The Lyerly Town Council met for their agenda planning meeting on Tuesday, October 2, 2018 at Lyerly Town Hall. Those in attendance were:

Jim Ferguson, Mayor

Gwen Fisher

Phil Brooks

Juanita Baker

Shirley Davis

October 2, 2018

Mayor Ferguson began the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

 Mayor Ferguson said that on the back side of the park where the walking trail is, those pine trees are dying. Michael Cabe said that we are losing about seven or eight per year and there are a bunch of dead ones back there now. Mayor Ferguson said he believes that it is some sort of beetle that is causing them to die. He added that he has always thought that it would be nice to open that up anyway so if it ok with the council, we are going to look at having about 2/3 of those trees taken out. Juanita Baker asked if we would put something else in their place. Mayor Ferguson said that he was going to start by grinding the stumps and making an open area and then we could decide what to do with it. Shirley Davis asked what the cost would be. Mayor Ferguson said that hopefully we could get someone to take them out just for the wood. Phil Brooks said that he had talked with some pulp wooders at one time and they said that they won’t cut trees with the beetles in them. The reason is that they don’t weigh anything and they are sold by weight. Mayor Ferguson said that if it is ok with everyone, we would look into some options. Gwen Fisher asked if we aren’t supposed to take out all of the trees when you get that beetle infestation. Mayor Ferguson said that he isn’t sure but he hopes not. Phil Brooks added that if we do have the trees removed and make a clear area, which he is for, we need to check and make sure with those big trees being gone that it won’t affect the ground. Mayor Ferguson said that there isn’t much of a slope so it should be ok. Phil Brooks said that he was talking about erosion from getting rid of the root systems. Mayor Ferguson said yes, that is true but hopefully we can keep a lot of grass there. Shirley Davis said that we need to see what the cost is going to be and then go from there. She said that she isn’t against it; she just thinks we need to know how much money it’s going to cost. Juanita Baker said that she suggests that we look into and see what we can do.

 Mayor Ferguson asked Juanita Baker, Gwen Fisher and Shirley Davis if they talked with their churches about Halloween. All three said that the churches are in. Shirley Davis said that she didn’t know about the Pentecostal Church but the Methodist and Baptist churches are in. Mayor Ferguson said that he would call the Pentecostal Church. Shirley Davis said that the Baptist Church is interested in putting a tent up and having hot chocolate and if it’s cold enough, put out a couple of fire pits for people to stand around. Juanita Baker suggested that we have it on Saturday night before Halloween, October 27th. Shirley Davis asked what time everyone wants to start. Juanita Baker said that by the end of the month it will be dark at 7:00. Shirley Davis suggested that when they set up for trunk or treat, they start down the pavement out so far and let the kids stay on the pavement to do the trunk or treating. Gwen Fisher said that we want the kids to have games also. She then asked where the visitors will park. Juanita said they can park on the ball field or on the pavement close to the ball field. Shirley Davis said that it was suggested that we fix the truck up and do the fishing thing. She asked if everyone still wants to do that or if it would be too much trouble. Juanita Baker said that all you would have to do is put a bag or canvas over the back. All the fishing poles need is a line and some clothes pin. Shirley Davis then asked about food. Juanita Baker said that hot dogs, chips and drinks will be plenty. Shirley Davis said that we need volunteers to grill hot dogs. Clerk Sally Kerce said that she would do it. Mayor Ferguson said that we will cook 75 hot dogs. Juanita Baker said that the Town will do the hot dogs; the churches will bring cokes and chips. Shirley Davis asked Gwen Fisher if the Methodist Church wants to do the cokes or the chips. Gwen Fisher said that they will bring the drinks. Shirley Davis said that was fine and the Baptist Church would bring the chips. Mayor Ferguson said that he would take care of the ice. Shirley Davis said that we are going to have it on Saturday, October 27th. She then asked what time everyone agreed on. Everyone said 7:00pm. She added that we will have hot dogs, chips and drinks and the fishing truck. She then asked if we are going to have a hay ride or anything. Mayor Ferguson said that we had talked about a hay ride. Juanita Baker said that you could take the hay ride around the blocks in Lyerly and that would be great. Gwen Fisher said that she will talk with the Methodist Church about providing the hay ride. Mayor Ferguson said that we can work the details out later.

