Crossett City Council met in regular session February 28, 2022 at 6:00 p.m. in the Crossett Public Library.

Roll call vote was taken as follows:

Present: Mayor Crystal Marshall, Clerk/Treasurer Clark Terrell

Councilmembers: Cary Carter, Kerstin Mondragon, Chris Gill, Sheila Phillips, James Knight and CT Foster

Absent: City Attorney James Hamilton

Mayor Marshall opened the meeting with a prayer and pledge. Mayor Marshall introduced Charlee Pippen who led in the pledge of allegiance.

Mayor Marshall gave the floor to Fire Chief Bo Higginbotham for a special presentation. Chief Higginbotham stated that in January, the fire department received a call that a house was on fire and someone was inside. When they arrived on the scene, the house was totally engulfed. Risking her own safety, Ms. Cynthia Clark had gone into the house to rescue her father. Chief Higginbotham introduced Captain Ray Lewis who presented Ms. Clark with a Certificate of Bravery. Ms. Clark expressed appreciation to the Crossett Police Department and the Crossett Fire Department for their assistance.

Motion by Councilman Foster, seconded by Councilman Knight to approve the minutes of the December financial meeting and the December 21, 2021 regular meeting. There was no meeting held in January due to sickness. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Motion by Councilman Gill, seconded by Councilwoman Mondragon to approve the financial reports for December, 2021 and January 2022. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed and financial reports were approved.

**STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS**

Mayor Marshall delivered the state of the city address. She stated that city employees, city council, CEDF, SEADD, AR Municipal League, state and county officials and especially Crossett businesses and citizens have worked hand-in-hand through difficult times to make improvements in the city. Mayor Marshall mentioned that although ad valorem taxes were down in 2021, sales tax revenues increased helping the city remain flat on finances. She informed council that grants received in 2021 (and the broadband grant received in 2020 but rolled out in 2021) totaled over $4 million dollars. Mayor mentioned that we will be applying for grants for the municipal building, tennis courts, splash pad, renovations to the city auditorium, upgrades and lighting at the sports complex, dog pound, port boat slip and the RV Park. While none of this is guaranteed, she will work diligently to get any of the funds available. She stated that the Main Street repaving project is set to begin tomorrow, March 1. This is a $2.34 million project, worked out with a deal between the city of Crossett and the AR State Highway Department. Mayor Marshall extended appreciation to the Crossett Economic Development Foundation. Their revamp Crossett campaign has helped 9 local businesses to improve their store fronts at a cost of $21,145. Businesses have invested another $50,579 on these projects. Those businesses included Ashley County Family Dentistry, Bakers Pharmacy, Griffin BBQ, JB’s Wingstop, Person Equity, Pine Plaza, Rodgers Financial, Shebrews and the Mills Title Company. Mayor Marshall mentioned that new businesses have helped with the local economy. Cynergy Cargo has made an expansion and are looking for more job growth in both manufacturing and retail operations. Primorris is expecting to bring about 80 jobs and AOP is bringing manufacturing and retail operations. They have increased their investment in our community and are looking to further expand operations in the near future. CEDF is working along with Mayor with several recruits for multiple types of industry. Hopefully, some of these prospects will make public commitment soon. She updated the council and citizens on the wastewater project, flashing safety lights in school zones on MLK and on Main Street. Mayor Marshall brought attention to some of the noticeable improvements this year including tennis court fencing, farmers market stage, Wiggins Cabin fencing, Lucas bond improvements, Yale Cabin addition, park playground equipment repairs, 6th Avenue Ballpark cleaning, Tex Moore cleaning, repairs to fields at sports complex, and new sidewalks at city park. She added that with collaboration with businesses and civic groups both bridges behind Lucas Pond have been repaired. Mayor Marshall mentioned some of the city clean-up initiatives, street light repairs, municipal parking lot and alley repairs, former zoo clean-up and RV Park. She added that in 2021 City Code Enforcer has razed 19 houses and had 9 lots cleaned. Projections for 2022 include 25 houses and an addition 8 properties. Road Mart property is of major concern and intend to address that this year. In entertainment, the city has hosted a monthly Farmer’s Market Crafter’s Fair, movies at the City Auditorium, New Year’s Eve Ball Drop, and a circus. We had a successful pool season hosting two swim meets and our sports complex served as a venue for Crossett Eagles to host a cross country meet with over 300 participants. Boy Scouts also held a Touch a Truck event at the sports complex. Wonderful events such as Wiggins Cabin Festival, Crossett rodeo, Veteran’s parade, Juneteenth Parade, Christmas Parade and lights over Main Street have showcased the beauty of our town. Crossett Parks and Recreation has come up with new strategy for hosting tournaments in the coming year. A Special Needs Ball tournament is in the plan. The city is also holding an Art Contest. The coming year includes transitioning to automated garbage trucks and adding new equipment to the city’s fleet. Crossett Airport is planning to apply for grants to replace airport beacon and to install automated gates. Mayor Marshall stated that she, Mr. Foster and Mr. Knight are Certified Municipal Officials. This past year they each received their continued education certification. Mayor has been appointed to the State Street Aid Committee, Executive Committee of the Arkansas Municipal League and she and Cherub Alford have achieved Grant writing certification through Arkansas Municipal League. She added that this is important because it gives us a seat at the table to ensure that the City of Crossett in in the forefront of minds.

