

**Westover City Council
"Special Called" Meeting**

**MINUTES
July 13, 2021
6:30 p.m.**

Call To Order

Mayor Riggins called the meeting to order.

Opening Statement – Mayor Larry Riggins

Mayor Riggins thanked Pastor Matt Britt for opening church to allow for our meeting.

Those who wish to speak will be allowed three (3) minutes and may not speak more than once.

Cameras and media are to remain in the rear of the room and not to block view of the speakers from the audience.

The purpose of the meeting is for our citizens to provide feedback to our Council, concerning the possible formation of a City of Chelsea Board of Education and what that means for us and our students. Many of our children attend County schools which are located within the Chelsea City limits and at this time, we are led to believe only children residing in the City of Chelsea would be allowed to attend those schools. Many of you have the same thoughts shared by others, so please for the sake of time, do not make the same points as a previous speaker.

The Mayor and Mayor Protem will be the official timekeepers of the speakers and the Planning & Zoning Clerk will be the recorder for the speakers.

We thank you again, for your attendance and we look forward to a productive meeting.

The meeting of the Council of the City of Westover, Alabama was held in the New Life Assembly Church in Westover, Alabama at 6:30 p.m. on July 13, 2021.

Roll Call – Clerk Meacham

Upon roll call, the Mayor declared a quorum present and the Special Called Meeting session was opened.

In Attendance were:

Mayor Larry Riggins, Councilmembers: Wayne Jones, Susan Lane, Annette Tyler and Dr. Jay Crisman.

Absent: Councilmember Roberta Stamp

Mayor Riggins stated that there is a quorum present and that Councilmember Roberta Stamp was out of town and not able to attend.

Invocation: The invocation was given by Pastor Matt Britt.

Pledge of Allegiance: The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mayor Riggins.

Introduction

Mayor Riggins introduced the City Councilmembers: Susan Lane, Annette Tyler, Dr. Jay Crisman and Wayne Jones, Mayor-Protem.

City Clerk – Treasurer: Bonnie Meacham

Guest on stage are:

City Attorney: Josh Arnold

Shelby County Board of Education Assistant Superintendent: David Calhoun

Again, the purpose of this meeting is to hear input from our Citizens about what has been discussed in the Opening Statement concerning the possible formation of a City School System for the City of Chelsea.

Public Hearing

Mayor Riggins asked the Council for a motion to Open The Public Hearing.

A motion was made by Councilmember Susan Lane to Open Public Hearing.

A second was made by Councilmember Annette Tyler.

Motion passed and the public hearing was opened.

The following Citizens voiced their questions and concerns:

Speaker 1: Jeff Muzer - 4810 Old Highway 280, Westover, Al.

Speaker 2: Vicky Couch – 140 Willow View, Wilsonville, Al

Speaker 3: Patrick Bennett – 11264 Highway 55, Sterrett, Al

Speaker 4: Kathy Parrish – 94 Lakewood Drive, Westover, Al

Speaker 5: Ray Franklin – 40 Rosewood Drive, Westover, Al

Speaker 6: Sommer Piotrowski – 136 Willow View Lane, Wilsonville, Al

Speaker 7: Tiffany Pardue – 76 Big Oak Circle, Sterrett, Al

Speaker 8: Brandon Fennell – 101 Willow Lake Lane, Wilsonville, Al

Speaker 9: Doug Mims – 1325 Willow Oaks Drive, Wilsonville, Al

Speaker 10: Justin Reid – 409 Lakewood Drive, Westover, Al

Speaker 11: Cody Cothron – 4420 Old Highway 280, Westover, Al

Speaker 12: Angel Longre – 409 Lakewood Drive, Sterrett, Al

Speaker 13: Darby Owenby – 182 Rosewood Drive, Westover, Al

There being no more questions Mayor Riggins asked the Council for a motion to Close Public Hearing.

A motion was made by Councilmember Wayne Jones to close public Hearing.

A second was made by Councilmember Susan Lane.

The motion to close the Public Hearing was adopted.

Mayor Riggins left the table open for any Council Comments of any questions or items that they want to address, then we will move on to Josh Arnold, Attorney and afterward, David Calhoun, Shelby County Board of Education Assistant Superintendent.

Councilmember Dr. Jay Crisman, thanked everyone for attending tonight's meeting, it is an honor to be a part of the Community with so much engagement and there is a lot of passion around the room, a lot of good questions raised. Part of the problem is that we do not have all those answers yet. One good thing that has happened tonight that we have a good list of questions to really dive into and sounds like the issues are very clear, those that were not certain, our citizens value and love our Community and that's why we chose to live here and not Chelsea. I think that it is good that we explore these things and value your input a great deal. I have heard a lot of those that want to stay in the Chelsea School System. I also heard a lot of concerns from those who want the Chelsea School System to stay in the County System. I, for one, appreciate hearing your input, so we know what questions that we need to dive into and get legal council and get you some of these answers. Mayor Riggins thanked Councilmember Dr. Jay Crisman for his comments.

