



REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING
Tuesday, July 21, 2026; 6:30 P.M.
Bennettsville Public Safety Complex

Minutes

1. CALL TO ORDER Mayor Tyron Abraham
2. INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE Gregory Scott, Sr.
3. ROLL CALL
During roll call, all Council members were in attendance except for Caraline Harpe (District #3). She entered at 6:36 pm.
4. APPROVAL/CORRECTION OF MINUTES
 - A. **Regular Council Meeting; Tuesday, June 16, 2026**- Mr. Jennings moved that we accept the meeting minutes for the Regular Council Meeting for Tuesday, June 16, 2026. Seconded by Mr. Scott. Motion passed.
5. PUBLIC REQUESTS/ PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS
 - A. **Employees Anniversaries**- Brantley Douglas (Gas), 11 years; Nathan Jones (Electric), 1 year; Tracy Lee (Finance), 2 years; David McLean (Public Works), 2 years; Howard Mumford (Public Works Shop), 4 years; William Parrish (Fire), 8 years; Johnny Roscoe (Water & Sewer), 12 years
 - B. **New Hires & Promotions** -Shaquelle Wren (Police); Yolonda McCall (Administration); Kenneth Dew (Water & Sewer); Shannon Smith (Utility Billing)
 - C. **Honoring Yolonda DuPree**- A Proclamation honoring the late Yolanda Dupree, a dedicated public servant, was read. Mrs. Miller highlighted Ms. Dupree's dedication, integrity, and commitment to the community. Council McRae expressed gratitude for Dupree's service and advocacy for PDRTA.

6. PUBLIC COMMENTS (Agenda Items Only)

Karin Larkins- Expressed concerns about fines for large gathering ordinance. She stated, "I don't think that you should be impose a fine for having something at your home, and the parking has to exceed your yard. Everybody doesn't have the same size yard. I want the council to think about that when they make this decision. I think people should be able to have something at their home, and they are not creating a problem for anyone else."

7. SECOND READING AND PASSAGE IN FULL OF ORDINANCES

- A. **Digital Signage (Ordinance #26-06-003)**- The City of Bennettsville is considering the installation of a digital sign along the U.S. 15-401 Bypass to enhance communication with residents, visitors, and travelers entering the community. The sign would serve as a highly visible platform for public notices, community events, emergency information, and promotional messaging that supports economic development and tourism. Strategically located on one of the region's primary transportation corridors, the sign would help strengthen the City's outreach efforts while showcasing Bennettsville as a vibrant and welcoming community.

Approving Action: A motion to approve Ordinance #26-06-003, the establishment of a policy that supports digital signage. Moved by Mr. Davis. Seconded by Mr. McRae. Motion passed.

Opposed: Mrs. Harpe

- B. **Annexation – 804 Ansel Street (Ordinance #26-06-002)**- The purpose of annexation is to promote the orderly growth and development of the municipality by extending city boundaries to areas that can be efficiently served by municipal utilities, infrastructure, and public services. Annexation helps ensure consistent land-use planning, economic development opportunities, and the equitable provision of services for residents and businesses within the community.

Approving Action: A motion to approve Ordinance #26-06-002, the annexation of 804 Ansel Street, also identified as tax map number 032-26-01-018. Moved by Mr. McRae. Seconded by Mr. Scott. Motion passed unanimously.

- C. **Large Purchases – (Ordinance #26-06-005)**- The City Council wishes to establish an ordinance requiring prior approval before making purchases that equal to or exceed \$50K.

Approving Action: A motion to approve Second Reading of Ordinance #26-06-005, the oversight of Large Purchases. Moved by Mr. McRae. Seconded by Ms. Weaver. Motion left on the floor.

Mrs. Harpe then made a motion to amend the ordinance to carve out an exception for real estate purchases. Seconded by Ms. Weaver. Motion left on the floor.

Mayor Abraham made a recommendation that we table this until we can get everything in order, and then come back and bring it back up at our next meeting. Motion left on the floor.

Mrs. Harpe made a motion that we add language to the current ordinance before us to exempt real estate purchases from this ordinance in any amount without council approval. Seconded by Ms. Weaver. Motion carried.

