

A REGULAR MEETING OF THE COMMON
COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BECKLEY CONVENED
AT 6:30 PM ON MARCH 14, 2023, IN COUNCIL
CHAMBERS AND VIA WEB-X.

PRESENT: Mayor Robert R. Rappold, Recorder-Treasurer Billie Trump, City Attorney Bill File, and Secretary Susan Miller. Council Members: Janine Bullock, Robert Canter, Robert Dunlap, Sherrie Hunter, Cody Reedy, Tom Sopher, and Kevin Price. The following Department Heads were present: Director of IT William Kelly, Assistant Director of IT Amy Evans, Anthony Martin (IT), Captain Parsons with BFD, Chief Code Officer Donald Morgan, Chief of BPD Dean Bailey, and Director of Parks & Recreation Leslie Baker.

The Mayor called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. The public had the option to join the meeting either in person or by WEB-X from their computer, or by phone, using the weblink or phone number provided the day of the meeting on the City's webpage at Beckley.org or the City's Facebook page.

The Mayor led the Pledge of Allegiance. Council dispensed with the reading and approval of minutes from the City Council meeting dated February 28, 2023, copies of which had been distributed to each member. Council unanimously approved the minutes as written on a motion by Councilman Sopher and seconded by Councilman Price.

Next, City Attorney Mr. File described the ordinance changing the zone from "M", Manufacturing District to "B-1", Neighborhood-Highway Business District for eight (8) parcels in the Central Avenue

area. The public hearing and second reading of this ordinance will be April 11, 2023. Mr. File read the ordinance by title, An Ordinance Amending The City of Beckley Zoning Ordinance Of 1971 And The Comprehensive Plan Of The City Of Beckley And The Zone Map Of The City Of Beckley, As From Time To Time Has Been Amended, To Provide For The Re-zoning Of Seven (7) Parcels On Central Avenue And One (1) Parcel On Virginia Street, All In The City Of Beckley, Raleigh County, WV, Including Parcels 33, 34, 37, 38, 40, And 41 As Shown On Beckley Corporation Tax Map 29, And Parcels 272 And 272.1 As Shown On Beckley Corporation Tax Map 30, From “M”, Manufacturing District, To “B-1”, Neighborhood Highway Business District. Mr. File stated that Exhibit A attached to this ordinance was prepared at the request of Mr. Brown and contains the metes and bounds description.

Councilman Sopher thanked Mr. Brown for the email regarding the parking situation. Councilwoman Bullock asked Mr. Brown how many businesses are interested in leasing space in this area. Mr. Brown said currently there are approximately nineteen. Mr. Brown said

another forty businesses may be interested. The ordinance was unanimously approved by Council on a motion made by Councilwoman Bullock and seconded by Councilman Reedy. The ordinance is hereby incorporated into these minutes.

Next, Mr. File read the ordinance by title,
An Ordinance Concerning Property To Be
Conveyed By The West Virginia
Department Of Health And Human

Resources, An Agency Of The State Of West Virginia, To The City Of Beckley. The first reading was February 14, 2023. Mr. File opened the public hearing. The Mayor asked Executive Director of the Raleigh County Community Action Association, Crystal Alonso, if she or Mike Horn have any additional comments. She said no. Mr. File asked if anyone in the audience had any comments or questions. There were none. The Mayor announced if calling in by phone: dial *3 to raise your hand, if connected by computer: click the "hand icon" on your participants panel to speak. There were no comments. Mr. File closed the public hearing. The Mayor said Mike, Crystal, and Danielle Stewart explained the purpose of this conveyance at a previous Council meeting. This is an effort to enable Raleigh County Community Action Association (R.C.C.A.A.) to qualify for more grants for this property. As building owner(s) they would not be qualified to apply for as many grants. The City will own the homeless shelter. They Mayor said over one million dollars has already been spent on upgrades and repairs to the building by R.C.C.A.A. Councilman Bullock asked if the residents

of the homeless shelter should file a lawsuit would the City be liable. The Mayor said the City will have an agreement with the R.C.C.A.A. which should help protect the City from this type of suit. The City merely owns the building. Mr. File stated that any building the City owns is insured, protecting the City, and the City should not have liability because the City will not be operating the facility. The ordinance was unanimously approved by Council on a motion made by Councilman Dunlap and seconded by Councilman Price. The ordinance is hereby incorporated into these minutes.

