

**GASTONIA CITY COUNCIL MEETING**  
**JANUARY 3, 2012 – 6:00 P.M.**  
**CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER – CITY HALL – GASTONIA, NC**

Mayor Bridgeman called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, January 3, 2012, in the City Council Chamber at City Hall, Gastonia, North Carolina. Councilman Kimble opened the meeting with prayer and Mayor Bridgeman led the audience in the pledge of allegiance to the flag. Ms. Virginia L. Creighton, City Clerk, recorded the minutes.

PRESENT: Mayor John D. Bridgeman  
 Mayor Pro Tem Brenda B. Craig  
 Council Members: Walter A. Kimble  
                           David R. Kirlin  
                           James Gallagher  
                           Todd Pierceall  
                           Porter L. McAteer  
 Assistant City Co-Manager J. Philip Bombardier  
 City Attorney L. Ashley Smith

ABSENT: None

**ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

Councilman McAteer made a motion to adopt the agenda as printed. Councilman Kirlin seconded the motion and Council approved it unanimously.

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES – REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING – DECEMBER 6, 2011**

Councilman McAteer made a motion to approve the minutes of the December 6, 2011, Regular Council meeting, as printed. Councilman Kimble seconded the motion and Council approved it unanimously.

**PRESENTATIONS**

(1) The Wilderman Group Representatives: Mr. John Wilderman, Ms. Kristin Kurie, and  
 Mr. Fred Julius

Re: Presentation by Gastonia Conference Center Management Firm

Mr. Wilderman, Founder of The Wilderman Group, briefly highlighted the experience that he, Ms. Kurie, and Mr. Julius have in the hospitality business, and more specifically in the conference center end of the hospitality industry. He said The Wilderman Group is an aggressive marketer, but is cognizant of the need for productive, selective sales guidelines. The negotiated contract between The Wilderman Group and the City makes it clear that the Gastonia Conference Center is to be run as a business, which is what they intend to do.

Ms. Kurie, President of The Wilderman Group, stated that since the Gastonia Conference Center officially opened in November, their focus has been on direct sales, social media, and public relations. Initially, their efforts focused on the local community. They then branched out regionally and then statewide. She noted the various membership organizations with which they have been involved. She advised that they have been successful in securing some groups that have previously held their meetings and events in Charlotte, which means not only business for the Conference Center, but also for the lodging industry, restaurants, etc. She encouraged everyone to look at their Facebook page and website, and to follow them on Twitter.

Mr. Julius, General Manager of the Gastonia Conference Center, explained that he was responsible for the day-to-day operations and the financial aspect of the Conference Center, which includes preparing the budget and the monthly financial statements that are to be provided to the City. He said November and December, plus what has been booked through June, represents \$186,000 worth of new business to the area. That is specific to the Conference Center in terms of gross revenue. He noted that in February, they would be hosting a college expo and the US Food Show. They have also developed partnerships with local businesses, golf courses, hotels, caterers, event planners, meeting planners, wedding planners, etc.

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Mr. Wilderman, Ms Kurie, and Mr. Julius then addressed various questions regarding the finances and the operations of the Gastonia Conference Center.

Councilman Kimble suggested to The Wilderman Group that they look into the possibility of holding a trade show at the Conference Center during the time that the Gastonia Sniper Conference is taking place. He also suggested that a counter be included on the Conference Center website to keep track of the amount of activity they are having.

(Reference as contained in Exhibit Book 3 to Minute Book 101 at Page 7.)

(2) Ms. Melody Usery, Director of Financial Services  
Re: Monthly Financial Report for November, 2011

Ms. Usery reviewed the Monthly Financial Report for November, 2011, a copy of which is contained in the exhibit book. She explained that, due to the City converting to a new administrative software package last year, some funds in this report may appear to be behind last year, because not all of last year's transactions were posted to the general ledger until the December/January timeframe. She said the funds are actually operating pretty much as expected.

Ms. Usery and Mr. J. Philip Bombardier, Interim City Co-Manager, addressed various questions of Council.

Councilman Kimble requested that going forward, staff track the occupancy tax revenues so they can see what impact the Conference Center may be having on that revenue.

Councilman Gallagher requested that FY 2009-2010 be included on the charts contained in the monthly financial report.

(Report as contained in Exhibit Book 3 to Minute Book 101 at Page 8.)

**PUBLIC EXPRESSION**

(1) Mr. Tom Thornburg, 2954 Planer Terrace, Gastonia

Mr. Thornburg first commended Council for recently repealing an ordinance regarding the use of decorative stone on downtown buildings. He then cited statistics on the number of people living in the United States, and more specifically in the City of Gastonia, who are over the age of 65 and are living on a fixed income. He expressed concern that the garbage fee would have a direct impact on those individuals.

