

City of Varnell
Public Citizen Meeting
July 20, 2017
7:00 pm

Council Members Present: Mayor Pro Tem – David Owens, Jan Pourquoi, Andrea Gordy

City Manager: Mike Brown
City Clerk: Pam Garrison
City Attorney: Terry Miller

Absent: Mayor - Anthony Hulsey
Council member – Ashlee Godfrey

David Owens gave the call to order and confirmed a quorum. Mr. Owens gave the opening statement regarding purpose of the Special Called Meeting. City Attorney Terry Miller who was acting as moderator of the meeting gave a statement regarding the order in which the meeting would be handled as well as ground rules for the public hearing.

David Owens read a public notice regarding the meeting and declared the meeting as a “citizen’s meeting.” Mr. Owens stated that only city residents would be allowed to speak and no personal questions would be allowed.

Mr. Terry Miller was ask to describe the rule of order to the audience. Subject to the GA open meetings law, no legal action can be taken. The next scheduled Council meeting will be on July 25, 2017 at 7:00 pm and held in the Varnell City Gym.

David Owens stated he has several reasons for wanting the abolish the Varnell Police Department as follows:

- Mr. Owens read an article from the January 18, 2008 edition of the Daily Citizen news regarding former Police Chief, Tim Henderson which contained derogatory information regarding Mr. Henderson. Mr. Owens stated that he felt this type of information did not leave a favorable perception of the Police Department with the public.
- Mr. Owens further stated that due to an auto accident in March 2012 with Officer Smith which involved a fatality, this insurance settlement was \$650,000.00. Also a second accident occurred in 2014 with Officer Hayes who was found at fault, this insurance settlement was \$270,000.00. Mr. Owens feels like these accidents are due to lack of discipline and supervision. He further states that we are high risk for losing our liability insurance if we have another claim.
- Another thing was brought to his attention where our police officers were allowed to use the city’s police cars on I-75 to work off duty in construction zones for safety issues. Per David Owens, he feels we are in violation of “Oath of Office”.
- Mr. Owens did however state regarding an incident in the home of a former City Councilman, Sheldon Fowler, Chief Grant was cleared of any wrong doings by the DA’s office. There was no reason to send The case to the GBI office because there was no criminal wrong doing. Mr. Owens states he still thinks the case should have been handled by Whitfield County Sherriff’s Office.

Andrea Gordy states her position as follows:

- She has spoken with an insurance broker, Mr. Steve McMullins and states that he has concerns that due to high claim volume, no insurance company will insure our City.
- Ms. Gordy states that she has spoken with Sheriff Chitwood who assured her that his deputies are already covering the City of Varnell so we are doing double coverage which she feels is unnecessary. Ms. Gordy also states that having a quick response time is not an issue and can be handled by the county.

- Safety and response time were her main concern.

Jan Pourquoi stated his reasons for abolishment as follows:

- Mr. Pourquoi states that he is not opposed to the Police Department and has always stood behind the Police Department. When he recently had a conversation with David Owens, the question was brought up, “Do we need a Police Department in the City of Varnell?” At the time, his response was, “maybe/maybe not” He stated that the Council needed to decide whether or not a Police Department was needed.
- Mr. Pourquoi stated that he is uncompromising when it comes to cost and budgets. As it relates to law enforcement, since the city is already covered by Whitfield County Sherriff’s Department, we don’t need City of Varnell Police Department. He further states with a \$307,000.00 budget, \$200,000.00 of that is offset with tickets. We would lose \$200,000.00 if the Police Department was abolished. However, if Whitfield County Sherriff’s Office hired a Deputy specifically for City of Varnell coverage, at an average rate of \$40,000.00 salary, \$10,000.00 in benefits, the cost to the city would run around \$50,000.00. Whitfield County Deputy’s would write traffic citations when necessary and the cases would be heard in Varnell Municipal Court.
- Mr. Pourquoi further believes that if we choose to abolish the Police Department and eliminate property taxes, it would be easier to annex new properties into the City of Varnell.

With no further comments from the Council persons, Moderator Terry Miller stated the floor would now become Open for public comment which was received from the following people:

Bill Morgan; Sandy Pangle; Kyle Lofty; Bob Rouche; Clyde Williams; Jason Hall; Mary Ellen Hankins; Tom Dickson; Debra Pourquoi, Bill Caylor; Frank Land & Ralph Morgan.

In summary, David Owens stated that a referendum would worked on by the Council members and presented at a Future meeting to be presented to the public.

With no further comments, the meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Pam Garrison
City Clerk