 Mayor Ferguson said that the next thing is water balance write-offs. There is $4,709.77 worth of delinquent accounts in QuickBooks. From a bookkeeping stand point, they get in the way. We would like to move them off so they are not in the way anymore. We are not saying that we will never collect the money; we just need the council’s permission to make that accounting change. Clerk Sally Kerce said that if any of these customers that owe delinquent bills come back to Lyerly, these balances will still show under their name and will have to be paid in full before they can have water service turned on. Gwen Fisher said so we are not forgiving the debt. Sally Kerce said no, we are not forgiving; we are just getting it off of my books. Phil Brooks asked how these accounts are in arrears. He then asked if it was mainly renters. Sally Kerce said that yes, it is mostly renters and they had a large water bill and then they up and moved. Phil Brooks said that he thought that we had it where if the renter leaves owing, we could hold the landlord responsible. Sally Kerce said that she was not aware that we could do that. Phil Brooks added that the landlord owns the property and is the person who makes the profit from it. Mayor Ferguson said that he would have to investigate that. Sally Kerce said that she does have several fellow clerks that are looking into an ordinance for making the landlord responsible for unpaid water bills. Phil Brooks said that if we don’t have an ordinance for that, we need to make one immediately. Sally Kerce said that she would dig in the ordinances to double check but she has never seen it before. Shirley Davis said she thinks that it should be that way too. She said that she is sure that Georgia Power makes the property owner pay the bill if the renter doesn’t. Sally Kerce said that we aren’t voting on it tonight but would the council agree to write off the delinquent balances to get it off of her books and then try to collect it later. Phil Brooks said yes. And everyone else agreed. Mayor Ferguson said that we are not giving up on it; we are just moving it to where it isn’t in her way. And this way, when we print out a list of water customers, we don’t have 100 people on there that don’t have service anymore. We will vote on this next week.

 Mayor Ferguson said that we have to talk about water rates. He said that he wants to start off by saying that he is unhappy that he has to bring this up. The underwriter for GEFA who is doing our loan to get the work done on the sewer pond, the grant, was unhappy with the amount of revenue that we show going forward. He said that he doesn’t completely understand why she is unhappy with it because we are running at a profit even after all of the unexpected problems we have had this year. She said that we didn’t show enough for her debt coverage ratio. Ladd is the one who projected our expenses going forward when they submitted the application for us, which we paid them to do. He said that he doesn’t know exactly where Ladd came up with their figures and unfortunately, it is a little late for him to crawl into everything that Ladd did with a microscope. He said that he explained to the underwriter about the problems that we have had this year and that it doesn’t happen often but she said it still wasn’t enough. She suggested that we raise the water rates since they haven’t been raised since 2012. He told her that he didn’t want to do that and they went back and forth and he finally suggested that we could raise them 50¢ per thousand gallons over two years, so 25¢ per year. She came back and said that they want 75¢ per thousand gallons plus $1 on the flat rate and that will get enough revenue for them to be satisfied going through 2024. Mayor Ferguson told the council that he had a table drawn up on the dry erase board. Shirley Davis said that she knows that we need to do it but she hates to because we have the highest water bills. Mayor Ferguson said that we have the lowest water rates in the county. If we raised the rates all at once, we would still have lower rates than Summerville. He said that the average bill for the last five years has been $52.72. The average bill in 2019 would go to $56.96, 2020 would go to $50.90 and in 2021 would go to $61.05. Jimmy Espy asked if that average includes commercial customers. Mayor Ferguson said yes. He added that for the customers that don’t use a lot of water, there bill will go up $1. In general, the monthly water bill will go up $8 by 2021. That is for heavy users. Mayor Ferguson asked if someone mentioned going up all at once instead of spreading it out over three years. Shirley Davis asked how that would affect the water bill. Mayor Ferguson said that it would make the average bill go up from $52.72 to $61.05 now. Shirley Davis said that would be hard on the people who are on social security. Juanita Baker said she lives on social security and her bill is never over $49. She said that $8 more dollars will not bother her. Mayor Ferguson said that he doesn’t think that it will bother the majority of the customers but he does like the fact that we have low water rates and he hated to bring this up and he doesn’t see where we have much of a choice. Shirley Davis asked if we go up the $8 now, we won’t go up anymore. Mayor Ferguson said that is correct. Jimmy Espy asked if the commercial rates are higher. Mayor Ferguson said yes and that is something else that we need to talk about. Phil Brooks asked if we are going to proportionally raise them. Mayor Ferguson said that Summerville doesn’t have a commercial rate at all. He asked if we should leave the commercial rate higher or are we going to let them be the same as the residential rate. Juanita Baker asked what it is now. Mayor Ferguson said that right now it is $3.48 for inside the city limits and $3.50 for outside and that is 28¢ per thousand more than inside residential and 10¢ per thousand more than outside residential customers. Phil Brooks said that he thinks we should raise it proportionally. Clerk Sally Kerce said that the flat rate for residential customers is $14 and $15 and for commercial’s flat rate is $30. Shirley Davis said that she thinks that it would be better to go up $1 on the flat rate and go up 25¢ per thousand per year than all at once. Mayor Ferguson said that with all this being said, if we dig into this later and find that the expenses submitted to GEFA from LADD are a little high, then we could always not do the total increase. He said that is one of the reasons that he spread it out over three years. He said that this will increase our revenue by $64,663.00 per year. Jimmy Espy asked what the loan payment will be. Mayor Ferguson said that it should be about $10,000 per year.

There being no further business or discussion, the meeting ended at 7:45 p.m.

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 Mayor Town Clerk