(2) Mr. Mike Tate, 407 West Fifth Avenue, Gastonia

Mr. Tate stated that his remarks were not intended to offend everyone who is not a native Gastonian. He said Mr. Rob Davis, who spoke at the last City Council meeting, and others seem to preface their remarks with, "when I moved here", and they always want to make changes to our City based on the fact that that was the way it was done where they came from. Mr. Davis made the statement that Gastonia was spoiled rotten when it came to our solid waste program. He does not understand how just because they move here from somewhere else where it was done differently, that we are wrong and they are right. He would say to everyone who has moved here from somewhere else and wants to make changes, we do not need them and their opinions to run this city. It was running fine before they got here and it will run much better if they would make an effort to adjust to the way we do things here. It will run just fine if they decide we are too backward and move back to where they came from.

He also asked that Council diligently monitor the profitability, or lack of profitability, of the Conference Center. He said it seems that the Conference Center is seldom used and that a lot of money is being wasted on lighting it when it is not in use. Taxpayers should not be asked to subsidize this place that was not needed, or in his opinion wanted, by most of the people. If this turns out to be a losing proposition, he would ask that Council act accordingly to ensure that they do not have to keep pouring money into it. He also believes that citizens have a right to the information regarding the profitability and loss statement and he would ask that they pass that information along to anyone who asks for it.

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(3) Mr. Tim Ellis, Spartanburg, SC

Mr. Ellis noted that he was born and raised in Gastonia, but has lived in Spartanburg for the last 15 years. He stated that he appeared before Council on September 7, 2010, to speak on Gastonia downtown revitalization, and advised where they could find the text of his address. He said the main reason he was here tonight was that prior to 2007, the Mayor and City Council served 2-year terms. Sometime in 2007, without a referendum, Council determined that they would increase their term of office from 2 years to 4 years. He challenged the Mayor and Council, without referendum, to return to 2-year terms of office and to apply that new term of office to themselves.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

- ITEM 1: BUDGET AMENDMENT #FY12-017 – \$6,012,000  
(Reference as contained in Exhibit Book 3 to Minute Book 101 at Page 9.)
- ITEM 2: BUDGET AMENDMENT #FY12-018 – \$7,417  
(Reference as contained in Exhibit Book 3 to Minute Book 101 at Page 10.)
- ITEM 3: 2011 ANNUAL CERTIFICATION OF FIREFIGHTERS  
(Reference as contained in Exhibit Book 3 to Minute Book 101 at Page 11.)
- ITEM 4: ANNUAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN ELECTRICITIES OF NORTH CAROLINA, INC. AND THE CITY OF GASTONIA FOR TREE TRIMMING – ASPLUNDH TREE EXPERT COMPANY  
(Reference as contained in Exhibit Book 3 to Minute Book 101 at Page 12. Agreement on file through City Clerk's office.)
- ITEM 5: FINAL RECORDING PLAT – PRIMAX PROPERTIES – DOLLAR GENERAL STORE  
(Reference and Plat as contained in Exhibit Book 3 to Minute Book 101 at Page 13.)

Councilman McAteer made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Councilman Kimble seconded the motion and Council approved it unanimously.

**AUDIT RESULTS AND ANNUAL FINANCIAL AUDIT REPORT FOR FISCAL YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2011**

Mayor Bridgeman recognized Mr. Chris Costner, Audit Director, Martin Starnes & Associates, CPA's, P.A., for the purpose of making the presentation.

Mr. Costner presented and reviewed a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the audit results for fiscal year ending June 30, 2011. A copy of that PowerPoint presentation is contained in the exhibit book. He noted that they issued an unqualified opinion on the financial statement, which means that the audit indicated no compliance findings or questioned costs, and no matters involving the internal control over financial reporting and its operation that would be considered a material weakness.

Mr. Costner, Mr. J. Philip Bombardier, Interim City Co-Manager, and Mr. Wendell Hendrix, Controller, addressed various questions of Council.

(Reference as contained in Exhibit Book 3 to Minute Book 101 at Page 14.)

**CITY ATTORNEY'S REPORT**

Mr. L. Ashley Smith, City Attorney, had no report.

**CITY MANAGER'S REPORT**

Mr. J. Philip Bombardier, Interim City Co-Manager, distributed a map showing the roads that the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) proposes to pave this paving season. A copy of that map is contained in the exhibit book. He noted that this would be in addition to any paving that the City would do in its annual budget.

(Reference as contained in Exhibit Book 3 to Minute Book 101 at Page 15.)

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Councilman McAteer noted that the people on his street had submitted a petition for speed humps around two years ago. He asked how they would go about getting those speed humps. Mr. Bombardier explained that for the past two years, speed humps were not determined as a priority and no funds were budgeted to pursue that program. He said that will be something that Council can consider as they look at the FY12-13 budget.

