



MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
of THE MARY ESTHER CITY COUNCIL
September 6, 2023 - 6:00 PM

195 Christobal Road – North, Mary Esther, FL 32569

CITY COUNCIL PRESENT

Chris Stein, Mayor
Susan Coxwell, Councilmember
Jan Lipscomb, Councilmember

Larry Carter, Mayor Pro Tem
April Sutton, Councilmember
Bernie Oder, Councilmember

CITY STAFF PRESENT

Jared Cobb, City Manager
Hayward Dykes, City Attorney

Valerie Broxson, City Clerk

OTHERS PRESENT

Grady Carpenter, OSCO Captain

Mark Bundrick, OCWFD Chief

1. INVOCATION

Pastor Winningham, First Baptist Church of Mary Esther, gave the invocation.

2. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Stein at 6:00 pm.

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mayor Stein led the pledge of allegiance.

4. ROLL CALL

The City Clerk called the roll as reflected above.

5. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Mayor Stein asked if the council wished to make any changes to the agenda. Hearing none, Mayor Stein asked for a motion. Councilmember Sutton initiated the motion, seconded by Councilmember Lipscomb. The motion passed 5 to 0.

RESULT:	PASSED (5-0)
MOVER:	Councilmember April Sutton
SECOND:	Councilmember Janice Lipscomb
AYES:	Bernie Oder, Larry Carter, Susan Coxwell, Janice Lipscomb, April Sutton
NAYS:	None

6. BUDGET HEARING

6.1. FY 2024 Tentative Budget Hearing

City Manager Cobb provided an overview of the proposed FY 2024 budget by reading the background, discussion, and financial impact sections of the agenda item.

Mayor Stein opened the public hearing for the budget to receive comments.

Robert "Butch" Williams, 28 Kohler Drive

Mr. Williams wanted clarification on the total rate increase for FY 2024. Mr. Williams thought there

was one year left for the ten percent (10%) increase and an additional five percent (5%) was going to be added. CM Cobb clarified that the last ten percent (10%) increase occurred in FY 2022 and there was no rate increase last year. The proposed rate increase for FY 2024 is five percent (5%). CM Cobb also shared that the inflation for utilities was a little over five percent (5%) so the amount proposed will help to maintain where the city is at.

Hearing no other comments from the public, Mayor Stein closed the public hearing.

City Clerk Broxson read the first reading of Ordinance 2023-01:

ORDINANCE NO. 2023-01

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF MARY ESTHER, IN OKALOOSA COUNTY, FLORIDA, ADOPTING AN AD VALOREM TAX MILLAGE RATE OF 5.0261 MILLS FOR THE 2023-2024 TAXABLE YEAR; AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

Mayor Stein read the following:

- The name of the taxing authority is the City of Mary Esther, Florida,
- The rolled back rate is 4.6770,
- The percentage by which the millage rate exceeds the roll back rate is 7.46%, and
- The millage rate to be levied for FY 2024 is 5.0261 mills.

Mayor Stein asked if there was a motion by the council. Councilmember Oder made the motion to approve Ordinance 2023-01 on the first reading and to have the ordinance sent to the second reading, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Carter. Motion passed 5 to 0.

RESULT:	PASSED (5-0)
MOVER:	Councilmember Bernie Oder
SECOND:	Mayor Pro Tem Larry Carter
AYES:	Bernie Oder, Larry Carter, Susan Coxwell, Janice Lipscomb, April Sutton
NAYS:	None

Mayor Stein announced that the second and final public hearing for the FY 2024 mileage and budget is scheduled for Wednesday, September 20, 2023 at 6:00 pm at City Hall. The public may also attend the meeting virtually.

Mayor Stein concluded the budget hearing.

7. SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

Mayor Stein congratulated Councilmember Oder and Councilmember Sutton for receiving the Gold Florida League of Cities (FLC) University Certificate for Elected Municipal Officials. The points they accrued were from August 2022 to July 2023. Officials earned points for participating in training events offered by the FLC University, including monthly webinars, online orientation, the Institute for Elected Municipal Officials (IEMO I and II), the State-Mandated Continuing Education in Ethics, and the League's Annual Conference and legislative events. Mayor Stein presented both councilmembers with the FLC Gold Certificate, a \$2 bill, and a City of Mary Esther coaster.

7.1. Okaloosa County Public Library Cooperative

Councilmember Oder is assigned to the Okaloosa County Public Library Cooperative Committee. At the last library cooperative committee meeting, a PowerPoint was provided to the committee members since there were several new members. Councilmember Oder presented the PowerPoint to help others better understand the Okaloosa County Public Library Cooperative Committee. Discussion points included the cooperative starting twenty-five (25) years ago, agencies sharing resources but maintaining autonomy,

residents may use the services at any library within the county, there is more to the library than just reading a book, the funding for the libraries, and the need to receive federal funding. Vicky Stever, the Cooperative Coordinator, appeared via Zoom and thanked the Mary Esther library and the member group.

