

City of New Ellenton  
Special Meeting of City Council  
City Hall Council Chambers  
Minutes

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Tuesday, July 28, 2009

**1. Welcome**

Mayor Dunbar welcomed everyone to and called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**2. Invocation**

Mayor Dunbar offered the invocation

**3. Pledge of Allegiance**

**4. Roll Call for the Record**

Present: Rex Nordeen, Eartha Rogers, Vernon Dunbar, and Anthony Shaw

Absent: Terrance Williams, Deborah Maddox, and Daniel Braswell

**Others Present**

Assistant City Clerk Courtney Moseley, City Administrator L. C. Greene, Chief Mike Kellems, Gene Wood, Phillip Scott, [Inaudible] Schmidt, Jimmily Williams, Jack (Inaudible), Herbert Schmidt.

Mayor Dunbar welcomed everyone again to the meeting.

**5. New Business**

a) Consideration of having Aiken County include the City fire fees on New Ellenton citizens' tax notice each year. This will include the improved and unimproved property within the City. Chief Kellems stated that unimproved property is the open or vacant lots. Chief Kellems stated that in the county open lots are charged fire fees. The City charges \$1.00 per month fire fee if residents are connected to city water. Mayor Dunbar stated that lots with houses in the City are being charged fire fees and the vacant lots are not being charged. Chief Kellems stated the City of New Ellenton currently has 892 customers who are being billed fire fees. According to Aiken County's list the City of New Ellenton should have 1,618 customers. City Administrator, L.C. Greene estimated a total of 726 unimproved properties. Councilwoman Rogers asked if the citizens could be billed for open lots without having the fire fees attached to their taxes. Chief Kellems stated they could be charged \$1.00 per month. Councilman Shaw stated it would be more cost effective to place it on the tax notice. Chief Kellems agreed. Councilman Nordeen

asked what Aiken County charges to place it on the tax notice? Chief Kellems stated there is no cost assessed. He further explained it is an agreement between all fire departments within the county to collect the fire fees. Councilman Nordeen stated parcels outside the city limits are already on the tax notice. Chief Kellems stated the total fire fee manifest is approximately 6,800 customers or parcels of land in the City of New Ellenton. Approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  of New Ellenton's residents reside in the county. An unidentified speaker asked what are residents outside the City of New Ellenton charged for a parcel of land? Chief Kellems stated the residents are charged \$40.00 regardless of the size of the lot. Ms. Williams asked, for example, if she had a vacant lot that caught fire and the fire department had to put that fire out, would a fee be charged, even though the \$1.00 per month fire fee has not been assessed? Chief Kellems stated a fee of up to \$500.00 per truck could be charged in that case. Councilman Nordeen asked if City fire fees had been put on county tax notices in the past. Chief Kellems stated not to his knowledge. Ms. Williams stated the citizens of New Ellenton did not want the fire fees on their tax notices in the past nor do they want it now. Ms. Williams asked if fire fees were going to be billed to the elderly who are tax exempt? Chief Kellems stated that Aiken County does bill \$12.00 for fire fees even if citizens are tax exempt. Ms. Williams asked what would happen if fire fees were not paid? Chief Kellems stated Aiken County would turn it over to a collection agency or a lien placed on the land. Councilwoman Rogers stated she couldn't support this change because the citizens of New Ellenton do not want it. Mayor Dunbar stated the fire department does have costs that are paid by the City, out of the budget, that are not reimbursed. Chief Kellems stated those costs to be approximately \$20,000.00 in insurance premiums. Chief Kellems suggested possibly charging \$25.00 per year to landowners and not for vacant lots. Councilwoman Rogers stated she would consider increasing the fire fees, but does not agree to attach them to the citizens' taxes. Mayor Dunbar suggested billing the vacant lots \$1.00 per month and putting it on the tax notice. Chief Kellems stated there are 726 customers, not necessarily empty lots, currently not billed for fire fees. Councilman Nordeen asked if there were any citizens in the city that are exempt from fire fees? Chief Kellems stated that is unknown. Unidentified speaker asked if the County pays \$40.00 for open land. Chief Kellems responded that they did. Ms. Williams asked who controls the amount charged for fire fees after the County takes control? Mayor Dunbar stated that inside the city limits the fire fees are controlled by the City. Councilman Shaw stated if the fire fees are not put on the tax notice the City cannot collect on the vacant lots. City Administrator L.C. Greene stated there are 26 customers who are tax exempt inside the City, including some churches. Mayor Dunbar stated 10 of those customers are churches. Chief Kellems stated churches are not billed inside or outside the city limits. Chief Kellems stated the County only bills from the fire fee manifest list that has been submitted by the fire department. Mayor Dunbar asked if only the customers with unimproved property in the county could be put on the tax notice, and then continue to bill the others inside the City separately? Chief Kellems stated he thought it could be done. Councilman Shaw asked if there are citizens who refuse to pay the fire fee? Ms. Moseley stated that it is common for some citizens to pay a portion of the bill, or at times will not pay it at all. Councilman Nordeen asked

