



City of Lawton

City Council

MINUTES

Lawton City Hall
212 SW 9th Street
Lawton, Oklahoma
73501-3944

Tuesday, February 11, 2025

6:00 PM

**Lawton City Hall
Council Chambers/Auditorium**

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER WITH INVOCATION, FOLLOWED BY THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mayor Stan Booker called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Pastor Terry Corvette Marsh of Carriage Hills Christian Church delivered the invocation, and all remained standing for the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Hankins, Smith, Chapman, Gill, Hampton, Weger, Williams, Warren

ABSENT: None

ALSO PRESENT: Stanley Booker, Mayor; John Ratliff, City Manager; John Andrew, City Attorney; Donalynn Blazek-Scherler, City Clerk.

PRESENTATION:

True North Award: Kristen Fitzpatrick, Water Distribution Dispatcher

Ratliff presented the True North Award to Kristen Fitzpatrick, who has been a city employee for about 2.5 years and works as the Water Distribution Dispatcher. Ratliff noted that Ms. Fitzpatrick deals with water breaks, concerned citizens, emergencies, and contingencies in a professional manner.

PROCLAMATION:

Citizen of the Month - January: Darby's Furniture

Mayor Booker presented the Citizen of the Month proclamation for January 2025 to Darby's Furniture. The proclamation highlighted that since 1907, Darby's has built a legacy based on quality furniture, exceptional customer service, and value. In 2005, Darby's underwent significant expansion by opening a major new showroom in Lawton and was voted the best furniture store in town. Darby's has consistently demonstrated generosity by donating furniture to nonprofits and communities in need.

Citizen of the Month - February: Tim and Dee McFarland

Mayor Booker presented the Citizen of the Month proclamation for February 2025 to Tim and Dee McFarland. The proclamation recognized their unwavering commitment to the beautification of the city through their volunteer efforts. Every other day, the McFarlands walk 5-8 miles throughout the east side of Lawton, including 45th Street, Cache Road, Flower Mound, and Gore Boulevard, diligently picking up litter and improving the appearance of the community.

REPORTS: MAYOR/CITY COUNCIL

COL Baird reported on upcoming events at Fort Sill, including a Department of Defense-directed event called Black Start that will shut off power for about eight hours, and the Warrior Run scheduled for March 22nd with a marathon, half-marathon, 10K, and events for youngsters 12 and under (5K and mile). An expo will be held on March 21st.

Councilman Warren announced that donations are being collected for the CH Brazil statue that will eventually be located in Elmer Thomas Park near the playgrounds. Donations can be dropped off at Warren's Imports or Checker Records until the local FOP establishes an account. The statue will depict CH bending down and placing a child on a pedestal.

Councilwoman Williams provided information on services available through Hearts that Care, located at Salt of the Earth Ministries at 2209 NW 25th Street. Free diapers, baby clothing, and men's and women's clothing are available on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. She also announced several Black History Month events:

- February 12th: NAACP Founders Day at 11:30 a.m. at the NAACP building (1512 SW Washington Street)
- February 16th: Community Black History Program Observance Service at Union Baptist Church (1601 Charles Whitlow Avenue) at 3:30 p.m.
- February 20th-21st: Legend of Strings honoring Frederick Douglas at the Abbey Johnson Senior Conference Center
- February 22nd: Buffalo Soldier Run at 9:00 a.m., meeting in front of the Garcia Dining Facility
- February 28th: NAACP Black Heritage Stamp Unveiling at the NAACP building

Councilman Hampton highlighted the Farmers Market on Saturday mornings, noting the availability of German cookies, homemade bagels, and pesto. He also announced the upcoming Open Streets event on March 29th, a healthy kids initiative funded by tobacco settlement money.

Councilman Gill mentioned that the Council would be considering 105 new roads for 2025 and noted that Councilwoman Chapman would discuss one particular important road.

Councilwoman Chapman expressed excitement about 38th Street finally being fixed after five years and one month of waiting.