7.2. Yard of the Month

Mayor Stein shared that there are three locations nominated for the September Yard of the Month. The council discussed the three choices. The council selected 100 N. Lorraine Drive as the September 2023 Yard of the Month.

Mayor Stein shared that nominations for Yard of the Month or Best Decorated can be done in person or through our website (www.cityofmaryesther.com/218/Yard-of-the-month).

Mayor Stein discussed with the council that in October the location could start being based upon the best decorated house for the season through December. The Yard of the Month program will be halted in January and February until the grass starts growing again.

8. CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor Stein asked if the council wished to make any changes to the consent agenda. Hearing none, Mayor Stein asked for a motion. Councilmember Coxwell initiated the motion, seconded by Councilmember Sutton. The motion passed 5 to 0.

RESULT:	PASSED (5-0)
MOVER:	Councilmember Susan Coxwell
SECOND:	Councilmember April Sutton
AYES:	Bernie Oder, Larry Carter, Susan Coxwell, Janice Lipscomb, April Sutton
NAYS:	None

8.1. Approval of the Minutes

8.2. Financial Report

8.3. Maintenance Report

8.4. Library Report

8.5. Fire Department Report

8.6. Code Compliance Report

8.7. Jacobs Report

9. CITIZENS WHO HAVE REQUESTED TO BE PLACED ON THE AGENDA

None.

10. PUBLIC COMMENT (NON-AGENDA ITEMS)

None.

11. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

12. NEW BUSINESS

12.1. City Manager Evaluation

City Manager Cobb read, in part, the background section of the agenda item. "On November 7, 2022, the City Council approved an agreement with Dr. Walt Hanline to facilitate the 2023 annual evaluation of the City Manager. On July 10, 2023, the evaluation form and process were reviewed by the City Council." CM Cobb stated that we are at the end of the process, and Dr. Handline is here to present the evaluation results.

Dr. Handline thanked the council and briefly went through the comments section for each area listed in the City Manager's evaluation (the evaluation was attached to the agenda item). Dr. Handline finished by stating that City manager Cobb demonstrated exemplary leadership and is a model for others. Dr. Handline finished by summarizing the summary comments.

"Overall, Mr. Cobb is a great asset to the City! He has done an excellent job in keeping the Council informed and up to date on all City business. Mr. Cobb has spent this last year getting major projects to their final stages. Jared is quick to respond to Council member questions or needs. Residents express that they are pleased with his attention to their concerns. Mr. Cobb's staffing recommendations have been well stated. The positions that he is requesting are designed to ensure that the City functions more efficiently. We appreciate Jared's openness to questions and his forward-thinking thoughts and ideas. His openness to ideas from Council members is also appreciated. Under Mr. Cobb's leadership, the City is moving in the right direction."

Dr. Handline concluded by asking the council if they had questions. If not, he requested that the council approve the evaluation.

Discussion by the council included asking Dr. Handline for recommendations addressing how CM Cobb could do better, how the council can assist CM Cobb to do better, the great communication provided by CM Cobb with the council, noting the progress CM Cobb has had on several projects, and thanking him for the job he has done.

Dr. Handline responded to the discussion by sharing that the theme of improvement for CM Cobb is two parts: develop and delegate to staff as a long-term strategy and continue to listen and deal with conflict. The council genuinely feels that Jared is a very caring and dedicated individual and at times he takes conflict personally. Dr. Handline suggested for him to relax with it and be confident in his position.

Dr. Handline stated that he feels that the suggestions made in 2021 and in 2022 have been addressed by the council.

Dr. Handline shared that the council can help to support Jared through communication, which improves the understanding of each other's differences of opinions and styles, creates a willingness to listen to the other, be patient with another, and to forgive one another. Dr. Handline commended the council and the progress and feels that there is a really good team that is making a lot of progress and has a tremendous future.

CM Cobb thanked the mayor and the council for the comments on the evaluation, stated that he would digest the information, and bring his contract with a draft plan for the next year at the next regular city council meeting for the council's consideration.

Councilmember Oder made the motion to approve the City Managers evaluation as presented, seconded by Councilmember Lipscomb. Motion passed 5 to 0.

RESULT:	PASSED (5-0)
MOVER:	Councilmember Bernie Oder
SECOND:	Councilmember Janice Lipscomb
AYES:	Bernie Oder, Larry Carter, Susan Coxwell, Janice Lipscomb, April Sutton
NAYS:	None

Dr. Handline asked if there were any suggestions for him going forward if he were to be hired to assist with the evaluation again next year.

Discussion afterwards included whether the council had input to assist Dr. Handline to improve the

evaluation process, recommendations by Dr. Handline for future activities (similar to a past team building exercise performed by Dr. Handline).

