

Town of Kingston Springs - City Commission Minutes

- 1 Mayor Corlew called the August 16, 2007 Kingston Springs City Commission meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

Roll Call:

|                  |         |
|------------------|---------|
| Laurie Cooper    | Present |
| Gary Corlew      | Present |
| Larry Craig      | Present |
| Ray Crouch, Sr.  | Present |
| Debbie Finch     | Present |
| Pam Lorenz       | Present |
| David Risner     | Absent  |
| Chuck Sleighter  | Present |
| Richard Swafford | Present |

- 2 The City Commission minutes for the July 19, 2007 meeting have been circulated.

Corrections to the minutes:  
There were no corrections.

Motion to Approve:  
Commissioner Sleighter

Second:  
Commissioner Lorenz

Discussion:  
None

Those in favor of the motion:  
Corlew, Lorenz, Sleighter, Swafford

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Those opposed to the motion:

None

The motion passed / failed:

The motion passed.

### 3 Commissioners announcements:

- Commissioner Lorenz stated that she had provided a sign-in sheet for those citizens that would like to receive a monthly email. This is her way of trying to get the message out.
- Commissioner Sleighter stated that he did not like the birthday card mailed from city hall. He would have appreciated it more had it been signed by everyone at city hall. He stated that city hall is becoming Corporate America.

### 4 Community Input:

- Dale Graham stated to the commission that people in the audience can not hear them and suggested that they use microphones.
- Adair Schippers stated that it was nice to have public present at the meetings and invited them to attend the county budget workshop.

### 5 The department reports were circulated:

Motion to approve as circulated:

Commissioner Crouch

Second:

Commissioner Sleighter

Discussion:

None

Those in favor of the motion:

Corlew, Crouch, Lorenz, Sleighter, Swafford

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Those opposed to the motion:

None

The motion passed / failed:

The motion passed.

### 6 Update by the City Manager:

- Mrs. Cooper stated that all the updates had been placed on the agenda.

### 7 Old Business:

#### 7A Sewer Repair Projects:

Mrs. Cooper stated that the sewer repairs on Main Street had been projected to be completed in 90 days. They were completed in 28 days. Mrs. Cooper requested approval for pay request #1 from the contractor for \$225,683.87.

Motion:

Commissioner Lorenz made a motion to approve the pay request.

Second:

Commissioner Sleighter

Discussion:

Mayor Corlew stated that he had been called by Channel 17 News because a citizen had complained to them that the town was dragging their feet on the project. Once they were informed about being way ahead of schedule they were no longer interested in the story.

Those in favor of the motion:

Corlew, Crouch, Lorenz, Sleighter, Swafford

Those opposed to the motion:

None

The motion passed / failed:

The motion passed.

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8 New Business:

8A Uncollectible Sewer Charges:

Motion:

Commissioner Crouch made a motion to approve the \$1,514.59 in uncollectible debt.

Second:

Commissioner Sleighter

Discussion:

Mrs. Cooper stated that Second South Cheatham Utility District does an excellent job on collections.

Those in favor of the motion:

Corlew, Crouch, Lorenz, Sleighter, Swafford

Those opposed to the motion:

None

The motion passed / failed:

The motion passed.

8B Roadwork:

Mrs. Cooper stated that the light poles had been damaged in shipping which will delay the lighting project. The contractor will continue with guttering, pouring curbs and putting down binder. The next step will be the light poles and sidewalks. The contractor hopes to have the binder down in about (3) weeks. The cost for Phase II to date is \$608,145.00. This includes \$125,000.00 in overages.

Phase III will be from the railroad downtown pass the Church of Christ to Merrylog Lane. The sidewalks will be continued from the elementary school. Cost projection sheets were given to the board. Mrs. Cooper also stated that right-of-ways would have to be purchased.

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**Motion:**

Commissioner Crouch made a motion to authorize the city manager to put Phase III out to bid.

**Second:**

Commissioner Sleighter

**Discussion:**

Commissioner Lorenz asked when repairs to Oak Street would be done and was told that would be a spring project.