Mayor's New Year Address

Mayor Stan Booker's New Year Address video was shown. This video can be viewed at lawtonok.gov.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION:

Chad Rogers (43 Chimney Creek) expressed appreciation for the Lawton Police Department, describing their prompt and professional response to calls at his shopping center. He noted the courtesy and respect officers show when dealing with challenging situations.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Mayor Warren announced there were no requests to remove items from the consent agenda.

Motion by Gill and seconded by Weger to approve the Consent Agenda items 1-14.

VOTE: 8-0. Motion carried.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

15. Consider establishing a permanent meeting time for City Council regular meetings.

Councilman Gill made a motion to return to 2:00 p.m. meetings on Tuesdays, stating there were no observed benefits from moving to 6:00 p.m. and noting the additional expenses incurred. Seconded by Councilwoman Williams.

Councilman Warren made a substitute motion to keep City Council meetings at 6:00 p.m., citing the true north culture statement that "We exist solely to serve the citizens." He noted that evening meetings allow teachers, nurses, and small business owners to attend after work, and that all peer cities hold evening meetings. Seconded by Councilwoman Chapman.

Discussion followed. Councilwoman Williams stated that as stewards of taxpayer money, Council should consider the approximately \$60,000 annual cost of evening meetings, and noted that when counting attendance, she observed fewer citizens at 6:00 p.m. meetings than at 2:00 p.m. meetings. Councilman Gill stated he had not seen increased participation at night meetings and mentioned that Oklahoma City meets in the morning.

Vote on substitute motion to keep meetings at 6:00 p.m.:

VOTE: 5-3. Substitute motion carried.

16. Continue the discussion and consider adopting a resolution declaring the structures located at 1902 W Gore, to be dilapidated pursuant to Section 6-5-1 Lawton City Code, ordering the owner to abate the nuisance, authorizing summary abatement, and authorizing the City Attorney to commence legal action in District Court to abate the nuisance.

City Manager Ratliff reported that after observing the owner's efforts to rehabilitate the property and the permits filed, staff's recommendation was not to place the property on the dilapidated list.

Jonathan Jernigan, Neighborhood Services added that a roofing permit was issued on January 29th, a new roof was installed on February 3rd, and as of February 10th, the contractor had started the remodeling process to turn the structure into offices.

No action was taken.

BUSINESS ITEMS:

17. Consider approving a resolution of the City of Lawton, Oklahoma (the "City") establishing and declaring its official intent to reimburse the City's general fund on behalf of one or more of the public trusts of which the City is the beneficiary for preliminary and other expenditures relating to the construction, equipping, renovating, and improving of certain capital improvement

projects for the benefit of the City, said reimbursement being anticipated to be funded from the proceeds of the bonds issued for the same said construction, equipping, renovating, and improving of certain capital improvement projects for the benefit of the City; and containing other provisions relating thereto.

Deputy City Manager Burk explained that this resolution is connected to an item passed on January 28th regarding the Elmer Thomas Park boardwalk and amphitheater. He proposed two floor amendments: changing the amount from \$50 million to \$60 million in the second whereas clause, and striking the Lawton Youth Sports Facility from item number four, Project Description, with the intention to bring that item back at a later date.

Motion by Hampton and seconded by Hankins to approve the resolution with the floor amendments.

VOTE: 8-0. Motion carried.

18. Consider and take action with respect to Resolution No. 2025____ of the City of Lawton, Oklahoma (the "City") approving action taken by the Lawton Water Authority (the "Authority") authorizing the filing a programmatic applications with the Oklahoma Water Resources Board for financial assistance for the purpose of making certain capital improvements to certain water system improvements including, but not limited to lake and dam repairs and authorizing issuance, sale and delivery of a promissory note or notes in one or more series of the Authority to the Oklahoma Water Resources Board ("OWRB") in the total aggregate principal amount of not to exceed \$39 million for purposes of certain capital improvements to the water, sanitary sewer and refuse system; ratifying and confirming a lease agreement, as amended pertaining to certain water, sanitary sewer, and refuse systems; and containing other provisions related thereto.

