Crossett City Council met in regular session April 17, 2017 at 6:00 p.m. in the Crossett Public Library.

Roll call vote was taken as follows:

Present: Mayor Scott McCormick, City Attorney James Hamilton

Councilmember’s: Valarie Martin, Crystal Marshall, Eddie Rowe, James Knight, CT Foster,

Lynn Rodgers

Absent: Clerk/Treasurer Jesse Walthall

Mayor McCormick called the meeting to order with prayer and Pledge of Allegiance.

Motion by Councilwoman Rodgers, seconded by Councilman Foster to approve the minutes of the regular 3/20/2017 meeting and special meetings of 3/31 and 4/10/2017. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Motion by Councilwoman Rodgers, seconded by Councilman Knight to approve the March 2017 financial statements. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Mayor McCormick recognized State Representative Leanne Burch and thanked her for attending the Crossett Council meeting.

Mayor McCormick asked Police Chief JW Cruce for an update on the Ashley County Jail contract. Chief Cruce explained that after the contract was approved by the council in March, the Ashley County Quorum Court asked that the daily rate for housing inmates be changed from $30 per day to $35 per day. This is the rate that is being charged by other facilities. Motion by Councilman Knight, seconded by Councilwoman Marshall to amend the contract as suggested. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Councilwoman Rodgers asked about the status of a personnel committee to update the city Personnel Handbook. Mayor McCormick stated that he feels that department heads as well as our city personnel director Rebecca Ledbetter should be included on this committee along with citizens with some Human Resource knowledge. Mayor reminded the council that any changes made to the vacation policy will not affect current employees. Motion by Councilwoman Martin, seconded by Councilwoman Rodgers to have Mayor McCormick find citizens willing to serve and establish a committee before the next regular meeting. Councilwoman Rodgers added that she would like to have the handbook in effect by July. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Councilwoman Marshall asked the status of the restroom at the park. She would like to have the restrooms open for public use. Concern was shown as to how to keep the restrooms supplied and clean and how to keep vandals from destroying the property. Mayor McCormick mentioned that the water is off to the restrooms now due to a water leak. The leak will be found and fixed and the city will find a way to have the facility open during daylight hours. Councilwoman Martin asked if cameras may be considered for observation around the restrooms.

Mayor McCormick reminded council that a meeting to discuss the ½% sales tax proposal is scheduled for 5:00 tomorrow (Tuesday, April 18) at the Crossett Economic Development Foundation.

Councilwoman Rodgers asked about specifics of the drainage report and the police reports. She also inquired as to the status of time clocks and codification of ordinances.

Mayor McCormick informed council of a rezoning issue at 202-204 Beech Street. Chester and Laura Huntsman have been to the planning commission asking for the rezoning in order to open a restaurant at 202 Beech. The planning commission has held a public hearing to rezone the entire area from Hwy 82 to 3rd Avenue on Cedar, Elm and Beech Street. Doug Webb, chairman of the Planning Commission, spoke on behalf of the commission. Mr. Webb added that the area is being considered rather than spot zoning at the recommendation of the city planner the city had on retainer several years ago. He stated that at the public hearing many residents in the area were present to oppose. Many were against the issue because if they were to try to sell their property, it would have to be sold as commercial property. Others opposed due to the traffic that a restaurant would bring to the neighborhood. Mr. Webb stated that if a vote had been taken at the public hearing, he feels that 75% of the commission would have been opposed.

Chester Huntsman spoke to the council regarding his intentions with the property. He expressed his love for this community and his love for the restaurant business. He added that he intends improve the property and make it something that the community can be proud of.

Councilwoman Marshall asked how the citizens felt about spot zoning the property. Mr. Webb stated that he felt that if they had presented it to the public with “spot zoning” instead of neighborhood zoning the results would have been different.

Mr. Henry Singleton, a member of the audience, asked what this would do to property value in the neighborhood. Howard Beatty, First State Bank president, stated that normally commercial real estate holds a higher value than residential property, especially with the improvements promised.

Councilwoman Rodgers expressed concern with the planning commission bringing this issue to the council rather than handling it themselves. City Attorney Hamilton stated that the rezoning can be done by the commission or by a resolution by the city council (1408.01 dated 2/17/2003).

Motion by Councilwoman Martin to initiate rezoning 202-204 Beech Street for the purpose of building a restaurant. Hearing no second, the motion died.

Councilwoman Marshall asked if this could be brought back before the residents to get the feedback for spot zoning. Director of Public Works, Jeff Harrison, explained that this will have to be advertised for 2 weeks and the property will have to be posted for 2 weeks before you can hold the meeting. Mr. Huntsman stated that he has already been tied up with this procedure for 3 months and would really like an answer.

Motion by Councilwoman Martin to initiate rezoning 202-204 Beech Street to residential-commercial for the purpose of allowing a restaurant to be built on the property. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Rodgers. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed. City Attorney Hamilton will prepare a resolution to memorialize the issue.

Mayor McCormick added that the council may consider keeping a city planner on retainer for such occasions as this.

Mayor McCormick introduced Brother Jamie Stahley to the council. Brother Stahley is pastor of First Baptist Church of Crossett. Brother Stahley quoted Proverbs 11:11 and added that his desire and the desire of several members of his congregation is to be a blessing to the city. His feelings are that all should love the community and show this love within the community; pray for the community; and invest in the community. On behalf of his congregation, he is asking if there are projects that the city could use help with. Mayor McCormick mentioned that there is a tree that has fallen on the girl scout hut on Cedar Street and there is a lot of work that needs to be done there. Councilwoman Rodgers added that Centennial Park is in need of some major attention. Councilwoman Marshall mentioned that trash pickup and cleaning around Lucas Pond is always needed and that maybe if his group took the lead, others would join.

Mayor McCormick asked the council to consider reappointing Downey Robinson, Billy Gammel, Warren Gouner and Alan Wilson to the Crossett Airport Commission. Motion by Councilwoman Rodgers, seconded by Councilman Foster to approve the appointments. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Justin Reed, Crossett Recreation Commission chairperson, asked that a council member be appointed to the recreation commission. He also asked that the ordinance be amended to increase the number of commission members from 5 to 7. Mr. Reed asked who would be responsible for establishing by-laws for the Crossett Recreation. Mayor McCormick stated that he would need to work with City Attorney James Hamilton and Recreation Director Larry Cantley to come up with by-laws.

With no other business, the meeting adjourned.

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