

**WALNUT GROVE CITY COUNCIL**

**MINUTES**

**THURSDAY APRIL 14, 2016**

Present at Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Mayor Lamar Lee

Carol Witcher

Kathy Dimsdale

Wayne Dimsdale

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Meeting called to Order by Mayor Lee

**II. INVOCATION**

Given by Don Cannon

**III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**IV. AGENDA APPROVAL**

Motion made by Wayne Dimsdale to approve the agenda, seconded by Carol Witcher – Motion Passed

**V. PUBLIC COMMENT**

None

**VI. MINUTES APPROVAL – March 10, 2016 City Council Meeting**

Motion made by Wayne Dimsdale to approve the Minutes as presented, seconded by Carol Witcher – Motion Passed.

**VII. PUBLIC HEARING:**

Conducted by: Lee Abney (here for Joe Reitman)

**#1. VARIANCE HEARING FOR ALCOVY BUILDERS**

The hearing will allow 10 minutes for public comment before and 10 minutes after. Mr. Allen would you please step up and tell the Council what you are asking for. Patrick Allen for Alcovy Builders - to reduce the minimum square feet for residential housing from 2400 square feet to 1350 square feet for 950 Park St. Our intent is to remove a dilapidated mobile home and build a new site built home, three bedroom two bath site built home. Lee Abney – Any questions? No Questions from the Council. Would anyone else like to speak in favor of the variance? – No comment. Would anyone like to speak in opposition? Carol Witcher – I would like to make a comment. The one thing that concerns me is, is this a one-time variance? Is this going to be a

one-time variance because I don't want to set precedence because our zoning laws say that we have 2400 and now we are asking to reduce this one to 1350. I don't necessarily have an objection at that point but I do want the information stated that is this going to set a precedent if we have other builders come in or other people in the area if they come in and do. Our ordinance states 2400 and yet when I went through the records I find that we have 13 properties in that same area under 1350 so the average square footage is 1390. I personally don't have a problem with it but I don't want to have to come back some time in our zoning. Lee Abney - I'll address that in two ways. First off yes, this will set a precedence that this can be taken and used as evidence in the future. But future contractors and what we will have to do is basically justify why. And one of the reasons we made this decision is because the improvements that are lacking. So we are removing a structure that is uninhabitable and dilapidated and it will basically improve the land and improve the tax base. I presume that the square footage was grandfathered in and that is evidence that would back up what it is and surrounding properties. That would protect us if someone else was asking for a variance in another area. The variances are run on a case by case basis. So if they come in and we are looking at it you have to show reason. It appears looking at this variance it kinda meets the goals. Carol Witcher – It is very dilapidated it is evident once you go past it and I would think if you are a resident there you would be concerned about rodents the way it is overgrown and unkempt. But I just want to make sure we don't run into a situation where we have dug ourselves a hole. Lee Abney – When a contractor approaches the city, say they want to build a house in an area where everything around it is 2400 square feet and they wanted a variance, we could point out that this was a different situation. This is a situation where a variance is appropriate. Wayne Dimsdale – Ah this piece of property the way I understand it under our ordinances he would have to replace it with a trailer and the trailer would actually hang off over the property line. And this would be replacing it with what we would have ordinarily have done in a trailer park. So I think it is a pretty good deal if we do the variance. That's my answer to her under our ordinance of a trailer park. They require to put a double wide to be put back in there. Mr. Allen – Yes sir. Wayne Dimsdale – It has to be so long and so many square feet. And by the time you do that we don't have the variance on each side of the lot.

Carol Witcher – I would like to ask Mr. Allen a question. When I have gone back the last three days I notice the sign is lying on the hillside there. Mr. Allen – Yes. Carol Witcher – Is it possible to get that in the ground, standing up? Mr. Allen – how long does it need to remain? Kathy Glass – After tonight it can come down. Alan Barton- It just got knocked down in the last day or two. Mr. Allen – just today is the first time I noticed it. Lee Abney – Are there any other questions? If not then I will close the discussion portion and the council can make a motion to either approve the variance or deny it.

