

MINUTES OF COUNCIL
FEBRUARY 23, 2016

The Batesville City Council met in regular session on February 23 at 5:30 P.M. in the Municipal Building. Mayor Rick Elumbaugh called the meeting to order. Utility Billing Supervisor Nick Baxter gave the invocation. Upon roll call, the following councilmembers answered present; Chris Beller, Tommy Bryant, Sonya Crafton, Margaret Henley, Paige Hubbard, Doug Matthews, Chris Poole and David Shetron. Also present were the City Attorney Tim Meitzen and City Clerk Denise Johnston.

Councilmember Bryant moved to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. Councilmember Henley seconded and all voted for.

Councilmember Bryant moved to approve the prepared agenda as amended and Councilmember Shetron seconded. All voted for.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A) CONSIDER TABLED ORDINANCE TO ADOPT THE UPDATED EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

Mayor Elumbaugh said they are not ready to consider the handbook. The handbook committee is seeking additional input from the supervisors and should be ready to consider at the next meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

A) HEAR AN UPDATE FROM MARY WOOD COX, TOBACCO PREVENTION COORDINATOR

Tobacco Prevention Coordinator Mary Wood Cox addressed the council. Mayor Elumbaugh introduced Ms. Cox who replaced Mr. Frank Land, who moved to Mississippi. Ms. Cox said she was excited about her position and has hit the ground running. She is the Tobacco Prevention Coordinator for Independence, Stone and White counties. Ms. Cox praised the City for its proactive stance on tobacco use by banning tobacco use, including E-Cigarettes at city owned facilities including our parks and cemetery. She said she is focusing on educating the public on the dangers of E-Cigarettes and second hand smoke. She said she does education at all the schools in her counties as well as county fairs, churches, local businesses and multi family living facilities. She is also hoping to raise awareness of the T-21 message which allows states and cities to change the legal age to buy tobacco products from 18 to 21. And lastly, Ms. Cox said she is targeting businesses that sell tobacco and distributing quit smoking signs. She said tobacco advertisement is regulated on where and how it can advertise, therefore, they do lots of the ads in the stores that sell their products. Most of the ads seem to target our youth so she is trying to put her signage next to theirs to hopefully discourage tobacco use.

**B) CONSIDER A RESOLUTION TO UTILIZE FESTIVAL ADVERTISING FUNDS
FROM THE ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND TOURISM**

Councilmember Bryant introduced a resolution to utilize Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism Festival Advertising Funds for advertising the White River Water Carnival. The grant is a 2/3 cash match and will be awarded in increments of \$50 with a minimum of \$550 and a maximum of \$2,000. Councilmember

Bryant moved to suspend the rules and read the resolution by title only.

Councilmember Matthews seconded and the electronic vote was 8 for and 0

against. Mr. Meitzen read the resolution by title only. Councilmember Bryant

moved to adopt the resolution and Councilmember Henley seconded. The

electronic roll call was 8 for and 0 against. The resolution was given #2016-02-

02-R.

C) STATE OF THE CITY

This year marks my tenth year to lead the City of Batesville. The past nine years have been exciting and challenging for our community, but the state of our city is stronger than ever and the future has never looked brighter. Today, our community works to ensure that each aspect of our city drives our economy. This hasn't always been the case. Just days after I was sworn in as mayor in January of 2007, White Rogers laid off half of its workforce. In November of 2007, GDX Automotive shocked our community when it closed and took hundreds of jobs with it. Then, in February of 2008, Emerson Electric announced the closure of the White Rogers facility. There was a time when our direction and fate were unclear, a time when we needed to work together to pull our community away from the economic brink. Our community's employment security was crumbling, and so was its infrastructure.

Decades of neglect and complacency of our city's basic water and wastewater infrastructure had jeopardized our community's future. Upgrades to the system would cost a staggering 45 to 50 million dollars. For the sake of our economy, serious measures had to be taken. In March of 2007, the city council abolished the Batesville Utilities Commission, which had been in existence since the early 1970s, and put infrastructure decisions back into the hands of the people.

