

March 3, 2020

Orangeburg City Council held its regularly scheduled City Council Meeting on Tuesday, March 3, 2020 at 7:00 P.M. in Council Chambers with Mayor Butler presiding.

PRESENT:

Michael Butler, Mayor
Bernard Haire
Jerry Hannah
Dr. Kalu Kalu
L. Zimmerman Keitt
Sandra Knotts
Richard F. Stroman

A motion was made by Councilmember Stroman and seconded by Councilmember Keitt to approve the February 18, 2020 City Council Minutes as distributed. The motion was unanimously approved.

Ms. Evelyn Disher, Executive Director of the Community of Character accepted the March 2020 Character Trait Proclamation, Diligence.

City Administrator Yow addressed Council regarding a new proposed ordinance, Weeds and Other Offensive Matter. He stated, "As you know we have had many conversations regarding property owners maintaining their property in the City. Councilmember Keitt has asked about litter and Councilmember Haire asked about absent landowners and their responsibilities. We have to be diligent in this. Assistant City Administrator Singh, City Attorney Walsh, Public Works Director Felkel, Building Official Epting and I have fashioned an Ordinance to enhance the ability to have lots cut and cleaned and maintain them long-term. The City sends letters repeatedly and some of them are the same homeowners over and over. This Ordinance would help us to stop that. We have to send staff to the same property and owners. Later in this Ordinance, please note the definition of the owner. Councilmember Haire, this goes back to the point of agents or representatives of a property. There were 865 letters sent out in FY 2018-19. That number does not include numerous phone calls, visits in person or visits to the property. In FY 2019-20, we have sent 362 letters so far, so we are probably going to surpass the last year's number. This also includes November, December and January which are typically slow growth months." Pictures were shown of overgrown lots, underbrush, piles of trash and trees down throughout the City.

City Administrator Yow further stated, "We not only have to deal with weeds, we have to deal with junked cars, metal items, and other debris." Pictures were shown of these items in the City. He stated, "In each of your districts, I am sure some of this is going on. When you look at this Ordinance, it is written to handle overgrown lots, undergrowth, overgrowth, junked cars and other debris. We do not get involved in leaning trees, but if a huge tree is down, public safety vehicles have to get in and we must have downed trees removed

This Ordinance changes the amount of time a property owner has to respond to a letter from the City from 21 days to 7 days whether or not the owner signs for it. Sometimes, the lot has been overgrown for a while and they receive a letter for an additional 21 days, by that time, it is out of control. The other thing that is very important is that we can post the property. Sometimes, the owners are out of state or we cannot find the owner. On the second page, this Ordinance states that 'In addition to said notice requirements, such notice shall warn the Owner that the Premises will be periodically monitored by the City building official for the next twelve (12) calendar months following the date of the notice and no further notices will be given for repeat violations during said following twelve (12) months. If the Owner previously served, has a repeat violation within the following twelve (12) months, the City building official, without notice to the Owner, shall have all authority and remedies to abate or remedy such condition in accordance with Section 22-6.3 and to issue a Uniform Ordinance Summons for each repeat violation during said following twelve (12) months as authorized by Section 1-12 of this Code.'

This means if it is January and they get a letter, for the next twelve (12) calendar months we are not going to have to write them additional letters to clean up their property. That is what we have to do right now. We write a letter; the property gets cleaned up and mowed and then gets overgrown again and we have to go through the same process again when it gets overgrown again. So, what this is saying in twelve (12) calendar months, once you have been notified once, in the next twelve (12) months, if it is overgrown again, the Building Official can take care of it or issue a citation. We hope not to issue a citation and the word will get out that you have to maintain your property. I do know human nature, and some will have to get a citation in order to maintain their property.

This is not a cure-all. We will be bringing back some other items on rental properties and signs later. We currently are taking down houses that have been condemned and the Service Department will take down the ones they can handle. We try to get the owners to do this first, if not, a lien goes on their property or they make payment arrangements.

We wanted to present this new Ordinance to you for your comments and we can bring it back to you next meeting."

Mayor Butler stated, "I agree with cleaning up and having a clean city. We want everyone to be held accountable. My concern is if citizens put out yard debris, will it be picked up?"

City Administrator Yow replied, "We pick up yard debris. If it is commercial, we do not pick up commercial. For example, if someone cleans out an office or remodels apartments."

Mayor Butler stated, "I just want to be clear, if a homeowner cleans up their yard, it will be picked up?"

City Administrator Yow replied, "Yes, if we miss the pickup, if they will call, we will get it picked up."

Councilmember Haire asked, "Is it possible for you to provide me the present Ordinance to compare to the new one? I think seven days is too short of a length of time. I have a problem with that."

Mayor Butler stated, "We really need to put pressure on homeowners who walk away from their responsibilities. We only hear from them when they have a citation or when there is a fine."

Councilmember Hannah stated, "I see both sides, what we need and what is being offered is just the tip of the iceberg. Seven days or more, people go on vacation or go out of town to a funeral, the seven days needs to be added to. I say that because not everyone is a repeat offender and you don't want to treat that person like a repeat offender. A little more than seven days may be needed. I live on Sunnyside and all the trash is not Sunnyside trash, people ride through and pick a spot and put it there or their friends put it there. To pick debris up, people should know their pickup day. I am all for it. We have homes that need attention also."

