

**Lamar Town Council Meeting Minutes**  
**January 11, 2021**

Lamar Town Council Meeting was called to order by Mayor Darnell Byrd-McPherson at 6:15 PM.

Invocation was given by Deacon Tim Dargan.

Roll call was taken by Mayor McPherson. Mayor McPherson was the lone Council Member in attendance. Councilwoman Angele White-Bradley and Councilwoman Inez B. Lee participated remotely via Zoom call. Councilwoman Mary Ann Mack was not in attendance.

Others in attendance were Tim Dargan and Chief Carl Scott. Jannie Lathan, Doug Poston, and William Hancock participated remotely via Zoom.

Mayor McPherson added Public Works update by Councilwoman Bradley. A motion was made by Councilwoman Bradley that the agenda be accepted. Councilwoman Lee seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Bradley to accept the minutes from the December 14, 2020 Lamar Town Council Meeting, Councilwoman Lee seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

Jannie Lathan of Lathan Consulting gave an update on the Zion Pump Station Project and the close out on the wastewater treatment plant requirements:

- The Zion Pump Station Project design is 100 % complete and on schedule to be put up for bid near the end of next month (February) or early March.
- The closeout work on the wastewater treatment plant upgrades is essentially done, but the Town is waiting on engineering firm Davis & Brown to provide necessary closeout requirements.

Councilwoman Bradley asked if the Town is facing penalties from DHEC due to the delayed closeout documents. Ms. Lathan commented that DHEC has fined the Town because of the delays.

Mayor McPherson remarked that we should forward the documents requirements to the Town's attorney (Gene Warr). Ms. Lathan replied that Mr. Warr has been copied on the correspondences relating to these closeout requirements.

Councilwoman Bradley gave an update from the Public Works Department:

- The wastewater plant manager, Don Johnson, reported that there has been an overflow of the sewer pond and that it has been overflowing for about 5 days. Mr. Johnson is going to fill out the necessary paperwork and contact DHEC about the situation prior the DHEC site visit this week. The plan is to get a truck to pump the pond and dispose in a nearby river.
- The excessive rain has caused an overload on the pumps at the station.

Mayor McPherson mentioned that the Town is in negotiation with Mike Lloyd to come aboard in a management capacity for the water and sewer division of Public Works. Mr. Lloyd brings a wealth of knowledge and experience in this area and would be a great asset to the Town.

Mayor McPherson asked that we all pray for Michael McDonald, Public Works Manager, as he continues to recover from his recent illness.

Mayor McPherson informed the citizens of Lamar that the water bills went out late for the month of January, therefore all customers would be granted a one-week extension (January 18) to pay their water bills without incurring a penalty.

Chief Carl Scott gave the Police Department Report:

- The Lamar Police Department is currently accepting applicants for an open position in the department. Interested parties can fill out an application online or they can drop the application off at the Police Department.
- Lamar Municipal Court will be closed until April 19 due to an order from the Supreme Court.
- The Lamar Neighborhood Watch will have their next meeting on February 4, 2021.

Mayor McPherson asked Chief Scott to explain the procedure for those who had court dates or those wanted to pay their fines.

Chief Scott responded that the individuals could pay their fines online or bring a money order to the Police Department. He also stated the judge will suspend all court case pending for the months of January, February, and March until the April 19, 2021.

Town of Lamar Financial Report - Doug Poston of Douglas R Poston Jr. CPA:

- The General Fund had a decrease in cash of \$3800.
- The Utility Fund had a decrease of in cash of \$8800.  
Mr. Poston pointed out that the decrease in the utility fund was due to some very large water bills incurred by the Town. The Town made a \$20, 000 water payment, but it did not include all that was owed.
- The expenditures from July 2020 to the current date budget to actual for each department:  
Administrative - \$103,000, Police Department - \$80,000, and Water & Sewer - \$205,000

Mayor McPherson stated that there appears to be a lot of water that is being charged to the Town that the Town is not able to recoup. She theorized that there must be an issue with the calculations, the readings, leaks, or some other issue. Mike Lloyd informed Mr. Dargan that the Town was losing approximately 34 % in revenue due to water loss monthly.

Mayor McPherson suggested that the Town of Lamar budget be amended to capture categories that funds were not allocated for. She said that there would be a work session before the next Lamar Town Council Meeting to address this issue.

Mayor McPherson stated that the Town of Lamar's 2019 audit fell through the cracks and that the 2020 audit is now due. As a result, the Town has been looking to secure an audit firm that handles municipal audits. The Mayor spoke to the City Manager (Howard Garland) of the City of Darlington and he highly

recommended that the Town of Lamar use the audit firm that they are currently using (The Brittingham Group, LLP)

William Hancock gave the following report:

- Mr. Hancock spoke to Howard Garland (City of Darlington Manager) on last week who informed him that the Town of Lamar was looking for an audit firm to get the Town's audit reporting current.
- Mr. Hancock reached out to the SC State Treasurer's office to see if the state was holding any of the Town's fund; as of last Friday, they were holding \$62,000. According to state law, the state must start holding funds after the 13th month after the fiscal year ends.
- Mr. Hancock spoke to the State Treasurer personally to see if some of the Town's funds can be released prior to the 2019 audit being completed; the treasurer will check and get back with him later.
- If the Town of Lamar retains the services of Mr. Hancock's firm (The Brittingham Group), he will go to the State Treasurer on behalf of the Town to secure the release of the withheld funds. He will also get the 2019 audit complete as soon as possible, schedule the 2020 audit, and then schedule the 2021 audit so we can become and remain good municipal citizens of the state.