Rusty Whisenhunt, Public Utilities, explained this was a companion item to the Water Authority meeting previously approved by Council, ratifying the Water Authority's action.

Motion by Warren to approve the resolution. Seconded by Williams.

VOTE: 8-0. Motion carried.

19. Consider approving an Ordinance amending the Employee Retirement System, Defined Contribution Plan for the City of Lawton, Oklahoma; providing retirement benefits for eligible employees of the City of Lawton, Oklahoma; pertaining to plan design; providing for employer pickup of required contributions; providing for repealer and severability.

Craig Akard explained that this ordinance increases the contribution amounts for both employees and the City by 1.5% to make them both 5% for the defined contribution plan, which covers employees hired on or after July 1, 2017. Unlike the previous ordinance that benefited the defined benefit plan, this ordinance benefits the employee when they retire.

Motion by Chapman to approve the ordinance, waive the reading of the ordinance, and read the title only. Seconded by Weger.

The City Attorney read the title of the ordinance: "AN ORDINANCE AMENDING THE EMPLOYEE RETIREMENT SYSTEM DEFINED CONTRIBUTION PLAN FOR THE CITY OF LAWTON OKLAHOMA PROVIDING RETIREMENT BENEFITS FOR ELIGIBLE EMPLOYEES OF THE CITY OF LAWTON OKLAHOMA PERTAINING TO PLAN DESIGN PROVIDING FOR EMPLOYER PICKUP OF REQUIRED CONTRIBUTIONS PROVIDING FOR REPEALER AND SEVERABILITY."

VOTE: 8-0. Motion carried.

20. Consider approving an Ordinance pertaining to Buildings, Construction, and Housing by amending Section 6-1-1-108, Division 6-1-1, Article 6-1, Chapter 6, Lawton City Code, 2015; by changing the expiration date for properties that have been declared dilapidated to be 90 days after issuance and requiring an inspection be conducted to check progress before any additional permits may be issued, providing for severability and establishing an effective date.

Charlotte Brown, Community Services, explained that the current ordinance allows for six 30-day permits for dilapidated remodels, and the proposed change would allow for two 90-day permits. The property owner would still get the same 180 days total but would have longer periods to work without constantly renewing permits. An inspection would be conducted after the first 90 days to verify progress before issuing the second permit.

Motion by Gill to approve the ordinance, waive the reading of the ordinance, and read the title only. Seconded by Hampton.

The City Attorney read the title of the ordinance: "AN ORDINANCE PERTAINING TO BUILDINGS CONSTRUCTION AND HOUSING BY AMENDING SECTION 6-11-108 DIVISION 6-1-1 ARTICLE 6-1 CHAPTER 6 LAWTON CITY CODE 2015 BY CHANGING THE EXPIRATION DATE FOR PROPERTIES THAT HAVE BEEN DECLARED DILAPIDATED TO BE 90 DAYS AFTER ISSUANCE AND REQUIRING AN INSPECTION BE CONDUCTED TO CHECK PROGRESS BEFORE ANY ADDITIONAL PERMITS MAY BE ISSUED PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY AND ESTABLISHING AN EFFECTIVE DATE."

VOTE: 8-0. Motion carried.

21. Consider approving an Ordinance pertaining to Buildings, Housing and Construction by amending Section 6-5-1-507, Article 6-5-1, Division 6-5, Chapter 6, Lawton City Code, 2015, by creating the requirement to issue Property Maintenance violation letters to perspective dilapidated properties, allowing for building permits to be issued after notice is given for a potential dilapidated property, making the requirement that if a permit is pulled prior to the property being declared dilapidated, the permit expiration date will change to 90 days after issuance if Council declares it dilapidated, providing for severability, and establishing an effective date.

Charlotte Brown, Community Services, explained this is a companion item to item #20. No less than 30 days before bringing a property to Council, Neighborhood Services will send out a notice of violation letter which will include the exhibit and minimum requirements. Property owners can pull remodel permits up until the Council meeting, and if Council declares the property dilapidated, any existing permit will be changed to a 90-day expiration.

