

**WORK SESSION MEETING MINUTES
February 21, 2023**

The members of the City Council of the City of Phenix City, Alabama met at 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time for the regularly scheduled work session on Tuesday, February 21, 2023, at the Martin Idle Hour Park Community Center located at 3743 Moon Lake Drive, Phenix City, Alabama 36867. Upon roll call, the following members were present: Councilmember Arthur L. Day, Jr., Councilmember Vickey F. Carter, Councilmember Steve Bailey, Councilmember R. Griff Gordy, and Mayor Eddie N. Lowe. Also present were City Manager Wallace Hunter, City Attorney Jimmy Graham, and City Clerk Melony Lee. Department Heads in attendance: Deputy Building Official Ray Rogers, City Engineer Angel Moore, Economic Development Manager Shaun Culligan, Planning Director Tracie Hadaway, IT Manager Mike Bauer, Fire Chief Kris Kennedy, Golf Manager Mike Barber, Library Director Tammy Henry, Parks and Recreation Director Todd Hughes, Chief of Police Ray Smith, Assistant Chief of Police George Staudinger, Graduate Engineer John Spraggins and Utilities Director Charles Woody.

Upon a quorum being established, Mayor Lowe called the meeting to order.

Councilmember Day led the invocation.

Mayor Lowe called upon Edna Bolden to address Council, as listed on the agenda. Ms. Bolden came forward to address Council. Ms. Bolden thanked Mayor and Council for allowing her the opportunity to express her concerns. Ms. Bolden read an email that she sent in with her Request to Address Council at a Work Session form. Ms. Bolden read:

Due to current financial systematic changes (online banking, bank accounts, postal delivery time-line, social security and retirement checks, etc.), it is necessary for utility bills to have a longer timeline than 22 days before one experiences a late and reconnecting fee. I am seeking to speak to City Council to provide a brief presentation to request the issue cited above be reviewed and considered for favorable changes.

Ms. Bolden stated that she comes before Council on behalf of herself and several members of the community that she has spoken with concerning the billing cycle for Phenix City Utilities which she believes is with twenty two days. Ms. Bolden also stated that most company's billing cycles are thirty days which allow customers time to pay their bills on time which means services are not disconnected. Ms. Bolden further stated that Social Security payments are not all received at the same time and people who receive Social Security benefits are on a fixed income and many cannot afford the \$75.00 disconnect fee if their services have been turned off. Ms. Bolden stated that the disconnect fee is often greater than the utility bill itself. Ms. Bolden asked Mayor and Council if they would consider extending the billing cycle which gives citizens more time to pay their bill or at least call customers to let them know that their services are about to be disconnected. Mayor Lowe called upon Utilities Director Charles Woody to explain the billing cycle. Mr. Woody explained how the billing cycle works by displaying an actual bill. Mr. Woody stated that the bill shows the date it was generated, the amount of water that was used between meter readings, the amount of the bill, and the cutoff date. Mr. Woody stated that after the twenty one days from the generated date, a customer is not automatically cut off. Mr. Woody also stated that a late fee is attached if payment is not received five days after the twenty one day billing cycle. Mr. Woody further stated that calling customers to inform them that their services will be disconnected is not an option at this time for several reasons including the amount of incoming calls and staffing. Mr. Woody stated that with the changes and growth in technology, text and email reminders may be possible in the future. Councilmember Gordy stated that if the City had

capabilities, a general text message or email message could be sent to customers as a reminder which wouldn't tie up a customer services representative on a phone call. City Manager Wallace Hunter stated that text messages or email messages will not work for everyone, because all citizens don't have access to the internet or may not get the text message reminder. Mr. Hunter also stated that it is not an easy fix for everyone. Mr. Hunter reiterated what Mr. Woody explained about the bill date, due date and cut-off date. Mr. Hunter stated that customers are billed for prior usage of services and payment is due upon receipt of the statement to help customers and not hinder them from making payments. Mayor Lowe stated that the lack of workforce is not an excuse but a fact and at this time, the City is not able to call customers to inform them that their services are about to be disconnected. Mayor Lowe also stated that he agrees with Mr. Hunter in the fact that text and email messages in the future may help some customers but not all. Mr. Hunter stated that "paperless billing" may be an option for some businesses but it will not work for all Phenix City Utilities customers because the City has quite a few citizens who do not have access to electronics that allows text or email messages. Councilmember Day asked if Ms. Bolden has a better understanding of how the billing cycle works. Ms. Bolden stated that she understands the billing cycle just doesn't feel that customers have enough time to pay their bill within that cycle before their services are disconnected. Councilmember Carter asked if it was the verbiage of the statement that is not being understood. Ms. Bolden stated that it should be clearer and state that if payment is not received by a particular date, services will be cut off and a reconnection fee will be charged. Mr. Hunter stated that it is stated on the bill that payment is due upon receipt which is with twenty one days another five days added but before late fee and then the cutoff date so in reality a customer has more than the twenty one days to actually pay for their services. Mr. Woody stated that the Utilities Department has nearly fifteen thousand customers and it would be impossible to notify everyone by phone. Councilmember Bailey stated that the City has several ways that a customer can make a payment. Mr. Woody stated that there is a kiosk located outside of the municipal building, telephone payments, mail in payments, online payments and cash payments with a customer service representative available. Mr. Woody also stated that the kiosk will accept cash, check and credit/debit card payments but it will not accept late or reconnection fees, those payments must be made inside. Mayor Lowe stated that things will not change automatically but over time. Mr. Hunter stated that if a person is having problems paying their bills, there are resources available including the United Way and other agencies. Mayor Lowe thanked Ms. Bolden for coming to speak with Council.