Carol Witcher made a motion the variance should be granted, seconded by Wayne Dimsdale – Motion passed.

## #2 CONDITIONAL USE REQUEST – MORRIS SMITH

Lee Abney – The next thing we have is a conditional use permit request and it will have the same 10 minute in favor and 10 minute of opposition. We will open the public hearing. Is Mr. Smith present? Mayor Lee – No. Lee Abney – Well just to bring you up to date Mr. Smith currently owns an agriculturally zoned piece of property and he would like to grow vegetables in a vegetable garden because he wants to harvest those to sell. He doesn't want to rezone to a commercial zone he wants to retain the agricultural zone and he agrees to remove those vegetables off site to sell them. So there will be no commercial activity. I have reviewed this and it seems that his use would be in the spirit of the agricultural zone in place. Is there anyone here who would like to speak in favor or this request? Does anyone want to speak opposing this request? If not we will close the public hearing. Does anyone have any questions for me? Carol Witcher – Isn't this what we went through when Joe gave the talk about it and we all agreed that it would be perfectly fine for him to grow his veggies and ... Wayne Dimsdale – we didn't vote on it at that time. Kathy Glass –We didn't run it in the paper prior to and it needed to be run in the paper. Carol Witcher - It has now? Kathy Glass – Yes it has now so now is the proper time to vote on it.

Motion made to grant the conditional use permit by Carol Witcher, seconded by Wayne Dimsdale – Motion passed.

## VIII. PUBLIC WORKS REPORT –

Given by Alan Barton – Public Works Director

Well looks like everything is going good. We have the three Crepe Myrtle in the roundabout. We are in the process of doing something with the grass there. I sprayed the other grass and killed it. We are in the process of putting down sod. We have a few things left to do on that. We are cleaning downtown a good bit. We are going to get it where you can eat off the sidewalks. Made some improvements in the park. There are a few more things I want to build for the kids. The little building has been completed. Everything came out just right on it. I don't know if any of you have gotten over there to see it or not but it turned out good. Other than that everything is going like it should. They are getting ready to plow up the spray fields and sprig the Burmuda grass in the next thirty days. Carol Witcher – May I asked Wayne a question? You are always talking about your grass wouldn't this be a perfect time to use the grass you have in your yard? Wayne – It takes a while for it to fill in. You have to sprig it in every six inches. It grows like carpet. It turns brown in the winter if it doesn't have water. You are welcome to get some sprigs of that if you want it. Alan Barton - I don't think we need that. We need something that is a little more hardy than that. Wayne Dimsdale – It's hardy. Alan Barton – something you don't have to water. Wayne Dimsdale – you don't have to water it. That's what I'm saying, it will go 6 to 8 weeks without watering. As soon as it rains you can sit out there and watch it turn green again. Carol Witcher – the way the weather has been it will stay green. Mayor Lee – The Lion's Club has adopted the Parkway. Alan Barton – that's right. Mayor Lee - and I think they might want to put in the sod. Alan Barton – well that's what I

was... Lamar Lee – well it's not etched in stone we need to check with them. Ms. June will tell you they have a cleanup day this Saturday. So I will be able to talk with Mark Moore on Saturday morning. We'll see where he is at with that. June Pringle - The Lion's Club has a yard sale scheduled on the 23<sup>rd</sup> here in the Park. There will be food and if anybody has anything. It is kinda like a glorified garage sale. This money will go back to the Lion's Club. Carol Witcher complimented Alan Barton on how the city looks. Alan Barton – We have done a lot of edging where stuff got dirty over the winter. All the dirt piled up on the side of the curbs. Next month it will look a whole lot better from the city limits sign to the city limits sign. We are going to get it shaped up and keep it that way. I have told the guys this is how it is going to be. All the privy hedge and growth on the right of way will be cut down and cleaned up. Sidewalks, we have two bad places one near the BBQ and one near the liquor store. Wayne Dimsdale – we've been talking about getting a grant to re-do our sidewalks and make them handicap assessable. There is a stretch near the day care we have already looked at. We looked at down Park St. too maybe to join in with this too. Down toward the school that way and maybe carry it on that way or something. There are several places we have looked at. Wayne Dimsdale – I'm not too fond of having a sidewalk in front of my house but kids are walking down the road to Emerald Cove from school and they need a sidewalk to walk on. And we have no sidewalks down Park St. back down to the school. Alan Barton - There are a lot of kids that walk down the sidewalk and then when they get to the end they have to get out in the road. Wayne Dimsdale – That's what I'm talking about. We need to do something before something happens. Alan Barton – I've seen a lot of people on the sidewalk up near the Waffle House and when they get to the end they are walking down Hwy 138.

