

**CITY OF RUSTON  
REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING**

**Tuesday, November 7, 2023**

**MEETING CALLED TO ORDER**

At 7:01PM Mayor Hopkins called the regular Council Meeting to order. Councilmembers present were Councilmember Hedrick, Councilmember Kristovich, Councilmember Syler and Councilmember Jensen. Councilmember Huson was excused. Following the flag salute, Councilmember Hedrick moved to approve the Agenda, with a second from Councilmember Kristovich, passed 4-0.

**MINUTES** - Councilmember Hedrick moved to approve the minutes for the regular Council Meeting of October 17, 2023, with a second from Councilmember Kristovich, passed 4-0.

**STAFF REPORT** – Nothing at this time.

**GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENTS** – Nothing at this time.

**BUSINESS** –

**ORD 1573 – 2024 Property Tax Levy (2nd reading)** – As part of the budget process, Ruston considered a budget and the revenue sources for City operations and capital expenses. As part of that process, the City held the required public hearing on this topic on October 17, 2023. Ruston is required to adopt its property tax levy in November of each year by ordinance and transmit a certified copy of the ordinance to Pierce County Assessor-Treasurer and to the Pierce County Council no later than November 30<sup>th</sup>. A Levy Certification must also be transmitted with the Ordinance. This levy ordinance increases the property taxes levied by Ruston by the maximum amount allowed by law (one percent plus new construction, etc.). The maximum amount allowed by law is \$635,591.40. This is a 2.1321 percent increase from 2023, or a \$12,840.36 increase. The assessed value of new construction in the current year is \$1,878,023 which generates \$2,565.73 in property taxes for Ruston. This Levy did not include the levy lid lift that was on the ballot for November 7<sup>th</sup>. Councilmember Hedrick moved to approve Ordinance 1573, with a second from Councilmember Kristovich, passed 4-0.

**ORD 1575 – 2024 Budget (1<sup>st</sup> reading)** – In accordance with State law, the Mayor of the City of Ruston will complete and place on file with the City Clerk-Treasurer a proposed preliminary budget and estimate of the amount of monies required to meet the public expenses, interest, reserve funds, and expense of government of the city of Ruston for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2024. The Council is required to adopt its budget ordinance prior to January 1, 2024. On October 17, 2023 the Council held a preliminary public hearing to hear from the public about their budget priorities.

The final public hearing on the budget will be held on November 21, 2023. The final public hearing must take place prior to budget adoption. The City is required to pass the budget before the end of this calendar year.

The City Council Budget consideration schedule for Fiscal Year 2024 is as follows:

Mayor's Budget Message to Council:	October 3, 2023
Council discussion of revenue sources:	October 17, 2023
Public Hearing on Revenue Sources	October 17, 2023
Public Hearing on Preliminary Budget	October 17, 2023
Adoption of Tax Levy Ordinance No. 1573	November 7, 2023
Public Hearing on Proposed Budget	November 21, 2023
Budget Discussion #1:	October 17, 2023
Budget Discussion #2:	November 7, 2023
Budget Discussion #3:	November 21, 2023
Budget Discussion #4:	December 5, 2023
Adoption of Final Annual Budget for 2024	December 5 or 19, 2023

Prior to budget adoption, the City Clerk will have fully complied with state law by publishing notice of the availability of the budget for public review and publishing notice of the required public hearings on the City's proposed tax levy and budget, including a preliminary and final budget hearing. Mayor Hopkins presented an overview of the 2024 Budget. Councilmember Jensen noted that the Council would have two weeks, between tonight's meeting and the next Council meeting, to review the 2024 Budget. Councilmember Jensen asked if discussion would be open to public comment and if the 2024 itemized budget could be posted to the Ruston website. Mayor Hopkins confirmed that the budget was open to public comment and the itemized budget report could be placed to the Ruston website, with the understanding that the 2024 Budget, in its current form, was a work in process document. Mayor Hopkins shared that he had not factored in the Levy LID Lift passing, any grants, nor was revenue and expenses tied in. Councilmember Jensen noted the importance that the itemized budget report be posted to the Ruston website for the public to review and have comment on at the November 21<sup>st</sup> Council meeting. Councilmember Jensen shared the need for a report that would reflect what actually took place in 2023 so that Council could compare it to what was being forecasted within the 2024 budget. Mayor Hopkins noted he would email a report for Council review. Mayor Hopkins was happy to report on the LGIP investment fund and the interest we would see in 2024. Last year the City budgeted \$2,500 in interest and this year \$100,000 will go into the general fund. The City is currently earning interest of just under \$12,000 a month on our investment, with a current total of \$2.8 million dollars invested at LGIP. Councilmember Syler asked what the interest rate was on the City's investment. Mayor Hopkins noted it was around 4%. Mayor Hopkins shared that general liability/property

insurance, insured with the Association of Washington Cities, had skyrocketed and was reaching out to independent insurance brokers for quotes. Councilmember Syler recommended the City contact Brown and Brown. Mayor Hopkins shared there were several other items under review. The City's court costs were high, and he had tasked the Ruston Police Chief to review other options, the City would undergo another State Audit in 2024, and Mayor Hopkins placed a 4% COLA for the Ruston Police Department, in an effort in keeping the current Police Chief and Ruston Police officers.