**Those in favor of the motion:**

Corlew, Crouch, Lorenz, Sleighter, Swafford

**Those opposed to the motion:**

None

**The motion passed / failed:**

The motion passed.

*(Comments have been edited. Detailed comments are on disk and can be heard at city hall.)*

**8C Richard Gibbs and Keith Honchell - Property Tax Discussion:**

Keith Honchell (407 Allison Court) presented the board with handouts and questioned them for a lengthy time on several issues about the budget.

Debbie Finch, City Recorder: Mr. Honchell, I offered to sit down with you and explain the budget last month. You did not call me or come to city hall.

Commissioner Crouch: It appears to me that you are going through the budget and making judgment calls about what the board has decided. That is fine for you to do that but it should be done at the ballot box.

Mr. Honchell: It is my prerogative to stand here at this meeting and do that.

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Commissioner Crouch: I resent the fact that you have come to this board's meeting where we are trying to conduct business to lecture us.

Commissioner Crouch: I am in the phone book and your elected representative and you have never contacted me, yet you would come here tonight and waste the entire council's time and all the people who are visiting to tell us stuff that you assume to be fact, most of which was incorrect because you do not understand municipal accounting.

Commissioner Crouch: I know that you are well intended and I don't want to be critical of anybody that wants to know more. I would sit down with you and talk for hours about this, but you did not ask. You were invited to city hall where you could view all public documents and did not come. The thing about this situation is you did not do your homework.

Mr. Honchell : I do not know where you are at.

Commissioner Crouch: This is not a public hearing it is a business meeting. The public hearing for the budget was held and you did not come.

Mr. Honchell : You have made it clear to me that you don't think I have the right to be here. I asked what I had to do to be heard and was told that I had to be put on the agenda and that is what I did.

Commissioner Crouch: I do not feel you have the right to be saying some of the things that you are saying because they are wrong and you are telling us to violate the law.

Commissioner Crouch: This all could have been resolved  
....(interrupted by Mr. Honchell)

Mr. Honchell: In secret....where nobody in this room would be exposed to these numbers.

Larry Craig, City Attorney: suggested to the mayor that he call for order.

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Commissioner Crouch: I call for a point of order and request that the board limit any more comments from this gentlemen to ten minutes.

Commissioner Lorenz : We are each individuals and nobody speaks for each other, we only speak for ourselves.

**Motion:**

Commissioner Crouch made a motion to take statements only from Mr. Honchell and to limit the statements to ten minutes.

**Second:**

Commissioner Sleighter

**Those in favor of the motion:**

Corlew, Crouch, Sleighter, Swafford

**Those opposed to the motion:**

Commissioner Lorenz

**Discussion:**

None

**The motion passed / failed:**

The motion passed.

Mr. Honchell: How would I get the numbers for the sewer depreciation? Is it available at city hall? We can't answer, that's what this is about. Oh, I see, now we have changed the rules. Unfortunately I think that his council has exemplified what the concerns and dis-concerns of this group are. The citizens of this city are very concerned and the confidence that we have in this council is exemplified in the way that you are conducting business. Whether you like me or don't like me should have no bearing on the fact that I'm sitting here and pointing out numbers and asking why do we do this and looking for answers and I get this lecture about how I don't, that I'm an ignorant so and so and that's ok, I can handle that, I'm a big guy.

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Pam, I appreciate what you had to say and I respect everyone on this council and treated you with respect and if it came any other way than that, I apologize that was never my intent. What I am looking for is to learn. I would love to know what the debt service is. When I look at the budget I don't understand it. I see (7) million dollars in debt service. How do we get out of that. What's the plan? Where's the plan? WHERE IS THE PLAN? I don't see a plan. Folks it is a business and you know what you have to run it like a business and you have to have a plan. As a resident I don't see a plan and I have very little confidence that we as a group can work through it without a plan.....and that is less than 10 minutes!