Lisa Whitehead spoke out on sidewalk problem on Old Hwy 138. We have a sidewalk and then it stops there is a gravel driveway and then it stops. There is a trailer or a rental house back there. Then the sidewalk starts again. I know personally on several occasions my husband and I have been on our motorcycle and it's hard to get by there. If you are going up the road like toward the Waffle House. It is weird to describe it the sand makes you, like if you are going the regular speed on that road the sand forces you down. I know at one time when the city paved they put a little of the black tar or asphalt down and I don't know why there is not a side walk across there or a little ramp that goes across there. People that don't ride down it a lot they don't realize it but there are a lot of motorcycles that go down that road. Alan Barton – the sidewalk does go all the way across but the sand washes over it. I try to keep that sand..Lisa Whitehead – there is a sidewalk there? Alan Barton – Yes, it goes all the way through that Wayne Dimsdale – I thought it stopped. Alan Barton – No there are three houses up that drive. The sidewalk goes all the way through. I've taken the front end loader and scraped that sand. Lisa Whitehead – He did that last year. Alan Barton – I've done it three or four times. I scrape that sand and put it back up in the driveway and try to build it up where it will hold. But that water comes from up in there. And there is really nothing we can do. When they paved 138 they did put some asphalt there but the sand keeps coming down in there. The only thing you can do is put culverts in there and cut ditches down each side of it. But that ain't the City's..it is

pretty much a driveway. It is not a street. Lisa Whitehad – alright that's what I was going to ask. Alan Barton – There is nothing the city can do because it is not a city street, it is a driveway unless we go to the home owners up there and make them do something. Wayne Dimsdale – we have some the same way on Greenhill Way. And it washes down in the street. Alan Barton – And I have to take to take the frontend loader over there and scrape it all out. It is just like where you are talking about. I took the frontend loader and scraped the grass and dirt off the road. It wouldn't let the water run off the road. I pretty much do all I can do with the situation the way it is. I don't know anything else to do. I keep it as clean as I can. It was 8 inches deep when I first started keeping it cleaned out. Mayor Lee – That is a private driveway so there is nothing we can do. We keep it off the road and off the sidewalk. Other than that it is up to the homeowner. Alan Barton – That's about all I've got on Public Works.

#### **IX. FINANCIAL REPORT**

Given by Katherine A. Glass, City Clerk

The financials are in the back of your notebook. Please let me know if you have any questions. Carol Witcher – Kathy I have a question about the sanitation fees. Are we seeing an increase in collections? Mayor Lee – Just a minute and we will address that. Carol Witcher – It just jumped at me. Wayne Dimsdale – Speaking of budgets we got that coming up. Mayor Lee – We will address that in a minute.

Wayne Dimsdale made a motion the financials be accepted as presented, seconded by Carol Witcher, Motion passed.

#### **X. CLERK'S REPORT**

Given by Katherine A. Glass, Clerk

30 citations were issued by Walton County Sheriff's Department. We didn't have any citations from the GA State Patrol and no citations from the Walton Animal Control. We didn't have any business licenses or any permits issued. We did have 18 ball park reservations and 2 pavilion reservations. That's all I have.