**ORD 1576 – Update of Parking Code (1<sup>st</sup> reading)** - The Ruston Police Department became aware that portions of the City's traffic and parking code were out of date and had penalties that were below State law and surrounding jurisdictions. Police requested that the code be updated for consistency. The current code mostly dates to the mid-1990s and has had very few changes since that time. This Ordinance was a housekeeping ordinance. It makes things consistent with State law and updates language and fines. As part of this update, additional housekeeping changes were put into place, such as changing "town" to "city" and the like. The Ordinance was reviewed by Ruston PD, and they support the Council's adoption of these measures. If passed, Ordinance 1576 would increase fines consistent with State law and other jurisdictions. Ruston Police Chief Bautista shared why the ordinance was brought forward noting the change would update 1956 law.

**ORD 780 – Appointment of Hearing Examiner and Contract** – The City created a Hearing Examiner position and adopted a chapter in the Ruston Municipal Code establishing the Office of the Hearing Examiner. Stephen R. Shelton served as the City's hearing examiner since October of 2021 but recently informed the City that he will be retiring at the end of this year. Mr. Phil Olbrechts is recommended as his replacement. Mr. Olbrechts has a long and distinguished record as a hearing examiner, municipal attorney, and planning director. Mr. Olbrechts serves as a hearing examiner for many different cities, at least two of whom are represented by the Ruston City Attorney who also recommends Mr. Olbrechts. Mayor Hopkins determined that Mr. Olbrechts is qualified and should be appointed as the City of Ruston Hearing Examiner. Resolution No. 780 appoints Mr. Olbrechts as the City Hearing Examiner and authorizes the Mayor to enter into an agreement for such services. Authorizing the agreement makes the City responsible for payment of the fees and costs incurred in the providing of Hearing Examiner Services to the City. Bills are to be submitted monthly and are due within 30 days unless disputed. The City Clerk will provide support to the Hearing Examiner, so there will be no additional administrative fees beyond the Hearing Examiner's hourly rate. The hourly rate in this agreement is \$210.00 per hour for the Hearing Examiner. Councilmember Hedrick moved to approve Resolution 780, with a second from Councilmember Kristovich, passed 4-0.

**RES 781 – Contract for Enterprise Agreement with ESRI** – The City was working to improve operations in all of its utilities. The Mayor determined that use of the ESRI software and cloud-based system would assist with improved operations, management, planning, and infrastructure maintenance for all of Ruston’s utilities (electricity, sewer, and storm). The proposed agreement is a 3-year term at the rate of \$15,500 per year, plus tax. Authorizing the agreement makes the City responsible for payment of the fees for this service. The total cost over three years is \$51,196.50. There are adequate funds in the utilities accounts to cover this expense. Mayor Hopkins presented an overview of the ESRI Software. Councilmember Hedrick moved to approve Resolution 781, with a second from Councilmember Kristovich, passed 4-0.

**CLAIMS/PAYROLL** – Councilmember Hedrick moved to approve Claims for November 7, 2023, Payroll for October 20, 2023, and November 5, 2023, with a second from Councilmember Kristovich, passed 4-0.

**MAYOR’S TIME** – Mayor Hopkins wanted to thank everyone for voting. Mayor Hopkins provided an update on a meeting with House Speaker Jenkins and was optimistic that EPA would step up in providing the resources the City would need in refining the remedial work in and around Ruston.

**Councilmember Hedrick** – Commented on the meeting and great discussion they had with House Speaker Jenkins. House Speaker Jenkins offered to help in providing state capital appropriations going forward into 2024. Speaker Jenkins acknowledged the strained relationship with the legislative delegation in the past, recognized that the past is the past, and understood the needs the City of Ruston currently has.

**Councilmember Kristovich** – Nothing at this time.

**Councilmember Syler** – Nothing at this time.

**Councilmember Huson** – Was excused.

**Councilmember Jensen** – Thanked Mayor Hopkins for including the council in the meeting with House Speaker Jenkins. Councilmember Jensen felt the meeting was productive and that it was refreshing to hear from Speaker Jenkins. Councilmember visited the Pierce County Election office for a tour of the election process. It was refreshing to see how Washington State processes it’s elections and how votes were counted. Councilmember Jensen learned that Washington State won awards on it’s election process. Councilmember Jensen wanted to encourage residents to be involved in reviewing the 2024 budget and asked them to bring their public comments to the next Council meeting.

CITY OF RUSTON  
Regular Council Minutes  
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Councilmember Jensen announced that the Red Cross would be holding a winter blood drive on January 6, 2024 at the Tacoma Yacht Club and were looking for volunteers.

**MEETING AJOURNED** – At 7:42PM Councilmember Hedrick moved to adjourn, with a second from Councilmember Kristovich, passed 4-0.

  
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Mayor Bruce Hopkins

ATTEST:  
  
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Judy Grams