In favor: Ms. Weaver, Mrs. Harpe, Mayor Abraham, Mr. Jennings and Mr. McRae.

Opposed: Mr. Davis and Mr. Scott.

8. FIRST READING AND ADVERTISEMENT OF ORDINANCES

A. **Annexation – Wallace Road Tract (Ordinance #26-06-001)-**

The purpose of annexation is to promote the orderly growth and development of the municipality by extending city boundaries to areas that can be efficiently served by municipal utilities, infrastructure, and public services. Annexation helps ensure consistent land-use planning, economic development opportunities, and the equitable provision of services for residents and businesses within the community.

Approving Action: A motion to approve Ordinance #26-07-001, the annexation of the Wallace Road tract identified as tax map number 032-14-01-033. Moved by Mr. McRae. Seconded by Mr. Scott. Motion carried.

In favor: Ms. Weaver, Mr. Davis, Mayor Abraham, Mr. McRae, and Mr. Scott.

Opposed: Mrs. Harpe and Mr. Jennings.

B. **Fireworks Ordinance Text Amendment (Ordinance #26-07-002)-**

The purpose of this ordinance amendment is to promote the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of the City of Bennettsville by establishing reasonable limitations on the discharge of consumer fireworks within the corporate limits. This amendment is intended to reduce the risk of fires, personal injury, property damage, and unnecessary disturbances to residents, while recognizing the community's ability to celebrate nationally recognized holidays. By limiting the discharge of fireworks to the Fourth of July and New Year's Eve, except as otherwise authorized by state law, the city seeks to balance public safety with traditional holiday celebrations, protect first responders and public resources, and preserve the peace and quiet enjoyment of residential neighborhoods.

Approving Action: A motion to table Ordinance #26-07-002, the amendment of Section 93.35, Fireworks Prohibited. Moved by Mr. Scott. Seconded by Mr. Davis. Motion carried.

In favor: Mr. Davis, Mayor Abraham, Mr. McRae and Mr. Scott.

Opposed: Ms. Weaver, Mrs. Harpe and Mr. Jennings.

C. **Large Gatherings (Ordinance #26-07-003)-**

The City of Bennettsville Police Department regularly responds to large gatherings and parties in residential areas that create safety concerns for surrounding neighborhoods. While the City's ordinances already address many of the individual behaviors associated with these events, such as excessive noise, disorderly conduct, littering, and illegal parking, those provisions are dispersed across multiple sections of the Code and do not provide a clear mechanism for addressing the gathering itself.

Approving Action: A motion to approve Ordinance #26-07-003, adding an ordinance to police large gatherings within the City of Bennettsville. Moved by Mrs. Harpe. Seconded by Mr. Jennings. Motion carried.

In favor: Ms. Weaver, Mrs. Harpe, and Mr. Jennings.

Opposed: Mr. Davis, Mayor Abraham, Mr. McRae, and Mr. Scott.

D. **Budgetary Transfers (Ordinance #26-06-004)-**

The City Council wishes to establish an ordinance requiring prior approval before making budgetary transfers.

Approving Action: A motion to table the item and send it to the Finance Committee for discussion.

E. **Administrator's Duties (Ordinance #26-07-005)-**

The Council wishes to introduce an ordinance that defines the duties and responsibilities of the City Administrator.

Approving Action: A motion to table this item and send it to the Finance Committee for a Workshop session within 2 weeks. Moved by Mr. McRae. Seconded by Mr. Scott. Motion passed unanimously.

9. **PASSAGE OF RESOLUTIONS**
No Business

10. **GENERAL BUSINESS DISPENSED BY MOTION**

A. **Contract with Public Defender's Office**

To authorize an agreement with the Public Defender's Office for the provision of indigent defense services in the Bennettsville Municipal Court and to establish the terms of compensation and responsibilities for those services.

Approving Action: Motion to allow the administrator to enter into an agreement with the Fourth Circuit Public Defender for legal services for indigent defendants. Moved by Mr. Davis. Seconded by Mr. McRae. Motion passed unanimously.

