**Minutes**

**Forsyth City Council Meeting**

**September 3, 2024**

**Call to Order**

Mayor Wilson called the meeting to order at 6:01p.m

**Pledge of Allegiance, Invocation and Roll Call**

Mayor Wilson led the Pledge of Allegiance. The invocation was led by Councilman Josh Hill. In attendance for the meeting was Mayor Eric Wilson, Councilmembers Josh Hill, Chris Hewett, Lois Allen, Greg Goolsby, Charles Wilder, and Mike Dodd. Also in attendance was the City Manager, Craig Mims, the Assistant City Manager, Regina Ivie and the City Attorney, Bobby Melton. Six members of the council were in attendance for the meeting; therefore, all unanimous votes will be six votes (Hill, Hewett, Allen, Goolsby, Wilder and Dodd).

**Approval of the agenda**

Mr. Hewett offered a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Seconded by Mrs. Allen; the motion carried unanimously.

**Approval of the minutes from the called meeting and council meeting held on August 19, 2024**

Mr. Hewett offered a motion to approve the minutes from the called meeting and council meeting held on August 19, 2024 with the addition to the council meeting minutes that Ms. Stanbery and Ms. Buff work along with the Downtown Director on the project for the Vibrant Community Grant. Seconded by Mr. Dodd; the motion carried unanimously with five votes (Hill, Hewett, Allen, Wilder, and Dodd) and one abstention (Goolsby).

**Public Hearing to consider a** **variance request regarding Article 10, Non-residential Zoning Districts, Table 10.1**

Bobby Melton, the City Attorney, stated that the public hearing is for a variance regarding Article 10, Non-residential District, Table 10.1. This was advertised in the Monroe County Reporter on August 7th, 14th, and the 21st. The variance request is to allow tattoo studio to be allowed in the Central Business District. Under Article 10, Table 10.1, this is currently not permitted use for that zoning. He stated that he prepared the ordinance. Mr. David Watson is requesting the variance, it’s located at 16 E. Main Street. A tattoo studio is not listed in the table of uses within Article 10 Non-residential Zoning Districts of the Forsyth zoning code.

Dean Nelson, the Community Development Director, stated Mr. Watson is requesting a variance to allow for a tattoo studio in the Central Business District. He stated that this specific business fits within the city’s land use map as found in the Monroe County joint comprehensive plan as amended in 2022 of commercial businesses within downtown Forsyth’s district. Additionally, it is within the mission of Main Street which is to develop and encourage a prosperous downtown area, that provides diverse shopping, entertainment, and living options, creating a vibrant community for all. He stated that the planning and zoning commission recommended approval during the July 22, 2024 planning and zoning meeting.

Kemie Childs, the Mainstreet Coordinator, stated that the mission for Main Street is all inclusive and diverse shopping. She stated that she was at training when this was mentioned to her regarding the tattoo shop. She spoke with several communities and most stated that they have tattoo parlors downtown and have no issues with them. They stated that they’re great additions, they participate, most clients are everyday people, and they are great community members. She also stated she had the opportunity to meet with Mr. Watson and she agreed more because they are already members of the community. Kemie stated she invited Mr. Watson to a retail meeting last month. He met with all the downtown business owners and the business owners are in support of them. She recommended that the tattoo studio be allowed in the community.

Mayor Wilson opened the public hearing for comments in favor of or opposition to the proposed request for a variance regarding Article 10, Non-residential Zoning Districts, Table 10.1.

Mayor Wilson stated that he received a letter from Ms. Ellen Criswell addressed to him and the council and asked the City Clerk to read it aloud.

Mrs. Regina Ivie, the Assistant City Manager, stated Dear Mr. mayor and City Council members, I had planned to come to the city council meeting tonight in support of Dave Watson and his wife, Julia, opening a tattoo shop in Forsyth, but have had some unforeseen circumstances arise and will not make it. Dave and Julia are very good, honest, and hardworking people. I met them when they started bringing their adult son, who has Downs Syndrome, to Rob’s Place over a year ago. They have been so supportive of Rob’s Place and help whenever they can. Julia is even part of our board for our 501c3, The Sunshine Foundation at Rob’s Place, where she serves as the parent liaison. Anytime I need a hand I know I can count on both. I have no doubt that they will bring good business to Forsyth. Tattoos are artwork and many people express this art in the form of a tattoo. Young and older citizens alike now must go to Macon, or other cities, if they want to get a tattoo.  My own daughters have tattoos which they had to go to Macon to get, but they would love to be able to do that right here in our town if they wish. I think this business would be an asset to our community and help bring in more revenue for existing restaurants as well. I hope you all will allow Dave Wilson to open the tattoo shop. I appreciate your time. Thank you, Ellen Criswell Director and Owner of Rob’s Place.

Mr. Dave Watson, at 994 Juliette Rd., stated that he and Julie have been in the tattoo business for over thirty years, from Tampa to Macon. He wants to create a quality business. He stated it will be very professional, appointment only and open Tuesday thru Saturday from the hours of 11:00a.m. until 8:00p.m. with no late nights. He has spent some time going around the community meeting people and has gotten support.