#### **XI. CODE ENFORCEMENT REPORT**

Not Present

#### **XII. MAYOR'S REPORT**

Cal Barton is back in Walton County and is back with the GA State Patrol's Office. He will be working in the City again. Carol Witcher – Is that Cal? Mayor Lee – Yes Cal Barton. He's been down to AL and now he's back home. He's back so you will see a little difference on the speed and traffic around here now. Now I will asked Sonya Cox to give a report on the sanitation. She's been working hard on that. Sonya Cox – Not just me, Kathy too.

Sanitation Report – Sonya Cox – We sent out our sanitation bills in March. We sent out notices to all the customers who were delinquent by \$200.00 or more. We gave them until March 31<sup>st</sup> to pay for their service or we let them know it would be discontinued. So we have

discontinued services for all those who have not paid. We are getting phone calls and customers in every day wanting to know how they can pay their balance off or we will try to work something out with them and make arrangements. When we started we were in arrears for about \$19,000.00 and as of today we have collected \$5,364.29. And then the last week I've been sending out letters to the homeowners. I went back to the tax assessor's office to find out who the homeowners are and sent them letters. So we are still working hard to get these accounts zeroed out. We are trying not to turn these over to a collection agency because that will be our last resort. So I'll let you know how it is going next month. Mayor Lee - Thank you Sonya. Sonya Cox – You're welcome.

All right, road project on re-paving Park Street. There is going to have to be a lot of deep patching on it. We've got the DOT giving us a \$100,000.00 grant because of their educational road project and they gave us \$100,000.00 with that. Jimmy Parker and Precision is getting up the bids now and looking to see how much patching we are going to have to do. Probably Park Street will have to be cut all the way down to the dirt and start back again from the base. It ain't going to be cheap. From the roundabout here at the High School to Hwy 81 they are looking at a rough estimate of \$160,000.00. So they are doing a little more trimming and cutting with that. So we will know a little more about it a little later on. Probably by the next council meeting we will know about what's going to be done there.

We have to do something because the road is coming all apart. So we are going to look at that. Carol Witcher – will it affect the side boundaries? Are we going to increase.. Lamar Lee – that is what they are looking at. There are a lot of things they are looking at. I can't say what is going to be what. But it is just a wait and see thing right now until Jimmy comes back and tells me what we are going to have to do.

Work Session to discuss the budget for next year is set for April 28<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 a.m. Council needs to be thinking about what we need to look at. And this council knows there are a lot of things that we are going to have to look at. Carol Witcher – time and place? Mayor Lee – At City Hall at 11:00 o'clock. Kathy Glass –Everyone should have gotten an email about it. Mayor Lee – Well all right then. That's all I've got.

### **XIII. OLD BUSINESS**

Carol Witcher – Do we have an update on Dollar General? Are they breaking ground or.. Mayor Lee – they have given all their paperwork back along with money for permits. Ready to break ground anytime. Carol Witcher – What about the Heritage Festival? Where are we with planning on this? It's going to be in October. It's going to slip up on us. Mayor Lee – The Lion's Club is going to handle that this year. Carol Witcher – Really? Mayor Lee – Yes. Carol Witcher –and how much of it are they going to do? Mayor Lee –well we are in the planning stages with it. We've got the Heritage Festival covered. It's going to be alright. Carol Witcher – And I have one more thing. The Splash Park, where is that? Mayor Lee – we are still looking at that. We are still looking at the Splash Park. As soon as we find out what we are going to do we will bring that up. Mayor Lee – Anything else? Carol Witcher – Review of the

Ordinances – will that be on the Work Session? Joe had advised us in January.. Mayor Lee – Joe will be with us in the work session so we will have everything. I talked with Joe just before I came over here. Carol Witcher – I think that about covers it. Mayor Lee –Anything you want to cover Wayne? Wayne Dimsdale – No I'll make a comment under new business.

