CITY OF OGLETHORPE

OGLETHORPE CITY HALL

115 CHATHAM STREET

COUNCIL MEETING

AUGUST 3, 2023 – 6:00PM

**Call to order:** Mayor Hill at 6:02PM

Council and Dept Heads in Attendance: Mayor Hill, Pro-tem Cross, CM Harrison, CM Daniels, CM Coogle, CM Mahone, City Clerk Melissa Jones, Police Chief Eric Finch

Council absent: none

**Pledge of Allegiance:**

**Invocation:** CM Harrison

**Approval of Agenda:** Motion to approve Agenda with additions/changes of Line 2 and Line 5 under New Business made by CM Cross, 2nd by CM Harrison, AIF

**Approval of Minutes** from July 13, 2023 Regular Council Session and July 27, 2023 Work Session – Motion made by CM Coogle, 2nd by CM Cross, AIF

**Recognitions of Guest(s)**: Gene Allen, Melvin Moore(absent), GA State Trooper Lemon, Jean Duncan

**New Business:**

1) Gene Allen – Completed 2022 Financial Audit- reviewed with council. Questions answered in regards to transfers, property taxes, and leases. All accounts are in the positive. Motion to approve the 2022 Financial Budget as presented by Auditor Gene Allen made by CM Coogle, 2nd by CM Cross, AIF

