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Civic Corner: Board of Aldermen Recap

By Ricki Garrett, PhD, Alderwoman at Large



For those of you who missed this week's Board of Aldermen Meeting, please know that I will do my best to succinctly cover the high points of the meeting. However, since it lasted almost three hours, that will be a little more difficult than usual.

The department head report was provided by Daniel Lang, our economic development director. Daniel focused on the upcoming development between Interstate 20 and Highway 80, west of Springridge Road, being carried out by Mississippi College in collaboration with developer Ben Walker. He also mentioned recent interest in the Hamstead Boulevard area.

The Board then moved into a public hearing for the purpose of getting input on the 2022-2023 budget and to approve a resolution fixing the Ad Valorem Tax Levy for the City and for the Clinton Public School District. Mayor Fisher highlighted the two-million-dollar growth in the budget, the 2% tax on restaurants that recently passed to improve parks and recreation, the future 84-acre park, and the proposed 3% raise for City employees. He also mentioned the Lovett Treatment Facility expansion, which will be complete in 2023, and commended the Board for its diligence in finding 1.1 million dollars in funding to provide police, fire, and public works employees with significant raises. During the public hearing, Laurie Lawson, executive director of the Four C's, and others made a plea to the Board not to cut the funding of the Four C's from twenty thousand to ten thousand a year, and the Board has taken the request under advisement. The Board unanimously approved the Resolution fixing the Ad Valorem Tax Levy, which is unchanged from last year.

The Board hired Marlee Price as its new communications and tourism director, and approved the partial paving of Northside Drive. Two items created considerable discussion among the Board Members. The first was the request by Lark Properties (Rob and Melody Logan) to rezone their property from Residential Estate to Agriculture. The rationale was to allow them to have chickens and to make other changes to the property without Board approval. However, the approval for the zoning change failed on a four to three vote, because the majority of Board members expressed concern that the criteria for zoning changes had not been met, and that zoning changes should not be made for the benefit of one family, but, rather, in the interest of the city as a whole. At the request of a Board member, the Board will discuss this issue further at its next work session.

The other issue that drew considerable discussion was the approval of the site plan review regarding signage and an exterior paint change for The Winning Smile dental office. The controversy arose because the company came to the Board for approval after the painting and signage had already gone up at the building. Having already dealt with similar issues two other times in less than a year, some Board members expressed the need for the Board to discuss the possibility of fining any individual or company that moves ahead with unapproved changes and then comes to the Board, after the fact, for approval. Although the Board ultimately approved the signage, it was agreed that a discussion of this issue was needed in order to reduce the possibility of it becoming a recurring problem.

Finally, in a long-awaited vote on short-term rentals, following last month's vote to approve the short-term rental ordinance, the Board approved, in a five to two vote, amendments to the City of Clinton Zoning Ordinance, to the building code, and to the fire code as related to short-term rentals. The short-term rentals will only be allowed in the mixed-use area of Olde Towne and will require a conditional use by the Board for each short-term rental unit.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Space will be provided in each issue of The Clinton Courier to the Board of Aldermen for a recap of each meeting. Aldermen are asked to volunteer to provide this recap for the Courier.