Mayor Riggins stated the process for taking on a School System for Chelsea, if that were to happen. The first thing would be for Chelsea Council to look at their Feasibility Study and then, they will decide whether they want to proceed. It will take a vote of the people of the City of Chelsea, to approve the taxes to support that School System. So, there will be a school tax for the City of Chelsea to be voted on by the citizens of Chelsea. The amount of tax is not known until the Feasibility Study is in on how much money it will take to run that system on an annual basis.

I have seen a lot of numbers and I have looked at other Schools in other cities in Shelby County, as well as those parts of Hoover, Sylacauga and Pell City. There are a lot of numbers on a per capital basis to look at of how much it is going to take to run the school system and take on debt service. There is a tremendous amount of debt service on Chelsea Schools even though a couple of the schools, are getting older now, but, some are newer schools. I know that everybody has a deep conviction one way or the other and it is our job to get these questions answered. There will not be anything done until the Feasibility Study comes in the middle to end of October 2021 and the Chelsea City Council makes their decision on how to move forward.

Mayor Riggins stated that Josh Arnold, Attorney, will address some of the numbers on tax millage that might happen. What the millage will be depends on what cities or communities annex into Chelsea and increase the land mass that taxes are divided on. It appears that based on cities within Shelby County that our Ad Valorem Tax will increase somewhere between 30 to 40%. Now I do not know that until the Feasible Study comes in and having said that I do know that one other thing a lot of people are addimnt about Westover's identity. Westover incorporated in 2001 so that Westover would not be taken up by Chelsea or Harpersville and Westover maintain its own identity. I would like to say thank you for all the support from our citizens. Westover is in a much better financial position than four to five years ago. I appreciate that and everybody has been cooperative. We need to get the facts in people's hands so that everyone can make an educated decision and stop believing all you see on social media. Mayor Riggins stated that he will not rebut on social media and will not do business on the internet.

Mayor Riggins asked the Council if anyone had any comments at this time. No one replied. Mayor Riggins asked Josh Arnold, Attorney to make a few comments on the things that he has heard during this meeting.

Josh Arnold, Attorney, had the numbers broken down on our Ad Valorem Tax into municipalities is available for anyone that would like a hard copy or direct you to the website and Department of Revenue.

Mr. Arnold stated the biggest concern for most, is the process. By Alabama Law there are three processes to annex one municipality into another by the Alabama Statue and explained them. They are:

1. Municipality Absorption Action
2. Councilor Initiation Action
Two Cities Vote To Merge To Make a New City – No one has mentioned this possibility.
3. Merger with a Commission

Mr. Arnold stated he had the state law references for anyone who wanted them. There will be an election and you will be notified. Handouts are available. When the Feasible Study is ready more questions will be answered. Read this Study and ask your elected officials questions. We will be glad to answer any questions.

Mayor Riggins asked David Calhoun, Shelby County Board of Education Assistant Superintendent, to comment on any questions that have been asked if he knows the answers at this time.

Mr. Calhoun stated there have been no reassignments at this time. City of Chelsea made this announcement approximately four weeks ago and so a lot of things are going to have to be considered and someone mentioned the impact on other schools like travel time to schools. These are factors that will be considered for the students of Westover should they not go into the City of Chelsea. Regardless, to what is being said about the students of Westover, where they will go to school, no final decisions have been made. If you listen to the City of Chelsea Leadership, they announced a month ago that in the event they do push forward, after the Feasibility Study, it will determine if they will move forward to have their own school system, The earliest date to take the schools would be July 2023. This is a process over a period of time, for the City of Chelsea, to determine if it will be practical for them to go independent with their own School System. What does this mean for students that are currently attending Chelsea now? It means absolutely nothing. Your children will continue to go to the same schools they currently attend. At some point in time if Chelsea decides they want to break away and Westover stays as Westover and not a part of Chelsea, it will be according to what part of the Shelby County School system provides education for the community.

The Children with disabilities will be the responsibility of the City School System they are zoned for when they break away from the County School System. The New City School system will be responsible to meet the needs of all students within the City School System.

Everyone will be notified and information posted on the Shelby County Board of Education website if the City of Chelsea has their own City School system.

Council Comments:

Councilmember Susan Lane stated that the Mayor and Council want to Thank the citizens for taking time to attend tonight's meeting. I can see by looking around this room our constituents are passionate about Westover.

Your voice has been heard and is valuable to the Mayor and Council.
A special Thank you to Mr. David Calhoun, Assistant Superintendent, Shelby County schools for being here tonight upon our request.

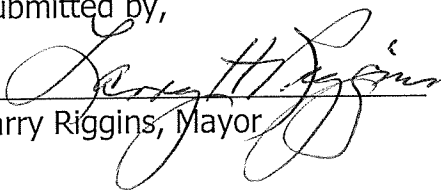
ADJOURNMENT:

A motion was made by Councilmember Annette Tyler to adjourn the meeting.

A second was made by Councilmember Wayne Jones.

The motion to adjourn was passed and meeting was adjourned at 7:36 p.m.

Submitted by,


Larry Riggins, Mayor


Bonnie Meacham, City Clerk – Treasurer