

**MINUTES OF
SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING
CITY HALL
MARCH 25, 2022 – 5:30 PM**

PRESENT

MAYOR

TODD M. HARRELSON

COUNCIL

**JOAN GAUSE
LEWIS C. HARDEE, JR.
ANDREA L. COLEMAN
CARROLL D. PADGETT, JR.
MICHAEL E. SUGGS
JAN VESCOVI**

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Harrelson at 5:30 pm on Monday, March 25, 2022.

INVOCATION:

The invocation was given by Mayor Harrelson.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mayor Harrelson.

ROLL CALL:

The roll was called by City Clerk Massey.

FOIA:

Notice of the meeting with an agenda was publicly posted, published, and forwarded to the media no less than 24 hours prior to commencement.

BUSINESS:

A. COUNCIL WILL DISCUSS THE PURCHASE OF PROPERTY LOCATED 4126 RAILROAD AVE

PIN: 176-14-04-0098

Mayor Harrelson advised Council that the property subject to this discussion is the empty corner lot directly across from City Hall and situated between After Glow Hair and Donna's Beauty Shop. Administrator Young advised Council on the possibility of purchasing said property with ARP funds to be used for accommodations. Councilwoman Vescovi recalled previous [Recreation] Committee meeting discussions regarding the City's opportunity to purchase this property as a beneficial asset for the Loris citizens and businesses; she advised that the Committee recommended that Council purchase the property via ARP funds as mentioned by Administrator Young. Mayor Harrelson requested clarification on whether Councilwoman Vescovi recommended that for a Motion; Councilwoman Vescovi affirmed with interruption. Councilman Padgett opined that appropriateness for discussion of this matter being in Executive Session as it is for a contract to purchase land and opined the same for discussion of the contract for Datamax. He advised having no knowledge of previous discussions concerning the potential purchase of the property subject to this Council Meeting. Mayor Harrelson advised Councilman Padgett that these matters may be discussed now if desired; Councilman Padgett affirmed.

Mayor Harrelson informed Council that the property is currently owned by Ms. Barbara Taylor and recalled discussions of this property dating back to, at least, when he was first elected to Council. He stated that Ms. Taylor claimed that a City employee previously informed her that if she removed the dilapidated building the City would then purchase the said land; however, the City opted not to acquire the property at that time, followed by numerous back-and-forth communications since. Mayor Harrelson stated that Ms. Taylor ultimately had the building demolished, with all asbestos removed, and listed the land on the real estate market. He added that it was occasionally discussed at prior Council meetings and there had been previous internal communications within City Hall on potential uses of the property similar to those stated by Councilwoman Vescovi. Mayor Harrelson advised Council that property utilized by the City of Loris is, in fact, individually owned and not that of the City; therefore, should the City proceed with the purchase of this parcel, at a minimum, there would be a long-term location for the City's Christmas tree. He further advised Council that he was informed of an offer made to Ms. Taylor by an individual for the purchase of the said property. Therefore, Mayor Harrelson contacted Ms. Taylor to request a status update on the property. He relayed that she would still like to offer the City the opportunity to purchase. Mayor Harrelson informed Council that Ms. Taylor needed to know by the upcoming weekend whether the City was interested in procuring the property; otherwise, she will move forward with selling the parcel to the other interested party. He stated that the current asking price is \$42,500 for the City to obtain the lot, adding that he did not currently have a survey of the boundaries but had seen one in the past.

Councilman Padgett inquired as to the asking price when Ms. Taylor listed the property; Mayor Harrelson stated that the original asking price was \$69,000 but had been reduced and an offer from the other individual will be under consideration should the City decline to proceed. Councilman Padgett asked whether the offer from the other individual was the same [\$42,500]; Mayor Harrelson advised that he was not privy to that information. Councilman Suggs added

that he had a copy of the listing which reflected a current asking price of \$42,500; Mayor Harrelson reaffirmed that higher asking prices had previously been listed for the parcel. Councilman Hardee inquired whether the property had been appraised for that amount; Mayor Harrelson replied that he was unaware of the appraised value, but the location of the property made it tremendously beneficial for the City of Loris. Mayor Harrelson stated that property down the street could potentially be purchased at a lower cost but there is no other property available that is in close proximity to City Hall; he opined that this property could potentially help the City's appearance while simultaneously helping businesses.

Councilwoman Vescovi informed Council of feedback received from the community through various individuals on social media was the desire for the City to acquire the property for a miniature park, similar to one located in Conway, and opined the potential attraction for growth in tourism, including downtown shopping. She added that the monies received from the W. Paul Prince award could be applied to purchase this asset and to honor Mr. Prince through the final product should the City choose to purchase the property; Mayor Harrelson added that there had also been other individuals who relayed their willingness to contribute to a project of this nature and that there were numerous methods to achieving this task.

