

The Austwell City Council met for its regular monthly meeting on Thursday, August 18, 2022, at 6:00 PM at the Community Center. Mayor Andrew Biery called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM Commissioner Torres was unable to attend the meeting.

Item 2: Welcome and Announcements

Mayor Biery announced that TCEQ has granted an extension on the October 31 deadline for the installation of the generator at the water plant. He also announced that Dwight Mutschler had completed a week of training to prepare him to serve as the municipal judge for Austwell. City Secretary Jodi Lerma will serve as secretary of the municipal court. Ordinances must be published before any changes can be made in preparation for the court to operate.

Item 3: Mayor Biery led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Item 4: There were no citizen comments.

Item 5: Staff Reports

Secretary Jodi Lerma reported that the city is now using accounts at First National Bank:Port Lavaca for ongoing financial business and reported balances in various accounts.

*Rene Rodriguez of Rene's Water Services had sent a message that he had been delayed but that he would be attending the meeting.

Precinct 4 Commissioner Blaine Wolfshohl reported on repairs of sewer lines and water main leaks that his crews had repaired through interlocal agreements.

Item 6: Minutes of Previous Meetings

Minutes of the July 23 Workshop Meeting regarding consideration of the proposed 2022-2023 Budget were approved.

Minutes of the July 26 Regular Meeting were also approved.

Item 7: Grant Committee Update

Mayor Biery introduced Joey Moehler who reported on various grants that he is researching as possible sources of funding for city projects, especially those dealing with drainage. Many are matching grants which will require partial city funding. Grants awarded in previous years are being closed out and new sources of grant funding will need to be obtained for street repairs, drainage improvement, and water and sewer updates.

Item 8: Frontier Communications Contract and Alternatives

In an effort to reduce costs of telephone and internet services, alternate service providers (such as Magic Jack and TISD VOIP) are being investigated. A change in telephone numbers may be required. Commissioner Ancira moved to start negotiations with alternate providers. Mayor Biery seconded the motion, and both commissioners voted for the proposal. Motion to begin negotiations passed.

Item 9: USU Divers-CONSOR Engineers

Divers' services are required to remove sediment from water storage facilities in order to improve water quality and water flow. The procedure will cost approximately \$6400 and will require that water service be shut down for several hours. Commissioner Ancira moved to accept the agreement to have this work done, to approve the expense, and to schedule the work. Mayor Biery seconded the motion. Motion carried. Commissioner Ancira also moved to allow the divers to work longer than the planned time period if necessary to thoroughly complete the project. Mayor Biery seconded the motion and both commissioners voted to support it. Motion passed to allow extension of time required to complete the project, if necessary.

Item 10: Interlocal Agreements Concerning (a) Assistance with Emergency Standby Materials and (b) Services Concerning Assistance with Removal and Monitoring of Storm Debris
Sheldon Wigington, Refugio County Emergency Services Director, explained the purpose of having the emergency assistance agreements in place before emergencies occur. He also pointed out the differences between the two documents and the services they provide. Commissioner Ancira moved that both agreements be accepted. Mayor Biery seconded the motion and it passed.

Item 11: Terminate Building Official Eric Kurecka
Mayor Biery reviewed some of the services that Mr. Kurecka has provided for the City of Austwell and mentioned some of the instances that have indicated a recent lack of Mr. Kurecka's interest to the duties of City Building Official. Mayor Biery moved to terminate Mr. Kurecka's position as Austwell Building Official. Commissioner Ancira seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Item 12: Appoint Earl Bluhm Temporary Building Official
Mayor Biery reported that a recent discussion with Earl Bluhm indicated that Mr. Bluhm would be willing to accept the position of Temporary Building Official. Mayor Biery moved that Mr. Bluhm be appointed to that position. Commissioner Ancira seconded the motion; the motion passed. Mr. Bluhm agreed to accept the appointment.

Item 13: Post Notice of Opening for Building Official/Discuss Use of Bureau Veritas as Primary Provider
Anyone interested in applying for the position of Building Official must hold one of the skill licenses: plumbing, electrical, or HVAC. Recent use of Bureau Veritas for inspection has been successful. Their charge per project is \$900, and their services would ease the workload for a city building inspector. Mayor Biery moved to post a call for applicants for building inspector and review the situation at the next meeting. Commissioner Ancira seconded the motion; it passed by a 2-0 vote. The option of using Bureau Veritas as primary provider of inspection services was discussed and will be re-evaluated at the next council meeting.

*Item 5: (Delayed) Rene's Water Service Report
Rene Rodriguez reported on dates and results of testing after water system repairs. A Boil Water notice had been posted and then rescinded. He reported that there had been some issues with flow levels and sediment settling after rain, requiring repairs of some chambers. In preparation for work on Saturday (August 20), decisions will need to be made regarding repairs to water system equipment behind the backstop.

Item 14: Update on Banking Operations, AutoDraft, and Credit Card Billing
Funds and banking services are being moved from Wells Fargo Bank in Port Lavaca to First National Bank of Port Lavaca. City officials will be visiting bank facilities in Seadrift next week to evaluate the possibility of offering similar services to the City of Austwell. More information will be provided at the next meeting.

Item 15: New Base Water/Sewer Rate of \$100
Mayor Biery opened the floor for questions and comments by citizens in regard to increasing the base rate for water/sewer services from the current \$66.06 per month to \$100 per month. The increase is necessary for the passage of the proposed FY2022-2023 Budget. Water, sewer, and drainage projects will need to be locally funded since the \$591,000 grant was not approved. Citizens discussed alternate sources of income but the total of those projects would not provide the amount required. Commissioner Ancira moved to establish the base water/sewer rate at \$100 per month. Motion was seconded by Biery and both commissioners voted for the proposal. The motion to increase the monthly rate from \$66.06 per month to \$100 per month passed.

Item 16: Adopt Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Budget

The purpose of the proposed budget is to address urgent needs, and to begin to make improvements to critical infrastructure while reserving emergency funds and planning for continued improvement of services. Fifty thousand dollars has been dedicated to water, sewer, and drainage projects that will benefit all citizens. Commissioner Ancira moved that the 2022-2023 budget be adopted as presented; Mayor Biery seconded the motion. Both commissioners voted for acceptance. The motion carried.

Item 17: Adjournment

Mayor Biery declared the meeting adjourned at 7:44 PM.