B. **Disaster Assistance Program (DAP) Reimbursement**

SC Housing required the city to enter into a new agreement that excludes ALL homes located in the floodplain. This restriction significantly limited the number of citizens (approximately 54 homes) who could have benefited from the program. These homes were included in the original application when the level of funding was being considered by SC Housing. As the city processes 'pending' DAP projects and rolling all other projects into a separate program (Critical Home Repair), it is apparent that we cannot spend all of the awarded funds. Recently, SC Housing met with communities to assess progress and asked them to consider forfeiting funds back to SC Housing if we anticipate difficulty spending the awarded amount. City Administration is asking to reduce acceptance of the award by \$900K.

Approving Action: A motion to approve the Administration to reduce acceptance of the award by \$900K to SC Housing due to the restrictions placed on the program.

In favor: Ms. Weaver, Mr. Davis, Mrs. Harpe, Mayor Abraham, Mr. Jennings, and Scott.

Opposed: Mr. McRae, "I would like to state my dissent because I'm just confused overall about what we got going on here, and we at the 9th hour July 21st and just hearing about so."

C. **Humane Society Contract-**

Mr. McRae made a motion to table this item to the next Workshop. Seconded by Mr. Davis. Motion passed unanimously.

D. **Policy *NEW* Planning Commission Review of Ordinances**

Administrator asked that we just defer this item as well for the Policy *NEW* Planning Commission Review of Ordinances.

11. PUBLIC COMMENTS (Non-Agenda Items Only)

Pamela Best- She addressed some serious issues in different neighborhoods. While it may not be entirely the district's fault, she believes it's important to observe your surroundings and consider how they feel. She finds it rude that public speakers have to wait two hours for just three minutes to voice their concerns. There's a significant problem with loose and aggressive dogs in neighborhoods. She would appreciate being included in the Humane Society Workshop.

12. BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

- A. **Planning Commission (Proposed Street Name Change)** -The Planning Commission met on July 14 to discuss the proposed street name change from Lawson Street to Mary Dease Lane. The Council debated the street name change from Lawson Street to Mary Dease Lane, deciding to send it back to the Planning Commission for further review and resident feedback. The issue is whether Council wants to approve the name change now under the ordinance's existing process or require additional resident support/notification before final action.

Approving Action: Mayor Abraham entertained a motion that we send it back to the Planning Commission for further review. Moved by McRae. Seconded by Mayor Abraham. Motion carried.

In favor: Ms. Weaver, Mayor Abraham, Mr. Jennings and Mr. McRae.

Opposed: Mr. Davis, Mrs. Harpe and Mr. Scott.

Mr. McRae then withdrew the motion, but it was already voted on.

B. **Board of Architectural Review/Tree Committee** (No Cases)

C. **Board of Zoning Appeals** (No Cases)

13. COUNCIL COMMITTEES

A. **Finance Committee (Chairperson Jennings)**

•Employee Pay Increases (3%)

The Finance Committee has met several times regarding recent meeting requests and related financial matters. The committee had initially discussed and recommended a **3% pay increase**, along with other compensation adjustments. However, the circumstances have changed, and those earlier recommendations are no longer applicable to the current situation. The committee plans to meet again to revisit compensation and related financial issues. The Finance Committee will also consider revenue increases and how to account for pay increases or other expenses going forward, including expenses occurring in November and beyond. The Finance Committee agreement is therefore not considered final or applicable in its original form, and further discussion/action is anticipated.

B. **Public Services Committee (Chairperson Harpe)-** No Report.

C. **Public Safety Committee (Chairperson McRae) –**

•Employee Pay Increases (3% - 15%)

Mr. McRae expressed frustration over the city's financial situation, stating that the Fire and Police Departments require pay increases, but the budget is limited. While the Fire Department is stable, support is necessary for the next fiscal year. A major concern is that firefighters work 24-hour shifts without full compensation; McRae proposed making 24-hour pay a priority. The Police Department has requested over \$100,000 in additional funding, and both departments are short-staffed, leading to employee turnover. He highlighted inadequate compensation as a key issue, suggesting a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) and a reevaluation of the merit-based pay system. A Public Safety pay scale for Fire and Police could provide employees with predictable salary increases over time. McRae believes that improving compensation is essential for retaining staff in these high-demand jobs. He plans to prioritize Public Safety compensation in the next fiscal year and will discuss budget options with Councilman Jennings before the next meeting.

