



**REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING  
Tuesday, May 21, 2024; 6:30 P.M.  
Bennettsville Public Safety Complex**

**Minutes**

1. CALL TO ORDER Mayor Fowler
2. INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE Tyrone Davis
3. ROLL CALL  
District 1-Wanda Weaver  
District 2- Tyrone Davis  
District 3-Allen Taylor  
Mayor Leith Fowler  
District 4-William “Bill” Jennings, Jr.  
District 5- Tyron Abraham  
District 6- Gregory Scott
4. APPROVAL/CORRECTION OF MINUTES  
A. **Regular Council Meeting; Tuesday, April 16, 2024-** Mr. Scott moved that we approve the Regular Council Meeting minutes for Tuesday, April 16, 2024. Seconded by Mr. Jennings. Motion passed unanimously.
5. PUBLIC REQUESTS/ PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS  
A. **Employees Anniversaries-**Mrs. Angela Ward announced Employee Anniversaries Wade Cheves, Fire, 20 years; William (Kell) Hall, Police, 19 years; Michael David, Planning & Zoning, 7 years; Marques Stanton, Public Works, 9 years; Morris Smith, Gas, 20 years; Grover “Pete” Wilkes, Administration, 6 years; Tammy Hamer, Human Resources, 3 years; Bryant Galloway, Public Works, 2 years; Anthony Chavis, Police, 1 year; Shekela Brown, Police, 1 year  
B. **New Hires & Promotions** – None  
C. **PDRTA-Don Strickland-** Gave an update for Bennettsville services. Services are doing exceptionally well. PDRTA covers six counties in the PeeDee Region. Services in this area started in 2019, you will now see buses traveling throughout the city every hour. They are providing demand response services, as well. Citizens that are not on the fixed route can call a day ahead and schedule their

trips such as: doctor appointments, grocery store visits, pharmacy, dialysis, etc. Mr. Strickland ended his presentation by saying, “The growth is phenomenal.”

- D. **Tree City Award Presentation to the City**-Representative presented a recognition award of 13 years, Arbor Day 2023 former Mayor Dr. Carolyn Prince and Jaharra Graves, Director of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, Ms. Marie Franqui , Main Street Chairperson and Ms. Jerusha McArthur , TPR Maintenance. A picture was taken with Mayor Fowler, City Council, Jaharra Graves and former Mayor Dr. Carolyn Prince
- E. **Statement from City Council regarding lawsuit**- Mr. Mason King stated, “We were recently served a lawsuit and notified the South Carolina Insurance Risk Fund and they have now obtained Defense Council on our behalf to us in this lawsuit.”

## 6. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Dr. Carolyn A. Prince- Stated she would like, “A copy of the 2024-2025 budget, to produce the public funds and available to show us how our money is being spent. Give copies to individuals and please put a copy in the Reference Section of the Public Library, so that we access.” Secondly, “Rumors are about, but in order to restore the public citizens confidence, and the City’s Finance Department, we suggest and strongly ask for a true physical audit of the original 2023-2024 budget. The amended budget for 2023, 2024 and the new budget. Maybe not the new budget. The 2023, original budget from the 2023 amended budget. Including the Capital Plan. We want this to be a true external audit, not internal. We want the auditing firm to come to the city and look at and examine every document, every financial document, every purchase order, every payment, every deposit, everything in order to restore the public’s confidence in what’s going on and to eliminate the rumors that are about. You know how people are. You have nothing to hide, provide the document or that service for us and I think the people have the confidence and be able to work with you and move forward with everything that you might do.”

Thomas Bennett-A citizen from the Richardson Park area. He is concerned about awareness. He stated, It seems to be that we’re the last to know. The breach of the dam started early but wasn’t given notice until 5:30pm. So, how can we prepare for something in the lives that destroy others? If we hadn’t got a phone call, myself and a few people would have not known anything about. We think this is unfair and as you all know, Richardson Park and Shady rest is always having problems with the creek, and it seems like nobody seems to care about it. We have a resident here (pointing at audience)Ms. Fair, she’s a senior citizen. If she don’t know the stuff early enough how she’s going to know?” Next, he states, “It seems like we are the last to know. I’ve talked to the chief about it. We had a flood the other day and our neighborhood should have been blocked off. Your Police Officers was riding around and let lights flash doing nothing else. So, if a crook was riding around in the crowd, sightseeing, they could have broken in our houses, you wouldn’t know nothing about it. So, we are asking City Council to figure this stuff out. Everybody here, we might not have a million-dollar house on the lakeside, but we love our houses too.” Lastly, “So, ladies and gentlemen I’m asking you as a citizen of the Richardson Park and Shady Rest Community, help us out. That’s all we ask. The problem is awareness. When something happens, we’re the last to know. Thank you and God bless you all.”

