

MINUTES

DECATUR CITY COMMISSION

Regular Meeting
March 19, 2018
City Hall: 7:30 p.m.

Mayor Garrett called the Regular Meeting of the Decatur City Commission to order at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, March 19, 2018.

PRESENT: Mayor Garrett; Mayor pro tem Powers; and Commissioners Drake, Smith and Walsh; and, City Manager Merriss.

MINUTES of the Executive Session and Regular Meeting of March 5, 2018 were approved on a motion by Commissioner Walsh; second by Mayor pro tem Powers; and Mayor Garrett; Mayor pro tem Powers; and, Commissioners Drake, Smith and Walsh voting “aye.”

PRESENTATION FROM “YEA! FOR AN INCLUSIVE DECATUR.”

Mary Stoops began the presentation by explaining that YEA! stood for Young Exceptional Adults and included young adults with developmental disabilities who resided in the City of Decatur. She stated that a developmental disability was defined as a cognitive or physical impairment that manifested before the age of 22 and continued throughout the individual’s lifespan. Ms. Stoops stated that the group wanted to make a presentation to the City Commission regarding ways the City could be more inclusive of all residents. The following group members spoke on topics such as affordable housing options, recreation programming, employment and bicycle infrastructure: Joshua Grant, Catherine Helmers, Christine Sass, Mae Rosen, Martha Haythorn and Lena Rosen.

PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS.

City Manager Merriss stated that requests from Alliance Realty Services, LLC for consideration of adopting a land use designation, zoning classification, a regulating master site plan and special exceptions for eleven properties located at 2700 Grove Street, 173 Grove Street, 165 Grove Place, 161 Grove Place, 153 Grove Place, 2688 East Ponce De Leon Avenue, 2700 East Ponce De Leon Avenue, 2706 East Ponce De Leon Avenue, 2716 East Ponce De Leon Avenue, 2734 East Ponce De Leon Avenue, and 2748 East Ponce De Leon Avenue had been deferred until the April 16, 2018 City Commission meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS.

Mayor Garrett opened the meeting for public comment. Hearing none, the public comment portion of the meeting was closed.

TAX BILLING ORDINANCE.

Assistant City Manager Andrea Arnold recommended adoption of Ordinance O-18-02 establishing 2018 property tax billing dates and establishing the process for assessing penalties and interest rates for unpaid property taxes.

In response to a question from Commissioner Walsh, Ms. Arnold stated that the total annual interest rate that could be assessed on unpaid property taxes was 7.5%.

In response to a question from Mayor pro tem Powers, Ms. Arnold stated that if a taxpayer requested an appeal of the property value that resulted in a reassessment, the property homeowner's tax payment due date could change.

City Manager Merriss added that most taxpayers still had to meet the established deadlines even if their property value was under appeal but that they would receive a refund if they had overpaid or an additional bill if they had underpaid once the value review process was completed.

On a motion by Commissioner Smith, second by Mayor pro tem Powers; and Mayor Garrett; Mayor pro tem Powers; and, Commissioners Drake, Smith and Walsh voting "aye," Ordinance O-18-02 was adopted as recommended.

SANITATION FEE SCHEDULE.

Assistant City Manager David Junger recommended adoption of the proposed sanitation fee schedule for 2018. He stated that proposed operational costs were estimated at a rate to maintain the current service delivery level for refuse and recycling collections and it was recommended that the single-family residential fee be increased from \$278 to \$290 per unit. Mr. Junger also recommended increases to the commercial service rates. He noted that it was recommended that bag prices would remain the same as in 2017.

In response to a question from Commissioner Drake, Mr. Junger stated the proposed distribution of red bins for glass recyclables would be coordinated with the recycling hauler.

In response to a question from Mayor pro tem Powers, Mr. Junger stated that homes without red collection bins would be given priority and that the remainder of the bins would be kept for replacing broken or lost bins.

In response to a question from Commissioner Drake, Mr. Junger stated that the City typically acquired commercial sanitation accounts from businesses that could not get service from a private hauler.

Mayor Garrett recommended that an educational and information campaign be developed for residents once the red bins were distributed.

On a motion by Commissioner Drake, second by Mayor pro tem Powers; and, Mayor Garrett; Mayor pro tem Powers; and, Commissioners Drake, Smith and Walsh voting “aye,” the Sanitation Fee Schedule was adopted as recommended.

SANITATION FEE OFFSET.

Finance Director Russ Madison requested approval of a fee offset from the residential sanitation fee and storm-water utility fee for homeowners who qualified for the S-2 (age-80) homestead exemption. The fee offset would require a transfer from the general fund to the solid waste and storm-water funds to cover the value of the fee offset.

Mr. Madison stated that local property values spiked in 2015 prompting a strong community reaction and an approval of a fee offset for homeowners over the age of 70. He noted that a fee offset was approved again in 2016 for a smaller group of low to moderate-income homeowners over the age of 80 until additional homestead exemption tax relief could be enacted. Mr. Madison stated that many of the affected senior residents appealed their property assessments in 2015; and, that the values that were set based on their appeals were locked in for three years. He noted that those values were likely to be reset in 2018. Mr. Madison added that other factors affecting increased property tax rates included the tax assessment to cover the cost of the school bond issuance that became effective in 2016 which increased property taxes a couple hundred dollars per household depending on the property value. Mr. Madison noted that no taxpayers were exempt from the school bond tax payment.