2) Chief Finch – Gave an update and a handout to be published in local paper stating tasks he’s accomplished since stepping in as Chief of Police for Oglethorpe. Chief Finch advised that the wall that is being put up at the policed dept to separate the evidence room is almost complete. Could possibly move Cindy back up to the police dept next week. Another thing I wanted to talk about is last week while ya’ll was in your meeting, as you know there were 5 inmates who escaped the county jail. Three turned themselves back in. We caught one in Columbus. CM Cross – Chief can I pause that? Tell us when YOU were notified. Chief Finch – I’ll get to that. Once we found out about it, we put a notice on our Face Book page. One of the guys was caught at 12:10AM in Columbus trying to break into somebody’s house. We got notified of it that Friday afternoon at 7:10PM. We heard all kind of stuff. Been hearing “why wasn’t the police there”? Let me tell you what the police did do. The police was there. That night we got call of suspicious people up there on Carla Drive at Tiffany Joiner’s house. Office made contact, ran a check on the people, they weren’t wanted…. Because they weren’t put in the system. The sad part is they could have killed my officers. CM Cross – That’s very upsetting. Chief Finch – My officer made contact with them that night. That’s what people don’t know. I ain’t putting that out there. Our guys made contact with them that night. And how I found out about it. After we posted it to our Face Book page, Tiffany Joiner called us back and said those are the guys that came to the house. But nobody notified us. CM Harrison – Came to her house? Chief Finch – Came to her house. Knocked on her door. She called the police. We ran the names. They weren’t wanted because they weren’t in the system. CM Cross – If he had done something when they got out, but they didn’t know they got out. Chief Finch – Me and Mrs. Harrison, she can verify what I’m saying, cause we were both at the county commissioners meeting, they going to be problematic with us. Let me tell you why. Myself, Mel Fulghom and them been on the phone with Kevin Lewis and Mr. Mickey George. They want us to transfer inmates to other jails now. If we lock somebody up, they want us to do the transferring of inmates to whatever county we have to take them to, like Houston Co or whatever. No, our contract says Oglethorpe and Montezuma is with Macon Co. Sheriff’s Dept. It is your responsibility to take them where ever if we take them there on a state warrant. If it’s a city charge, we will cite them on a citation and get them out of there. If they have a state warrant, then they are a state prisoner which means they belong to Macon County jail. If we have to sign a criminal warrant. That’s the issue. We sent out an email to the sheriff today letting him know per our contract, we are not going to be having our officers riding up and down the road. We were in the meeting last night, and I don’t know how Mrs. Harrison felt about this, I feel like nothing got accomplished. I just going to be real with you. The county, they don’t want to build no new jail, costing about $7million. And the kind of jail they talking about building won’t house but 35 people. They don’t want to put no money in that jail that they have. It was built 33 years ago. The locks they have are not jail locks. They are high grade motel locks. The problem is the sheriff got one jailer working and one dispatcher. So, if one of the officers takes someone there, the one jailer has to process that person in and that means nobody is watching them. They ain’t being supervised. They are tearing up the jail. We did a walk - through Monday, it’s bad. Everybody in just one little area. They couldn’t go in rooms or nothing. Mattresses on the floor. CM Harrison – Let me just say, since you said my name, what I got out of it is 3 of the 5 commissioners, particularly the chairman, was like we cannot continue. We can’t not do anything. The old jail is not worth it. We have to build a new jail. Mr. Lewis agreed that we do have 50-60 percent in the county ARPA monies to fund the $5-$8 million jail. He feels pretty confident he can get some grants to supplement the rest. They are going to petition Senators Ossauff and Warnock to let them know of the situation and try to get some more money to fund the jail. They are also going to try and reconfigure the dispatcher position so that they have more than one jailer because the dispatcher isn’t as important as having multiple jailers. Pretty much everyone agreed that it was a deplorable situation in regards to how it looks. They’re just concerned for long term. If you having problems staffing it. They don’t want to just build this jail and continue having the same problems. So, to me, talking about it instead of ignoring it, is a major step. They asked the county manager to get more quotes and look for more money to help build this. CM Cross – If I remember right, when 911 came in, they chose to keep a dispatcher where other sheriff departments chose not to keep a dispatcher because 911 is the dispatcher. CM Harrison – That is what was said last night. Chief Finch – Just to brief y’all, they are going through the air ducts to get out. They crawling up through there and getting out. The have had Dorsey’s come in now and put up a metal piece where the vent is at now and one little piece that was bent out, Dorsey fixed that. They are in the process of getting someone to come in and pressure wash the whole interior of the jail out and hopefully have someone to go back in and fix it. In my honest opinion, I think they probably going to try and get it back so they can house some people. The reason I say that is from my understanding is that Sumter County is charging them $8K a week. If you looking at 52 weeks, that’s running you about $416K just on housing inmates. CM Cross – So where they cut out the fence, do they just wire it back? Because it didn’t look like they put new fence up. Chief Finch – I don’t know what they are going to do about that. They are doing work every day on it. CM Coogle – They have any prisoners over there now do they? Chief Finch – Ain’t nobody there. The main 29 they had, they took them down to Dougherty County, and you have 20 in Sumter County, and 2 in Terrell County. The one’s down in Dougherty County are complaining and calling their moma and daddy trying to get back here if they can. Because the one’s in Dougherty County only get 2 hours out for recreation. Other than that, they have to stay in their rooms. CM Cross – That’s what jail is. Chief Finch – That pretty much where we are on the jail. This print out I gave you is what we’ve done in Oglethorpe. I’m not going to go over it. Going to be honest, the people of the state of Georgia is watching us. And this shows that District 4 nomination letter. And this flow chart shows what y’all had before we consolidated. The next page shows what you got now. If you go to the next page it shows my first full 6 months. (goes over citations) I’m going to do an article for the paper, this is going to RogerAnn Davis for the newspaper. We had an accident today and had 4 people working there and still others available. With one officer on duty, you ain’t got nothing. The people need to know you don’t have nothing. You go back in 10-15 years ago, Montezuma was still doing the same thing. Mr. Harry Thomaston was not a certified police officer. We had to answer all of y’alls calls over here at night time. I’m just being real with people doing this talking. He wasn’t even certified. Only thing he was, he rode around. If he got a call, we had to come over here and answer it. CM Harrison – Can I say something just for the sake of messaging? Chief Finch – Yes mam. CM Harrison – Is consolidation the right word? Chief Finch – Well, I just used that from when we first started. I’m just talking about joining both, what I mean by consolidation is joining both agencies together. I can change the wording on that. When I talk about Oglethorpe, everything I utilize as the Chief of Police over here, I focus on Oglethorpe. I even had Ms. Cindy order me and Captain Hill Oglethorpe shirts for over here. When I was nominated Ga Chief’s Association last week in Savannah. I didn’t even wear a Montezuma uniform. I wore a suit because I didn’t want people to take a picture and start saying he wore a Montezuma uniform. I was there to represent both cities. My tag said Montezuma and Oglethorpe Police Dept. CM Harrison – I have one more question that was brought to me by a couple of different citizens. I’ve not seen it, but I’ve been told that officers in Oglethorpe cars are writing tickets in Montezuma. And I didn’t know how to speak to that. Chief Finch – To answer that question, my guys write tickets over here and every now and then one of them will see something over there and they have the authority to do it over there because we are certified in the county, we are certified in Montezuma, and Oglethorpe as well. The majority of what they are doing, pretty much y’alls guys are not taking care of Montezuma, Oglethorpe is getting way more from Montezuma than what you can imagine Oglethorpe is doing for us. Like I said today, Officer Whitehead came on at 2pm and all of those officers at the wreck were from Montezuma. CM Cross – So, I’ve seen an Oglethorpe car stopped someone by the bridge in Montezuma and I pretty much put it together that the issue started in Oglethorpe and it took that long to get the stop. Chief Finch – I’m fixing to explain it to you. When Officer Whitehead runs the tag reader, he has to verify a hit to make sure with 911 that the tag reader is correct. If he catches them at Fast Flint, by the time he gets the confirmation, his actual stop is going to be \_\_\_\_\_\_ (Montezuma). The citation will be for Oglethorpe. CM Cross – That was my assumption. Officer Whitehead – When I get a tag and run a registration it takes a good 3 minutes for the information to come back. By that time the vehicle is past Oglethorpe Road. I can still charge them with an Oglethorpe citation. CM Cross – I also want to compliment you as I’ve heard nothing but good things from our citizens about you. How fair, cordial, and professional you are. Chief Finch – My final thing I want to tell y’all is that wreck today, the truck was leaving out of Oglethorpe and made that turn. The truck was not properly strapped and the load shifted which caused the accident. What really got me mad about it is Flock System was coming in today to install our cameras. If anybody wants to talk to us, I’m free. They can go to city hall and talk to Ms. Cindy and if she needs to, she can call us. We are available. CM Cross – And in saying that citizens are getting upset about things sitting on the side of the road. Couches, mattresses, etc. I’ve talked with Chief Finch and asked that as our officers are patrolling to start putting these tags on the resident’s doors to advise. Cole and them are contractors, they don’t have time to do it as they are here to pick up trash. Then if one of the officers walks up and puts this on somebody’s door, it’s going to get their attention. And he’s got a gun and if someone comes out being ugly… they will be less ugly to an officer than the contractors. And according to our charter, the police dept. is our code enforcement. Chief Finch – I am also going to be working with Ms. Melissa on this. What we do with ours is, the question is do we have an enforcement mechanism there? I’m going to check y’alls, but on ours we have so many days to have it moved or you go before the court. I’ll bring ours to the work session and hopefully by the next council meeting it can be taken care of. CM Harrison – That’s a good segue way because I spoke with Rick Morris at RVRC and I need a meeting with you and him probably because he is going to bring samples from other cities around our size and how they assess citation fees and sending it to magistrate court. This makes a statement. CM Cross – The officers are riding the streets anyway, so maybe it will work some. (Chief Finch shows a book of everything he has done in the City of Oglethorpe since they started).

