

Minutes

City Council Meeting

March 10th, 2025

6:30 pm

Baldwin Municipal Courtroom, 155 Willingham Avenue, Baldwin, GA 30511

Mayor Stephanie Almagno, Councilmember Erik Keith, Councilmember Nancy Lehman, Councilmember Kerri Davis, Councilmember Maarten Venter, Councilmember Alice Venter (via phone) were all in attendance.

Call Meeting to Order

Mayor Almagno called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

Invocation and Pledge

Consent Agenda

- a. Approval of Minutes: Council Meeting 2/24/25 and Work Session 3/4/25.

Action: A motion was made by Maarten Venter to approve the consent agenda as presented with a second by Nancy Lehman. Motion Carried 5-0.

Public Comments

Casey Agnew

Casey Agnew addressed Council regarding her water bill and a leak at her property at 117 Heartwood Way. Ms. Agnew requested that the bill be further adjusted or some other resolution, as she did not feel she was responsible for the leak and can't afford the current \$1,158 bill. Ms. Agnew stated that she had been without water at her property for two weeks, as she had been disconnected.

Mayor Almagno stated that Council would need to review the information and come to an agreement. CAO Emily Woodmaster requested that Council authorize Ms. Agnew's water be turned back on tonight by the on-call Public Works workers. Council approved the reconnection, and Woodmaster will reach back out to Ms. Agnew with the Council's decision.

Vanessa and Zach Terrell

Vaness and Zach Terrell addressed Council regarding an adjusted water bill after a bad water leak in January at their home at 759 Harmony Church Road. They arrived home with their water shut off and a notice from the City that they had a leak. Approximately 1.1 million gallons of water reportedly went through the meter. The original bill of \$23,280 had been adjusted by City staff down to \$8,369. The Terrells requested further adjustment and also expressed concern that another leak could happen due to water pressure issues.

Mayor Almagno requested that Council have time to review the information and will be in contact with the Terrells next week. Councilmember Alice Venter mentioned the idea of leak insurance that many municipalities participate in, which Council was in favor of looking into further.

Keith Freeman of 879 Harmony Church Road addressed Council as a City of Baldwin water customer. He asked if there is a plan in place to replace the waterlines on Highway 105, as there are repetitive issues with pressure, and if it would be possible to add fire hydrants to the line, as the closest functional hydrant to his house is approximately two miles away. Freeman mentioned the City of Demorest's \$1.00 hydrant fee to offset some of the costs as an option.

Woodmaster stated that there is a plan to address the 105 waterlines, but the issue is funding, and the search for those funding sources is ongoing. She added that the City would also be in favor of adding the hydrants. Freeman offered to speak to his neighbors to get feedback, stating that he himself was willing to pay extra in order to help with more consistent water and with hydrants. Councilmember Maarten Venter expressed concern that assessing a service charge would not be enough to pay off the hydrant and if there are possible legal repercussions of assessing such a charge. Mayor Almagno said that this item would be discussed at the spring Council retreat next month, and that maybe a meeting could be arranged with the water customers in Mr. Freeman's area to discuss options.

Public Hearings

Reports

Old Business

1. Consideration/Approval of Fieldale Farms Zoning Change Ordinance #2025-02161Z

Council had no further questions or comments regarding the proposed zoning change. Mayor Almagno read the highlighted portion of the ordinance.

Action: A motion was made by Nancy Lehman to approve the second reading of the Fieldale Farms Zoning Change Ordinance #2025-02161Z as presented with a second by Erik Keith. Motion Carried 5-0.

2. Consideration/Approval of Master Fee Schedule

Council had no further questions or comments regarding the proposed Master Fee Schedule.

Action: A motion was made by Alice Venter to approve the Master Fee Schedule for Fiscal Year 2026 as presented with a second by Kerri Davis. Motion Carried 4-1 (Opposed: Maarten Venter).