Motion by Councilman Gill to approve the ordinance, waive the reading of the ordinance, and read the title only. Seconded by Williams.

The City Attorney read the title of the ordinance: "AN ORDINANCE PERTAINING TO BUILDINGS CONSTRUCTION AND HOUSING BY AMENDING SECTION 6-5-1-507 DIVISION 6-5-1 ARTICLE 6-5 CHAPTER 6 LAWTON CITY CODE 2015 BY REQUIRING A PROPERTY MAINTENANCE VIOLATION NOTICE TO BE SENT TO PROPERTIES THAT ARE BEING CONSIDERED FOR DILAPIDATION BY ALLOWING REMODEL OR DEMOLITION PERMITS TO BE OBTAINED AFTER NOTICE IS GIVEN AND BEFORE THE PUBLIC HEARING REQUIRING SAID PERMITS TO EXPIRE 90 DAYS AFTER COUNCIL DECLARES THE

PROPERTY DILAPIDATED ADDING LANGUAGE THAT FOR ANY ACTIVE REMODEL PERMIT THAT HAS NOT HAD PROGRESS AND THE PROPERTY IS BEING CONSIDERED FOR DILAPIDATION THE EXPIRATION DATE SHALL BE CHANGED TO NO MORE THAN 90 DAYS AFTER COUNCIL DECLARES A PROPERTY DILAPIDATED PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY AND ESTABLISHING AN EFFECTIVE DATE."

VOTE: 8-0. Motion carried.

22. Consider approving the Kids First: Neighborhood Cleanup and Beautification Plan and take action as deemed necessary.

City Manager Ratliff presented a comprehensive plan for neighborhood cleanup and beautification as part of the Kids First initiative. Key points included:

- The importance of clean and safe neighborhoods for children's health and development
- Four main goals: remove hazards and waste from public areas, ensure playgrounds and parks are safe, foster a community culture of cleanliness, and educate the community
- Organization of community cleanup events, including trash-offs and stream clean Saturdays
- Increasing the number of dilapidated structures brought to Council to 40 per month by April 1st
- Reorganizing Neighborhood Services assignments to align with the eight Council Wards
- Establishing a Redevelopment Authority to address vacant lots after demolition
- Reassigning the Community Services Department as a subordinate division under Larry Parks
- Having Code Enforcement Officers meet with Council members to understand Ward priorities
- Launching a public awareness campaign on cleanliness and D&D rules

Caitlin Gatlin presented the communications and marketing strategy, including a 30-second commercial, website updates, social media content, and community engagement initiatives.

Motion by Councilman Gill to accept the City Manager's plan, allowing for flexibility as needed, and renaming Neighborhood Services to the Department of Safe and Clean Neighborhoods, and directing the City Manager to remove all obstacles to success. Seconded by Weger.

VOTE: 8-0. Motion carried.

23. Consider approving the Kids First: Homeless Action Strategic Plan and take action as deemed necessary.

This item was struck from the agenda. Mayor Booker explained that the city learned it would run afoul of federal regulations if it prioritized kids on CDBG funding, and the item would be reworked and brought back at a later date.

24. Consider directing staff to proceed with the rehabilitation of 38th Street from Lee Blvd. to Gore Blvd. by authorizing staff to go out for bid on said project.

Michael Watrous, Public Works, requested permission to go out for bids on the 38th Street rehabilitation project with a hopeful start date in April.

Motion by Chapman for approval. Seconded by Councilman Smith.

VOTE: 8-0. Motion carried.

25. Per the recommendation of the Streets and Bridges Committee, consider approving a Transportation Activity Management Guide as a companion to the Pavement Maintenance Guide.

Michael Watrous, Public Works, explained that this guide addresses the entire transportation network including traffic lights and drainage under roads, treating it as a whole activity instead of just focusing on pavements.

Motion by Gill to approve. Seconded by Hampton.

VOTE: 8-0. Motion carried.

