

**Village of Waynesville
Special Council Meeting Minutes
October 2, 2023 at 6:00 pm**

Present: Mr. Brian Blankenship
Mr. Chris Colvin
Ms. Joette Dedden
Mr. Zack Gallagher
Mr. Troy Lauffer
Mayor Earl Isaacs
Mrs. Connie Miller

Jeff Forbes, Law Director; Chief Gary Copeland, Village Manager and Safety Director; Jamie Morley, Clerk of Council

CLERK’S NOTE- This is a summary of the Special Village Council Meeting held on Monday, October 2, 2023 at 6:00 p.m.

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Mayor Isaacs called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

Roll Call – 7 present

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Purpose of the Special Meeting

Mayor Isaacs explained the purpose of this special meeting was to discuss upcoming ballot issues for the Village of Waynesville.

New Business

At this time, Mayor Isaacs invited anyone from the public to ask any questions or voice any concerns over the November 7th, 2023 ballot issues.

Ms. Rebecca Blaho from 575 Royston asked about the current police funding and the impact of a failed levy replacement. Ms. Dedden stated that anyone can go to the Warren County Auditor’s website and look up their property. The site will show taxpayers the true appraised value of their property, this is what the auditor uses to figure out property taxes. Mr. Lauffer added that this does not have to do with what the property would sell for. Furthermore, a property owner can click on tax distribution, and it will show how all the property taxes are distributed between entities such as the school, county, township, vocational school, and corporation. Ms. Dedden continued that her home's true value according to the auditor is \$213K

and she pays \$3,271 a year in property taxes. The auditor stated that for every \$100K of appraised value, the property owner would pay \$245 for the replacement levy. Ms. Dedden said that currently she pays \$436 a year to the corporation, 90% of that is police levy. If the police levy passes, she would be paying \$505 to the corporation which is about \$68 more a year, which ultimately is only \$5.67 a month.

Ms. Blaho asked if this was a replacement levy, not a new levy. Ms. Dedden responded that yes, it is a replacement levy. The levy is still 7 mil, but the old levy is based on 2008 housing prices. The replacement levy will stay at 7 mil but will be based on 2023 housing values. This will bring in about \$135K more a year.

Chief Copeland stated that calls for service have increased tremendously since the original levy was passed. The Village used to be able to operate a full-time police department by supplementing the officers with reserves, however, that is no longer an option. There is a massive shortage of police officers. Officers do not want to work part-time when they can get on at another department full-time at a much higher rate of pay. The Village recently switched over to a full-time officer department. Furthermore, operation expenses have risen dramatically, including patrol cars, gas, and health insurance. For example, the Village used to be able to purchase a patrol car for 28K, the cost is now up to 46K. The state has not even offered state-bid prices because there is a shortage of police cruisers. Chief Copeland further emphasized that it is not a new levy, just a replacement levy to help keep up with the demands and continue to operate as they have been doing over the years. He added that the Finance Committee looked at finances and determined that the best option was a replacement levy and tax houses on current property values rather than values from 15 years ago.

Ms. Blaho asked how much extra revenue this would bring in. Ms. Dedden responded that it would bring in approximately \$135K more a year. Ms. Blaho also asked if this would keep the police department running as it currently is. Chief Copeland stated that it will help, the current levy will not support a full-time police force and the Village has had to rely on the general fund to supplement the Police Department. Ms. Blaho asked what would happen to the general fund if the replacement levy did not pass. Ms. Dedden responded that the police levy fund would be drained, and Council would have to make some hard decisions. Chief Copeland added that police officers are in shortage. Just about every department is looking for officers and the academies are not running because no one wants to be a police officer. To remain competitive and keep current officers, the Village has had to increase wages.

Ms. Dedden said the Finance Committee considered adding additional millage. The auditor estimated that one more mil would bring in an additional 73K and the Village would need an additional two mil to cover an officer. An additional 2 mil would cost the residents more, so the committee felt a replacement levy was the best option. Chief Copeland stated that in over 15 years, the Village has not increased the current police levy, but everything has gotten more expensive.

Ms. Blaho asked how many officers the Village employs. Chief Copeland responded that there are 5 patrol officers, 1 SRO (School Resource Officer), a Chief, and 1 reserve officer. This provides the Village with 24-hour coverage 365 days.

Christine Callahan, 415 Fifth Street, approached Council to ask about proposed charter amendments. She asked why unsuccessful candidates who ran for Council get first dibs at being considered for an open Council seat. Mrs. Miller explained that that is what is currently in the charter and the change would remove it.