Ms. Leslie Waters, from Macon, stated she is the General Manager of Grits Café, and she supports the Watsons. She is in favor of the tattoo shop. Ms. Waters stated she thinks it would add to everything that they are doing downtown. She has servers that have gotten tattoos by Mr. Watson.

Mr. Hal Clark, at 320 W. Main Street, stated that he thinks it’s good that supporters came to support Mr. Watson. His clan has been in the county for a long time. He stated he was not here to talk about the Watson or not about having a tattoo parlor. He stated he was here to talk about the tattoo parlor being just around the corner from the square. He thinks it would be much better in an area that would not be exposed to all the walking traffic. In Georgia you can’t get a tattoo unless you are eighteen years or older even if you parent consent. If you get a tattoo depending on the size, you may not be able to join the army. Mr. Clark stated he has been looking things up and in some other cities they speak of health issues, they are going through loops on who and how things will be regulated. He stated that there is no federal law protecting tattoos. Mr. Clark stated that tattoos are adult artwork. He thinks it should be in Forsyth just off the square. The county ordinance has things about tattoos in C-2, which is a lot like our Highway Business. It’s called special use ours is called conditional use. He advised it was well worded trying to protect the pedestrian walking area. It is not about the Watsons, it’s just the location. He stated he thinks the tattoo parlor variance should not be passed.

Mr. Dave Watson stated that all shops are state regulated, and the Health Department in Monroe County will be inspecting the shop. It will not be just children walking in, it is eighteen and up.

There being no further comments in favor of or opposition to the proposed variance request regarding Article 10, Non-residential Zoning Districts, Table 10.1, Mayor Wilson closed the public hearing.

Mr. Hill offered a motion to approve the variance request regarding Article 10, Non-residential Zoning Districts, Table 10.1. Seconded by Mr. Dodd; the motion carried unanimously with five votes (Hill, Allen, Goolsby, Wilder, and Dodd) and one in opposition (Hewett).

**Approval of the common use agreement with Georgia Power Company**

Mr. Hewett offered a motion to approve the common use agreement with Georgia Power Company and the City of Forsyth. Seconded by Mr. Dodd; the motion carried unanimously.

**Approval to set millage rate**

Mr. Dodd offered a motion to set the millage rate at 2 mills. Seconded by Mr. Goolsby; the motion carried unanimously.

**Walter Goodson**

Mr. Walter Goodson was not in attendance for the meeting.

**Approval of Requisitions Greater than $6,000**

* **Goforth Williamson, Inc. - $19,850.00**

Mr. Hewett offered a motion to approve the requisitions greater than $6000 as presented. Seconded by Mrs. Allen; the motion carried unanimously.

**City Manager’s Report**

Mr. Craig Mims, the City Manager reported that:

-He would like to thank our fire department along with the Monroe and Macon-Bibb County fire departments for their professional efforts in firefighting and saving property during the downtown fire last week.

-The Splashpad has officially closed for the season effective September 3rd.

-On August 28th the senior staff officially kicked off the budget process for 2025.

**City Attorney Report**

Mr. Bobby Melton, the City Attorney, stated that he received an application for an alcohol beverage license for Bonzu Japanese Steak and Sushi at 22 W. Main Street.

**Mayor’s Report**

Mayor Wilson reported that he received a request from the publisher of the to use the council chambers on September 23, 2024 for a legislative forum. This would be for the candidates of State legislature. It would be republican and democrat candidates.

Mr. Hill offered a motion to allow the council chambers to be used on September 23, 2024. Seconded by Mr. Hewett; the motion carried unanimously with four votes (Hill, Hewett, Goolsby, and Mayor Wilson) and three votes in opposition (Allen, Wilder, and Dodd).

**Council Board Reports**

No business to report.

**Additional Business**

Mr. Hill stated that several residents have approached him regarding high electric bills. He stated that obviously the temperatures were higher last most, which means increased power usage for HVAC systems and questioned if it was any reason other than excessive use that would cause power bills to increase.

Mr. Goolsby thanked the Mayor, City Council, and City Staff for notes, cards, phone calls and gestures during his family’s difficult time.

**Public Comments**

Ms. Linda Hampton at 419 MLK Jr. Drive, asked for clarification regarding the set millage rate. She suggested leaving the millage rate set at 2.25 mills.

Mayor Wilson stated that they dedicated the property tax for the parks.

Ms. Hampton questioned if funding could be added for the homeless and community-based services.

Mrs. Allen questioned what she suggested we do with the funds.

Ms. Hampton stated we should look into getting a warming center, housing, and support the senior center.

**Executive Session**

Mr. Hewett offered a motion for executive session at 6:42p.m. for real estate. Seconded by Mr. Hewett; the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Goolsby offered a motion to end the executive session at 6:48p.m. Seconded by Mr. Hewett; the motion carried unanimously.

**Adjourn**

There being no further business to discuss, Mr. Goolsby offered a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:49p.m. Seconded by Mr. Dodd; the motion carried unanimously

**Minutes submitted by:**

**Shayla Furlow, Assistant City Clerk**