

City of Crossville

392 N. Main
Crossville, TN 38555



Minutes

Tuesday, August 2, 2022

5:15 PM

Conference Room 317

Call for Special Meeting

*Mayor James Mayberry
Mayor Pro Tem R.J. Crawford
Council Member Scot Shanks
Council Member Rob Harrison
Council Member Art Gernt
City Manager Greg Wood
City Clerk Valerie Hale*

Call to Order

The Crossville City Council met in special session on Tuesday, August 2, 2022 at Crossville City Hall. Mayor James Mayberry was present and presiding. He called the meeting to order at 5:17 p.m. Mayor Mayberry explained the Standing Rules for Special Called Meetings, which do not allow for public comment.

Rollcall

Present 5 - Council Member Scot Shanks, Council Member Rob Harrison, Council Member Art Gernt, Mayor Pro-tem R.J. Crawford, and Mayor James Mayberry

Others present were City Attorney Will Ridley, City Clerk Valerie Hale, Tim Begley, Lee Lawson, Jessie Brooks, Leah Crockett, Steve Powell, Tim Johnson, Terry Potter, Chris Kendrick, Bryant Dunaway, Lanny Colvard, Steve Threet, Robert Wood, Nathan Clouse, Larry Kidwell, Ethan Medley, Fred Houston, Heather Mullinix, Mike Turner, Christa Naegele, Kevin Music, Chris South, Steve Powell, Tom Isham, Danny Thurman, Melissa Coudriet, Mark Fox, Darian Dykes, Andre Crawford, Levonn Hubbard, Tony Perry, Jeremy Walls, Simone Richards, Toni Cheney, Keith Grant, and Aaron Wells.

Other Business

1. Matters relative to Village Inn and City Administration

A motion was made by Mayor James Mayberry, seconded by Council Member Scot Shanks, to suspend the standing rules regarding Special Called Meetings. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 5 - Council Member Scot Shanks, Council Member Rob Harrison, Council Member Art Gernt, Mayor Pro-tem R.J. Crawford and Mayor James Mayberry

Matters relative to Village Inn and City Administration

Mayor Mayberry explained the impetus for the meeting and that it was called due to questions surrounding the closure of the Village Inn on July 27, 2022 by City Administration for Codes Violations.

Mayor Mayberry asked Dr. Wood, owner of the Village Inn, to speak. Dr. Wood decided to wait until the end of the meeting.

City Attorney Will Ridley stated he was first made aware of the incident through social media the evening of the closure, after the event occurred. He recommended, based on his limited review, that the Council take the following action:

1) Based upon the advice of the insurance provider, Mr. Ridley recommended that a

private, independent investigation be completed. Mr. Ridley identified a Chattanooga firm, Robinson, Smith, and Wells. Mr. Ridley provided an engagement letter for the investigation, which quoted a price not to exceed \$10,000. Mr. Ridley introduced Keith Grant and Aaron Wells from the law firm. Mr. Grant stated he has been practicing law for 21 years, with the last 12-13 years specifically dealing with Municipal Law. He also stated that Mr. Wells has been practicing law for 5 years. Mr. Grant explained the process for an independent investigation. Their mission will be to determine the events and report them back to the City Council. The City Council can use the findings however they choose. Mr. Grant indicated his schedule would allow for the investigation to begin immediately. He also explained that the investigation will be under attorney-client privilege and will only release information that is necessary.

A motion was made by Mayor James Mayberry, seconded by Council Member Art Gernt, to hire Robinson, Smith, Wells to move forward with an independent investigation, and 1st reading of a budget amendment to cover the costs. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 5 - Council Member Scot Shanks, Council Member Rob Harrison, Council Member Art Gernt, Mayor Pro-tem R.J. Crawford and Mayor James Mayberry

Mr. Ridley stated that under his limited review, that Fire Chief South acted in good faith during the events; however, it will be determined through the investigation, but relayed that he feels that Chief South did not have any ill will on behalf of the Fire Chief or Fire Department going into the events surrounding the closure of the Village Inn.

Mr. Ridley also stated that after his limited review, he recommended suspending the City Manager due to his lack of seeking legal advice, lack of foresight to know that the closure should have gone through the due process in the court system before moving forward with the closure, and due to the fact that Mr. Ridley had relayed the proper process to the employees involved on four different occasions previously.