### Richard Gibbs:

Mr. Gibbs: I can get up here and talk but I want this board to respond back to me. I'm not Keith Honchell, I'm a new guy and I would appreciate you doing whatever needs to be done to change the rules.

Commissioner Lorenz: I don't know how to do that. I want to have dialog and I opposed that motion because I want to hear what the public has to say. I really, really want to meet with Keith and Debbie and explain the plan. There is a plan! We have a good government here and yes it is hard to absorb. I have had to spend hours and attend seminars to learn these things. This is a time consuming process.

Commissioner Swafford: You can't learn it in two months. It takes more time. Come to the meetings and listen and learn.

Commissioner Sleighter: We have a budget workshop every year. It is advertised every year and this year we had one person attend the workshop. I look at the budget thoroughly every year and for years Mrs. Finch has been telling us that we need to watch our expenses and that we need to cut back. We pushed that aside and now it has caught up with us and we have had to raise taxes a substantial amount (which I opposed). When you start looking at things to cut the first thing that comes to me is personnel and I was shot down on that too. We all look at things differently. I have spent hours punching numbers, then running down to city hall and asking Debbie if this is how you got to this point and she would say yes or no you have to do it this way.

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I will have spent (14) years as a commissioner and I struggle with the budget every year because it is an entirely different accounting system than corporate accounting. Debbie does such a good job that we don't worry. We know if there is a problem Debbie is going to bring it to our attention to be addressed. Debbie does a heck of a job on this budget and it is not something you can learn in the course of one evening at a city council meeting.

Mr. Gibbs : All of you are good people. No one is saying that anyone is bad. We're just trying to understand. The whole issue with everyone being upset is the 66% tax increase.

Mr. Gibbs : Thank you Mr. Sleighter for voting against the tax increase and Mr. Crouch you voted wrong. How did we get to this point?

Commissioner Crouch : I don't like to raise taxes but it would have been irresponsible of me because we had already been told by Debbie, by our auditors and the comptrollers office that we were scraping by every year. Every year we had to cut things out of capital improvements. The infrastructure is what cities are built on. Your a popular politician when you vote for parks and unpopular when you vote for sewer.

Mr. Gibbs: If we were in that situation why did you approve the downtown project. How were you planning on paying for the 1.1 million dollars?

Commissioner Crouch: We were going to take the paving funds to make the bond payments.

Mr. Gibbs: That was a bad decision. I have lived in Harpeth Meadows for 17 years and the town has never done anything to our roads. The people in Harpeth Meadows pay a large portion of the property taxes received by the town.

Mr. Gibbs : There was no planning done and no foresight to figure out how it was going to be paid for without increasing taxes 66%.

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Mr. Gibbs : We would have been here in force had we known about the tax increase before hand.

Mr. Gibbs : What is done is done and you can't go back and fix it, but it is my understanding that you could go back and revise the budget. What has been done to reduce cost?

Mr. Gibbs : The town has 14 employees and pays \$80,000 in health insurance for the employees. I own a business and I provided insurance for my 17 employees and I am paying less than \$53,000 a year. Why are you paying \$80,000?

Mr. Gibbs: At what point is it too much tax on the homeowners, where does it stop?

Mr. Gibbs : What about the master plan?

Laurie Cooper, City Manager : The town was turned down for the road grants because we did not have a master plan, which was not a requirement for the grants but was the edge that other towns had in receiving the grants. We are going through that process now. It will not help with the present road plan but it will help with future grants.

Commissioner Crouch: stated that there was a lot of logic to fixing it right the first time rather than just continuing to pave.

Mr. Gibbs : We are a bedroom community and we are never going to be anything more than that.

Mayor Corlew: What is your definition of a bedroom community?

Mr. Gibbs : It is where most of the towns income comes from people living in homes.

Commissioner Crouch: That is the reason why we want to build the towns infrastructure to be able to add enough commercial growth to support our population.

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Mr. Gibbs : I have talked to people in business about coming to Kingston Springs and they said there was no way they would come to Kingston Springs because of all the restrictions, all the fees and all the crap they have to pay to build something here.