Mayor McPherson took full responsibility for the 2019 audit not being conducted in time. She said that the audit was not on a working calendar and that she was recently informed that the individual that handled Lamar's audits no longer works at the firm that conducts Town's audit.

Mayor McPherson relayed that Mr. Hancock said that even though it is tax season, their firm can begin working with the Town immediately. She recommended that the Town Council moved forward with hiring Mr. Hancock's firm. Mayor McPherson stated that the Town will have to sign an engagement letter for the 2019 audit and would like to sign the engagement letter for the 2020 audit as well. Mr. Hancock suggested that the best practice would be to sign one engagement letter at a time. Mayor McPherson asked Mr. Hancock to contact Mr. Poston as soon as possible.

Mr. Hancock asked, "Is Lamar a Town or City"? Councilwoman Bradley remarked that the charter states that Lamar is a Town. Mr. Poston added that he has seen the Town of Lamar and the City of Lamar on different correspondence; however, the bank statements list Town of Lamar. Town of Lamar will be the name of record.

Mayor McPherson reminded the Citizens of Lamar about Mask Ordinance that went into effect on January 4, 2021 and said that more information about the ordinance can be found on the Town's Facebook page and website. She also cited data that she received from CareSouth that stated 17% of Lamar's population has tested positive for covid-19. Mayor McPherson implored all citizens to wear masks, practice social distancing, and sanitize (wash hands).

Mayor McPherson stated that the Town is trying to align with state regulation as far as business license applications are concerned; In the meantime, interested parties can access and pay for their business licenses online. She mentioned that tickets and bills can be paid online as well.

Councilwoman Bradley wanted to discuss reaching a conclusion to the conversations that the council has been having concerning Town Hall being opened more than two days a week.

She that she understood that the women in the Town Hall Office did not want to work extended hours and days because they were fearful of being alone in the building; however, she has been contacted multiple times by citizens and have had discussions with staff members about the need to have Town Hall open at least 4 days a week. Councilwoman said that we should find ways to make the workers feel safer and perhaps split their days to cover the 4-day work week.

Mayor McPherson responded that it is pretty much settled that there will be a 4-day work week. She also said that the office is not closed because the workers are fearful of being alone, but it is closed due to the coronavirus pandemic. Mayor McPherson wanted to know what the pressing business transactions are that would necessitate citizens needing to enter the actual building. She cited examples of public buildings that are open but are not allowing the public to enter the building.

Mayor McPherson said that someone will be hired to make sure that the office is “manned” on the 4 days that Town Hall is opened. She suggested that one of the biggest concerns from the citizens is there being someone to answer the telephone, check messages, and return telephone calls. Speaking of the telephone, Mayor McPherson said that the phone system the Town currently has is old and antiquated; upgrading the telephone system will be the next project.

Mayor McPherson discussed bringing on a retiree who has banking experience who may be able to help process water bills. The mayor asked the water clerk to compose a detail list of duties and responsibilities so that the Town can determine what roles someone else would have to play in terms of making sure that we are operating efficiently. Mayor McPherson said the Council was still waiting on Tim Dargan to decide if was going to work for the Town full time and was hopeful that he would. She pointed out that Mr. Dargan was already sharing some of the roles of the Town Clerk and other duties.

Councilwoman Bradley suggested that answering the phone is one thing, being knowledgeable enough to provide a helpful answer is another. She gave several examples that would require someone with knowledge of and access to certain information to be available.

Mayor McPherson responded that Town Council is already working on this and that it is the goal of the council to have something in place by the beginning of February. She asked that anyone interested in working for the Town part-time should fill out an online application.

Tim Dargan gave an overview of recent events (Harvest Hope Mobile Food Pantry and First Responders Christmas Parade) and upcoming events (CareSouth Mobile Schedule, Memorial for deceased Lamar citizens, and Lamar Town Council Special Election).

Mayor McPherson spoke about the upcoming election. She stated that the election was advertised in the News and Press, the Town’s newsletter, the Town’s website, and the Town’s Facebook page. She mentioned that we must all work together for the good of the Town and that volunteers are very viable to that success. Mayor McPherson listed some of the achievements that have occurred under this administration including the website, Facebook page, direct deposits, etc.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Bradley to adjourn the Lamar Town Council Meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Lee. Mayor McPherson adjourned the meeting at 7:07 pm.

Timothy L. Dargan, Administrative Support