Pamela Best- Stated, I’m tired of coming in here. This makes 3 years. (She pointed out who was different), but states, “Nothing has changed.” She went saying that she has been

trying to help Shady Rest and Richardson Park. “My phone don’t ring. I don’t get no text, no email, no callback, nothing! But I’m still trying to have one cat plucked one by one and get them fixed and bring the bill here next month. I have an appointment May 29<sup>th</sup> to get one cat fixed. Don’t put that water back in that hole for them people, it’s just going to mess with these people. Nobody don’t won’t to recognize it, don’t put no water back in that hole. It’s simple as that. Like I get it, y’all want the water, but if it’s going to do that to the rest of the people in Bennettsville. Don’t put it back!”

Yvette Douglas- Started by saying, “I want you all to know after coming here about District 3, I have not gotten anything. I put in a FOIA. Mayor, you turn a blind eye to everything. You never called, followed up. You came to these churches, you came to my church, you are sitting here. You go these black folks’ house, you sit down, you sit, and drink Kool-Aid and you’ve done nothing. We got a chief that is suing us. We had more opportunities to get rid of him and we are paying him. How are we supposed to feel protected by this chief? Who’s suing the county, doesn’t care. Who sues for riding over chicken poop? Who makes claims that he fell at citizens homes? If I had that many complaints, I would be called a liability without a job. The practices that this gentleman in District three does is unreal. So, I filled out a form when I went on the Ethic’s. It’s not anonymous, I went on the Ethic’s Commission, this has to stop and it’s not about black and white, it’s about what’s right. You all are constantly trying to make it about color, it has nothing to do with color. It has something to do with integrity. When the law is being broken, there are consequences. When I broke the law, there were consequences for me. So, there has to be consequences. You have this man with a paper from 2011, if you knew what to do in 2011 to be annex in, you knew what to do in 2023. You voted on that. You clearly saw that you were out of your district, but because you think no one is going to say anything you so blazingly that you didn’t take the proper procedures. Don’t show me anything from 2011, 201, I was at 114 pounds, but look at me now. This is ridiculous. You knew the procedures. You didn’t do it and now it’s getting swept under the rug. You have turned a blind eye to what is going on and you compromised. You are not here to make friends. That’s not your friend, that’s your colleague. You all do not work for the chief. You work for the people. No, don’t come with the 3 minutes. I sat there and timed everybody, and everybody went over because I knew you were going to say that when I called you out and held you accountable. You didn’t say that when Mr. Barr was jumping all up in here. No,(while beating on the podium)don’t say it now because it’s time for you to be called to the carpet with what you’re doing. You turn the blind eye, you know there’s no contract, there’s nothing! I asked for logs, everything of when these activities were done and it’s not right. So , since you couldn’t work with me like you said you would, Imma let the people come in here and work on you.”

Donna Jones- Stated that she was concerned about the 2.5% increase on the use of debit cards. “My concern is that we live in a digital currency society, the only people that know how to write a check or write checks are elderly people and business owners. Majority of the people pay with debit card or credit card. So, really inadvertently that means that we have now a 2.5% increase on our bill.” Next, she stated, “If everyone comes in and start writing checks, which, your millennials don’t write checks. So, that means you gave us an increase without asking for it. You should explain it to us and let them tell with that being said, will people in the office be able to handle the influx of people that would be coming in? Now, they can’t pay over the phone because they have to come in with a check. Will

those people get an increase in their pay, in their income?” Secondly, I noticed that you had something in the newspaper where you have some positions open for a Chief Finance Officer and a Finance Officer. Where is all this money at in finance? Y’all tell us that we broke all the time. So, I’m trying to figure out where’s the money? Do we need somebody to watch the money, or take the money to the bank? Why do we need all of these people to handle this money that we say we don’t have? Now we’re getting the increase and we’re putting positions in the city, but I don’t see any jobs coming there. “Everything has increased all the way around except our incomes. So, we have to make a change. If you want us to those increase, you gotta get us a job and you gotta get that income up to at least \$18hr because \$15hr will not pay insurance increase, light bill increase, egg bill, milk, cheese, butter and doctor bill, everything has increased.”

