

Council Meeting Minutes  
For  
July 7, 2008  
Branchville Town Hall  
7:00 P.M.

**PRESENT**

Mayor Tim Cooner  
Mayor Pro Tem Glenn Miller  
Councilwoman Benita Gibbs  
Councilman Chris Ott  
Councilwoman Georgianna Harmon  
Councilwoman Amy Bryant

**OTHERS PRESENT**

Rhonda Thompson Town Clerk

**GUESTS**

Dan Campbell	Harriet Hughes	Tommy Vickers	Betty Skolasky
Debra Perugini	Phyllis Overstreet	Melody Ethridge	Hiram R. Johnson
Sammie Ruple	Betty Blaylock	Jackie Ethridge	John Goodwin
Vivian Fogle	Luther Folk	Beverly Berry	Kareem Williams

Three guests unreadable on sign in sheet

Mayor Cooner called the meeting to order and asked that all stand for the Pledge of Allegiance followed by a moment of silence.

Mayor Cooner welcomed everyone out tonight.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Mayor Cooner asked the pleasure of Council on the approval of minutes Councilman Ott motioned and Mayor Pro Tem Miller seconded.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS – AGENDA ITEMS/NON AGENDA ITEMS**

None

**PUBLIC COMMENTS OF OTHER MATTERS**

\*Betty Skolasky stated that last month the Mayor stated he did not raise taxes. Mayor Cooner answered that he looked it up and that his statement was an error, he did sign the paper that raised taxes.

\*Tommy Vickers handed out some policies and procedures for review. He stated that after the last Council Meeting and meeting with the Mayor, he came up with several ideas. He asked that Council review them and advise.

\*Harriott Hughes raised a concern about speeding on Ott Street and about Crown Vics riding through town and possibly conducting drug deals at the end of Ott Street. Mayor Cooner stated that he would pass the information on to the Police Department.

### **APPROVAL OF FINANCIAL REPORT**

After several questions from Councilwoman Harmon, it was then motioned by Councilman Ott to approve the financial report and seconded by Councilman Amy Bryant. Councilwoman Harmon nayed.

### **COMMITTEE AND STAFF REPORTS**

**Police Department** – Mayor Cooner stated the Police Department was doing a good job and was keeping the Town quiet.

#### **Administrative Office**

- Mayor Cooner asked Mayor Pro Tem Miller if he had anything.
- Mayor Pro Tem Miller Stated he was reporting to SCEG, the lights out at the old elementary school and would be getting them fixed.
- He also questioned whether the tin on the freight depot was installed without felt under it. He stated it was reported to him that the felt had blown off and the contractor installed the tin without replacing all of it.
- He questioned the Mayor about the trash and Town Hall debris removal. Mayor Cooner answered that the County received bids on that and would be removing the debris.
- Asked the status of closing the ditch previously discussed. Mayor Cooner stated that SCDOT has approved a 4' high chain link fence until further funding can be obtained to have the ditch piped. Mayor Cooner stated the funds would be used from the grant.
- For the record, Mayor Pro Tem Miller stated that an agreement was made between the new school and the Town that no one else could tap into the line. He questioned why the school district is having to pay for the line when the Town is tapping into it for the Rural Water Project. Mayor Cooner stated that the school district is paying for the actual line to the school, an additional pump station, and updates to the sewage pond to accommodate the school.
- Mayor Pro Tem Miller questioned where the funds came from for the Bar-B-Que place. Mayor Cooner answered from the insurance funds.
- He answered how much the new Town Hall will cost because he was not present at the meeting in which the resolution was passed. He stated that he had a copy of the resolution but it didn't have cost. Mayor Cooner stated the cost were to stay within budget.
- Councilwoman Harmon questioned when the meeting for budget adjustments would be held. Mayor Cooner stated that was a meeting that was to be scheduled by Mayor Pro Tem Miller who answered he would get back to her with a date.
- Councilwoman Harmon questioned the progress on business licenses. The Clerk stated businesses are being forced to pay the license with a lot of complaints. Councilwoman Harmon stated that the peanut plant could not be exempt.
- Councilwoman Harmon questioned Municipal Clerk Bettie Rhoad's status at this time. Mayor Cooner stated that she is working and would continue to work.

-Mayor Cooner stated that some of the business license needed to be adjusted. He stated the licenses were too high and the result would be businesses relocated. He pointed out an instance where last year the license was \$650 and this year \$2440. He reminded Council that these are small businesses. He stated that Class 1 licenses seem to have a problem with the businesses that have the second million of income. Councilwoman Harmon stated that the ordinance should be unchanged so that the Town can make money. Mayor Cooner stated that if the second million fee was reduced there would still be an increase in the business license but not such a steep increase. Mayor Cooner requested that a committee be formed to review the rate structure before next year licenses are renewed. Mayor Cooner recommended that some reimbursements should be made to the handful of merchants where the second rate structure affects. Mayor Cooner appointed Mayor Pro Tem Miller, Councilwoman Bryant and Councilwoman Gibbs to the committee. Councilwoman Harmon wanted to sit on the committee. Mayor Cooner stated that Councilwoman Harmon was the one that has the structure the way it is. He stated that the Town of Branchville can not charge businesses the same as bigger towns such as St. George. Mayor Cooner asked for a motion to change the rate structure on the second million from 1.1 to .5 until a committee can review further. Councilman Ott motioned with a second from Councilwoman Bryant. Motion carried.

### **Public Works**

-Mayor Cooner stated water line is being installed. Tank contractor to start construction within the next 30 days.

