



*Council workshop  
Jan. 20, 2024*

Present: Mayor Chris Lelle; Councilmen, Eric Dailey, Tommy Buchanan, Sally Brown and Sharon Johnson; Clerk, Kathy Bridges; Attorney Brian Dempsey

Visitors: Beth Buchanan, Jerry Johnson, Paul Brown, Brandie Lelle, Mike Rice and Greg Stephens

The meeting was called to order at 2:30 by Mayor Lelle who led the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. The council discussed the zoning map which was redone by Mark Beatty with the NE Ga. Regional Development Center with input from council. Attorney Dempsey said the map should be reviewed once a year and after every rezone/annexation. The Mayor said Beatty would be present at the February meeting and bring the big copy of the map.
2. The council discussed culvert repairs. The Mayor said there were 3 areas in need of repair and initial estimates were a couple of 100 thousand plus. The areas are: in front of the old elementary school on Star Street; King Street about halfway down the street; and Joseph Street-from Hwy 11 about a third of the way down the street. The Mayor said a preventative maintenance plan should be created and checked each year. Sharon Johnson pointed out the culvert in the front of the Bethlehem First UMC. The drainage ditch needs cleaning out. The Mayor said the state has the right of way on Highway 11.
3. The council listened to a review of the Local Maintenance Improvement Grant funds. The town is 3 years behind on the projects which include patching and paving Star Street East from Hwy 11 to the city limits and patching and paving Shepherd Street from Hwy. 11 to Star Street. The Mayor said he would get bids for council approval. He said Shepherd Street would need to be widened or declared a one-way street in order to be paved according to state regulations.
4. The council agreed to renew a \$150,000 CD at a 6-month rate. The CD matured on 1-17-24.
5. The Mayor discussed the town home development on Star Street. The 300-unit development is in the county and Lelle would like to reach out to the developer to get the property annexed into Bethlehem. This would bring sewer closer to the town. Mike Rice pointed out that the county has a moratorium on sewer until 2026.

The council then had an open discussion on future planning ideas. The Mayor said hopefully the UDC would be approved at the February meeting and then the council could start working on the future land use map. He would like to move away from the intergovernmental agreement the town has with the county on planning. "We could hire a consulting firm to do our planning," he said.

The Mayor said there would be a huge demographic change in the area in the next 30-40 years with new industries coming to the area such as the Rivian Plant, the battery plant and the Rowan Foundation. He said Barrow County has a workforce of 40,000 with only 5,000 workers staying in the county. As a council we need to think of top priorities to get a plan into action and move forward. Council contributed ideas for the list:

1. Preventive maintenance (roads and culverts)
2. Plan for sewer
3. Annexation
4. Purchase property
5. Library/a county park with green space, walking trails.
6. Purchasing the old fire station
7. Community involvement/service/committees
8. Bringing back Star Festival
9. Increasing the business license fees (comparing fees with other towns)
10. Public discussion during regular meetings or work sessions
11. A quarterly town hall meeting for the public with the Mayor and 2 council members (no quorum)
12. Police force (Lelle pointed out that the cost of 1 police officer would be about ¼ million)
13. Electronic locks on the restrooms at the pavilion (for playground visitors to access during day)

Before the meeting ended Mike Rice spoke about purchasing property on Gifton Thomas and wanted the council's opinion on how to develop it.

The meeting adjourned at 4:45.