Pursant to the City Charter, a suspension must be with pay. A preliminary resolution must be passed by the City Council, and delivered promptly to the City Manager. The City Attorney presented a resolution stating a suspension for a three week period or until the investigation has been completed. He advised the City Council to also determine who will be the Interim City Manager during the suspension. The Charter states it must be a City employee. He stated that during the suspension, City Hall access would not be allowed, nor participation in any City activities.

A motion was made by Mayor James Mayberry, seconded by Council Member Art Gernt, to suspend the City Manager for three weeks or less with pay and appoint City Clerk Valerie Hale as Interim City Manager, paying her an additional \$750 per week. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 5 - Council Member Scot Shanks, Council Member Rob Harrison, Council Member Art Gernt, Mayor Pro-tem R.J. Crawford and Mayor James Mayberry

Mayor Mayberry invited the public to speak and asked that comments be limited to three minutes.

Dr. Robert "Buck" Wood, owner of the Village Inn, made comments to the City Council. He stated this was the second time the motel has been shut down, with the

first time being in 2009. Dr. Wood still doesn't know what happened or why. He stated that with both events, they were not notified of any code violations and felt like the closures were "pre-planned". There were 44 rooms occupied on July 27, 2022 and 22-30 people have returned.

He discussed that the Village Inn is a low income housing unit and offers it as a service to the community. He stated he allows tenants to stay that don't always pay rent in full. The manager often pays for the tenants' meals. He admitted that there are issues with illegal drugs and they try to work with the Police Department and weed them out. He felt it was shameful the way that people were treated on July 27, 2022 and that a lot of food was lost due to the electricity being shut off. Dr. Wood suggested that he and the City Council come to a solution without a lawsuit/legal action. He stated the motel does not make a lot of money and would like to be informed of any code violations. He expressed that he's open to suggestions, and wants to try to resolve issues without litigation. He cited the incident has been slanderous to himself and the manager, Steve Threet. Dr. Wood offered that he would like to see a resolution without an investigation.

The Mayor agreed that the issues need to be resolved and that to protect the City in the future, an independent study should be completed.

Christa Naegele, Cumberland County citizen and lifelong resident, addressed the City Council and commended Chief Brooks and Chief South. She reported that she got permission to go onto the property and met with some of the residents on July 30. She helped with the needs of the children and wants the community to work together for long term help for residents of the Village Inn.

Mayor Mayberry commended the community for its efforts.

Steve Threet, Manager of the Village Inn, addressed the City Council and stated that he has worked closely with the Police Department for months. He admitted that Crossville has an issue with homelessness and stated that it is 90% of his problem at Village Inn. Recently he evicted tenants from 4 rooms for drug activity, escorted drug dealers off of the property, and stated that there are more to be dealt with. He gave an example of their community service by reporting on U.S. Veteran that has lived there 12 years, never paying a full month's rent. He also reported that there are many of the tenants that work full time. He applauded those from the Community that brought food and helped. He feels like the business was targeted and there has been a huge mistake. He said he is classified as a transient hotel.

Toni Chaney addressed the City Council and stated that in her opinion, there is a high homeless rate in Crossville because the current homeless shelters limit who is able to stay in their facilities.

Simone Richards, addressed the City Council and asked about the rights of those that have been harmed by the drugs, either by excessive use or overdose. She stated the Village Inn should be closed so they can be helped. She expressed that everyone should come together to create a solution. She also commended the Crossville Police Department.

District Attorney Bryant Dunaway spoke to the City Council and stated that he was invited by the City Attorney to attend and reported that the Village Inn has been on his office's radar and agreed it was a problematic property. Because of the number of police calls and issues he has seen, a conversation began about a month ago

regarding a nuisance action, which is a civil lawsuit and can be effective to solve problems such as this in communities. He had success with this process a few years ago with the Budget Inn. It was closed down for approximately a year and has since reopened without any issues. The civil lawsuit is not taken lightly and strong evidence is needed to build a case, which his office was working toward. He stated that the DA's office did not have any involvement with closing the Village Inn, and had no communication with City Manager regarding its closure. He also stated that the civil lawsuit is no longer being considered by his office because of the events from last week.

Adjournment

With no one else interested in speaking, Mayor Mayberry adjourned the meeting at 5:46 p.m.