Our community had taken some serious hits but the City of Batesville citizens took responsibility and steered our city in the right direction. In March of 2009, the citizens passed a one-cent temporary sales tax by a 93% vote to fund the needed wastewater improvements and put Batesville on the path for job growth and a better future. The new wastewater treatment facility is now fully operational and our wastewater capacity has been increased from 4.3 million gallons per day to 9 million gallons per day. Our filtered water treatment capacity had been struggling at 6 million gallons per day but with upgrades using existing revenue, that capacity is now up to about 9 million gallons per day. Increased wastewater capacity is essential to our citizens' livelihoods, in terms of their health and in terms of employment.

Wastewater capacity is essential to maintaining existing industry and attracting new industry. Because of our community's willingness to fix our infrastructure, hundreds of jobs were saved. When the Townsend's Poultry Plant declared bankruptcy, Peco Foods purchased the facility and kept nearly all Townsend's employees as Peco began modernizing and expanding the facility. Ozark Mountain Poultry added to the poultry industry's revival by purchasing the Pilgrim's Pride plant and the ConAgra facility, which had been slated for closure. It is likely that neither company would have purchased these outdated plants if the City of Batesville had not undertaken the necessary wastewater upgrades. Agriculture and the poultry industry form the basic core of our economy. Our poultry industry provides jobs for our citizens—from plant workers to chicken house builders to farmers who raise chickens, cattle, and grain. Our core economy is now stabilized and can grow again. But economic growth is not possible without adequate transportation routes.

Modern highways are another important component that influence economic development. Significant highway improvements have occurred in recent years to modernize our transportation system. These include the completion of the US Highway 167 four-lane corridor between Batesville and Bald Knob, the widening of Arkansas Highway 69 (Harrison Street), and the ongoing construction of the US Highway 167 four-lane corridor to Cave City that will ultimately continue to Ash Flat where it will connect to US 412. The highways that run through Batesville are crucial to our city's development, but so are our small streets—specifically, our Main Street.

When I took office, our historic downtown was in serious trouble. Downtown businesses were closing and the livelihood of a once prosperous area of our community was dwindling at an uncontrollable rate. The city council understands the economic importance of a vibrant downtown, and in 2009, it passed the Downtown Historic District Ordinance. This ordinance set the stage for the renewed interest and investment that our historic downtown is experiencing today. The Main Street Batesville Organization's Board of Directors, led by Mr. Bob Carius and fully supported by the Batesville City Council, embraced radical change to the downtown district. Those changes have reversed the district's downward spiral. Now, we see new businesses and rejuvenation where there had been none.

In addition to an increase in economic and downtown vibrancy, our community has made tremendous strides to ensure an increase in public safety. The City of Batesville has continued its commitment to public safety improvements for our citizens. Our new community-based police force is an outstanding success, and our city's fire fighting capabilities continue to improve through the addition of new firefighters and equipment updates. Our economy is only as good as our people, and our people cannot drive our economy if they are not safe and secure. Citizen safety is a priority in the City of Batesville, and we are pleased to provide the quality of safety that our citizens deserve. In addition to quality of safety, Batesville citizens also deserve quality of life.

The city's numerous recreation opportunities assist in that quality of life. The city's annual Christmas lights display is one such opportunity. This event provides seasonal entertainment for Batesville citizens, attracts thousands to Riverside Park each December, and continually breaks tourism records.

Our new Diamond Sports Complex and soccer complex continue to advance sports tourism in our community. Each year, more and more visitors participate in tournaments at these complexes, and they bring new dollars to our economy as they stay in our hotels, eat in our restaurants, and shop at our businesses.

The new Fitzhugh Park Community and Aquatics Center is an important part of our economic development strategy. It will attract people from all over our region and stimulate our economy. While I am just as frustrated as you are by the 240 rain-day delays in the center's construction, I promise that when it is finished it will be a project that everyone will be proud of and many will be asking why we didn't build it years ago!

