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Friday, February 8, 2019

Chaos continues at Monday’s Robert Lee City Council meeting

by Melinda McCutchen, Publisher

At Monday’s Robert Lee City Council meeting, the third in as many weeks, citizens were once again left with more questions than answers. The special meeting began at 6 pm Monday, February 4, 2019. Present were Mayor Allyson Crenshaw, City Superintendent Billy Williams, City Secretary Crystal Blevins and Council Members Roger Alexander, Janie Munoz, Ann Hedges, Brandi Brosh and Ricky Green.

Following the prayer by Sheriff Wayne McCutchen and the Pledge of Allegiance, council members and the mayor adjourned into executive session at 6:02 pm. The City Secretary and City Superintendent were not included in the session and City Attorney Jeff Betty was not present either physically or by conference call. At 6:38 pm, Council Members Alexander and Munoz exited the Executive Session and when asked by members of the audience, they relayed that they were resigning – effective immediately. They made it clear that they did not wish to be a party to what was taking place in Executive Session. At this point, the remaining members were in violation of the Open Meetings Act. However, the meeting continued for another 2 hours and 58 minutes. The City Attorney was contacted by city staff and the remaining council members were informed he would be available for a conference call at 7 pm. These council members, along with the mayor, came back into regular session at 8:58 pm. The executive session lasted for 2 hours and 56 minutes. The regular agenda for the meeting only included four items – the audit, personnel matters, property and security devices.

(Continued on page 8)

Letter to the Editor from Roger Alexander

I intended to provide the following during the Council Meeting of January 29, 2019, but due to the executive session and motions passed I did not. I feel an obligation to report to the Citizens of Robert Lee the following information.

Let me begin by stating that the Mayor assumed this position at a very trying time. The City did not have a certified City Secretary or a certified City Superintendent. She helped the City hire qualified individuals for these critical positions. She has worked diligently to improve the City and the standing of the City in the greater community. For about two months she held the City Hall together until the City Council could hire a qualified City Secretary and then a City Superintendent.

Control of Tax Payer Money is one of the main jobs of City Government. The City Council through Budgets and oversight, such as reviewing invoices and approving expenditures, is charged with controlling tax money as well as revenue and expenses. It appears that the control of tax payer money is in question.

During FYE 2017 and FYE 2018 Utility revenues were not properly allocated to the various funds that the City maintains. There was not an audit completed for 10/1/16 through 9/30/17 due to turnover in city staff as well as computer problems. Staff did not get a good grip on the finances of the city until late June or early July 2018. Due to the volume of transactions that needed to be looked at, in preparation for the audit, Councilman Alexander was asked to assist in preparation of revenue spread sheets. He worked on this project during September, October, and November of 2018.

Near the end of this project, Councilman Alexander noticed a debit charge in the Water Fund. Councilman Alexander brought this up at a Council meeting and Billy Williams, City Superintendent, explained to council that the charge for over \$3,000 was for plumbing parts for water leaks. No further action was taken at that meeting.

In preparation for the City Audit, the Auditor reviewed bank statements and discovered a large volume of debit card charges from City bank accounts. Because this had not been prevalent in past City Audits, the Auditor requested policies for approval of these charges. Councilman Alexander, knowing that the Auditor would require receipts for these charges asked city staff to begin compiling a spread sheet detailing debit card charges with explanations and receipts. It quickly became apparent that these debit card charges started in May 2018.

In early January 2019 the City Attorney was made aware of these problems with the City debit card charges. He recommended that the City hire a Forensic Auditor to review these charges and make recommendations to City Council.

Let’s note here that the City Council was not aware that the City had debit cards until December 2018.

As of today, January 28, 2019, there are debit card charges that were not approved or voted on by City Council. The total of these charges is as follows:

| | |
|----------------|--------------|
| • General Fund | \$44,427.46 |
| • Water Fund | \$31,419.39 |
| • Sewer Fund | \$33,584.16 |
| TOTAL | \$109,431.01 |

There has been no procedure to report to City Council funds deducted from City bank accounts due to debit card charges. In other words, whether by ignorance or design the City Council has not been able to exercise their duty to watch over the money of the citizens of Robert Lee.

Based on a review of a spread sheet that details debit card charges for the General Fund, it has been determined that there were not receipts for over \$15,000 in charges. Based on the vendor, about \$6,000 can be identified, leaving over \$9,000 of charges that we know nothing about except money was taken out of our bank account. It appears that we have receipts for most of the debit card charges in the Water and Sewer Funds.

Several examples of irregularities are as follows:

1. In August 2018 the Mayor’s personal electric bill was PAID from the City General Fund Bank Account. This was brought to the Mayor’s attention in early December 2018. She repaid the City for this and 15 other charges in January 2019. The Mayor, through a letter to Council that was not dated or signed, stated that she discovered the problem with the City debit card in September.

(Continued on page 8)

WEEK AT A GLANCE

Friday, February 8

High School Basketball -
Bronte vs Irion County at Bronte, 6 pm
Blackwell at Water Valley, 5 pm

Tuesday, February 12

High School Basketball -
Bronte at Robert Lee, 6 pm

Thursday, February 14

Bake Sale, 9 am - 11 am,
Robert Lee State Bank

Friday, February 15

School Holiday -
Blackwell CISD

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