Mr. Madison stated that homeowners over the age of 80 with federal adjusted gross income of less than \$40,000 qualified for the S-2 exemption. He noted that the City traditionally had 200 or fewer homeowners who qualified for the S-2 exemption. Mr. Madison stated that since the residential sanitation fee for 2018 would be \$290, the cost to the general fund for funding the proposed sanitation fee offset would be about \$50,000, and if the storm-water fee remained \$100 for a typical home, the cost to the general fund for funding the storm-water fee offset would be about \$17,100. He stated that the City already had the S-2 data, and staff could adjust the fees for the subject properties in time for the first installment billing of 2018. Mr. Madison recommended that the offset be granted for a period of three years (2018, 2019, and 2020) as this would allow seniors who are on fixed incomes to do financial planning with greater certainty without overcommitting or tying the hands of City Commission for subsequent years.

On a motion by Mayor pro tem Powers, second by Commissioner Smith; and, Mayor Garrett; Mayor pro tem Powers; and, Commissioners Drake, Smith and Walsh voting “aye,” the Sanitation fee offset was adopted as recommended.

REQUESTS AND PETITIONS.

On a motion by Commissioner Drake, second by Mayor pro tem Powers; and, Mayor Garrett; Mayor pro tem Powers; and, Commissioners Drake, Smith and Walsh voting “aye,” the request from the Westchester Elementary School third grade classes to have the US Board of Geographic Names designated a tributary of Peavine Creek as Wolfpack Creek was approved.

Christine Hunsacker, owner of Paws, Whiskers and Wags, stated that she was disappointed at learning of the deferral of the consideration of the requests from Alliance Realty Services until April 16th. Ms. Hunsacker spoke against the annexation of the 11 parcels and stated that the area did not need any more grocery stores or apartment complexes.

REPORTS AND OTHER BUSINESS.

City Manager Merriss stated that the request for annexation from Alliance Realty Services, LLC would be considered at the April 16, 2018 City Commission meeting.

City Manager Merriss stated that the West Ponce de Leon movie night event would feature the movie “Wonder” after dark on Friday, March 23. She stated that the Easter egg hunt would begin at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, March 24 at Decatur First Baptist Church and that the Touch-a-Budget budget expo would be held on the Square from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, March 20.

On a motion by Commissioner Smith, second by Commissioner Walsh; and, Mayor Garrett; Mayor pro tem Powers; and, Commissioners Drake, Smith and Walsh voting “aye,” Resolution R-18-07 request that the General Assembly recognize the needs of local governments to maintain and control rights-of-way was adopted.

Commissioner Walsh stated that she was proud to call the members of YEA! her neighbors.

Commissioner Walsh noted that Decatur High School’s production of Grease was fantastic and that there were still tickets available for the production’s second weekend.

Commissioner Walsh stated that many of her neighbors in the Great Lakes area had come together to do a cleanup at Waddell Park.

Commissioner Walsh stated that she had a blast as a volunteer at the mile 13 water station during the Publix Georgia marathon.

Commissioner Smith stated that the presentation from YEA! was fantastic.

Commissioner Smith stated that the Decatur Business Association meeting would be held on March 27th at 5:15 p.m. at Cornerstone Bank.

Commissioner Drake stated that the City should share YEA’s contact information with the members of the Decatur Business Association.

Commissioner Drake stated that the City also hosted the annual Tour deCatur race.

Commissioner Drake stated that Grease was one of the best productions he had seen performed by high school students.

Mayor pro tem Powers stated that Friday, March 23 was a busy day for Decatur related events including the Oakhurst Elementary spring auction and the Westchester Elementary School Battle of the Bands.

Mayor pro tem Powers remarked “Yes to YEA!” and stated that the group was comprised of great residents.

Mayor pro tem Powers stated that the City Commission would remain engaged with the community when it came to making big decisions in the near future.

Mayor pro tem Powers stated that Decatur had been named as the “#1 Place to Live in the Atlanta area” by Niche.com.

Mayor Garrett stated that she had also attended a performance of Grease and that the production was filled with talented students on and off the stage.

Mayor Garrett thanked members of the City’s Police, Fire and Public Works staff for their response during the school walkout event on March 14th.

Mayor Garrett noted that the City’s hotel-motel tax bill was making its way through the General Assembly and that she hoped to have an update soon.

Mayor Garrett stated that she was participating in a joint DeKalb Municipal Association and DeKalb County transit study that was a part of the County’s community transportation planning efforts. She stated that the study was looking at transit and connectivity options throughout the county.

Mayor Garrett stated that she was also serving on a committee to study annexation countywide as part of an effort being coordinated by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government.

Mayor Garrett stated that Trinity Mercantile would be hosting a Women in the Arts event on Friday, March 23.

Mayor Garrett thanked the YEA! members for making an inspiring presentation at the beginning of the meeting.

The City Commission thanked the volunteers who worked with and cheered on the runners during the Georgia Publix Marathon.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.

Meredith Roark
City Clerk