



**REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING
Tuesday, February 17, 2026; 6:30 P.M.
Bennettville Public Safety Complex**

Minutes

1. CALL TO ORDER Mayor Tyron Abraham
2. INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE Gregory Scott, Sr.
3. ROLL CALL
All Council Members were in attendance.
4. APPROVAL/CORRECTION OF MINUTES
 - A. **Regular Council Meeting; Tuesday, January 20, 2026** – Mrs. Harpe stated that under Item 17-G, Real Estate Transaction, the motion to make an offer on the North Carolina Fire Department property passed unanimously, but she did not vote on that motion. Mrs. Harpe made a motion to approve the minutes with the corrections that have been made. Mr. McRae seconded. Motion passed unanimously.
5. PUBLIC REQUESTS/ PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS
 - A. **Employees Anniversaries-** Barbara Baker, Administration (26 years), Scott Bowen, Police (7 years), Hayden Graham, Police(4 years), Terry Brown, Public Works (2 years), Kalija Galloway (2 years), Joshua Graham (2 years), James Moore (2 years), Aaron Frazier (1 year)
 - B. **New Hires** -LiAsia Tillman (HR clerk); Councilwoman: Caroline Harpe
Promotions: Joshua Rivers (Project Manager, Public Utilities Admin); Donald Hamilton (Assistant Fire Chief)
 - C. **Lake Paul Wallace Update, Representative Jason Luck**-On behalf of Representative Jason Luck, Mr. Simon gave an update on Lake Paul Wallace. On February 20, 2026, South Carolina DNR will receive \$25 million from the South Carolina Treasurer (secured in the FY2025–2026 budget); DNR will administer funds, make engineering/contracting/oversight decisions, and use state procurement law; DNR’s engineering firm will prepare a new cost analysis expected in March; a construction manager at risk delivery method will be used with a guaranteed maximum price; preliminary matters and permitting will occur in spring/early summer 2026, with construction beginning in summer 2026 and potential completion in winter 2027 (subject to change); He also noted Crooked Creek improvements: \$1.5 million was included in the recently signed Transportation, Housing and Urban Development budget for the South Carolina Office of Resilience to remove silt/sediment/debris and trim back overgrowth.

6. PUBLIC COMMENTS (Agenda Items Only)
None
7. SECOND READING AND PASSAGE IN FULL OF ORDINANCES
 - A. **Business License Ordinance 2026-2028 Revised**
Approving Action: A motion to approve the revised ordinance adopting the latest standardized Business License Class Schedule. Moved by Mr. Scott. Seconded by Mr. McRae. Motion passed unanimously.
8. FIRST READING AND ADVERTISEMENT OF ORDINANCES
No Business
9. PASSAGE OF RESOLUTIONS
 - A. **Viability Improvement Program Resolution**
Approving Action: A motion to approve a Resolution as part of the application to the Viability Improvement Program. Moved by Mr. Davis. Seconded by Mr. Scott. Motion passed unanimously.
10. GENERAL BUSINESS DISPENSED BY MOTION
 - A. **City Administrator's Employment Agreement**
Mrs. Harpe made a motion that we move into Executive Session to give Council a chance to discuss the contract with our city attorney, since he was not present at that meeting. Seconded by McRae. All in favor, except for Mayor Abraham. Motion passed.

Mr. Scott amended that we go into Executive Session at the end of our Agenda Instead of doing it now. Seconded by Mr. Davis.

Mayor Abraham entertained a motion to go into Executive Session after Item 16 to discuss the Administrators' Contract Agreement. Moved by Mr. Scott. Seconded by Mr. Davis. Mayor Abraham opposed. Motion carried.
11. PUBLIC COMMENTS (Non-Agenda Items Only)
Cynthia Cook -Stated living alone for six years, using minimal utilities, yet bills continue to rise; she questioned how electricity is calculated and noted she often freezes meals and eats out, yet her electricity costs keep increasing.
Brandy Howard-Addressed Councilmember Jennings, referencing a prior comment that was made in the last meeting, "You say that it's not fair for people who pay their property taxes on time that the other people get a year or so to pay whatever, whatever it was. I just feel like this is a poor state. This is the second poorest county in an already poor state with the highest rate of unemployment. What are people supposed to do? Where did jobs go? We had three factories closed in four years, or four factories closed in three years. What are people supposed to do? I don't think that that's fair, and I feel that was very insensitive.
Virginia Bostic- Spoke about her 46 years at her residence and how her services are increasing, but she's on a fixed income; she asked if there is an emergency fund to help seniors with utility costs, noting that in a place like Marlboro County, people cannot work and they must choose between groceries and health.
Bessie Canty-Stated she is interested in vehicles and housing, but emphasized the need for a place to live; she criticized utility charges in Marlboro County, noting that utility bills are too high and that she doesn't even do basic home tasks like laundry and cooking because her bill would be \$1,000, which she cannot afford; she said none of the council members seem to care and called the charges ridiculous.