14. REPORTS AND INFORMATION PRESENTATION

A. **Finance Report - Samuel Sparkman, Chief Financial Officer** - The city is currently tracking about 3% above budget projections for the first two months of the fiscal year. Past-year comparisons indicate that the city has consistently met or

exceeded its budget projections in previous years. It was clarified that budget projections do not necessarily correspond evenly to each month because revenues may be received at different times during the year.

- B. **Grants Report – Lisa Jones, Grants Manager-** We are currently administering approximately 20 grants, and everything is progressing as planned. Also, maintaining a spreadsheet that tracks activities. This allows for continuous updates for Administration. For the calendar year 2026, we applied for just over \$28 million in grant funds this past month. The three grants that were applied for were all through FEMA, but they were administered by different agencies.
- C. **Upcoming Events – Jaharra Graves, Dir. Of Tourism, Parks, & Rec. –** USDA approved four mini grants in July for the TPR department to celebrate Parks and Rec Month. Thank you, Lisa Jones. July 15th, we had our Red Ball tennis event for everyone at Smith Park with the Marlboro County Special Needs and Disability Board, AMI Kids Sandhill's, our TPR team tennis instructor, junior tennis instructor Mackenzie Douglas, and members of the community. Participants had an amazing time learning the fundamentals of Red Ball Tennis. She thanked beverage sponsors Priority One and Pepsi for keeping everyone refreshed and hydrated throughout the day. Last week, Friday, Kids' Play Day in the Park. A huge thank you to SoPak-Co for the generous donation, which helped make this event possible. We had a water slide, played Red Ball, tennis, games, music, and provided free food and beverages for everyone. Scotland Health Hair South and Simply Breast Survivors participated with giveaways and information for attendees. Tomorrow we have our Minion movie night at the Community Center. The doors will open at seven. The movie will begin at eight. Trinity Behavior Health has partnered with us to provide the movie popcorn boxes, backpacks, and education stations. The Mayor will be giving out freshly popped popcorn. We will also have additional community partners in attendance with goodies to give out before the movie begins. This Thursday, July 23rd, we have Sports Day. This event is designed to introduce participants to multiple sports and activities through hands-on experience to play and engage with others. Kids and adults will have the opportunity to enjoy volleyball, football, Red Ball tennis, soccer, frisbee, and cornhole. We will reschedule our hoop fest for a date in August, as the event was canceled due to extreme outdoor temperatures. Don't forget National Night Out on Tuesday, August 4 at NETC from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

15. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CITY COUNCIL AND CITY ADMINISTRATOR

- A. **Administrator's Monthly Report-** Mr. Simon stated, "I just simply want to say thank you to my staff. They mean so much to me, and they are all doing a wonderful job, and all of you need to know that. I know we often get criticized whenever people see things or think certain things, but just know we have a utilities department that is working all through the day and night. We have our electric folks out hours of the night. They're doing all they can. Sometimes with subpar equipment. We have our water. Mr. Johnny Roscoe cannot even keep up with all the things that he is doing. I am trying to give him everything he needs, including rest and grace. Our Wastewater, Mr. David Hoover, and Jordan at our Water Treatment Plant are doing an outstanding job. My Administrative Personnel

are doing an outstanding job. Fire and Police are doing an outstanding job. I always like to recognize people who have just really stepped up. I can't say enough about Mr. Donald Hamilton and Chief Burks, but Donald has really just kind of lend his expertise and helped us out with a lot of different things administratively. Administratively, the team at City Hall is just really working at 100 miles per hour. They are all doing well. They deserve a thank you sometimes, and not the criticism that they receive all the time. I'm okay with it. It's what I signed up for. But for my team who's out there working hard and doing everything they can to them, y'all remember this real quickly. Leadership is about serving everyone, not just the loudest and the most rude voices. As leaders, we must appreciate those who show up, support the mission, and work together to move the organization forward. It's easy to become consumed by the few who criticize or resist change, but if we focus all of our energy there, we risk overlooking the many who believe in the vision and contribute every day. True leadership requires gratitude, perspective, and courage. Be thankful for those who encourage progress. Invest in the people who are committed to excellence. Listen to every single voice because all that matters. But don't allow a small minority to dictate your purpose or derail your mission. Leadership is not about pleasing everyone. It's about making principled decisions that serve the great good, Administrator."