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

8. FIRST READING AND ADVERTISEMENT OF ORDINANCES  
No Business

9. PASSAGE OF RESOLUTIONS

A. PEBA-Addendum to Employer Resolution for Participation in State Ins. Benefits-

**Approving Action:** A motion to approve the addendum to Employer Resolution for participation in State Insurance Benefits. Moved by Ms. Wanda Weaver. Seconded by Mr. Jennings. Mr. Taylor opposed. Motion passed 6-1.

10. GENERAL BUSINESS DISPENSED BY MOTION

A. Appointment of Mr. Glen Bunch to Housing Authority of Bennettsville-

**Approving Action:** A motion to appoint Mr. Glen Bunch to the Housing Authority of Bennettsville. Moved by Mr. Jennings. Seconded by Mr. Scott. Motion passed unanimously.

B. Contract for Laura Johnson Consulting-

**Approving Action:** A motion to allow the City Administrator to enter a contract with Laura Johnson Consulting Services. Moved by Mr. Davis. Seconded by Mr. Scott. Ms. Weaver and Mr. Taylor opposed. Motion passed 5-2.

11. REPORTS AND INFORMATION PRESENTATION

A. Storage/Parking Trucks Ordinance-Mr. Simon highlighted a few things the city is trying to accomplish. A few months back, there was still some questions regarding the type of vehicles, trucks, the size of trucks versus recreational vehicles versus other types of vehicles. This Ordinance defines that. Another concern was enforcement. “How do we do that ?” “Well, we think with the listing of roads here in this ordinance and we can always add to or subtract from that as well as some language at the end of the ordinance. Specifically, talking about how our City of Bennettsville Police and the Code Enforcement Officer would work

together along the lines and do patrolling and be able to issue fines along those lines for trucks coming through our city.” Storage was another concern; however, this ordinance goes into details talking about special exceptions of vehicles, certain types of vehicles aren’t certain types of area loading or unloading or therefore, special purpose for a short amount of time. It’s all written crystal clear here in the ordinance.”

Mr. Abaraham stated that he had an issue with the streets. “Why not all the streets?” Mr. Simon stated, “You don’t want to create a full boarder of the entire city of trucks coming through.” . Currently, the ordinance reads, “We are only asking people for those trucks to not use or to use that route which include a few of these streets. So, we think this way, we get more of the streets downtown.” If needed, more can be added.

Mr. Simon ended by saying, “We will recraft this thing and come back before you for First Reading and we can talk about specific things at that point.”

Ms. Weaver asked if the RVs can’t go on the streets? “Some large RV’s, yes. We’re trying to deter from coming through. But this is the challenge,” Mr. Simon replied.

B. Floodplain Management (Existing Ordinance)-Mr. Simon stated, “We do have a Flood Plain Management Ordinance that was signed into law back in 2011. It’s an older Ordinance, we know we probably need to go in and look at some sections to see what needs to be updated to any state or federal standards. They’ve changed since then.” Also, we have not been administering this ordinance for a number of years. If you are building a new home or doing substantial improvements to a home located in the floodplain area, what this ordinance requires is that you take additional steps towards protecting that home in certain ways. In some cases, you may have to get a survey or engineer involved. There are options there to elevate homes. Their options to elevate Hvac and other vital units.” He ended by saying, “All the language here in this ordinance, just so you’ll know it and everyone home you can go Google it if you need to. This is model language from the National Flood Insurance Program. So, the language here is federal language and then what a lot of states do when they implement this and the local government. As they use that model language and then they just make modifications and tailor it to your local community.” We do have an ordinance, but changes need to be made because of its age.

C. Incentives for Downtown Business (Discussion)- “How we can support downtown businesses?” Ms. Weaver stated she talked to some business owners, and they asked if they could get some kind of tax break? Are there any tax incentives that they can offer these businesses? Ms. Weaver said, “We had three businesses to close down in one week. We need to do something for them to keep them here.” Mr. Jennings, stated, “One thing we can do to support them is we buying stuff. As a city, we can but from local businesses and if we’re bidding, we can bid with a 5% leverage against the lowest price if they’re local contractor.” A lot of problems with our downtown are the condition of the buildings, which are absentee landowners and that’s where our Planning & Zoning, Architecture Review Board, and The Code Enforcement.”

12. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CITY COUNCIL AND CITY ADMINISTRATOR

A. City of Bennettsville Customer Service Initiative

- a. Pleasant
- b. Professional
- c. Patient

Mr. Simon said we should provide good customer service to everyone that we encounter and we're going to do that moving forward. "So, if they're citizens who encounter any professional with the City of Bennettsville and it doesn't matter who they are and if they are not all three of these things we need to know right away. If they are not pleasant, professional and patient. That is over the phone. That is in the field. That is when we're dealing with even contractors or other professionals. That is even when we are dealing with each other. There's no excuse for us to be emotional and some of the decisions that we have to make on a daily basis. There's no reason for us not to focus on the customer experience, which is ultimate who we serve in the City of Bennettsville, our citizens."

B. Crooked Creek Forum Feedback-A well-attended forum was held on May 20, 2024, at the Bennettsville Community Center. The purpose of that forum was to clarify some things. "We do not have all of the answers right now regarding what are the next steps as far as the dam breach and Crooked Creek. However, a lot of information was shared from the state agencies involved on yesterday." Mr. Charlie Barrineau, Field Services Manager attended the meeting virtually. He is from the Municipal Association of South Carolina; he assisted us in doing our reporting to the US Treasurer. Recently, this year and last year. Mr. Barrineau is also the coach for local Municipalities and other jurisdictions around or in his region here in the state of South Carolina. Coaching on how to do reporting of ARPA funds.

C. Text MyGov (New)- Miss. Brittany Jones discussed that our new Text MyGov text messaging was introduced to citizens. She mentioned that we now have a widget added to the City's website. This app allows users to have a two-way communication between our residents and the city. It will allow us to send alert notifications and it will allow residents to be able to give us reports on non-emergency related things. The number that was given is 843-897-8883 and you can report an issue or find information. You can also Text: "BENNETTSVILLE" to 91896 and this will allow you to opt into our notification system, and it will send you a message asking if you would like to opt in. You will need to reply, "YES."

D. Bennettsville Citizens Academy- We are now accepting applications for the Bennettsville Citizens Academy. The Bennettsville Citizens Academy introduces participants to the various functions of the City of Bennettsville operations and features instruction by staff from the different divisions of the local government. The goal of the Citizen's Academy, in addition to providing an overview of the city operations, is to create meaningful partnerships with the City of Bennettsville and give the local government the ability to serve our citizens better and more efficiently through the open exchange of facts and ideas. The class size is limited to the first 30 approved applicants and will be held at the Bennettsville Community Center with an occasional tour of a facility.

The program consists of 2.5 hours sessions a month that includes two areas of operation covered per class.

13. NON-AGENDA ITEMS FROM COUNCIL

Ms. Weaver- Would like updates on grants. On 119 Springdale Drive an issue has been going on since November. She would like to know what's going on with that. She thinks Text MyGov is a great idea. Next, she stated, we've got to figure out a way to get information out to those without cellphones and social media. She ended by saying the public comments that are made by people need to be addressed because she doesn't want them to come month after month saying the same thing over and over. She thanked Tammy King in Human Resources for doing a great job sending out updates each month and the Fire Department for cleaning the sidewalks. Lastly, she would like an update on District 3 with the maps.

Mr. Davis- Thanked all of his constituents for coming out to the meeting, especially Shady Rest and Richardson Park. He thanked all the citizens and employees.

Mr. Taylor- Thanked all the Agencies that assisted in the dam breach. He like the idea of Text MyGov, he thanked Brittany.

Mayor Fowler- Thanked Brittany for Text MyGov. We are all about saving lives and taking care of people.

Mr. Jennings- Would like to have a Workshop for the Salary Survey.

Mr. Abraham- Thanked all the first responders, staff, and agencies that assisted during the dam breach. He thanked the citizens in Shady Rest and Richardson Park that was protected. He would like a copy of the city employee emergency chain of command. He is glad the forensic audit is being supported because he asked for one last June.

Mr. Scott- Thanked all city workers and agencies that came to assist with the dam breach. He thanked the Richardson Park area community because they looked out for one another. They were knocking on each other's doors getting everyone out.

14. ADJOURN  
Mayor Fowler

**Public Comment Policy:**

Citizens desiring to speak at any regular meeting must provide a written request to notify the City Clerk prior to the agenda 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.