Mr. Bombardier advised that staff was working with NCDOT to set up a presentation to Council regarding the status of the I-85/US 321 interchange.

He reminded Council that the Strategic Planning Retreat would be held on January 20 & 21, at the Gastonia Conference Center. He also advised that staff would be contacting members of the Central City Revitalization and Housing Committee regarding setting up a meeting.

Mr. Bombardier requested Council's guidance on setting up a separate work session to discuss solid waste. He said the latest action by this Council was to postpone the fee implementation until February 1, 2012. Staff needs some direction on how to move forward with that for not only the remainder of this fiscal year, but also as they look into next year's budget.

Council discussed various dates on which they would be available to meet prior to the Regular Council meeting on January 17, 2012.

Not being able to come to a consensus on a meeting date, Councilman Pierceall made a motion to suspend the implementation of the solid waste fee until March 1, 2012. Councilman McAteer seconded the motion.

After considerable discussion, Councilman Gallagher made a motion to call the question. Councilman McAteer seconded the calling of the question and Council approved it unanimously.

The vote on the motion to suspend implementation of the solid waste fee until March 1, 2012, failed 3-4 (Mayor Bridgeman, Mayor Pro Tem Craig, Councilman Kimble, and Councilman Kirlin cast the dissenting votes).

Councilman Gallagher stated that the reason citizens elected this Council was to make sure that the garbage fee is stopped and that it is put back on the property taxes. He made a motion to instruct staff to look for \$1 million within the budget to offset the garbage fee for the remainder of this fiscal year, and to provide that information at the January 17, 2012, City Council meeting. Councilman McAteer seconded the motion.

Following additional discussion on the motion, Council approved it unanimously.

**CITY COUNCIL REPORTS**

Councilman Kimble – He said he and Mayor Pro Tem Craig, with the assistance of the Police Chief, were able to call for a meeting with regard to the new rules and regulations for utilizing the Community Room at Police headquarters. There were groups that needed some clarity on the issue and they wanted to instill a sense of fundamental fairness in the decisions that were made. He commended the Chief for his leadership and for not delegating that meeting to someone else. He feels that it was a fruitful meeting and that it accomplished everything that they set out to accomplish.

He wished everyone a happy New Year.

Mayor Pro Tem Craig – She said she agreed that the meeting regarding use of the Community Room was fruitful. She believes the parties involved were satisfied.

She noted that during public expression, someone requested that the profit and loss statements for the conference center be made public. She asked if that would be available to anyone who requests a copy. Mr. L. Ashley Smith, City Attorney, advised that that would be a public record and would be made available.

Mayor Pro Tem Craig wished everyone a happy New Year.

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Councilman Pierceall – He asked for a clarification on the statements made by Mr. Ellis during public expression regarding the two-year term of office. Mr. L. Ashley Smith, City Attorney, said Council can change the City Charter for the 2015 election. They can change the term of office back to two years or they can go to staggered terms. To get the current Mayor and City Council terms shortened to two years, they would have to ask the General Assembly to pass a local act doing so, and normally they require 100% support from the body requesting the change in order for them to introduce that sort of bill. The statement made that this Council could shorten their term to two years by a referendum is not correct. The Council that changed the term of office to four years with the 2007 election could have put the matter up for a referendum, but they chose not to because elections cost \$60,000 and with the turnout, the Council's judgment was that it did not justify \$60,000. This Council can put the change back to two years for the 2015 election up to a referendum if they want, but there is going to be a cost to do that. There also could be a petition that comes in to change things back, and if they get the required number of signatures it would have to go on the ballot.

Mayor Bridgeman – He noted the following upcoming events:

- January 6, 2012 – First Friday Focus at 7:30 a.m., in the Dogwood Room at Gaston Memorial Hospital.
- January 11, 2012 – Economic Development Information Session at 4:00 p.m., at the City Club of Gastonia.
- January 16, 2012 – City Offices Closed for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.
- January 20 & 21, 2012 – Strategic Planning Retreat at the Gastonia Conference Center.
- January 30, 2012 – Gaston County Elected Officials Seminar at 6:00 p.m., at the Gaston Citizens Resource Center.

Councilman McAteer questioned whether two full days were needed for the Strategic Planning Retreat. Mr. J. Philip Bombardier, Interim City Co-Manager, advised that staff was in the process of finalizing the agenda for that retreat. He said right now, they are planning to meet all day on Friday, January 20, and a half day on Saturday, January 21.

**MEETING ADJOURNED**

Mayor Bridgeman adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

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Mayor John D. Bridgeman

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L. Ashley Smith, City Attorney

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Virginia L. Creighton, City Clerk

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