Commissioner Crouch: People are paying double our fees to build in Franklin. It is important to take the long view on our infrastructure if you take the short view we would always remain a bedroom community.

Mr. Gibbs: A bedroom community is all I want to be.

Commissioner Crouch: From strategic planning sessions the people of the town would like to have shops. Not a Wal-mart but small shops.

Mr. Gibbs : Did you feel that the road project would bring those businesses here?

Commissioner Crouch : It already has. The next day after the council committed to the road project, property exchanged hands and two business were build on Main Street.

Commissioner Crouch: I honestly believe that this will be the last property tax increase for many, many years. We had to make up for lowering the taxes for the previous 30 years.

Mr. Gibbs : My property re-appraisal went up 25% so my taxes for the city are going to more than double. I can afford to pay the increase, money is not a problem for me but there are people that live in this area that this is going to be a very significant problem for them.

Mr. Gibbs : I spoke with Mr. Corlew and was told that the increase for a family that owns a \$100,000.00 home would be a coke a day. A person that buys a \$100,000.00 home is probably making about \$40,000.00 a year and taking home \$28,000.00 to \$30,000.00. The tax increase just took away 1 1/2 percent of his income.

Mayor Corlew : Where are these people?

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Mr. Gibbs : I don't know where they are at but I know that a lot of people are upset about this.

Commissioner Crouch: In a representative form of government you have to tell the commission before they take the vote.

Mr. Gibbs : I understand that, but I did not know about it until I saw it on the front page of the paper.

Mrs. Graham, Owner and Editor of the Advocate Newspaper: I have been writing about the tax increase for the past three months.

Mr. Gibbs : Going back to the road project, I do not think we are going to get the return on the investment that you guys thought we would get. We can not continue to keep raising property taxes. We only have a small pool to get this money from and the pool has had enough. I don't know what the answer is. I think we need to look a cutting cost. We may have to get rid of some people. I have to get rid of people when my business goes down. What's the difference in you?

Commissioner Sleighter : That point has been made to Mrs. Cooper a number of times because I'm the one that has made it and one of our previous mayors. Every time you have short falls in your budgeting, as a business person the first place you look to make cuts is personnel. That is where I look, but I'm only one voice on the commission. I'm here to tell you that I stayed up one morning until 3:00 crunching these numbers because I was bound and determined to find some money. After crunching those numbers I found \$10,000.00 more than our ending balance.

Commissioner Lorenz: I want to speak about the salaries. This is one place that Chuck and I have differed. We have (14) employees. The only place to lose an employee is public works. The \$20,000.00 saved in that salary is not going to solve our problem.

Commissioner Crouch: The taxes that we now have on us will generate revenue for the foreseeable future. Sometimes you have to vote for what is best for the people not necessarily what pleases the people.

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Mr. Gibbs: I do not agree with that because you are elected to represent us.

Commissioner Crouch: I was elected to represent the citizens collectively. I had three or four citizens contact me and tell me they understood the tax increase and were for the increase and I received one email against the increase.

Mr. Gibbs : That was my fault. Maybe I should have read the newspaper more but had I known I can guarantee that we would have been here in force. You can amend the budget and I would like for you to amend it. I think 66% is too high.

Commissioner Sleighter: I opposed the increase but when I worked the numbers I found an additional \$10,000.00, the numbers are not there.

Mr. Gibbs : Again there's the fact that you have (14) employees and you are paying \$90,000.00 for health insurance.

Debbie Finch, City Recorder : Mr. Gibbs the town's insurance is through the state of Tennessee. I have shopped insurance, but what tends to be the pattern is that the insurance company offers you a good deal going in and once you're in they increase the premiums 30% or higher. Then the town is locked into those premiums because the state will not let you back into their program for two years.

Mr. Gibbs: I have to make adjustments by raising deductibles and that sort of thing. You could find cheaper insurance.