26. Receive a presentation from the Fire Department regarding structure fires in 2024 in relation to the ongoing homeless issues and if necessary direct staff to take appropriate action.

Fire Chief Jared Williams presented information on structure fires in 2024:

- 171 total structure fires, with 56 (36%) being vacant structures
- 12 incendiary fires (arson), 13 accidental fires (including homeless seeking shelter), and 31 undetermined
- 20 citations written for negligent burning of trash and debris
- Prevention strategies include working with code enforcement, community engagement, working with the police department, and securing vacant structures
- HUD states that securing vacant homes reduces fire chance by 20%

Discussion followed regarding coordination between the Fire Department and neighborhood watch groups, with the Chief agreeing to attend neighborhood watch meetings in areas experiencing multiple fires.

No action was taken.

27. Discuss the efficiency study conducted for the Lawton Fire Department by Emergency Services Consulting International (ESCI), and take action as deemed necessary.

Councilman Warren expressed concerns that the study did not provide the information requested in the original motion. The motion had directed staff to find an entity to conduct an exhaustive study of the Fire Department to find efficiency savings and evaluate a long-term plan to pay firefighters competitive wages without raising taxes. He felt the study provided raw data but lacked a path forward.

Mayor Booker presented slides comparing Lawton with Norman, noting that Lawton has 9.8 employees per 1,000 citizens compared to Norman's 7 employees per 1,000 citizens (about 30% more), and Lawton has 1.76 firefighters per 1,000 citizens compared to Norman's 1.27 (about 28% more).

Mayor Booker announced he would schedule a Budget and Efficiency Committee meeting for Friday at 9:00 a.m. to begin addressing these issues, looking at employee numbers, fire station distribution, and establishing efficiency as part of the city's vision.

No formal action was taken.

28. Discuss implementing an AI review process for City procurement documents and take action as deemed necessary.

Councilman Warren proposed using artificial intelligence to review RFPs and RFQs to ensure they seek answers to the questions Council is asking. He noted that AI would have helped identify issues with the fire department efficiency study RFP.

Motion by Councilman Warren to direct staff to create a Council policy that requires all RFPs or RFQs that go out are run through AI to make sure they are seeking the answers to the questions we have, understanding there are limitations. Seconded by Smith.

VOTE: 8-0. Motion carried.

29. Discuss Section 17-2-9-211, Article 17-2-9, Division 17-2, Chapter 17, Lawton City Code, 2015, in order to determine if a "Council Liaison" as part of the Employee Advisory Committee is in alignment with the Lawton City Charter and take action as deemed necessary.

Mayor Booker explained that having a Council liaison on the Employee Advisory Committee appears to contradict state statute and the City Charter, which state "except for purposes of inquiry, the council and its members shall deal with the administrative service of the city solely through the city manager."

The City Attorney advised that while a liaison who only listens might be acceptable, a liaison who participates in discussions could violate the statute. The Director of HR confirmed that Council liaisons participate in discussions at the EAC meetings.

Motion by Councilman Gill to direct staff to remove this provision from the ordinance. Seconded by Hampton.

VOTE: 8-0. Motion carried.

STAFF REPORTS:

30. Receive a presentation from the Housing and Community Development Administrator on the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and HOME Entitlement Grant Programs and take action as deemed necessary.

Gary Brooks presented an overview of the CDBG and HOME entitlement grant programs, explaining the 5-year Consolidated Plan process, public participation requirements, eligible activities, and funding limits. He noted that public service organizations cannot exceed 15% of the CDBG entitlement grant.

Mayor Booker asked about prioritizing funding for organizations directly addressing homelessness. After discussion, Councilwoman Hankins volunteered to meet with Mr. Brooks to review the public service organization funding further.

No action was taken.

31. Receive a report regarding the Lawton Police Department Sentinel Program, a volunteer-based initiative that enhances police services to the community and take action as necessary.

