



CITY OF FLOWERY BRANCH
Organizational Meeting
Meeting Minutes
January 2, 2008, 9:30 am



CALL TO ORDER:

City Clerk McCain called the meeting to order at 9:31 am.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mayor Diane Hirling and Council Members Allen Bryans, Pat Zalewski and Mary Jones. Also in attendance were City Manager Bill Andrew, City Clerk Melissa McCain, City Planner James Riker, and City Attorney Ron Bennett.

NEW BUSINESS:

Swearing in of newly elected officials

City Clerk McCain gave the oath of office to the newly elected officials, Charles Craig Lutz, Post 1 and Christopher J Fetterman Post 2.

Councilman Lutz and Fetterman took their seats at the Council table.

City Clerk McCain turned the meeting over Mayor Diane Hirling.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

There were no public comments

NEW BUSINESS CON'T:

Appointments:

- Mayor Pro-tem

Councilwoman Pat Zalewski suggested that Councilman Allen Bryans remain the Mayor Pro-tem for the next two (2) years.

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There was a motion made to approve and appoint Councilman Allen Bryans as the Mayor Pro-tem.

MOTION: Mary Jones

SECOND: Pat Zalewski

AYES: Mary Jones, Allen Bryans, Pat Zalewski, Chris Fetterman and Craig Lutz.

NAYES: None

Motion carried

[Discussion – Dates and times of Meetings](#)

There was a motion to amend Ordinance 303-C Section 1(a) to change the words Wednesday to Tuesday and the time from 9:30 am to 6:30 p.m. and to amend section 1(b) to change the words Wednesday to Tuesday and the time from 9:30 am to 6:30 p.m.

MOTION: Craig Lutz

SECOND: Chris Fetterman

Vote follows discussion

Discussion:

Councilman Craig Lutz made the following statement:

City Council Meetings should be held at night- A couple of years ago, I came to realize that my local government had a more significant and direct impact on my life than any other level of government in this country. So for the last few years I have made a concerted effort to understand what was going on in our city government by attending the few meetings I could and keeping up with the minutes posted online. Even with the effort I exerted, the city council was able to pass plenty of legislation that I would have liked to have spoken out both for and against. It was about a year ago that I made the decision to follow the advice of Dwight D. Eisenhower when he said; "Politics ought to be the part-time profession of every citizen who would protect the rights and privileges of free men."

And so about 5 months ago I hit the campaign trail. While visiting different parts of the city and talking to so many of the fine people of Flowery Branch, one of the reoccurring issues that came up over and over again concerned the time of day when we hold our council meetings and the fact that the time we hold meetings limits the citizens ability to voice their opinion. In 1820 Thomas Jefferson said; "I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but inform their discretion."

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As the representatives of our city, it is imperative that we listen to the people that entrusted us. Follow the words of Abraham Lincoln when he said; "What I want is to get done what the people desire to have done, and the question for me is how to find that out exactly." But by holding our meetings at a time when most people work, we have automatically limited the input we can obtain. Before you set the argument that there is no difference in attendance between day and evening meetings, you need to concede that by holding the meetings during normal business hours, you have limited the opportunity for the majority of the cities population to attend. In essence, you have placed an unfair burden on the common employee who makes up the majority of our constituency.

"A popular government without popular information or the means of acquiring it is but a prologue to Farce or Tragedy or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own Governors must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives." It would seem that our city government has ignored the warning that James Madison gave back in 1778. The city has placed a barrier between themselves and the people by limiting the amount of information and making the means to acquire the information difficult.

In 1765 John Adams said; "Liberty cannot be preserved without a general knowledge among the people, who have a right...and a desire to know." While we cannot legislate desire for everyone, we can ensure that those who do desire knowledge have the ability to attend our meetings.

We also need to consider those who would like to serve their community in city government. While my employer, for the time being, has granted me the flexibility in my work schedule to serve, this consideration cannot be assumed for the majority of the people who work during normal business hours. By keeping our meetings at a time when most people work, we are excluding them being able to participate in this great process of representative government.

In conclusion I would like to paraphrase Thomas Jefferson by saying that our government is strongest when everyone feels a part of the process. Let's give the citizens of Flowery Branch the opportunity to become involved with our government and informed as to what issues we are facing by moving the meetings to Tuesday evenings starting at 6:30 p.m.

Councilman Chris Fetterman made the following statement:

It is no secret that I oppose 9:30 A.M. Council Meeting. It was one of my platforms, I told the citizens, while campaigning, and I will try and move the times of the City Council Meetings to the evenings.

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From my own personal experience – after a City Council Meeting ends, usually after 11:00 A.M., I may not make it to work until 11:30 A.M. or later, and a half of a day of work is wasted. Remember, not all of our citizens are retired, work for themselves, or have the ability to work from home. I am personally fortunate enough that my employer supports me in this endeavor, to serve the citizens of Flowery Branch, and allows me the flexibility to adjust my work schedule.

With 24 meetings proposed to be scheduled in 2008, at 9:30 A.M., a citizen of Flowery Branch could use up to 12 vacation or personal days a year to attend an open public meeting about their city and things that affect their daily lives.

I am aware of several teachers that live in Flowery Branch. How can a teacher make a 9:30 A.M. City Council Meeting, when they are teaching our children? I believe it would be an easier feat, for a teacher, if the City Council Meetings were moved to the evening time.

Here is a statement, from Kathryn Sanchez, a teacher, residing in Flowery Branch,

“I just wanted to take a minute to applaud you guys for attempting to move the meetings to a later time. As a Social Studies teacher I strongly feel we all have a duty to be informed of issues affecting our community and to be active members in the civic process. Yet, unfortunately, I will am teaching school at 9:30 in the morning and unable to attend meetings that are indeed important. To take a half a day off would not only short-change my student’s education, but put a hardship on the faculty and staff where I teach. Again, way to go guys!

How many other citizens feel this way? What other critical careers do people have, by attending the 9:30 A.M. City Council meetings, would put hardships on fellow employees when they are not at work?

So, I decided to look into when other municipalities have their meetings.

Here is a list of other local municipality’s meeting dates and times:

- Oakwood, Buford, Braselton, Lula, Duluth, and Lawrenceville – Monday @ 7:00 P.M.
- Winder - Tuesday @ 6:00 P.M.

As you can see, they are all in the evening and the majority on Monday. I also believe that Hall County Board of Commissioners recently moved all their Board Meetings to 5:00 P.M and Work Sessions to 3:00 P.M.

Don’t you think it would be much easier, for citizens who would like to attend City Council Meetings, to ask their employer to work through lunch and leave a bit early so they could attend City Council Meetings on a regular basis?

It would seem that these governments are in touch with their constituents as well as understand that their voices are important and should be heard.

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Remember, we the council, are here to serve the citizens of Flowery Branch and if it means we must work late into the evening to accomplish what we were elected to do – then we should do so.

I urge the council to support the motion to amend Ordinance 303-C to Tuesday evenings at 6:30 P.M.

As someone recently pointed out - City Council Members are supposed to unselfishly serve our fellow citizens.

Vote Con't

AYES: Craig Lutz, Chris Fetterman.

NAYES: Mary Jones, Allen Bryans and Pat Zalewski

Motion denied.

ADJOURNMENT:

There was a motion made to adjourn the meeting at 9:52 a.m.

MOTION: Craig Lutz

SECOND: Allen Bryans

AYES: Pat Zalewski, Mary Jones, Craig Lutz, Allen Bryans and Chris Fetterman.

NAYES: None

Motion carried

Mayor Diane Hirling

Date

City Clerk Melissa McCain

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