Commissioner Cook.

New Business:

Appointment to the Downtown Development Authority - City Manager Anderson stated that Jason Tanner has resigned from the DDA Board, and they have nominated Alexandra Michelle to fill the open position. Commissioner Bagwell made the motion to appoint Ms. Michelle, seconded by Commissioner Reed. Approved 4 - 0

Agreement with Norfolk Southern for Main Street Crossing Project - City Manager stated that this agreement will be for Norfolk Southern in install a Full Depth Rubber Panel Grade Crossing at the Noth Main Crossing. The cost is \$224,429 but our portion will be \$100,000, and GDOT has again agreed to pay the remaining \$124,429. Commissioner Reed made the motion to sign the agreement, seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Approved 4 - 0

Agreement with Norfolk Southern for Hoyt Street Bridge Removal - City Manager Anderson explained that this agreement will be for Norfolk Southern to remove the Hoyt Street Bridge. The railroad will pay the city \$100,000 for the removal of the bridge and they will be responsible for demolition and for the cleanup. Commissioner Cook made the motion

to sign the agreement seconded by Commissioner Bagwell. Approved 4 - 0

Ordinance # 11-23-01, This ordinance was removed from the Agenda until City Attorney can look into further.

Vibrant Communities Grant Agreement - City Manager, Anderson stated that we received a grant for \$5,000 to help with the Tim Loves Tink Mural. The agreement explains the city's responsibility by accepting the grant. The project must be completed by June 1, 2024. Commissioner Bagwell made the motion to sign the agreement, seconded by Commissioner Reed. Approved 4 - 0

Commissioner Griggs made the motion to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Reed. Approved 4 - 0

Debbie Turner, City Clerk

John Borrow, Mayor