City Administrator Yow stated, "We talked about seven days the first time or ten days and the next year going to seven days. This is why we are bringing this to you tonight. I will say that 14 days is too long. The lot is already overgrown before we send the first letter out."

Councilmember Keitt stated, "Let us all remember that when we have something like this and you have seven days, every homeowner should know the procedure. We all need to get on board with this and we must clean up our City. I am in agreement with the seven days."

Mayor Pro Tem Kalu asked, "I need some clarification, the picture of the trash, did we have to clean it up?"

City Administrator Yow stated, "Yes we picked it up."

Mayor Pro Tem Kalu asked, "What about disasters?"

City Administrator Yow replied, "In disasters everything changes, we have to clear the right-of-way for emergency vehicles and pick up items no matter where they came from. We have to coordinate with DPU and clear trees out where lines are down and in front of hydrants. Now, if

someone comes to my house anytime and cuts limbs, the contractor is responsible for hauling them off.”

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Mayor Butler stated, “I would like to see our City look like where we all live. I would like to see all parts of the City look like that and we have to have a no tolerance at this time. We have to have that in order to get these properties cleaned up. We need to instill appreciation to these homeowners for their property.”

City Administrator Yow stated, “This is going to take a long time. We take houses down every year and we don’t have the budget to take them all down. Our guys use discretion all the time, if someone comes in and says they were in the hospital, we work with people who want to work with us. We have payment arrangements as well. “

Mayor Butler stated, “We as a Council have to get the City cleaned up. If you go to other places, the Council gets on board and works to move the City forward and it helps with economic development and that is what we need here.”

City Administrator Yow stated, “Whatever Ordinance you decide on, please support us on it. Please support our staff. Sometimes, we get told off when we tell someone to clean up their yard.”

Councilmember Hannah stated, “In the area I serve and over 60% of the City, I see Dollar General carts down the streets, how does that play into this?”

City Administrator Yow replied, “We make them remove it off their property. We have gone to the businesses a few times. A few years back, we have had issues with Bi-lo. We have had to contact the stores and tell them that they should not be removed from their store premises.”

Councilmember Hannah stated, “I have talked to store owners and they can retrieve them, but they do not have the staff to do that every day. The same goes for cars or carts, if it is in my yard, it is mine. I put it there or if someone put it there, move it or call to have it picked up. There are 20 carts in my district”

City Administrator Yow replied, “It would take staff persons two days to talk to someone to have the carts picked up. I am interested in bringing this back up for first reading and have your support. Everyone of us will go somewhere and someone will come up to you and talk to you because they received a citation, so it is going to take everyone’s effort. I need to know the number of days that you can live with, but I will tell you 14 days is too long.”

Councilmember Haire asked, “If I provide you with addresses, can you provide me with the number of citations that address may have had in the last two years?”

City Administrator Yow stated, “Yes we can do that. Just to let you know this will not solve all our problems, this is the beginning.”

Mayor Butler stated, “We took the E-Mart building now and the corner now looks great. We are heading in the right direction. We have to enforce this.”

City Administrator Yow presented the City of Orangeburg Proposed Budget Calendar for FY 2020-21 to Mayor and Council as information. He stated, “I want to bring your attention to two dates. On Tuesday, June 23 and Wednesday, June 24, we have scheduled planning sessions for Council. We tried to work this calendar with the Municipal Association Meeting and our agendas and some councilmembers agendas. Council mentioned that you wanted staff to come and present information pertaining to their Department so this may take two days. I would propose we do that in the planning sessions before the Budget. Please check your calendars for these two dates. It may take some time to do this and we can take all the time you need. We are at your disposal and can schedule additional days. I will bring this back for adoption at the next meeting.”

Councilmember Knotts asked, “Is that 12 noon on each day?”

City Administrator Yow replied, “That was put on here, but I know we have started earlier in the past. That is up to Council. Mayor, you mentioned starting at 9:30am. If we quit at 3pm, that will give you enough time to recharge.”

Council agreed to start at 9:30am.

City Administrator Yow stated, "Now look at the calendar and see the dates, Tuesday and Wednesday, July 21 and 22. I need you to consider dates of Wednesday and Thursday, July 22 and 23. Mr. Singh and I will be out at a meeting and we will only have one day back on Monday to make sure everything is correct. The other item that you need to be aware of that we are proposing the cancelling of the July 7 and July 21 council meetings since we will be meeting four days in those weeks already. However, if there is any pressing business, we will call a special council meeting. This item will be brought back for approval at the next meeting."

A motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Kalu, seconded by Councilmember Keitt to enter Executive Session concerning Contractual Matter, Synergy Utilities, LP and Proposed Sale of City Property, A. 1895 Columbia Road and B. Old First Citizens building located on the corner of Russell and Broughton Streets. The vote was unanimous. Council did not return to open session.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.

Respectively submitted,



Carrie Johnson
City Clerk

/lrm