- B. **Bridge Closure & Detour Plan-** The attached information was provided for informational purposes.
- C. **Organizational Charts-**The attached information was provided for informational purposes.

16. NON-AGENDA ITEMS FROM COUNCIL

Mr. Davis- Stated the work we do can be quite challenging, especially when it comes to government tasks. Often, we wish we could complete our Public Works more quickly and efficiently. However, Mr. Simon mentioned that we often find ourselves traveling around town throughout the day and sometimes at night, staying focused on the mission to help as much as we can. He sees city employees working hard everywhere, and knows they are doing their best. Despite facing issues like equipment shortages and truck malfunctions, they continue to be out there, making progress. "We must get competitive, meaning that across the board, we got to do that. Thank you."

Mr. Jennings-No Comments

Mr. McRae- Stated we should be careful about making assumptions regarding someone's work without understanding their situation. It's important to communicate openly and ask questions before jumping to conclusions. Everything has been going well, but there was a recent trash pickup on State Street where some cans were skipped. Let's prioritize double-checking as discussed previously. Lastly, the kickball tournament this past Saturday was fantastic! Despite the heat, many people, including staff from the fire department and Mr. Simon, participated and had a great time. "It was what I wanted. It was what I had intended for it to be; people came out, let their hair down. It was a free event, had food trucks, but people got to have fun and enjoy themselves."

Ms. Weaver-No Comments

Mrs. Harpe-No Comments

Mayor Abraham- Took a moment to express his appreciation for the Municipal Association and their excellent annual conference in Greenville. Their training sessions and speakers were truly commendable. Next, he thanked all the citizens who came out, especially those who stayed. Your presence is valued. To the employees, you are vital to the city's operations; without you, we couldn't function effectively. He's here to support you and will be visiting all departments soon to hear your ideas and suggestions. Please feel free to reach out to me anytime. To the citizens, he appreciates you greatly; without you, there would be no city. Regarding the public comments made earlier, typically we don't respond at the time to ensure we collect accurate information; that's why I didn't respond previously.

He also thanked our Code Enforcement Officer, Mr. John Walters, for investigating Ms. Best's concerns. There was flooding, and he placed the dog in a dry area for its safety. Lastly, Ms. Best had requested materials for doghouses about a year ago, and he arranged for a donation and hasn't heard if those doghouses were made yet. "I have a dog and I love him, so I know that if anyone that has animals, I know that they're part of the family. I just want to share that because a lot of that doesn't get told. And one thing about it, I respect Miss Betts being consistent because she's consistent in what she believes in, and I respect her for that."

17. **WATER QUALITY DISCUSSION**

The Council debated a proposal for using water quality units, ultimately deciding against it due to financial constraints and concerns about the presentation's rush. Inform the external water quality unit provider that the Council has decided not to move forward with their proposed water quality units.

18. **PERSONNEL MATTER **(EXECUTIVE SESSION)****

A motion to go into Executive Session to discuss Personnel Matters. Moved by Mr. McRae. Seconded by Mr. Davis. Motion passed.

In favor: Ms. Weaver, Mr. Davis, Mrs. Harpe, Mayor Abraham, Mr. Jennings and Mr. McRae.

Opposed: Mr. Scott

19. **CITIZEN INSURANCE CLAIM DISBURSEMENT ** (EXECUTIVE SESSION)****

20. **ADJOURNMENT**

Meeting ended at 10:36 pm.

Public Comment Policy:

Citizens desiring to speak at any regular meeting must make a written request to notify the City Clerk prior to the deadline. Citizens interested in commenting at a regular meeting shall sign in to speak and limit comments to no more than 3 minutes.

Mission Statement: To utilize all available resources for the development of plans, programs, and projects to improve services to the citizens of Bennettsville and establish and maintain an active role in economic and community development.