Crossett City Council met in regular session August 19, 2019 at 6:00 p.m. in the Crossett Library.

Roll call vote was taken as follows:

Present: Mayor Scott McCormick, City Attorney James Hamilton

Councilmember’s: Cary Carter, Crystal Marshall, Dale Martinie, James Knight, CT Foster, and Interim Councilmember Sheila Phillips

Absent: Clerk/Treasurer Jesse Walthall

Mayor McCormick called the meeting to order with prayer and pledge allegiance to the flag.

Minutes of the regular council meeting of July 15 and special meeting of August 14 were presented. Motion by Councilman Foster, seconded by Councilman Knight to approve both sets of minutes. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Financial reports for July, 2019 were presented. Motion by Councilwoman Marshall, seconded by Councilman Martinie to approve the July reports. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Mayor McCormick asked that the approval and swearing in of councilwoman Sheila Phillips be the first order of business. Motion by Councilwoman Marshall, seconded by Councilman Knight to approve the appointment of Mrs. Sheila Phillips to fill the term of Mrs. Lynn Rodgers (Ward 1, Position 2) until December 31, 2020. Roll call vote. All in favor. Motion passed. Mayor McCormick swore Councilwoman Phillips into office and invited her to join the council table.

Mr. Claude Spainhour, Crossett Sewer Committee, addressed the council concerning East Crossett Sewer Improvement Project. He stated that a $7 million-dollar loan has been approved through Arkansas Natural Resource Commission. The payments for this loan will run from $40,243 to $50,327 per month, according to the interest rate. Mr. Spainhour presented a history of sales tax collection for the city of Crossett. According to those historical figures, a ½% sales tax issue would generate between $51,000 and $69,000 per month, which would be sufficient to cover the loan payments. The other option will be to raise sewer rates. Current rates would need to increase between 197% up to 221% to adequately generate enough funds to pay the loan. That would take the city of Crossett sewer rates from the 17th percentile to the 79th percentile within the state of Arkansas. Mr. Spainhour added that this will put the current residents paying for the improvements which will be of no benefit to them. He feels that the rate increase would be unfair to the citizens of Crossett.

Mr. Spainhour added that a committee was appointed in November 2017 to study the issue. Their determination was to seek the sales tax bond but didn’t want to have this on the general election ballot of 2018. During 2018 grants were applied for, which were denied. Although the grant from ANRC was initially denied, it is being reapplied.

Councilman Carter stated that this needs to be a priority for the city of Crossett. Some municipalities have allowed their sewer systems to be taken over by private businesses and that hasn’t worked well. Most of those municipalities are now trying to resume operating the system. He said this is not something the city should ever let happen.

Councilwoman Marshall asked, if eventually, the sewer rates will need to be increased to cover operating expenses. Mr. Spainhour stated that eventually a rate increase will be needed, but can maintain at current rates for a few more years.

Motion by Councilman Carter, seconded by Councilwoman Marshall to have Mr. Spainhour and City Attorney Hamilton met with bond council (William Spivey) and pursue the bond issue with a sales tax election. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed. Councilman Martinie asked Mr. Spainhour to give monthly updates if possible.

Ms. Sarah Hollimon, Crossett City Pool manager, updated council on activities at the pool. She stated that from August 8-12 the pool has had around 493 swimmers. Four session of after school swim has had 48 participants, and public swim weekends has seen 100 swimmers. Aqua Zumba/Aqua Yoga, Lap Swim/Water Walk, and private swim lessons have also proved to be successful. Party rentals have also generated interest. An estimated 800 community members have been served by the pool in less than one month. Ms. Holliman added that she would like to include more public swim lessons, weekly themed night swims, and season passes for next years opening. She added that she has several events in mind that can be centered around the Crossett City Pool including triathlon, street graffiti art contest, 3-on-3 basketball tournament, family movie nights, teen yard game nights with live music, rodeo week events and pumpkin walk/haunted park. Council commended Ms. Hollimon on an excellent job she and her staff have done.

