

AMENDMENT TO WORKSESSION FEBRUARY 2, 2015.

MINUTES ARE NOT VEBATIM.

SAFER GRANT

Chief Bennett said that he would like to apply for the Safer Grant, which is a staffing grant that would pay 100% of salaries for new Fireman if awarded the grant. He said that he wanted to let everyone know about the grant before he writes the grant and that he would like the support of the Council. He stated that it pays for 2 years of salaries. This would be about \$35,000-\$40,000 for one person and \$125,000-\$130,000 for 3 positions and that we would have to start paying the salaries in 2018. City Manager Sumner said just to tack on to what the Chief said, you are aware going through some of the budgetary processes our revenue streams are basically static with the exception of one the General Fund. And this is our mileage rate, it can go up or it could go down. From the stand point of covering \$125,000 in expenditure a mil is approximately \$60,000. This could mean that in year 3 basically August 2017 you would need to look at a millage rate increase of around 2 mil which is probably 4.375 to 6.75 to come up with that additional expenditure. Mayor Pro Tem Clendenin said what else will be coming up between now and then, this used to a little nice towns, I tell you we are trying to outdo Valdosta and everybody else. We are a small bedroom community. We have percentage wise one of the largest police departments in South Georgia and now you want more Fireman, get a volunteer fire department. This is becoming one of the most expensive cities in South Georgia. We are talking DDA, Historical Society, we are talking about a new Police department building and Fire department, putting another station on the other side of the tracks. It has to end somewhere. We can't keep spending, we have to find ways to conserve. With all due respect Chief I understand your position. Councilmember Davis asked the City Manager if we take on this \$125,000 expenditure for one year are there any other alternatives? Anywhere else to find the money. No said City Manager Sumner. Councilmember Benjamin asked how many lives have been lost in the last 25 years. Chief Bennett said 8 lives, 3 in the last few years. He stated this did not end with your mentality. What is the future of Hahira? He stated that this is 3 years away and nobody can know the future, we do not know where anyone will be then. We cannot put up a fence around Hahira. Councilmember Benjamin said that his take on the Fire department went from no existence to where we are now. The Citizens of District 1 have had improvements and it is the goal to accommodate all of our citizens. No one wants to raise anything but he citizens want certain services. The citizens would be surprised at what we do have and this is not good. We need to improve the quality of life and weigh the benefits to the citizens of Hahira. Councilmember Benjamin said we should look at what we are accomplishing to make sure the citizens are safe as possible. The cycle cannot continue, we have a band aid fix to get the 24 hour coverage that we need now. It is doable for now until we have another fix and this would make it free for a few years. Councilmember Davis asked what the population is now. It is about 3,500 per City Manager. We have one full-time employee and 14 part time employees in the Fire department with no volunteers. Mayor Pro Tem Clendenin said he thought we had volunteers. Chief Bennett said no that the training is 96 hours and people just cannot do it. Mayor Pro Tem Clendenin said you know we have water rate increases and we have to draw the line somewhere. We raise taxes, we raise water rates and then 3% per year. What are we going to do about the Police department, the sewer lines and the holding ponds? We cannot keep taxing people. The Mayor said you are talking three years away, we do not have to do anything right now. If we get the Safer grant they will not hire anyone for a while, we won't know about the grant if it is awarded until August or September, then we have the hiring process and then you have

2 years after that. I do think that things have started to pick back up a little bit, I just do not think a mill increase will be necessary. The Mayor said no one knows what will happen in three years. We have really blocked off the City limits, no-one is building, we are not interested in any new subdivisions or anything else coming up so we basically have a little fence around Hahira. We are saying no we do not want you to come in here.

Councilmember Benjamin said you have to constantly try to improve, the benefits of what it does for the citizens we have to have some type of balance. Yes we have built a Fire station and purchased a new truck but we cannot stop there, we have to protect the citizens. This cycle we have now cannot stop.

Mayor Pro Tem Clendenin said he would like to see the Mayor and City Manager put together a 5 year plan, what we need to look for in the next 5-10 years. We have sewer issues that need to be discussed, water rates, Police department and Fire department. What is the 5 year plan and 10 year plan? Every City has one. City Manager Sumner said that in terms of infrastructure 5 year plan, we have a comprehensive plan. Mayor Pro Tem Clendenin said Valdosta has one, Lowndes County has one. What kind of taxes are we looking at to support this for the next five years? City Manager Sumner said those are policy decisions made by the Council every year. Mayor Pro Tem Clendenin said we do not have a five year plan. Sumner said we have been talking about a 5 year Capital infrastructure plan, we talked about it at the retreat last August and will talk about it again on Friday at the retreat.

Councilmember Barfield said that before he makes a decision on something that will commit us to \$125,000 he said he would like to know how we measure up, talking about cities our size, how does Hahira measure up. He said he would like to see a simple study. Chief Bennett said he reviewed some of that last week and we are on the back of the bus. Barfield said that before we say right away go ahead we really need to see a small study to make sure we are making the proper move because again he has been in grant situation where later comes sooner than you think. We have to move prudently, I think we need to make sure of what we are doing. We need to be able to say this is what we really need, something we are way behind on. He asked if this is a grant that is available every year. Chief Bennett said it is but we do not know how much will be allocated in later years. Barfield said that he believes you need to fight for what your job is and that is what we hire you to do. Chief Bennett said that he appreciates your thought on that, we do not want to become complacent. Councilmember Davis said that his original thought was possible other funding but the only option may be to look at an increase in millage rate to pay for our incredible responsibility. I take pause because I do not know where we will be at in 2017. We are now looking at something that can impact SPLOST and LOST revenues but I am in favor of the Safer grant. We need to find a way to fund it, we need to be proactive, keep going don't stop now. City Manager Sumner said that in terms of other revenue sources the budget is not a Chinese puzzle, it is out there for anyone to see. He has done the best he could in the previous 9 years but of the 3 main funding sources, Fines & Forfeitures, LOST and Millage rate, 2 of the 3 are fixed and you cannot anticipate them. We thought LOST could expand but Hahira is getting far less than anticipated, but we were cut out of any type of increase along with all the small cities in Lowndes County. It looks like we are locked into that small number from 20 years ago. Mayor Pro Tem Clendenin said we need to do a 5 year plan. City Manager Sumner said that we tried that in the past and they were not very useful, every department head has a five year plan during the retreat. Clendenin said that we need to have some type of statistical analysis based on the last 5 years. He then asked Councilmember Barfield if he does this at the University, Barfield said yes but they are not useful, especially in today's times due to the economy.

