



REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING
Tuesday, May 19, 2026; 6:30 P.M.
Bennettsville Public Safety Complex

Minutes (Corrections)

1. CALL TO ORDER Mayor Tyron Abraham
2. INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE Tyrone R. Davis
3. ROLL CALL
All Council members were in attendance, with the exception of Gregory Scott, Sr.
4. APPROVAL/CORRECTION OF MINUTES
 - A. **Regular Council Meeting; Tuesday, March 17, 2026** - Mrs. Harpe made a motion to accept the meeting minutes for the Regular Council Meeting for Tuesday, March 17, 2026. Seconded by Mr. Jennings. Motion passed.
Regular Council Meeting; Tuesday, April 21, 2026 – Mr. Jennings moved that we accept the meeting minutes for the Regular Council Meeting for Tuesday, April 21, 2026, with the necessary corrections. Seconded by Mr. McRae. Motion passed.
5. PUBLIC REQUESTS/ PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS
 - A. **Employee Anniversaries** - Anthony Chavis (Police), 3 years; Bryant Galloway (Public Works), 4 years; Devonte Genwright (Public Works), 1 year; William Hall (Police), 21 years; Chris Hamer (Utility Billing), 1 year; Caleb Lopez (Police), 2 years; Patrick Smith (Gas), 22 years; Pete Wilkes (Administration) 8 year
 - B. **New Hires & Promotions**-Dontae Owens, Uncertified Police Officer (Police), Ivan McCoy (Public Works); Jacob King, Police Corporal (Police)
 - C. **Wastewater Modernization – Dr. Beverly Gurley** - Dr. Beverly Gurley introduced Bio Clean, a wastewater treatment system that could reduce Bennettsville's wastewater costs by 70-80% and potentially generate revenue through clean water sales. The system, which costs approximately \$125,000 per unit, could save the city significant operational costs and improve compliance. The proposal includes a pilot project to demonstrate the technology's

effectiveness. The council expressed interest but sought further clarification on the timeline and potential benefits.

- D. **Audit (Year Ended April 30, 2025) – Robert Milhous**- Mr. Milhous presented the auditor's report, confirming the statements presented fairly, with total assets of \$41.177 million and total liabilities of \$26.1 million, resulting in a net position of \$3.9 million. The general fund had a deficit of \$2.578 million, covered by \$3 million transfers from the utility fund. The combined utility fund reported a \$1.6 million deficit after transfers.

6. PUBLIC COMMENTS (Agenda Items Only)
No Comments

7. SECOND READING AND PASSAGE IN FULL OF ORDINANCES
No Business

8. FIRST READING AND ADVERTISEMENT OF ORDINANCES

- A. **FY 2026-2027 Amended Budget Ordinance #26-05-001**

Mr. Jennings made a motion to adopt the First Reading of the Amended Budget. Seconded by Mr. Davis. Those in favor: Ms. Weaver, Mr. Davis, Mrs. Harpe, Mayor Abraham, and Mr. Jennings. Mr. McRae opposed. Motion carried.

Statement for Inclusion in the Minutes

Councilman Cy'Heim O. McRae
District 5

Pursuant to the provisions of the City Code allowing members of Council to submit a written statement for inclusion in the official minutes, I respectfully submit the following explanation regarding my vote against the Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Budget.

After reviewing the proposed budget and considering the City's current financial position, I voted against adoption of the budget due to concerns regarding fiscal priorities, transparency, and the level of financial oversight exercised by City Council. In my opinion, the budget places emphasis on expenditures that should be more carefully evaluated while other priorities affecting residents and the long-term financial health of the City deserve greater attention. I am also concerned that City Council does not currently receive sufficient financial information to monitor revenues, expenditures, transfers, and overall fund performance throughout the year.

I believe that existing policies provide the administration with a significant degree of discretion regarding expenditures and budget transfers with limited Council involvement. As the elected body responsible for appropriating public funds, I believe Council should have a more active role in reviewing major expenditures, budget amendments, and financial decisions that impact taxpayers.

My vote was not intended as a criticism of any individual employee, department, or member of the administration. But, it reflects my belief that stronger financial controls, greater transparency, enhanced reporting, and increased Council oversight are necessary to ensure responsible stewardship of public resources.

I remain committed to working collaboratively with my fellow Council members and City staff to strengthen our financial policies and ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent in a manner that reflects the priorities of our residents.

9. PASSAGE OF RESOLUTIONS
No Business

10. GENERAL BUSINESS DISPENSED BY MOTION

A. **Request to Rename Lawson Street to Dease Street**

A motion to allow the request to proceed by following the established procedures outlined in section 151.23 -26 of the Ordinance. Moved by Mr. Davis. Seconded by Mrs. Harpe. Those in favor: Mr. Davis, Mrs. Harpe, Mayor Abraham, and Mr. Jennings. Ms. Weaver opposed. Mr. McRae abstained. Motion carried.