Mr. Gibbs : I see another place to save money. Why do we have police department in Kingston Springs? Why? Pegasus doesn't have one and they seem to get along just fine. What would that save us if we did away with the police department and let the county patrol.

Laurie Cooper, City Manager: Our department is not just a police department. They are firefighters and have medical training to be first responders.

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Commissioner Lorenz: We have citizens that want more coverage and would like to add additional officers. For everyone that doesn't like something we have somebody who likes it.

Mayor Corlew : We had one commissioner that wanted to add (2) additional officers this year.

Mr. Gibbs: You can not afford more people, I don't know that you can afford what we have now.

Mr. Gibbs : I have made my point.

Commissioner Sleighter: What was said here tonight were all valid points.

John McElroy : I just can not sit here anymore. I live at 215 Woodlands Drive. We are talking against each other on this whole thing. You can say what you want to, this road project is what has caused the budget crisis and all of you commissioners with the exception of Pam voted for the road project.

Commissioner Swafford : I did not vote for the road project.

John McElroy : I disagree. I have researched it and it was voted in unanimously. We have spent a lot of money and the income is not there because this is an extraordinary expense for this little community and talking about taking away an employee or taking away the health insurance is not going to solve the problem. This whole discussion should have happened three or four years ago when the road project came up.

John McElroy : I think all of us, myself included should have been asking how are we going to pay for this instead of sitting here and allowing it to happen. We knew this was going on, it was well publicized.

Mr. Gibbs : I agree, and I don't want it to happen again.

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Commissioner Sleighter : The project has actually been scaled back. The original plan included underground utilities. The cost was going to be another million dollars. So we said no. The thing that made this project move along was that we had applied for grants for two years in a row and were turned down and the general consensus in the community was disappointment. So we discussed applying for another grant or biting the bullet and doing the project on our own and that was the decision that was made.

Mr. Gibbs : Is there somebody in this city that knows the resources and where to go to get those resources from the state?

Larry Craig, City Attorney : We are firmly aware of the resources and make every effort to acquire them. Unfortunately many of these grants that are passed down from the feds for administration and through the state are tied to the median income. We fall outside of a majority of the grants and do not qualify.

Larry Craig, City Attorney: We have had other forms of master plans that are on file and have been adopted like the land use plan, transportation plan and a 10 year road plan. The current master plan is more for the potential use of certain areas of property in the town that would benefit the city.

Laurie Cooper, City Manager: We had a master plan for Burns Park and the brought in the public before we ever did the first thing. Technically the public designed that park.

Mr. Gibbs: I have said what I needed to say and I hoped you got the message.

Commissioner Lorenz: I did get the message. One that the communication did not work for a lot of people. We have a commitment out here and we have to deal with it. We welcome input and are happy to explain why we do what we do. No matter how we vote somebody is not going to be happy, but we really do try to do what is best. I also invite you again to participate in the election.

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Laurie Cooper, City Manager: I stated this at the last meeting and I am stating it again. We really do welcome you at city hall. We will spend time with you and explain whatever your concerns are.

Mr. Honchell : What about the minutes on the web-site. I could not find last months.

Laurie Cooper, City Manager: The minutes have to be approved before they go on the web-site. The web-site will be a month behind.

Commissioner Sleighter: I was surprised to see how out dated the information was on the web-site.

Mayor Corlew: I have been on the commission for 18 years and there are a lot of ways that the citizen could help the city. I helped build concession stands, mow grass, work the "Spring Fling", donate Easter eggs and bunnies, raise money and many other things. There are a lot of ways to help the budget if you want to help.

Commissioner Sleighter : By law we have to advertise our meetings and we do, but people don't come. We can only hope that we are doing the right thing when we make a decision.

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### 9 Planning Commission Update:

Mrs. Cooper stated that the planning commission was an educational session.

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10 Other:

No other items.

11 Meeting adjourned:

Mayor Corlew adjourned the meeting at 9:36 PM.

12 Signatures:

Mayor, Gary Corlew \_\_\_\_\_

Recorder, Debbie K. Finch \_\_\_\_\_