New Business

3. Consideration/Approval of Emergency Waterline Repair Expense

Woodmaster stated that the first part of the waterline repair had already been completed, however, the budgeted expense has exceeded city staff authorization levels. Further repairs will be needed down the road, but a cost estimate cannot be provided at this time.

Action: A motion was made by Maarten Venter to approve the emergency waterline repair, not to exceed \$12,000 and to be expensed through the Professional Services line item

and fund balance as presented with a second by Kerri Davis. Motion Carried 5-0.

4. Consideration/Approval of Ace Watch Dog System for K-9 Unit

Woodmaster presented a request to outfit the second K-9 vehicle with an Ace Watch Dog System, as well as a breakdown of Public Safety Funds expenditures and balance. Assistant Chief Justin Ferguson explained how the Ace Watch Dog System works to the Council, who had no further questions or concerns. Ferguson also shared that Baldwin K-9 Nikos recently passed his certification.

Action: A motion was made by Alice Venter to approve the Ace Watch Dog System for the second K-9 Unit, not to exceed \$2,700 and to be expensed from Public Safety Funds as presented with a second by Erik Keith. Motion Carried 4-0-1 (Abstained: Nancy Lehman).

5. Consideration/Approval of Community Information Software

Woodmaster presented three quotes for community/citizen notifications, as well as a summary of each program from Everbridge, GoGov, and OnSolve. While this was an anticipated item for the FY26 budget, Woodmaster stated that with the recent waterline breaks and boil water advisories, City staff decided to bring it forward to Council early. The three options are Everbridge, GoGov, and OnSolve. Woodmaster recommended adding this service as a surcharge to water bills, which would equate to \$0.23 per month per customer for Everbridge, \$0.05 per month for OnSolve, and \$.20 for GoGov.

For those with Baldwin water but are not billed by the City like Apple Pie Ridge, the cost per month would be passed onto Utility Services, Inc. To notify those water customers, City staff could publish a notice in the newspaper, create doorhangers, and knock on individual doors. Woodmaster said that it would take some time but is feasible.

Council was in consensus to move forward with Everbridge. Legal counsel Jack Samuels stated that if Council wanted to pursue a 36-month agreement, the cancellation portion of the contract would need to be renegotiated so as not to bind future councils.

Action: A motion was made by Alice Venter to authorize City staff to move forward with pursuing a contract with Everbridge for community notifications to be approved by Council at a later date with a second by Kerri Davis. Motion Carried 4-1 (Opposed: Maarten Venter.)

Executive Session

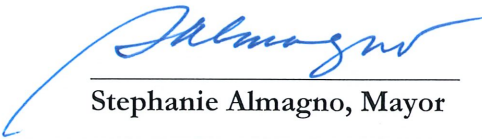
Announcements

- a. Homestead Exemption Affidavits for 2025 property taxes are due April 1st. If you do not have a Homestead Exemption, stop by City Hall or call 706-778-6341 to find out the exemption for which you qualify. If you have a City exemption, but not a County exemption, contact the County Clerk.
- b. The Baldwin City Council Spring 2025 Retreat will be April 10 - 11 from 8:00 am - 5:00 pm at EMI's Habersham Office at 202 Luthi Road, Alto, GA 30510. Formal notice and agenda to follow.

- c. The 26th annual Baldwin Clean Up Day is April 19th! Join us at Theron Ayers Park from 9:00 am - 12:00 pm to clean up Baldwin roads and plant a tree. Public Works will be collecting items that normally must go to the landfill, including appliances, scrap metal, and furniture. Tires, batteries, and paint cans will be accepted, but they must be separated from other items. All items must be placed out on the curb by 8:00 am on Monday April 14th. Sign up is required for pickup service. Call 706-778-6341 by April 11th to get your name on the list!

Adjournment

Action: A motion was made by Maarten Venter to adjourn the meeting with a second by Erik Keith. Motion Carried 5-0 at 7:39 pm.


Stephanie Almagno, Mayor

3/24/2025
Date Approved by Council


Erin Gathercoal, City Clerk