The center will provide an increased quality of place for all of our citizens by providing much needed meeting space, affordable fitness opportunities, and aquatic fun for all ages.

The main community center building will house two rooms for meetings of 20 or less and two rooms for meetings of 100 to 200. The two large meeting rooms will feature movable dividers to create four smaller meeting spaces. Adequate meeting space will provide new opportunities for our citizens and local organizations to hold conferences, workshops, and events, and it will also attract regional interest as organizations look to hold events outside their cities of origin. The catering kitchen will complement these meetings as well as events in the multi-use gymnasium.

The gymnasium will have three basketball courts that double as six volleyball courts and will allow Batesville to host regional and state tournaments that attract thousands of participants and spectators. There is even space dedicated for a racquetball court. In addition, the gymnasium will accommodate many other types of events, including boat and outdoor shows and the Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce's Business Expo, which has outgrown its current space. The spacious floor will comfortably accommodate at least 2,000 chairs to host concerts, high school graduations, banquets and other similar events. Two movable curtains will separate the space into three sections, allowing simultaneous events. If a natural disaster strikes, the gymnasium building will double as a community shelter that is powered by an on-site backup generator.

The main community center building will house the administrative offices for the parks and recreation department and two large fitness spaces that will enhance our citizens' exercise opportunities. Thanks to our grant writing partner at the Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce, the Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas awarded the city a \$144,505 grant to purchase exercise equipment for the 5,500-square foot fitness room. A large aerobics facility will accommodate exercise classes. During the winter months, outdoor recreation becomes less available and less appealing. The community center will eliminate the weather barrier.

Citizens can use the 1/8-mile indoor walking track to exercise even in times of the most inclement weather. Citizens of all ages will enjoy year-round swimming and aquatic exercise in the heated indoor pool that will also serve as the location for swim meets and sports tourism. The indoor aquatics amenities can be used for anything from winter birthday parties for our community's youth to water therapy for our community's senior citizens.

During the summer months, our community will enjoy the zero-entry pool and splash pad with a raised whirlpool, a diving area, two huge water slides, a four lane swimming area with a zip line, and a 440-foot lazy river with a tanning deck covered by two inches of water.

In addition to increasing our citizens' quality of life and stimulating our tourism economy, the Fitzhugh Park Community and Aquatics Center has and will continue to provide leverage to our local businesses and organizations in recruiting employees and attracting new citizens to our area. Recently, quality of life was a deciding factor for a position candidate at one of our colleges. The candidate requested to see the Fitzhugh Park Community and Aquatics Center and was so impressed, that he committed to the position! That's one more valuable employee added to our education sector and one more citizen that will grow to love and serve our community. Visitors and citizens alike look for quality of life when deciding to move or visit an area, but they are not the only ones who see quality of life as a priceless asset.

For new companies to consider our community, we must offer the amenities that will help their employees and their employees' families lead healthy, happy, and productive lives. Our community is blessed with many recreation opportunities. Our basic infrastructure now has the excess capacity to foster economic growth and our core economy—agriculture—has been stabilized.

We have pulled ourselves back from the brink. Now is the time for our community to embrace and support the changes needed to develop a diversified and knowledge-based economy.

We must support innovative entrepreneurship by providing the resources that foster small business creation, and we must recruit new industry to our area. Perhaps the most important element that will drive job creation and security is a trained and skilled workforce that is required of the global, 21st Century economy.

Our city faces a skilled workforce deficit. Local companies report that many of their workers lack the skills that allow company growth. We must create more workforce training opportunities for our high school graduates who prefer to go straight into the workforce rather than pursuing a college degree. While a skilled workforce is essential, our community cannot neglect its college graduates either. We must stop exporting this valuable asset. The 2010-2014 census numbers explain this problem well.