Public Works Director Jeff Harrison presented an update on enforcement of Ordinance 535. So far this year, 10 structures have been torn down with a goal of 25 for the year. On average it cost between $4,000-$6,000 to clean up a residential lot. Letters have been forwarded to City Attorney Hamilton so that liens can be placed on the property. Hamilton explained that this is a slow process. There are two ways that city can attempt to recoup money spent. They can put liens on the property or foreclose on the property. Liens are less expensive. Mr. Harrison explained that even though a lien is placed, most of these properties are abandoned and owe back taxes. The city rarely receives any payment for this. In one instant the owner deeded the property to the city. When this happens, the city is responsible for paying the back taxes on the property.

Councilman Martinie mentioned that in October, 2017 letters were sent to the city attorney by Mr Hamilton requesting for liens to be placed on several properties. Follow up discussions and reminders have been made to the City Attorney. Those liens still haven’t been processed. Council asked Mr. Hamilton to proceed with lien process as soon as possible. Councilwoman Marshall added that this procedure is within his scope of duties as city attorney.

Councilman Knight asked if it is legal for citizens to blow grass in the streets as they are mowing or cleaning yards. Mr. Harrison stated it is against state and local law.

Councilman Martinie added that since city has started charging for junk pickup, people have been dumping in the county, particularly in the 5-point area.

Mayor McCormick reminded council of the agreement with Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department to repave certain roads within the city of Crossett. Verbal approval was given by the council at a meeting earlier this year, but never officially noted. He asked the council to approve spending $50,000 to cover the shortage of state aid money to perform the task. Motion by Councilman Carter, seconded by Councilwoman Marshall to approve spending the $50,000 out of the capital account. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Crossett Water Commission office manager Dianne Marter presented June financial statements. Councilwoman Marshall asked about the status of meter upgrades. Mrs. Marter stated that as soon as permission is given from ANRC the meters will be ordered. They expect 2-3 week delivery time. Around 75 meters can be installed in a two-week time period. Councilwoman Marshall also asked about system upgrades. Mrs. Marter stated that is something she is adamant about also. She is working with the commission to get this done.

Mayor McCormick introduced Mr. Bill Mayo to the council. Mr. Mayo stated that he is planning a Veteran’s Festival Day and Parade to be held on October 19. This day will be to recognize our veterans and to show appreciation. Donations have been gathered from local citizens and businesses and two electric wheelchairs will be given away to physically challenged veterans. Mr. Mayo asked the council to help get the word out to all veterans who may be in need. He added that the parade will begin at 10:00 on that Saturday morning and is asking anyone interested to enter a float into the parade. After the parade, an afternoon of gospel singing is scheduled at the city auditorium with the drawing to be held during this event. The council commended Mr. Mayo for his service to the country and to the veterans of Ashley County.

Councilwoman Crystal Marshall asked council to consider purchasing flashing lights for the intersection of Petersburg and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr Drive. She stated that there are several children in the area that walk to Crossett Middle School or Crossett High School. This street serves as a truck route for the city and has heavy school traffic in the morning and afternoons. She added that she has spoken with Mr. Gary Williams, superintendent of Crossett Public Schools, and requested that a crossing guard be added to that location. Mr. Williams agreed to add a crossing guard. She also asked Mr. Williams if the school would consider going in with the city to purchase the flashing lights. Mr. Williams is not sure if this is an allowable expense for the school district, but will look into it. Councilwoman Marshall added that because this is a state highway, a permit will need to be approved by the state of Arkansas for the lights. Councilwoman Marshall has priced solar panel lights that can be attached to existing signs for around $1,800 each. She is asking council to consider purchasing 4 lights, one on north side and south side of intersection at Petersburg/Dr. Martin Luther King Jr Drive, and one on north side and south side of intersection at Petersburg/Main Street. Motion by Councilwoman Marshall, seconded by Councilman Knight to approve the purchase. Roll call vote. All vote yes.

Councilman Martinie recognized Mr. Freddie Guin and his wife for cleaning up the property at 305-307 Main Street. He added that others have shown interest in cleaning up other properties around the city.

Mayor McCormick opened the floor to the audience for any comments or questions. Mr. Gary Higginbotham asked if the city was responsible for getting rid of the limbs and debris left by the contractors who are clearing electric lines. DOPW Jeff Harrison said that Entergy has contracted with a company to do this. He supplied Mr. Higginbotham with phone numbers for the crew responsible.

With no other business, the meeting adjourned.

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Jesse Walthall, Clerk/Treasurer Marshall S. McCormick, Mayor