In other business, Mayor Marshall updated the council of the Youth Center Grant. Notice was received on Friday that the city was approved for the $300,000 CBDG grant. This grant is for roof, windows, floors and bring the bathroom into ADA compliance.

Mayor Marshall informed the council that after much persistence, the city received a FEMA grant for slightly over $63,000.

Mayor stated that in a previous meeting, permission was given to order school crossing lights for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr Drive and Main Street. Since that meeting, she has been working on getting the proper permitting. Mayor presented council with update designs as it had to be changed. Motion by Councilwoman Mondragon, seconded by Councilman Gill to allow Mayor Marshall to proceed with ordering the revised proposal. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Mayor Marshall gave an update on the traffic signal light at Millyard/Fairview. Arkansas State Highway Commission has informed her that the bagged lights are not allowed. Mayor Marshall has agreed to take down the light head but leave the poles up. She has reached out for quotes on having the lights repaired.

Mayor Marshall reminded the council of the major water leak on MLK/82 which was caused by a boaring company. She stated that because of the information city employees obtained, including pictures, statements and detailed descriptions, we were able to recoup most of the expense incurred. She commended Anthony Cockrell, Bryant Hicks and Albert Mills for the outstanding job they did onsite. She also congratulated CWC office manager, Dianne Marter, for her persistence in getting the company to make restitution.

Mayor Marshall stated that each year the city council sets meeting time and location. Motion by Councilwoman Mondragon, seconded by Councilman Foster to continue meeting on the 3rd Monday of each month at the Crossett Public Library with the financial meeting at 5:30 and the regular meeting at 6:00. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Clerk Treasurer Clark Terrell presented a Resolution 2022-1, approving the final budget of 2021. Motion by Councilwoman Mondragon, seconded by Councilman Knight to have Mayor Marshall read the proposed resolution. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Mayor read the proposal. Motion by Councilwoman Mondragon, seconded by Councilman Gill to adopt Resolution R-2022-1. Roll call vote. All vote yes and Resolution was adopted.

Mayor Marshall presented an easement request from Entergy on behalf of Crossett School. The school has installed a solar array in the Crossett Industrial Park and are needing utility easement in front of the water tower. Motion by Councilman Gill, seconded by Councilwoman Mondragon to grant the easement. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Councilman Carter addressed the council with concerns over animal control in the city. He stated he has received several calls and has noticed a large influx of stray dogs. Councilman Carter asked that the city hire a full-time animal control officer and have the position under the Code Enforcement Officer. Mayor Marshall stated that she had met with a former animal control officer who has volunteered to do the job part time. She has made inquiries with Arkansas Municipal League as to whether it would be legal to allow a part-time employee drive a city vehicle. The contract would have to be drawn up in a manner that takes liability off of the city. Councilman Carter feels that this should be a full-time position. Director Of Public Works Jeff Harrison added that the position should be left under the police department as the code enforcer does not work after hours and on weekends. If left under police department, there would be someone to answer those calls. Councilman Gill asked where we would house the dogs when picked up, as this has been a problem in the past. Police Chief Cruce stated that we may have to review the contract between the city and the Volunteers of the Crossett Pound and see if revisions can be made. Motion by Councilman Carter, seconded by Councilwoman Mondragon to hire a full-time animal control officer. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Motion by Councilwoman Mondragon, seconded by Councilman Gill to pursue legal advice on the volunteer position and allow him to work along with the full-time officer if provisions can be made. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Councilman Carter asked that all council members review the animal control ordinance and the contract with the Volunteers of the Crossett Pound. He asked that a special meeting be held to discuss this in more details. All agree.

Mayor Marshall asked the council if there was any more business. Hearing none, she asked the audience. Vershall Hogan informed the council that the Crossett Food Pantry will be hosting a dinner on March 15 at noon and invited the elected officials. Chase Carlson, on the Crossett Recreation Commission, stated that it has been a pleasure working with Mr. Harrison on ideas to improve the Crossett Sports Complex.

With no other business, the meeting was adjourned.

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Clark Terrell, Clerk/Treasurer Crystal Marshall, Mayor