11. PUBLIC COMMENTS (Non-Agenda Items Only)

Pamela Best- Expresses frustration about being cut off during public comments and mentions issues with stray animals in the city.

12. BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS (Denise Miller, Director of Planning & Zoning)

A. **Planning Commission** (No Cases)

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

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

13. COUNCIL COMMITTEES

A. **Finance Committee (Chairperson Jennings)**-The Finance Committee Chairperson discusses the budget process and the challenges faced in maintaining the budget. He thanked Mr. Simon and his staff for their efforts in preparing the budget. Lastly, he mentions the overperformance of revenues in the year's audit and the importance of the budget.

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

C. **Public Safety Committee (Chairperson McRae)**- He hasn't met with his committee due to prior meetings. Hopefully, they will meet soon.

14. REPORTS AND INFORMATION PRESENTATION

A. **Finance Report – Samuel Sparkman, Chief Financial Officer**- Mr. Sparkman noted that we exceeded our budget by about \$5 million in revenue. Fortunately, the revenue helped offset increased utility costs, despite being about 18% over in revenue and slightly above budget in expenses. He was proud that we received an unmodified opinion on the audit. He stated we're committed to improving our presentations next year, and he appreciates the support and confidence in our work. We'll continue to strive to do a good job.

B. **Grants Report - Brittany Jones, Director of Business & Community**

Development- Right now, we are almost complete with our Wastewater Treatment Plant Evaluation and Capital Improvement Plan. In addition, we have two Lime Feed Slurry Awards, one at the Lyllas Street Treatment Center and one at the Lake Wallace Treatment Center. We also have a PFAS study for raw water to test our water for different contaminants, which is from the South Carolina Department of Environmental Services, and we are doing additional testing and development of a watershed plan for the Public Works Department. We have two grants, the used oil grant and an e-waste grant, and those are coming to an end in June. In addition, we have a trees for SC canopy mapping grant with the South Carolina Forestry Commission. We got a mini grant for some electric charging stations, and we are moving forward with that. They are doing environmental and historical reviews right now on those. Another big part of our goals here at the city is walkability, so we know that we have a Safe Streets for all grants, but we also submitted an American Trails grant for \$15,000 for the Crooked Creek Trail. "In addition to that, internally we have submitted a state and local government cybersecurity program grant, and that's just for some IT upgrades internally, and of course, we have our skip projects, the water meters. We also have a lot of our sewer upgrades completed or near completion. Next, CDBG and streetscape, we got the main street parking lot paved, so we have a nicely fresh paved parking lot."

"Finally, the biggest grant, or the most recent grant, and the biggest impact that I've seen, our South Carolina Arts Commission Festival grant. We had our first Beeville festival this past Saturday, which was a great success. That grant will give us a reimbursement of \$7,500 back from the festival. I'm happy to report that we collected over \$6,300 in sponsorships and vendor fees. That square was packed. Everyone had a really good day. The vendors sold out of a lot. We had cake, cookies, pies, and unconventional desserts. We had over 30 submissions for that. We had over 60 pieces of artwork for the youth student art contest. We had great local acts with Chad Tolson, who's a Bennettsville native, and Next Level Band performed. I just want to thank all of the departments that really helped everybody here, all the citizens."

C. **Upcoming Events – Jaharra Graves, Director of Tourism, Parks, and**

Recreation - The Tennis Court Groundbreaking Ceremony will be next Friday, May 29, at 1 pm. Miss. Graves noted, "Basically, because the tennis courts have not been resurfaced, touched in however many years, probably over 20 plus years, and it's in dire need of some retention. So, we will be doing our groundbreaking to resurface the tennis courts. A representative from USTA, Sherman McAllister, will be in attendance as well."

15. **COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CITY COUNCIL AND CITY ADMINISTRATOR**

- A. **Administrator's Report**- I really just want to say thank you to my staff. Let me tell you this, I know we get beat up a lot, and I know everyone has opinions on what we do and don't do, and I get it. That is the world we live in today, but I get a chance to sit up there in that office and witness the hard work of the men and