Dr. Handline stated that his company performs a number of workshops similar to the one performed. He will present CM Cobb with some options that are available. Dr. Handline also suggested reviewing with new members the governance protocols, which will help them understand how you govern and what you believe is the proper way of doing what you do. The other advantage is it provides an opportunity to be reflective.

12.2. Draft 2023 Community Vision Plan Presentation

CM Cobb shared that Katherine Withers from Barge Design Solutions was present to present the Draft Community Vision Plan (see attached PowerPoint). Mrs. Withers shared that there was a 4-step process that started with Barge coming out and getting to know the community, which included significant community outreach. And then a draft vision plan. To recap the community outreach, Barge conducted stakeholder interviews. Interviews included finding out what the community thought were the strengths and challenges of Mary Esther. The interview included asking individuals if there is just one thing the vision plan covered. What would it be? The results were identity, intentional spending, creating a community location, updating the community visually, improving the quality of life for businesses and citizens, creating workforce housing, and becoming pedestrian friendly.

The next step was to perform an online public survey which was available on paper. There were 277 responses, which received good to excellent ratings. The fair to poor were on sidewalks and bicycle facilities. Individuals were asked how funds should be spent and what they would change about Mary Esther. The response was to spend more on parks & recreation, transportation and maintenance, and water and sewer infrastructure.

Barge then conducted the first public workshop where there was a deeper look into the four areas determined during the online public survey. Questions were asked about establishing an identity and branding, public investment priorities, parks and open spaces, mobility and connectivity, mixed use development, and housing opportunities.

Barge returned in May for the second public workshop where the Draft Plan was discussed and the take away was that a central gathering space is very important and that vision should be independent of the mall.

Mrs. Withers then presented the Draft Community Vision Plan by starting with the vision statement and the principles, an idea for a city center, a concept for mixed-use retail and residential, central gathering spaces, neighborhood parks with options for all age groups, connection to the sound and nature, additional housing opportunities, walking and biking paths, and fix the elementary driveway. Mrs. Withers then went over the implementation steps and goals, outlined in the PowerPoint, that would need to take place for the Community Vision Plan to become effective.

Discussion included the private property, the purpose of the Community Vision Plan, the request to hire a Parks Director in the vision plan when maintaining the parks is a bigger issue, the future use of TDD money, the need for entities to come and develop within Mary Esther, and using firms to find developers, lobbying developers to come to the area, community redevelopment staffing within municipalities, the available property to be developed, and being deliberate in what is developed in the city going forward.

Mrs. Withers shared that part of these plans includes showing private businesses what is supported by the community to help encourage them to spend money in a direction that is supported by the community. Mrs. Withers also shared that this plan would take time.

CM Cobb shared that the purpose of the project is to understand what the public would like to see, it helps to spark interest, but it also helps during major development. The reason is because when there is a major development, there is often a request for a reduction in fees or property taxes. If the request is granted, then we want to think about what the community is getting for it. By looking at the Community Vision Plan, council can see if the request matches what the community wants.

CM Cobb shared that a resolution will be brought to the regular council meeting in October for adoption. If adopted, then it would guide future plans like the Comprehensive Plans and changes to City Codes.

12.3. First reading of Ordinance 2023-02, Amending the 2024 Municipal Election Date
City Clerk Broxson is bringing forward Ordinance 2023-03 for the first hearing.

CC Broxson shared that a letter was received from the Supervisor of Elections recommending that the City of Mary Esther change the date of our regularly scheduled municipal election to coincide with the Presidential Preference Primary election. When it is held concurrently with the Presidential Preference Primary, the cost of the election will only be the cost of legal advertising.

CC Broxson read Ordinance 2023-03 by title as follows:

ORDINANCE NO. 2023-02
AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF MARY ESTHER, FLORIDA, APPROVING THE DATE FOR THE 2024 REGULAR CITY ELECTION TO COINCIDE WITH THE DATE OF THE PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE PRIMARY IN 2024; RESTATING THE QUALIFYING PERIOD FOR THE 2024 MUNICIPAL ELECTION; PROVIDING FOR TERM OF OFFICE RESULTING FROM THE 2024 MUNICIPAL ELECTION, PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE

CC Broxson shared that the ordinance would change the election date to March 19th and qualifying will be noon January 8, 2024 to noon January 12, 2024.

Councilmember Coxwell made the motion to approve Ordinance 2023-02 on the first reading and sent it to second reading. Councilmember Lipscomb seconded the motion. Motion passed 5 to 0.

RESULT:	PASSED (5-0)
MOVER:	Councilmember Susan Coxwell
SECOND:	Councilmember Janice Lipscomb
AYES:	Bernie Oder, Larry Carter, Susan Coxwell, Janice Lipscomb, April Sutton
NAYS:	None

Discussion after the vote included the monies saved or avoided by moving the election date, which is proposed to be over \$10K by piggybacking on a time when the Supervisor of Elections is already setting up polling stations, manning the stations, and preparing ballots.

