

**CITY OF RUSTON
REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING**

Tuesday, January 2, 2024

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

At 7:00PM Mayor Hopkins called the regular Council Meeting to order. Councilmembers present were Councilmember Syler Councilmember Huson and Councilmember Jensen. Councilmember Hedrick and Councilmember Holland were excused. Following the flag salute, Councilmember Syler moved to approve the Agenda, with a second from Councilmember Huson, passed 3-0.

OATH OF OFFICE- Mayor Hopkins administered the Oath of Office for Councilmember Syler and City Clerk, Laurie Cassell.

MINUTES - Councilmember Syler moved to approve the minutes for the regular Council Meeting of December 19, 2023, with a second from Councilmember Huson, passed 3-0.

STAFF REPORT – Nothing at this time.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENTS – Kevin Moser - Congratulations and thank you to Councilmember Syler for serving another 4-year term. Thank you to the council members and staff for all their hard work and to Mayor Hopkins for doing a wonderful job for the City of Ruston.

BUSINESS –

ORD 1577 – Ch.3.01 RMC – BLS Transport Fees (2nd Reading) - The Fire Department has been increasing its medical response as a portion of its call volume significantly over the past couple of decades. Medical response now makes up a significant portion of Fire’s calls for service. When a person is ill or injured, they may be transported to a hospital. Advance Life Support (ALS) transport is performed by a contractor for Ruston. ALS is used in the types of situations where the person’s life is at serious risk such as a heart attack, stroke, or grievous bodily injury. Basic Life Support (BLS) transport is done by Ruston Fire. BLS is appropriate where the person is ill or injured, but whose life is not in danger such as a broken ankle. Many area agencies have commenced charging BLS transport fees in order to recover the costs of providing this service. Insurance, Medicare, and Medicaid will reimburse the City for these transport fees and may be billed directly if the patient provides billing information. The transport fees proposed are consistent with surrounding agencies. Chief Allen surveyed surrounding agencies and the fees range from \$850 to \$900 plus a per mile fee of between \$21 and \$22. The proposed Ruston fee is in line with these other agencies. The attached ordinance creates a new chapter 3.01 RMC to provide the City the authority to impose these transport fees and to use a contractor for collections. Since there is no Fire Department title in the Code, this ordinance also creates Title 3 RMC. In addition, based on the Council discussion during first reading, a new subsection “H” has been added to RMC 3.01.010 to read:

H. As part of implementing this program, the Mayor may waive BLS transport fee charges that would otherwise be paid by the patient out of pocket after the application of any insurance, provided the patient provides the city with the medical insurance information and documentation needed to bill his or her insurance provider.

This language allows the City to forgive the debt over and above what insurance will cover and will allow the City to obtain reimbursement for the costs of transporting BLS patients in the amounts sent forth in the ordinance, which will be limited to the amount of insurance payment for residents who provide insurance billing information to the City. Councilmember Jensen commented at the last meeting her concerns with the uninsured paying for a transport service and supports the addition of item (H) in the Ordinance. Mayor Hopkins discussed this Ordinance with the City Attorney, and the city would like to take a year to see what type of activity the Fire Department incurs that fall into that realm. The city will take a wait and see approach before pursuing any actions.

RES 784 – Agreement With Systems Design West, LLC for Billing and Collection of BLS Transport Fee Billings

The City Council is considering adopting Ordinance No. 1577 which will allow the City to bill for Basic Life Support Transport Fees consistent with many other fire departments in the region. Systems Design West, LLC is a vendor that performs all of the administrative tasks for billing such BLS transport fees to insurance, obtaining insurance information from patients, and remitting the fees to the City. The City does not have the capacity nor expertise to do this work within current staffing resources. Therefore, Chief Allen is recommending that the City Council authorize execution of the Agreement attached to Resolution No. 784. With no further discussion, Councilmember Syler moved to approve Resolution 785, with a second from Councilmember Huson, passed 3-0.

CLAIMS – Councilmember Syler moved to approve Claims for December 31, 2023 and January 2, 2024, with a second from Councilmember Huson, passed 3-0

MAYOR'S TIME – Mayor Hopkins showed his appreciation to Councilmember Syler for her dedication to the city and serving another term. Staff were presented with a first look at the GIS system currently being worked on by our Planning Department and an intern using the ESRI software. There will be a Council presentation in March. Mayor Hopkins expressed appreciation of staff working through the transition of our accounting software to the cloud. The city is working through some challenges and looking to migrate everything to AWS in February, which will allow us to port over our website. There will be an auction for Point Ruston properties on March 22, 2024, for lots 15 and 16 with a future new owner.

Councilmember Hedrick – Was excused.

Councilmember Holland – Was excused.

Councilmember Syler – She is looking forward to serving the City of Ruston for the next 4 years and thanked everyone for their support. She would like to see an increase brought forward in the 2024 budget for the mayor’s salary with support from other council members.

Councilmember Huson – He agreed with Councilmember Syler on increasing the mayor’s salary. If it weren’t for Mayor Hopkins, the City of Ruston would not be what it is today. This year marks the 30th year that he has lived in the Town of Ruston. He moved here in 1994 right when the stock was imploded and is proud of the fact that Ruston has moved forward to become the city that it is today. He has been involved with the city in the planning commission, as Mayor Pro Tem and as a councilmember for 28 years. He is proud of where the city is, not only because of himself, but also Mayor Bruce Hopkins, Councilmember Lynn Syler, Councilmember Jim Hedrick, Judy, Ruston Police Department, Ruston Fire Department, planning commission and the residents working together to make this cohesive sense of community over the past 30 years.

Councilmember Jensen – She is glad to work in this community with all of you and is looking forward to 2024.

MEETING AJOURNED – At 7:19PM Councilmember Syler moved to adjourn, with a second from Councilmember Huson, passed 3-0.

Mayor Bruce Hopkins

ATTEST:

Laurie Cassell