Councilman Padgett inquired about the amount the City received from the Paul Prince award; Clerk Massey clarified that the amount received was \$20,000. Councilman Padgett stated that he was previously unaware of the offer and/or interest of the City to purchase this property and informed Council that he opined that the asking price [\$42,500] was too high; he added that had the price been \$30,000 then he would be more interested in pursuing this property. Councilman Suggs stated that Horry County had the property appraised at \$10,600 for the land in 2019 [as shown on the Land Records Property Card]; he added that he opined that he found the matter too coincidental for the property to have been listed since 2019 by various realtors, with no movement whatsoever, and now that the City supposedly has expressed an interest [in the property], the owner suddenly has a contract with another individual the owner is delaying. Councilwoman Vescovi advised that she did not believe this was the first discussion concerning this property, but she had inquired about it some time ago; she recalled the property's future had been a topic of discussion when she first took her seat on Council, but the City was not interested in acquiring the property for various reasons at that time. She advised Council that the discussion of purchasing this property was not a new subject and, in fact, it had been discussed during multiple committee meetings over the last few months, including the costs to acquire and various opportunities for development and potential uses. Mayor Harrelson provided a personal example regarding land he had purchased in the past and commented that appraisals reflected by Horry County have to be factored into the overall view; Councilman Suggs added that he understood but that was the only information Council had to utilize without a current, independent appraisal of the parcel. Councilman Suggs commented that if the owner is delaying a potential contract and the property is truly worth more than Horry County has appraised then she should move forward with negotiations; Mayor Harrelson responded that the owner was offering the City an opportunity to purchase the property, which was the reason the Special Council Meeting was called. Councilwoman Coleman added that the price of land will only continue to rise, and a miniature park would be ideal with the influx of people to the Loris

area. Mayor Harrelson added that there was a multitude of potential uses for the parcel. Councilman Suggs relayed that the [asking] price was too high for the City to consider, and he felt that the City was being cornered into purchasing the property without all the pertinent information; Mayor Harrelson reiterated that Council had called a special meeting specifically for this discussion and no councilmember was being forced to vote one way or another.

Councilman Hardee added that he believed that was a significant amount of money and he questioned the presentation to potentially purchase the said property; Mayor Harrelson provided an example of a recent transaction in which he, personally, had sold a lot located on McQueen Street for \$60,000. Councilwoman Gause requested clarification regarding the comparison of the McQueen Street lot versus the parcel subject to Council's discussion; Mayor Harrelson replied that the McQueen Street property was slightly larger in size.

Councilman Padgett reiterated his earlier statement that the property was overpriced, and he would have given serious consideration had the price to purchase been \$30,000 but he cannot consider [paying] \$42,500. Mayor Harrelson inquired as to Council's desire regarding moving forward; Councilman Padgett stated that he would like a review from an independent realtor followed by further discussion due to having no previous knowledge of the matter.

Attorney Moss advised that he had not been involved in previous discussions concerning the property nor was he aware in terms of an alternative offer but added that should Council be interested in the property and concerned about the owner moving forward with another potential buyer, perhaps Council could make an offer to the landowner that was contingent on an appraisal for as much as that offer and authorize entry of a contract that would allow time to get an appraisal. He added that may persuade her to work with Council but noted that he had not spoken with the landowner to opine whether she would be receptive to that. Mayor Harrelson stated that, during his last encounter with the landowner, she was ready to move forward either with the City or with another party.

Councilwoman Vescovi inquired whether Council would be amicable in following Attorney Moss's recommendation with pursuing the contract with an appraisal; Mayor Harrelson and Councilman Hardee commented in favor. Attorney Moss added that Council would be free to purchase the parcel even if it exceeded an appraisal, but at least Council would be informed of the appraised price. Councilman Padgett added he was certainly not obligated if the appraisal reflected \$42,500 but he agreed with Councilman Suggs that the money used to purchase was that of the taxpayers and Council needed to be as frugal as possible for their [taxpayers] benefit because should the City purchase the parcel then more money would be required for whatever use was determined. Mayor Harrelson advised Council that he had not encountered a single citizen who had a complaint concerning anything the City has done thus far to improve the City and everything that had been done to improve the City had received praises from the community, and he was optimistic that the City purchasing this parcel would receive similarly favorable public feedback. Mayor Harrelson added that he believed that Council's job was to take care of the citizens, make positive decisions on their behalf, and make the City a better place than it was before; Councilman Suggs responded that was all Council was attempting to accomplish but did