women who work for the city of Bennett Street, and that includes all departments. The things that all of you don't see, and most citizens don't see, are the hard work and hours they put in when people complain about various things. They don't hesitate to go fix things. It's for our public works department, our public utilities department, our fire department, police department, with all the things that goes on with business development, all the things that Miss.. Graves is doing with facilities. We are managing about 40 projects. We just came off doing or managing a good budget, and we've got a pretty decent audit. We are at the tail end of our skip grant, where we've done all of these infrastructure upgrades over the last three to four years, including water and sewer lines, some roads, and meter replacements. We've done a lot in this city regarding infrastructure upgrades, and we've had some unexpected things that happen that we've had to adjust to. And I just want y'all to hear things like this. I get it. You want to know, and we should do a better job as far as disclosing, like when we move money around to do certain things, but understand this, when you are managing utilities, it is, it is not small ball, whenever something happens if a well goes down, or breaker, or touring line breaks, or someone hit a sore line, and by the way, all of those happen today. Is you have to react, and sometimes you have to get, you know, in a lot of cases, don't have the luxury of kind of bringing everything back to council for decision, I know we need to bring a lot of things back to the FYI, but just know when you're running those utilities, it is, it is a tough, tough job, because a repair for a particular device or some equipment with your utilities department is not \$500,000 that's those things don't happen, so I just wanted to say that, and to thank my team, my entire city staff, for all that they do. They work so hard, and sometimes they get a thank you, and sometimes they don't. Sometimes they're treated very badly in the field when they're doing their job to the best of their ability. I just have to say that, and so you know we're trying to do all we can with our workplace culture. We have, and I have to give you, you know, the truth here. We have our staff that are coming to us in groups, they are stressed, and they're not mad about anything. It's just they, the demand is high. They need help. They want grace when they make a mistake. They're not perfect, and we're trying to do all we can to assist with that, you know, make sure that they understand that they are appreciated, and council, you all of you could certainly help us along those lines, whenever you work or speak with the individual departments and individual people, and just tell them, thank you, let them know you appreciate everything they do, they're doing, we're going to make mistakes, but just show us a little bit of grace, and it will take us so far.

He discussed the transition from the old tennis court to a new one for the upcoming season, with plans for increased school and community use, including hosting tournaments. The city is investing in facility upgrades, such as fire department renovations to create more comfortable living spaces and expand bathrooms. The city is also managing various infrastructure projects, including water and sewer line replacements, and has allocated funds for park upgrades. The council appreciated the staff's hard work and acknowledged the need for better communication and public education on city projects.

B. **S.C. Department of Commerce – City of Bennettsville Strategic Plan** – For Information Only.

16. NON-AGENDA ITEMS FROM COUNCIL

Mrs. Weaver- Stated the Beeville Festival was a great event. She ended by saying that Brittany and her crew did an excellent job.

Mr. Davis- Thanked Mr. Simon and his team for all the hard work they do. Next, he noted that funds were allocated for McLeod Park in the Shady Rest area.

Mrs. Harpe- No comments.

Mr. Jennings- Stated, “The interest retained and earned under a way the City of Bennettsville, still over the last several years handled a rather large grant came back to us through Mr. Simon work and on our budget this year with the \$1.6 million that we have to spend or obligate before December 31 to send back to the Federal Government we had a \$90,000 expense coming up on Cheraw Street Bridge to move our utility services away from that bridge, and we also have a dam project going on, and a well project going on. It would have been another \$110,000 out of our next year's budget had we not moved in this direction. I think that's the kind of work we need, and kind of foresight we need, because I mean we talked about 10s and 50s, and they're important to talk about 10s and \$50,000 that's \$200,000 that we will not have to spend out of our utility budget next year, you know what we get voted for, feeding it comes back to us, and that's the kind of foresight we all need to understand how important it is in these grants.”

Mr. McRae- Thanked the citizens for coming out. He expressed how good a time he had at the Beeville Festival. Next, He shared his thoughts on the recent strategic plan discussion. It was a positive initiative, where sessions on various topics, including Economic Development and Art, were discussed. During the discussions, a team of about ten people recorded feedback about downtown, and they provided a detailed report with insights on how we can improve our city. He was thankful to have participated in this process. Moreover, he thanked those who attended the Town Hall and Mr. Simon and his team for posting the budget.

“My dissent on the budget, so you know, I just wanted to explain that, because a lot of times people be thinking I'm a negative nasty, so I want to just let everybody know I don't just go for anything, I like to kind of evaluate everything myself, and I think that we need a few more parameters in place as far as the budget, because if I vote on the budget with these figures, I want to know, I want to track whenever something is changed on it, because I vote on it, you know, so I should be privy to that, and that's just my opinion, so I cannot support anything unless you have that, and I also sent an email out asking about those perimeters, asked if we could have them on the first reading.” Lastly, he announced a Kickball Tournament that will be held on July 18th, encouraging citizens to sign up and attend.

Mayor Abraham- Stated the Beeville Festival was a great event. He enjoyed the opportunity of meeting a lot of new people. “Everyone that participated, everyone that that helped out on that day, and one that helped out behind the scenes. It was a whole citywide team effort, and I thank you.”

17. ADJOURN
The meeting ended at 8:45 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