Pamela Best-No one on council sent her a letter yet. She doesn't believe it's her responsibility to address the problems with the Humane Society or animal control. Some think the solution is to expand the Humane Society, but that's not the answer—it will just fill up quickly. She feels the need to control the population outside. I will attend the county council meetings and speak with the animal control officers from other places for ideas. She ended by saying she wants to know if the texting service for animal control is still active.

12. BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

- 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)** -Is pleased with the report's operating stance, though expenses are higher than desired. While we're managing our overall budget well, some departments are exceeding their limits. He appreciates the thorough information from Mr. Sparkman; it will be helpful for the budget. He's optimistic about the upcoming budget process and believe it will be positive.
- B. **Public Services Committee (Chairperson Harpe)**-No updates.
- C. **Public Safety Committee (Chairperson McRae)**- He started from the bottom and set some goals, gaining an overview of our progress. He received updates from both departments, and they discussed ways to enhance collaboration and increase efforts to serve the community. So, keep an eye out! This year, they plan to accomplish some great things.

14. REPORTS AND INFORMATION PRESENTATION

- A. **Finance Report**-Mr. Sparkman provided an update that we are in the fourth quarter and have reached 75% of our revenue targets, slightly exceeding projections. A delay in receiving some tax receipts from the county affected our revenue figures, but we remain optimistic. He was proud to participate in our recent Council Retreat alongside Mr. Simon and appreciated the reports from our investment counselor and bond attorney. We are exploring creative ways to secure funding for essential projects as we move into the next year. We are also looking at ways to improve our building and potentially bring some operations in-house for cost savings, aiming to create excitement in the community.
- B. **Grants Report** Miss. Lisa Jones is seeking to apply for 20 grants. She also stated, "We are seeking technical assistance from the New Jersey Institute of Technology for brownfields, as well as the Green Infrastructure Center and the VIP program of Rural Infrastructure. That program gives us the opportunity to see floods, which is usually what I try to do. We just started construction on the Lake Wallace Water Treatment plant. The Lyllas Street project is bidding next month, and hopefully we'll be able to move it forward shortly thereafter, the wastewater treatment plant evaluation and capital improvement plan planning grant. The draft is complete and is being reviewed in-house, and will be presented to council once the final recommendations and everything are incorporated. The raw water pilot study. We have signed an agreement with our consultant, we have approved purchases for our DES grants, and expect to be able to implement those. We are waiting on a notice to proceed with our seed grant from Southeast Crescent Regional Information, and we are in the process of working with our Safe Streets rural grant agreement. And of course, the big one is the skip project. We have five Skip Projects going.

C. **Upcoming Events**

- Children’s Book Signing on February 28th from 12:30 pm -2:30 pm at Downtown Bennettsville & Co.;103 Broad Street
- Community Clean-up March 21st 8am -12noon;City Hall
- Easter Egg Hunt-March 28th, 3pm-5pm; Kid’s Land Park

D. **Emergency Preparedness Report-** Mr. Simon stated, “Mayor and Council Members, what I've included in your package is just a debrief of our emergency preparedness report. Of course, I won't read this memo, but it's just a memo to all of you stating the success, in my opinion, that we've had following the last two storms, the snowstorm and the ice storm. We did a good job communicating with our citizens and communicating with staff. I want to say thank you to staff, our fire department, our police department, our electric department, all of our utilities, who were out in about one, two and three o'clock in the morning, when we were all asleep, taking care of business, when trees fell and when they needed to assist people in their homes, and for a whole host of other things. So, we just want to say thank you for that, and this is just a debrief. Get used to this, because you'll receive one of these after each time we have inclement weather, so that we can continuously learn from our mistakes and from other things. Also, we opened up the Community Center, as most of you know, the warming shelter that was successful. We didn't have a lot of people to attend, but we just want to say thank you to our citizens who always, always graciously donate supplies to the community center, always willing to help. So, we certainly appreciate that, and we want to thank our community for that.”

Mayor Abraham Thanked administration and all the employees who played a part in in during implement weather, also some of the local businesses that donated to us. He really appreciates that. He appreciates the citizens, the volunteers, and the council member who came out and stayed at the shelter, and that was a big help. So again, just want to thank everyone. Mr. Morgan Ridges and Mr. John Walters helped out tremendously. He recognized them for all they did. He ended by saying, “Mr. Simon, I really appreciate you doing this because we want to improve every time. We want to know what we can do better, so we'd be better prepared.”

15. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CITY COUNCIL AND CITY ADMINISTRATOR

A. **Administrator’s Monthly Report-** The state is currently experiencing a spike in utility costs, affecting not just Bennettsville but also customers of Dominion Energy and Santee Cooper across the region. If you feel your bill is unusually high, please contact us for an automatic reread of your meter to ensure accuracy. Many customers compare bills with different utilities, which can lead to confusion, so it's important to compare similar services. Billing is based on a base rate for power and natural gas, which fluctuates according to what we pay. We're here to help you understand any high bills you may have, and we've found that some homes are not energy efficient, leading to increased usage and costs. We recognize that not everyone can attend meetings, so we plan to visit community locations like churches and lodges to meet with residents and explain how bills are calculated. If you have questions or need assistance, please reach out to our office.

16. NON-AGENDA ITEMS FROM COUNCIL

Mr. Scott- Thanked all the citizens who came out to share their concerns. He values

hearing directly from the citizens, even if don't get a response immediately. If you have more to say, please come back and don't give up on us. Regarding Crooked Creek, he appreciates the efforts of the Department of Natural Resources and all involved. However, the \$1.5 million promised for the creek lacks a clear timeline, and while we might eventually receive it, it could take years. The city plans to improve the creek as soon as we receive direction from the Corps of Engineers. This is the first time in ten years we're taking action on this issue, and we value your accountability. Additionally, he wants to commend the Chief and the officers for their excellent work and state-of-the-art training happening right here in Bennettsville. Our Police Department has received one of the highest ratings in the state, which we should all take pride in. Lastly, social media can sometimes misrepresent our community. While there may be reports about nearby areas, it's important to recognize that our community is safe and well-protected.

Mr. McRae-Thanked everyone for coming out to the meeting. He had been trying to encourage people to attend these meetings since April of last year, and he was thrilled to see such a great turnout. He stated the council doesn't handle day-to-day operations, and it's important for the citizens to share their concerns and keep us informed. He ended by saying, please continue to express your thoughts, and he hopes to see everyone at the next meeting and the ones after that.

Mr. Jennings- Expressed his appreciation to all the employees who worked during the winter storm, as well as to all other employees. He understands that utility bills have increased, and there are rising costs overall. Unfortunately, he has noticed that some attitudes have not been as positive as they should be. He has been patient with those he has spoken to and makes himself available to address any concerns. Lastly, he asked Mr. Simon about the pole inventory and pole condition.

Mrs. Harpe-None.

Mr. Davis-Expressed his gratitude to all the workers for their efforts to ensure citizens' safety and well-being. He supported Councilman Scott regarding Crooked Creek. As representatives of District Two and District Six, they are pushing for assistance from the DNR. It's crucial that when one project begins, the entire flow of Crooked Creek is addressed to prevent water issues downstream. While promises have been made, they continue advocating for this project. Everyone understands how important it is to clean Crooked Creek effectively. Lastly, he clarified that city council members do not receive free electricity; they pay just like everyone else.

Ms. Weaver- Thanked everyone for coming out. It makes her feel good that you care enough to be here. She stated she knew light bills can be high; she gets them too. Recently, hers was quite high, so I marched over to the utility office and expressed my concerns about the pricing. The staff was really nice and took the time to explain how the temperature and the settings in my house affect my bill. Lastly, she stated that if you had any questions, she encourages you to talk to Mr. Sam or someone at the window. They will be happy to help. After her visit, she felt much better about her situation.

Mayor Abraham-Extended his gratitude to all the citizens who attended the meeting and reminded them that they are welcome every third Tuesday of the month at 6:30. A special thanks to employees, particularly the Police Department, which received a commendable score of 94.29 in the recent law enforcement assessment, showing improvement from last year. He also recognized the Public Works Department for their compassionate work, as they regularly interact with our elderly citizens. Their dedication goes beyond the usual duties, and it truly makes a difference. Next, he stated how proud of Chief Burks and Captain Thomas Kale from our Fire Department, especially since Captain Kale was selected to instruct at the South Carolina Fire and Rescue Conference in Myrtle Beach. He thanked Mrs. Graves for overseeing upgrades at the Community Center to ensure it

meets citizens' needs. Mayor Abraham announced the South Carolina Statewide cleanup from March 21st to 29th. He announced our Project Manager, Josh Rivers, who will be holding a book signing at the Downtown Bennettsville & Co, and reminded everyone about the Community Health Fair this Saturday from 10 to 12 at the Community Center. Lastly, a big thanks to Miss. Brittany Jones for her efforts with the Hamlet Seaboard Festival Committee, as it's important for us to engage with other cities to see how we can improve.

17. ADJOURN
Meeting ended at 9:07 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.