3) Motion to approve Veteran’s Day 2023 for Saturday November 11, 2023 in the Oglethorpe City Park made by CM Cross, 2nd by CM Harrison, AIF

As a side note CM Harrison updated that a sponsorship in the amount of $1,000.00 had been secured from Flint Energies. Our initial sponsorship.

4) Motion to approve city support of a commercial grade round-a-bout at Hwys 49 & 26 with the county to GDOT made by CM Cross, 2nd by CM Harrison, AIF

CM Harrison - The county is proposing to GDOT and making a petition to our state representative and senator so that we can have a commercial grade big round a bout at 49 & 26 to help with traffic flow. CM Daniels – That’s right there by Wright’s? CM Harrison – yes. Chief Finch – They have one in Schley County.

5) Motion to approve using ARPA Funds up to $1,000.00 for the purchase of the panic doors and outlet covers for the gym made by CM Coogle, 2nd by CM Cross, AIF

(Motion changed from RFQ if needed) CM Harrison – You already have a quote for the door, right? CM Mahone – The material itself. CM Harrison – But not for the labor. CM Cross – Who’s doing the installing? CM Daniels – Not sure yet. Chief Finch – You can call the DOC and they have a construction crew that will come in for free and do the labor as long as you buy the material. You can call Sumter. CM Cross – I’ll even bring them lunch. They built my office in Americus. CM Daniels – So, as far as purchasing materials. CM Cross – How much was the materials? CM Daniels – The doors and the electrical covers. CM Mahone – As far as purchasing wise how we going to go about that? CM Cross – How much do you think? $500. $1,000. CM Harrison – You talking about for the cost of the doors and electrical covers? CM Mahone – I don’t see it being $1,000.00 because the doors that are there, the pressure door is going to be the most expensive. CM Cross – So under $1,000.00? We have to come up with an amount before we can approve it. CM Harrison – How much were the doors that you saw at Lowes? CM Mahone – About $50.00. It’s just the handle part. CM Harrison – Oh just the panic part. So that’s $300.00. And electrical plates. CM Cross – So if we say up to $1,000.00 out of ARPA for the gym than Melissa can work with you on that. CM Mahone – And then the additional? Melissa – You could just have another vote for other items that would be needed. CM Harrison – Thank y’all for doing the homework on that. CM Daniels – I talked with Mr. Yoder and it would be over $5K for him to bid on it. But if we can use the inmates it would be better.

**Old Business:**

CM Harrison – The Buck Creek Bypass work will start soon and Jimmy I have some information for you in regards to grants. CM Cross – Send them to me also so I can see how hard it may or may not be to apply for

**Other Business:**

Mayor Hill – I would like to go to RVRC meeting and class in a couple of months. CM Harrison – Do you have the date? Mayor Hill – Yes, but I didn’t bring the information with me. I thought we talked about it at the work session? CM Daniels – I don’t remember that? CM Harrison – Why don’t we talk about it at the next work session since we have time before it’s here. Then you can bring the information. Mayor Hill – ok

**Adjourn:** 7:06PM - CM Coogle, 2nd by CM Harrison, AIF