14.8% of Independence County's population aged 25 and older has a bachelors degree or higher, and Batesville's rate is 21.3% while the statewide average is 20.6%. Faulkner County has a rate of 27.3% with Conway, its largest city, at 36.6%. Craighead County has a rate of 24.8% while its largest city, Jonesboro, has 29.7%. (Source US Census 2010-2014). Not everyone is destined to earn a four-year degree, but to attract better paying jobs our workforce must become better educated. If our college graduates have jobs to come home to, we can more easily convince them to come back and build their futures in the same place that shaped their pasts.

All of our efforts—past, present, and future—have existed for the purpose of making a better life for the people of Batesville. When I came to office, our future had been stalled by a lack of direction. We fought our way back, and now we have a focus that will positively affect not only our city, but all of Independence County. IMPACT Independence County is leading our community to improve the quality of life, quality of place, and economic opportunities for all Independence County residents. The City of Batesville fully supports the vision of IMPACT Independence County and will work closely with its subcommittees and the Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce as they facilitate the accomplishment of this vision for our community by accessing and coordinating the resources of federal, state, and municipal agencies; philanthropic foundations; economic development organizations; key regional leaders, legislators, and commercial business organizations.

This vision for our community centers on four things: Economic Prosperity, Tourism, Educational Excellence, and Healthy Living and Wellbeing.

- Through its Economic Prosperity objectives, IMPACT Independence County will provide an open and progressive business environment that provides quality jobs for all community residents by implementing nine specific goals to further the economic prosperity of all Independence County residents.
- The Tourism objectives will rebrand and market Independence County as an atmosphere that is attractive to all generations as a uniquely progressive, rural, southern college community with outdoor recreation and adventure opportunities for all. There are six major objectives laid out to accomplish this goal.
- IMPACT Independence County will implement the Economic Excellence objectives to create a dynamic center of higher education with unique partnerships between K-12 public schools, higher education, and the regional and state business community, promoting entrepreneurial growth and creating high-quality and expanding employment opportunities for county residents.
- The Healthy Living and Wellbeing objective will make Independence County North Central Arkansas's regional medical center by expanding its vision in high-quality medical care and offering a full lineup of traditional and specialized medical practices. This committee's objectives will advance healthy living and improve the wellbeing of all our citizens.

As with every generation, the challenges we face are always different but the solutions are always there for those who rise to the challenge and inspire others to believe in a brighter future and create a defined blueprint for change. As quoted by Gandhi, "The future depends on what we do in the present." I believe that together we can meet the challenges of our generation and provide a great future for our citizens, children, and grandchildren.

MAYOR COMMENTS

Mayor Elumbaugh said, in regards to the upcoming council retreat scheduled for this Thursday night, if next Tuesday night would be more convenient for everyone he would change the date. A couple said next Tuesday, March 1 was a better date so the Mayor said he will change to retreat to next Tuesday from 5:30 to 9:30 at Councilmember Bryant's farm house north of town.

LIAISON REPORTS

None

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilmember Matthews said he was on the old Country Club property recently and it is in really bad disrepair. He said the swimming pool is still there and open to where a child or animal could fall in. Also the entire property is in need of mowing and cleaning up. Mayor Elumbaugh said he had actually visited with our code enforcement officer Chad McClure this morning during his Department Head meeting and Mr. McClure is aware of the problem and is working on having it corrected.

Councilmember Poole told the council that the city's dispatch committee met Monday night and had a very productive meeting. He said the county was invited to attend the meeting but chose not to. County Judge Robert Griffin asked the city to come up with our numbers and give the county a proposal regarding the running of dispatch. Mr. Poole said he feels like the City has a good and fair proposal to submit to the county which is based on a per capita share. The Mayor said he did not want to just send the county a proposal but present it to them at a meeting so the numbers arrived at could be explained and discussed. He said he will try to set up a joint meeting soon.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Councilmember Matthews moved that the meeting be adjourned. Councilmember Bryant seconded and all voted for.

DENISE M. JOHNSTON, CITY CLERK

RICK ELUMBAUGH, MAYOR