not have sufficient information thus far [regarding purchasing the said property]. Councilman Suggs added that he did not believe that because the City was a government entity that it was supposed to pay the premium [asking price] for a piece of property that may not be worth the said asking price just because it felt good; Mayor Harrelson affirmed. Councilwoman Vescovi added that she believed that purchasing the property was a good opportunity for the City and understood concerns regarding an appraisal but stated that there had been numerous discussions regarding methods to improve the downtown area and encourage economic growth by attracting more people [to Loris] to support the City's local businesses. She acknowledged Council's hesitancy to move forward due to the lack of appraisal and short notice; however, she added that purchasing this property would allow the opportunity to assist the City even more, and her opinion was based on feedback from the community.

Councilwoman Vescovi requested feedback from Council regarding utilizing the W. Paul Prince award should the City decide to purchase the property; Councilwoman Gause responded favorably for that purpose. Mayor Harrelson advised that would leave the remaining balance to be satisfied by either hospitality funds or APR funds. Councilwoman Vescovi questioned Administrator Young regarding the application of hospitality funds to satisfy the balance of this proposed acquisition; Administrator Young responded with his recommendation to apply ARP funds to the remaining balance instead due to the City's participation in future activities being hospitality-related and therefore utilization for those activities would be more appropriate.

Councilwoman Gause inquired about an approximate timeframe for obtaining an appraisal of the property; Attorney Moss responded with his estimation of a minimum of four to six [4-6] weeks in the current market based on recent trends, and he could contact realtors immediately, following adjournment [of this Special Council Meeting], with confidence in having an appraiser hired by Monday.

Motion made by Councilman Padgett for Attorney Moss to contact a realtor to obtain an appraisal concerning the subject parcel for further review by Council, followed by Council's discussion regarding the potential purchase of said parcel; Seconded by Councilwoman Vescovi. Attorney Moss requested clarification from Councilman Padgett that this Motion was only to obtain an appraisal; Councilman Padgett confirmed. All members voted in favor.

B. COUNCIL WILL DISCUSS DATAMAX CONTRACT

Administrator Young stated that a Datamax representative provided a potential contract and additional information at a recent committee meeting regarding Datamax services related to business licenses and associated taxes/fees; examples of the process were also provided. He informed Council of Datamax's proposed fee schedule, which stated a 50/50 split for the first two [2] years of fees collected from businesses operating without a business license and the City would receive 100% of collected fees thereafter. Administrator Young added that various municipalities relayed favorable outcomes from services provided by Datamax. Councilman Padgett inquired whether Marion, Mullins, and Conway had been contacted for feedback; Clerk Massey responded that Conway relayed favorable results within the first month; Administrator

Young responded that feedback from the City of Dillon was favorable. Attorney Moss requested clarification that no costs are associated except for a percentage of fees Datamax collects on behalf of the City; Administrator Young confirmed. Clerk Massey added that Datamax will forward all fees collected to the City and then invoice the City monthly. Attorney Moss advised Council that the alternative would be to do nothing and allow these businesses to continue without a city Loris business license, attempt to use utilize existing staff, or contract to render the services of Datamax. Councilman Padgett commented that the City currently does not have the additional staff or the expertise to undertake this task and recommended the option to contract with Datamax.

Motion made by Councilwoman Vescovi to allow Administrator Young to enter into a contract with Datamax on behalf of the City of Loris; Seconded by Councilwoman Gause. The Motion passed with council members Gause, Hardee, Coleman, Harrelson, Padgett, and Vescovi voting in favor, and Councilman Suggs voting against stating that he had no prior knowledge of this contract.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Motion made by Councilman Padgett to enter Executive Session for the discussion of personnel matter(s); Seconded by Councilwoman Vescovi. All members voted in favor to enter Executive Session at 6:02 pm.

Motion made by Councilman Hardee to exit Executive Session; Seconded by Councilwoman Vescovi. All members voted in favor to exit Executive Session at 6:09 pm.

Mayor Harrelson stated that no action was taken during Executive Session.

PUBLIC AND PRESS:

None

ADJOURNMENT:

Motion made by Councilman Padgett for adjournment; Seconded by Councilman Hardee. All members voted in favor. There being no further business, the Council Meeting was adjourned at 6:10 pm.

ATTEST:

TODD K. MASSEY, II
CITY CLERK

TODD M. HARRELSON
MAYOR

LORIS COUNCIL MEMBERS

JOAN S. GAUSE

LEWIS C. HARDEE JR.

ANDREA L. COLEMAN

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