Ms. Callahan asked Council to explain the proposed change to section 5.04 on increasing the amount from \$250K to \$2 million for the requirement to provide residents with notification of the project. Mrs. Miller explained that the cost of projects has increased a lot since the charter was written. Chief Copeland stated the stoplight project at the intersection between Route 42 and North Street will cost about \$2.3 million. He further stated that the Village received a grant to pay for 90% of the project and the other 10% will be covered by license plate money. He also outlined two other projects that are being done with OPWC grant money that will cost around \$1 million each. The \$250K threshold is too low. Mrs. Miller elaborated that the Village Manager must get permission from Council in the form of legislation on anything that costs over \$25K. Ms. Callahan asked how much it costs to run the Village. Ms. Dedden responded that the final appropriations were about \$6 million.

Ms. Blaho asked why there was a proposed change under 3.07 to reduce meetings from twice a month to once a month. Mr. Forbes stated that under the current charter, Council must meet twice a month. There are times when a Council meeting only lasts 5 minutes because there is no business that needs to be addressed, but the charter says there will be two meetings a month, so they have two meetings a month. The suggested change gives Council the flexibility to not have a second meeting if it is not needed. Mr. Forbes stressed that it does not say Council will only have one meeting a month, just gives them the ability to only have one meeting if a second is not needed. Ms. Blaho expressed concern that if a resident wanted to address Council, it would make it harder. Mr. Gallagher clarified that a meeting would not be canceled that day, but the public would have at least 2 weeks' notice if a meeting is canceled. Mr. Colvin stated he agreed with Ms. Blaho but agreed to follow the process and let the voters decide.

Ms. Blaho asked why the Village did not post more on social media. She stated she knows all the information is on the Village website but feels there are residents who are not knowledgeable enough to find the information. She feels social media posts would be more beneficial in keeping more residents informed and help control rumors. Chief Copeland explained that everything is posted on the website and there is an email group that receives the agendas and meeting notices. Ms. Morley added that social media is a slippery slope as the Village must abide by the Sunshine Law and maintain public records. Comments on social media posts are considered public records and are very difficult to track. The metadata on comments is nearly impossible to maintain unless you hire a very expensive company to do this for you. Chief Copeland elaborated that if the Village does not properly maintain public records, there is the possibility of being fined. Ms. Blaho stated that she feels she is the exception because she knows how to get the information and does not feel the Village is doing a good job of disseminating information to the public, such as the meeting tonight. She stated that she felt that if residents knew about tonight's meeting, the room would be full. Ms. Morley stated the notice for tonight's meeting was on the September and October water bills, the Village's Facebook page, the Village website, the electronic sign, and posted in 5 different locations.

Mr. Lauffer expressed why he agrees with changing the charter to have the ability to have only one meeting a month. He stated that there are occasional meetings that only last 10 minutes and no business is conducted, but a meeting is held because it is required by the charter. He added that he is busy and going to a meeting that is unnecessary is bothersome. Mr. Lauffer also stated that each time this happens, it costs the taxpayers \$700 because Council is paid for attending a Council meeting. He thinks it is a waste of \$700 of taxpayer's money for a meeting that is totally needless. He added that the City of Mason recently changed to only having one meeting a month and it has worked out well. Ms. Dedden agreed with Mr. Lauffer. However, Mr. Colvin and Mrs. Miller believe they should hold a meeting just in case there is one person who wants to come in and address Council. Ms. Blaho stated she agrees and believes it is well worth spending \$700, for the public to have access to Council.

Mr. Isaacs thanked Ms. Blaho and Ms. Callahan for coming and asking questions.

Ms. Dedden wanted to explain that most of the Charter changes were clean-up issues. Mrs. Miller added that some of the changes proposed bring the charter up to date with state laws.

Ms. Blaho expressed her opinion on the lots that are right next to the Village Corporation line that are currently for sale. She feels that the lots should only be allowed to be developed at a minimum of two-acre lots. She does not feel that the lots should be annexed. If they were to be annexed, she would like them to stay at 2-acre lots.

Mr. Lauffer thanked Ms. Blaho for expressing her opinions. He feels he is a representative of the residents and needs to hear from the residents to best be able to represent their will.

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All were in favor of adjourning at 6:50 p.m.

Date: _____

Jamie Morley, Clerk of Council