### **Mayors Report**

-Mayor Cooner stated that SCDOT has approved the Town's request that sidewalk be installed down Calhoun Street to Brian's Residential Care.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

Mayor Cooner asked the pleasure of Council concerning the second reading of Sec. 15-16 Unlawful Operation of a Motor Vehicle. Councilman Ott motioned and Mayor Pro Tem Miller seconded.

Councilwoman Harmon questioned the progress on the library. Mayor Cooner stated Orangeburg County and Department of Commerce and the Town of Branchville have been meeting to find funds for the Library.

Councilwoman Harmon requested that the prohibition of skateboarding, bicycles, roller blades, etc. on sidewalks be enforced.

Councilwoman Harmon the stated that according to Section 15-3 the Town's golf cart is to be registered and tagged if it is to be used.

Mayor Pro Tem stated that after meeting with officials Rural Health is not what he thought. He also stated he talked with John Smith, Emergency Services Director, that the reverse 911 is in effect today through Orangeburg County. He stated he was reassured that in the case of emergencies, for example a train derailment of hazardous material, that the reverse 911 would go into effect.

-Councilwoman Harmon stated that she went to Columbia and obtained a copy of the Town's insurance policy. She stated the new water tank is not on the Town's insurance policy but is on the old water tank. Mayor Cooner stated that a representative came and

wrote down all property of the Town and that was supposed to be insured but he would be checking on it.

-Mayor Cooner then put on the record that all future inquiries into his personal business by Councilwoman Harmon, representing herself on behalf of the Town without approval from the Council, would be forwarded to his attorney. He used as an example the recent inquiry in Columbia about the insurance of his personal vehicle. After discussion, Mayor Cooner ordered that the meeting proceed forward.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

-Mayor Cooner showed Council a letter from an attorney about the driveway removal by the Churn. After questioning by Mayor Pro Tem Miller, Mayor Cooner explained that per SCDOT a public meeting was held concerning the driveway with no businesses in attendance. The SCDOT approved the plans and the Town proceeded. Mayor Cooner stated he would answer the letter explaining from the attorney.

-Mayor Cooner then showed Council a letter from Donald Vallentine stating that he will turn the building leased from the Town by July 30<sup>th</sup>. It was noted that the lease is not up and the tenant is not current on lease payments.

-Mayor Cooner stated he was approached about the poor state of the sign to Horton Field by Mr. Horton. Mayor Cooner suggested that a new sign similar to the Welcome to the Town of Branchville signs be installed. He stated it is an eyesore to a park the Town is trying to improve. Council stated they would look at different ideas and a sign that would be appropriate.

-Mayor Pro Tem Miller stated the Welcome sign on East 78 needs to be repaired.

-Mayor Cooner requested that the floor at the Community Center needs to be stripped and cleaned.

-Mayor Cooner stated that the Town has received \$46,000 to restore Branch Junction from Senator Mathews. After questioning from Councilwoman Harmon, Mayor Cooner reiterated that the money was given to the Town with the stipulation that it be used to restore Branch Junction from a previous fire and from tornado damage. He stated that the Town bid out the work and BC Construction was the lowest bidder. He also stated that the materials would now be up for bid.

-Mayor Cooner informed Council that the architecture was working on the design for the new Town Hall and it was about completed. The County of Orangeburg is advising the building should be about 1000-1200 square feet

-Mayor Cooner stated that grass cutting was cut back to save money with not much difference. He then stated that grass cutting was resumed.

### **PROGRESS ON CAPITAL PROJECTS**

Mayor Cooner said this has already been covered.

### **ITEMS OF INFORMATION**

-Mayor Cooner stated the MASC meeting is scheduled this month in Charleston.

-Mayor Pro Tem Miller asked Council about the letter from Donald Vallentine. He questioned whether Mr. Vallentine could just walk away from the lease. The Mayor stated the lease has to be reviewed before further action could be taken.

- Mayor Cooner informed Council that the Town was named in a lawsuit from a citizen who fell on the sidewalk. He stated he forwarded that to the Highway Department since the sidewalk was their responsibility not the Town's.
- Mayor Pro Tem Miller complained about a trailer left in parking lot by Subway. Mayor Cooner stated that was a trailer for contractors employed by the Subway not by the Town.
- Mayor Pro Tem Miller stated that the pit bulls in Town are required to be on leashes.
- Praise was given to the Police Department for quick and professional responses.
- It was requested that programs be added so that the old school gym can be utilized. Mayor Cooner stated that the Town is in agreement with that but that it has to be a program in place so accountability for the damages. He stated that the Town has tried in the past to put a program in place but because of theft and vandalism the program was stopped. He said that if an appropriate program is in place the Town would consider fixing the gym and supporting the program. He also reiterated that the community has to be involved and not destroy the facilities that the Town may be willing to provide as in the past.
- After requests from citizens to clean out ditches. Sammie Ruple stated that the Highway Department would clean out ditches if requested. He gave the number to the Highway Department.
- Sammie Ruple requested that the Mayor contact the Highway Department about the poor state of the sidewalks in the Town and the poor state of state maintained ditches in Town. The Mayor stated he would.
- Councilwoman Harmon requested that the Mayor write a letter to the insurance company or sign a letter in which she wrote. Mayor Cooner stated that he would sign no letter that has not been decided on by full Council. He assured her that the insurance matter would be handled.

Councilwoman Amy Bryant made a motion to adjourn with a second from Councilman Ott.

Meeting Adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Cooner', written in a cursive style.

Tim Cooner  
Mayor