12.4. First Reading of Ordinance 2023-03, Compensation for Councilmembers and the Mayor as a result of the new financial reporting requirements.

City Clerk Broxson shared that at the regular council meeting in August, the council directed the City Attorney to draft an ordinance regarding salary compensation for the mayor and the council. Since that meeting, the City Attorney advised staff that the ordinance needs to have its first hearing on September 6, 2023 and the second hearing on September 20, 2023 for it to become effective as of April 1, 2024, because the Charter requires an increase to occur a minimum of six (6) months prior to any upcoming election. Therefore, staff provided the ordinance with its first hearing. The increased salary listed in the ordinance is \$75 per month for the mayor and the council. As mentioned during the last meeting, the last increase occurred in 2018.

Mayor Pro Tem Carter mentioned that he does not take a salary; however, he supports the concept and feels that an increase of \$100 per month would be better for calculations and to account for inflation.

Discussion regarding the salary increase included the impact of the change on the budget, the reason a

salary adjustment was brought up, the need to attract future councilmembers (to include those individuals that might be on a fixed or low income), and a reminder that Form 6 information is a public record.

CM Cobb shared that the change would only impact half of the budget year and if the amount is similar to the one proposed, the amount could be absorbed.

The reason it is being discussed now is because, as of January 1, 2024, elected officials for municipalities will be required to complete the Form 6 Financial Disclosure. Form 6 has penalties in excess of \$20,000 if errors are made, so it is recommended that individuals use an accountant to fill out the form.

Discussion regarding the amount of the salary increase included the estimated cost of the CPA, the cost of inflation, and that the last salary increase occurred in 2018.

Ordinance 2023-03 is listed as follows:

ORDINANCE NO. 2023-03
AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF MARY ESTHER, FLORIDA, PROVIDING FOR
AUTHORITY and findings; Providing for an increase in annual salaries for the city council and mayor;
Providing severability AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

Councilmember Coxwell made the motion to approve Ordinance 2023-03 on first reading with the salary for the mayor and the council increased by \$100 per month and sending the Ordinance to the second reading, seconded by

13. COUNCILS' STANDING COMMITTEE STATUS REPORTS

Councilmember Sutton mentioned that she was recently appointed to the Land Use Economic Development Legislative Committee by the League of Cities. She travels to the first meeting on Thursday, September 7th. Her goal is to listen to citizens and make decisions that positively impact the community.

Mayor Pro Tem Carter thanked everyone for the support, prayers, and calls during his road to recovery. He is happy to be part of the mix.

Councilmember Coxwell had no comment.

Mayor Stein shared that the Veteran's Day parade is on track. Representative Patt Maney has volunteered to be the Grand Marshal at the front of the parade. There will be a location at the mall where there will be food trucks and bounce houses. The Veteran's Day parade will take place on Saturday, November 11, at 1 pm.

Councilmember Lipscomb had no comment.

Councilmember Oder shared that the next Library Cooperative meeting will be held September 27, 2023 in Niceville, Florida. Cmbr. Oder mentioned that he was appointed to the Municipal Administration Committee by the League of Cities. He, too, will be traveling for the first committee meeting. There are two more meetings scheduled for October and November. By participating in the committees, it allows municipalities to work together to share with legislators what local municipalities find important. For example, the discussion of short-term rentals has already been brought up again.

14. OTHER COMMENTS

City Attorney Dykes had no comment.

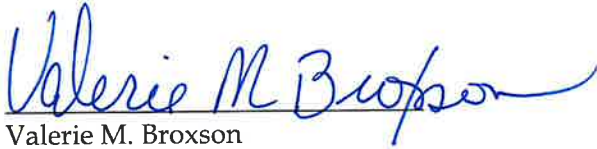
City Clerk Broxson shared that on September 19, 2023, the Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners will be adopting a Hit and Run awareness proclamation. The meeting will be held at the Shalimar Administration building at 3 pm. The County Commissioner that spearheaded the proclamation was Commissioner Mel Ponder. This Proclamation was brought forward by Mayor Stein.

City Manager Cobb shared that the county closed on the sale of the property on South Crystal Ball Road. In addition, the sidewalk installation project is moving forward along Shamrock Drive and north to Prior Drive. CM Cobb shared that staff will be bringing back a change order to the Jacob's contract for the Springdale Park Stormwater project. Finally, Max Boone, an employee of Jacob's, was involved in an accident while responding to an emergency call on Sunday.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 20, 2023 at 6 pm.

15. ADJOURN

The council meeting adjourned at 7:49 pm.



Valerie M. Broxson
City Clerk

(Approved at the 10/2/2023 meeting.)