if the fire fees were placed on the tax notices, and the residents become upset, could it be taken off of the notices or will the City be obligated to this for a certain period of time? Chief Kellems stated that the County would agree to this. Chief Kellems stated the new billing would begin when the tax notices come out in November, for the year 2010. In January the City would cease sending out bills for the fire fees. Councilman Nordeen stated the public would need to be notified of the change. City Administrator L C Greene suggested sending a mass mailing for notification. Councilman Shaw asked what do the mobile home parks in Town of New Ellenton pay in fire fees? Ms. Moseley stated at the present time fees are paid per unit and vacant lot. Chief Kellems stated customers inside the City of Aiken and on city water are charged \$38.00 per month, plus a fire fee of \$60.00 to \$70.00 on the tax notice in November. Businesses are charged \$48.00 per month, plus a fire fee of \$100.00 to \$125.00 a year. Mayor Dunbar stated a resolution has to be passed before any changes can be made. Chief Kellems stated the fire fee manifest was received on July 10<sup>th</sup>. All corrections have to be made and returned within 30 days. Mayor Dunbar suggested billing the unimproved parcels \$12.00 per year and place it on the tax notice. Mayor Dunbar asked if there were any other questions or comments. Councilman Nordeen reiterated the need to notify the citizens of New Ellenton of the change in billing. Chief Kellems agreed. Mayor Dunbar stated that before there were approximately 60% of customers paying fire fees. At the present time there are approximately 75%. Ms. Moseley stated payment of the fire fee could only be enforced in the event of a fire by withholding the fire report. Unidentified speaker asked if there is an option available to not pay fire fees outside the city limits? Unidentified speaker answered that an option was not available. Councilman Shaw stated it should not be an option inside the city limits. Unidentified speaker stated the question is not an increase or decrease in fees, but collecting what is due and payable. Mayor Dunbar asked if there were any more questions or comments. Mayor Dunbar stated he was not opposed to placing the fire fees on the tax notice because citizens are going to pay their taxes. Chief Kellems stated that if the City requested it, citizens in the county who are tax exempt would not be charged fire fees beginning this year. Mayor Dunbar called for a motion. ***Councilman Shaw MOVED to add the fire fees to the Aiken County tax notice inside the city limits; SECONDED by Councilman Nordeen; MOTION CARRIED on a vote of 3-1 (Councilwoman Rogers opposed for reasons stated earlier).*** Mayor Dunbar asked if a signed resolution would need to be passed and provided to the County to effect the change. City Administrator L.C. Greene stated a resolution can be passed authorizing Chief Kellems to inform the County in writing. Mayor Dunbar called for a motion. ***Councilman Shaw MOVED to pass the voice resolution to authorize Chief Kellems to instruct Aiken County to add inside the City fire fees to the tax notice; SECONDED by Councilman Nordeen; MOTION CARRIED on a vote of 3-1 (Councilwoman Rogers opposed).*** Mayor Dunbar asked if the change would become effective in November? Chief Kellems stated it would. He would contact Todd Glover, Assistant County Administrator, and notify him of all the changes included in the fire fee manifest being submitted. Chief Kellems stated the \$1.00 will be removed from the City's billing January 1st, 2010. Chief Kellems stated Godard & McGahee cleaned up around the retention pond. He

asked if three bids for purchase of the fence would be necessary? Councilman Shaw suggested a four foot fencing should be sufficient.

**6. Adjournment**

***Councilman Shaw MOVED to adjourn; SECONDED by Councilman Nordeen; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY. Approved. Meeting adjourned.***

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**Mayor's Signature**

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**Date**

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**Municipal Clerk Signature**

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**Date**