Mayor Lowe called upon Tracie Hadaway, Economic Development Planning Director, to discuss the actions taken by the Planning Commission at their February 14, 2023 meeting.

Mayor Lowe called upon City Clerk Melony Lee who discussed the following with Mayor and Council:

1. Advised Council of a regular scheduled Council Meeting to be held on February 22, 2023 at 9:00 a.m. at the Martin Idle Hour Park Community Center.
2. Advised Council that Councilmember Day's Elected Officials Luncheon will be held on February 23, 2023 at 11:30 a.m. at the Martin Idle Hour Park Community Center.
3. Advised Council that the Retirement Celebration for Judge Bellamy's Retirement Celebration will be held on February 25, 2023 at 1:00 p.m.
4. Informed Council that the Black History Month Observance Committee Breakfast will be held on February 27, 2023 at 7:00 a.m.
5. Advised Council that the Planning Commission will meet February 28, 2023 at 5:15 p.m.
6. Informed Council that the East Alabama Chamber of Commerce Business After Hours event will be held on February 28, 2023 at 5:00 p.m.

7. Advised Council that Councilmember Carter will host a Suit Up Clothing Drive on March 1, 2023 at 12:00 p.m. at the Female Veterans Transitional Living Facility located at Mother Mary Mission.
8. Reminded Council that Mayor's Prayer Breakfast was rescheduled from March 2, 2023 to March 16, 2023 at 7:00 a.m. at the Martin Idle Hour Park Community Center.
9. Informed Council that Read Across America will be held at Westview Elementary School on March 2, 2023 at 9:00 a.m.
10. Advised Council of a regular scheduled Work Session to be held on March 6, 2023 at 3:00 p.m. at the Martin Idle Hour Park Community Center.
11. Advised Council of a regular scheduled Council Meeting to be held on March 7, 2023 at 9:00 a.m. at the Martin Idle Hour Park Community Center.
12. Informed Council that the 2023 Alabama League of Municipalities Advocacy Day will be held on March 8, 2023 in Montgomery, Alabama.
13. Advised Council that the Planning Commission will meet March 14, 2023 at 5:15 p.m.
14. Advised Council of a regular scheduled Work Session to be held on March 20, 2023 at 3:00 p.m. at the Martin Idle Hour Park Community Center.
15. Advised Council of a regular scheduled Council Meeting to be held on March 21, 2023 at 6:00 p.m. at the Martin Idle Hour Park Community Center.
16. Advised Council that the Planning Commission will meet March, 28, 2023 at 5:15 p.m.
17. Informed Council that the Alabama League of Municipalities CMO Regional Training will be held on July 27, 2023 in Montgomery, Alabama.
18. Informed Council that the 2023 Alabama League of Municipalities Convention will be held May 10, 2023 through May 13, 2023 in Birmingham, Alabama. Ms. Lee stated that a voting delegate will need to be selected out of the Councilmembers that will attend the convention.
19. Reviewed upcoming board appointments.
20. Reminded Council of Board Interview for Downtown Redevelopment Authority after the Work Session Meeting.

Mayor Lowe went over the agenda items.

City Attorney Jimmy Graham reviewed agenda claims with Council.

Councilmember Bailey stated that the recycling locations in the City, behind City Hall and the Roy Martin Center are over filled. Councilmember Bailey also stated that they have not been emptied in quite some time. Councilmember Bailey asked if the owner of the bins could be contacted for pickup of the over flow of items and it appears to be household garbage items as well. Angel Moore, City Engineer stated that the Public Works Department collects items and transport them to the recycling company in Columbus, Georgia. Ms. Moore also stated that because there is a shortage of CDL drivers, the recyclable items are not picked up as often as before the workforce shortage. Ms. Moore further stated that the Public Works Department separates recyclable items from household garbage before items are transported to Columbus, Georgia. Councilmember Bailey stated that his main concern is the household garbage that is left outside of the bins attract stray animals that make more of a mess of the items looking for food. City Manager Wallace Hunter stated that more surveillance cameras will be placed throughout the City and they may be able to reduce a lot of the loitering issues throughout the City. Mr. Hunter also stated that stiff fines may also be attached to violators.

Councilmember Bailey stated that it was brought to his attention that the City of Phenix City will be one hundred years old this year on August 9, 2023. Councilmember Bailey asked if the anniversary can be celebrated throughout the City. Councilmember Bailey stated that two

Cities, Girard and Phenix City became one city, Brandon, Alabama with the efforts of a group of five gentlemen, the Mayor of Girard Clyde M. Knowles, the Mayor of Phenix City Claude Gullatt, former Mayor of Phenix City Dr. Ashby Floyd, Girard City Commission Member I. Moses and Phenix City, City Official H. D. Cobb. Councilmember Bailey further stated that renaming both cities was rejected by Alabama Legislature and the name Phenix City would represent both cities. Councilmember Bailey stated that some of the gentlemen's family members still reside in the area. City Manager Wallace Hunter stated that he is aware of the anniversary date and celebration plans are being considered. Mr. Hunter also stated that Phenix City has come a long way and there are several people whose names were not allowed to be placed on list because of their race or economic status. Mr. Hunter further stated that their names along with other historical information have been placed in a Historic Time capsule that was removed from in front of the Public Safety Building during the renovation project and will be open in the future. Mr. Hunter stated Phenix City has a lot of history, favorable and unfavorable.

There being nothing further to discuss, the meeting adjourned until 3:00 p.m., Monday, March 6, 2023.