Lieutenant Mallick presented information on the Sentinel program, which uses unarmed civilians who undergo background checks to provide services such as directing traffic, helping at city events, serving Municipal Court subpoenas, and fingerprinting/photographing minor crime scenes. He noted challenges with equipment and scheduling.

Deputy City Manager Burk proposed implementing a compensation package to incentivize more participation and addressing equipment issues, with this being included in the next budget year.

No formal action was taken.

32. Provide City Council with an update on the FY 2024 Audit Process.

Rebecca Johnson, Finance Director, reported that she has received a draft of the component unit audit (McMahon) and expects the pension audit to be complete by the end of the following week. She indicated that the audit would be presented at the first meeting in April rather than the first meeting in March as previously planned.

She explained that for the FY 2025 audit, they would ensure all component units are in compliance with state statute and start the audits sooner.

No action was taken.

EXECUTIVE SESSION ITEMS:

Motion by Warren and seconded by Councilwoman Chapman to enter into Executive Session to discuss items 33-37. Roll call vote: All present voted yes. Motion carried.

Council entered Executive Session at 10:08 p.m.

Motion by Smith and seconded by Hampton to return to Open Session. Roll call vote: All present voted yes. Motion carried.

Council returned to Open Session at 10:52 p.m.

33. Pursuant to Section 307B.4, Title 25, Oklahoma Statutes, consider convening in executive session to discuss the seven (7) pending actions in Comanche County District Court, each titled City of Lawton vs. Great Plains Improvement Foundation, et al, Case No. CJ-2025-31, CJ-2025-32, CJ-2025-33, CJ-2025-34, CJ-2025-35, CJ-2025-36 and CJ-2025-37, and if necessary, take appropriate action in open session.

City Attorney John Andrew reported that no action would be taken in Open Session on this item.

34. Pursuant to Section 307B.4, Title 25, Oklahoma Statutes, consider convening in executive session to discuss pending action related to the settlement of United States of America v. City of Lawton, Case No. CIV-80-2148-E in the United States District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma, and if necessary, take appropriate action in open session.

City Attorney John Andrew reported that no action would be taken in Open Session on this item.

35. Pursuant to Section 307B.4, Title 25, Oklahoma Statutes, consider convening in executive session to discuss a pending investigation into CDBG and HOME funds, and if necessary, take appropriate action in open session.

City Attorney John Andrew reported that no action would be taken in Open Session on this item.

36. Pursuant to Section 307B.4, Title 25, Oklahoma Statutes, consider convening in executive session to discuss litigation in the case Donna L. Raite v. City of Lawton and City of Lawton Public Works Administration, CJ-2022-177, and, if necessary, take appropriate action in open session.

Motion by Warren to approve a resolution authorizing the City Attorney to enter into an economic settlement agreement in The District Court of Comanche County, State of Oklahoma, for the sum of \$445,000 as settlement of lawsuit styled Donna L. Raite versus City of Lawton and Lawton Public Works Administration, CJ-2022-177, and directing the City Attorney to prepare and file a journal entry incorporating said resolution and settlement agreement for the Court's approval. Seconded by Gill.

VOTE: 8-0. Motion carried.

37. Pursuant to Section 307B.2, Title 25, Oklahoma Statutes, consider convening in executive session to discuss negotiations of the FY 2026 collective bargaining agreement between the International Association of Firefighters Local 1882 and the City of Lawton, and, if necessary, take appropriate action in open session.

City Attorney John Andrew reported that no action would be taken in Open Session on this item.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Gill to adjourn. Seconded by Hankins.

ROLL CALL: Hankins - Yes, Smith - Yes, Chapman - Yes, Gill - Yes, Hampton - Yes, Weger - Yes, Williams - Yes, Warren - Yes

VOTE: 8-0. Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 10:54 p.m.

The City of Lawton encourages participation from all of its citizens. If participation at any public meeting is not possible due to a disability, notification to the City Clerk at (580) 581-3305 at least 48 hours prior to the scheduled meeting is encouraged to make the necessary accommodations. The City may waive the 48 hour rule if interpreters for the deaf (signing) is not the necessary accommodation."