#### XIV. NEW BUSINESS

##### **Walnut Grove Library – Director, Ben Carter**

Ben Carter – Good evening Mr. Mayor and Council. I would like to take a minute to introduce myself and some staff members. I am from Gratis and currently live in Conyers and work in Madison. I technically drive around Walnut Grove 4 times a week. It is very interesting to see how Walnut Grove has changed. If I might, I would like to present you with our funding request for the next fiscal year. You get the first and official copy. We are asking for a modest increase of \$3,000.00. We are prepared for whatever may happen. Our goal for this \$3,000.00 is to add open hours. We have a very fancy letter asking for money and a very fancy justification letter explaining what we need it for. The third sheet is the budget. The fourth sheet is the one I want to bring your attention to. We call it our brag sheet. There are two statistics I want to bring to your attention, programs and patrons. Over the last fiscal year we've seen an almost 29% increase in program attendance. In one year. No other library in Uncle Remus, and we cover six counties, comes close to that increase. The same goes for patron visits. An almost 33% increase and again no other library in Uncle Remus comes close. So Walnut Grove is a relatively young library in the grand scheme of things. In Uncle Remus we have one library that is celebrating it's centennial this year. So Walnut Grove, relatively speaking, is a young library but it is growing by leaps and bounds. So again my name is Ben Carter and I'm a director with the Uncle Remus Library System. Many of you know Amy who is our fearless library manager. You might not remember Nancy. Nancy is our Member Library Services Librarian at our regional office. Do you have any questions? Carol Witcher – Could we have just a moment to review this in case we might formulate a question? Ben Carter – Definitely if you would like to keep reviewing it I'll do some grandstanding on the rest of the items in the packet. Mr. Carter reviewed the packet. Carol Witcher – What is the average age of your patrons? Amy Hicks – we have a lot of homeschoolers. I have a parent right now, she has 50 on her card and her husband has 50 because they use those materials constantly. She uses our books as her teaching tools so we see lots of families. Carol Witcher – and what about the older, like me with snow white hair? Amy Hicks – we have book clubs. They really enjoy it. I have some patrons that don't want to get out at night so they are our morning people. Carol Witcher – it looks like you have tried to accommodate the demands. Amy Hicks- we try our best to make everybody happy. Carol Witcher – would it be suffice to say the library is the only educational, disregarding the schools, in Walnut Grove? The only educational experience that exists in Walnut Grove? Free to citizens? Amy Hicks – absolutely. We have after school, copious amounts of teens that come in. They have the I pads now that require Wi-Fi. We are the only ones with it. So we constantly see students come in. It's a little escape. Carol Witcher – I've seen a parking lot of cars. It took me three or four trips to realize they are using

the Wi-Fi. I thought they were having a community party. Ben Carter – even when we are closed people can use the Wi-Fi and they can use downloadable apps. We encourage people to use the Wi-Fi because we get to count them. Every time they connect to the Wi-Fi. Charles, our IT guy, has written a little script that every time they connect to the Wi-Fi. Carol Witcher- so is that counting towards the number of people that come in and out? Ben Carter – it is not counted as people coming in and out. It is counted as Wi-Fi use. Sessions on Wi-Fi listed on your back sheet. So for 2015 we had 1587 sessions of people that connected to our Wi-Fi with their own devices. That was not using the devices within the library. We are very proud of the fact there is no password on Wi-Fi so you can pull into the parking lot at any time and use the Wi-Fi. Ben Carter – Any other questions? If you have any questions after I leave you can always contact Amy. My contact information is in the letter. Again thank you for your time.

**XV. DISCUSSION ITEMS**

**XVI. COUNCIL COMMENTS**

Kathy Dimsdale: None

Wayne Dimsdale: None

Carol Witcher: I do. I feel like when we sit in this position we should thank those who came and hope your questions were answered. As Mr. Carson said as we walk out the door we all have email and we have a website and you can call me at home if you need to. We are the City Council of Walnut Grove. We don't own the town we simply serve. It is a privilege and an honor to serve this community. Thank you to everybody who is here and thank you to our visiting attorney and the work he has done for us. And I'm glad Wayne is so much better.

Mayor Lee: Thank you Lee Abney for coming tonight.


Wayne Dimsdale made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Carol Witcher – Motion Passed.

Meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

This 12 day of May, 2016.



Mayor Lamar Lee



Katherine A. Glass, City Clerk