Next, Recorder-Treasurer Billie Trump submitted for Council's approval the Summary Page of the Budget for Fiscal Year July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024. This will be sent to the WV State Auditor's office. He said this mirrors the comprehensive budget he submitted to Council several weeks ago. Mr. Trump said there a slight difference in the aggregate total. He had to estimate the amount of property taxes (when he compiled this information) but, the County has provided accurate figures causing the aggregate total to increase by a few thousand dollars. This was balanced through expenses. The Mayor

complimented Mr. Trump, City
Controller Jessica Chandler, and staff for
the work they do on the City's budget.
The budget was unanimously approved by
Council on a motion made by
Councilman Price and seconded by
Councilwoman Bullock. The summary
page is incorporated into these minutes.

OLD BUSINESS: There was no old business.

NEW BUSINESS: Councilman Sopher said he spent the day at the City's Code Enforcement Office and drove around with Chief Code Enforcement Officer Donald Morgan for three hours. They observed numerous structures desperately needing attention. Councilman Sopher said some of the issues are dilapidated houses, litter, and various other issues. Councilman Sopher invited all Council members and Mr. Trump to visit and spend a day at the Code Enforcement Office. Afterwards, he suggested Council have a Workshop to discuss solutions. Councilman Hunter suggested the City implement a reporting process (including a complaint form) for citizens to use to report problems such as these. She said the reporter needs to have the option to make a complaint anonymously.

She said an assessment of abandoned buildings in the City and County has been completed to obtain a five-year comparison. She said without knowing where an absent property owner is, it is difficult to serve them notice. If a structure contains asbestos, it can be an issue. If the structure and/or land changes owners, if a notice of violation for litter, or if a structure meets the criteria for a dilapidated structure, the notification process must start from the beginning which causes delay and takes an excessive amount of time in the process. Chief Code Enforcement Officer Donald Morgan said citizens can utilize the City's website to email the Code Enforcement Office. Currently there is not official complaint form. They Mayor said there is a lot of communication and notification among Chief Code Enforcement Officer Donald Morgan, City Attorney Mr. File, and the Board of Public Works. The Mayor said there are structures scheduled to be demolished, some of which will be demolished by the City and others by Empire Salvage. Councilman Sopher said the Beckley Police Department gets involved when safety is an issue. Councilwoman Hunter said some

structures have homeless people trying to live in dilapidated structures. Mr. Brown asked the City to consider options other than demolishing buildings. He said he knows investors and other real estate agents are looking for properties to rehabilitate. He said when a structure is torn down there aren't people available to rebuild them and would like other options to be considered before demolition. He would like the City to work with the community to find people to invest the money to rehabilitate the structures. The Mayor said this is a good point. The Mayor said in the cases he is aware of, the buildings are far beyond affordable renovation. The Mayor said Recorder-Treasurer Billie Trump is researching landbanks where the City can purchase a property and invite investors to build affordable housing. Kanawha County implemented this program. There are forty-two houses there that came from landbanks. Chief Code Enforcement Officer Morgan said there is one house demolition that has been on hold for two or three years. It would be less expensive to build a new structure in its place. He said due to other reasons (such as crime, issues for neighbors, etc.) structures may

get demolished. He said structures are left standing as long as the Code Enforcement Office can allow.

Councilman Dunlap mentioned a Demolition By Neglect Program that he was involved in six years ago. The City could consider this in order to take possession of structures that are issues.

Councilman Dunlap said he would be happy to help with a Workshop to discuss this further. Chief Code Enforcement Officer Donald Morgan said the WV

Code Official Association may visit Beckley. If so, he will let Council and surrounding cities know. Councilwoman Hunter said Raleigh County Chamber of Commerce, "Make It Shine" is getting ready to start a litter index to assess where litter sweeps are needed. She said

Raleigh County is doing an abandoned building index and will supply Mr. Brown with pictures and addresses to share with investors. Councilman Sopher said a lot of the structure's roofs are on the ground, the porch is off the house, and there are no windows. The Mayor said it is good to hear some programs are underway to help with this issue. He said he too would like a structure saved, if possible, rather than demolished.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: The Mayor announced if calling in by phone: dial *3 to raise your hand, if connected by computer: click the “hand icon” on your participants panel to speak. Danielle Stewart, on behalf of the Raleigh County Community Action Association and the current and future residents of the homeless shelter, thanked Council for passing the ordinance. She said she would like to work with the City on the landbank program previously mentioned. Jerica Jones residing at 914 Woodlawn Avenue (phone number 304-731-1066) said a neighbor parks his truck (which has a flat tire) in front of her driveway blocking access. She is handicapped and needs direct access to her driveway. She is looking for clarity regarding this issue. The Mayor asked Chief of Police Dean Bailey to contact her within forty-eight hours. Councilman Dunlap suggested the curb in front of her driveway be painted blue. The Mayor said the Chief will get back with her once he investigates the issue.

With there being no further comments, the Mayor adjourned the meeting at 7:05 p.m.

Mayor

Recorder-Treasurer