

**Town of Walden**  
**Regular Monthly Meeting**  
**December 12, 2023**

**AGENDA WORKSHOP**

The agenda was reviewed and briefly discussed beginning at 5:15 PM. The following interested citizens were present: Linda Collins, Mike Cassidy, and Rusty Sewell.

Prior to the beginning of the Public Hearing, Mayor Lee Davis called on Brian Wright – from the audit firm Johnson, Murphey, and Wright – to give the audit report from FY23. Mr. Wright gave statements of total expenses and revenues for the Town of Walden. Overall, the audit produced an “unmodified opinion,” which Mr. Wright described as the best outcome possible. There were zero findings of any internal issues. The full audit report is available for public review at the Walden Town Hall.

**CALL TO ORDER OF THE PUBLIC HEARING ON ORDINANCE 2023-360, SHORT-TERM VACATION RENTALS**

Mayor Lee Davis called the Public Hearing on Ordinance 2023-360 to order. Mayor Davis noted that the first reading of this ordinance will be continued to the January meeting in order to allow for citizens to continue to state their views. He also noted that the Walden Planning Commission will address the issue of property owners with less than five acres who may want to begin a short-term vacation rental.

Prior to the first citizen comments, Attorney Sam Elliott clarified the reason that there are two ordinances relative to short-term vacation rentals (STVR). New Business agenda item #1 (O 2023-360) is the ordinance that will govern STVR in the Town of Walden. Agenda item #2 (O 2023-361) is an ordinance that will assign “policing power” (inspections, addressing violations, etc.) to the Town of Walden. There is no public hearing required for the second ordinance. Mayor Davis then invited interested citizens to comment publicly.

A Walden resident from East Brow Road noted that she was very opposed to allowing STVR, citing concerns over the problems they will cause. She stated that Walden is not a tourist destination, and she believes that STVR are not good for communities in general, as they often bring loud, raucous parties.

Walden resident Sissy Powell is in support of allowing STVR in Walden. She owns a back-yard cottage and has rented it out long-term for years. She would like to transition this to a STVR, and notes that there is not much availability for this type of rental on Signal Mountain. She stated that she believes there is a need for STVR in Walden for several reasons, including – visiting parents living at Alexian, building a house on Signal, and visiting family from out of town. In closing, she would like to see the 5-acre minimum be reconsidered or the allowance for grandfathering of smaller lots that have previously had rental housing on the property.

Walden resident Kristin Allen noted her concern that home owners won’t be involved or attentive enough to their renters. She is also worried about parties, noise, and potential violence.

Karen Stone asked if a STVR was different than a bed-and-breakfast. Mayor Lee Davis responded in the affirmative, and that they are two different things.

**ADJOURNMENT OF THE PUBLIC HEARING**

There being no further comments or questions from citizens, Mayor Lee Davis adjourned the hearing.

## CALL TO ORDER OF THE REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING

The regular monthly meeting of the Walden Board of Mayor and Aldermen was called to order by Mayor Lee Davis at 6:30 PM. The following interested citizens were present: Linda Collins, Mike Cassidy, Rusty Sewell, David and Ashley Thurston, John Hall, Rob Hall, Thomas Hall, Bill Thronton, Sissy Powell, Kristin Allen, Joe Robbins, Jr., Marshall Dandelski, Hal Turner, Karen and John Stone, Kim Rackel, Jean Trohanis, and Brown Chaffin.

## PRAYER AND PLEDGE TO THE FLAG

Town Administrator Mariah Prescott opened the meeting with a prayer. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by three members of Boy Scout Troop #176.

## ROLL CALL

Town Administrator Mariah Prescott called the roll and noted the presence of Mayor Lee Davis, Vice Mayor Lizzy Schmidt, and Alderwoman Angela Cassidy. Town Attorney Sam Elliott was also present.

## APPROVAL / CORRECTION OF MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

ALDERWOMAN ANGELA CASSIDY MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 14, 2023, SECONDED BY VICE MAYOR LIZZY SCHMIDT, AND UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF MAYOR AND ALDERMEN.

## REPORTS

### 1. POLICE

Hamilton County Sheriff's Deputy Chad Faulkner gave the Police Report, noting 87 calls for service in the past 30 days. These calls included 17 traffic stops and 8 arrests. Deputy Faulkner noted that these numbers reflect all calls for service in Hamilton County on Walden's Ridge.

### 2. FINANCIAL

The Financial Report was given by Town Administrator Mariah Prescott and is attached as an exhibit to these minutes.

### 3. WRES

The WRES report was given by Bill Thornton. Mr. Thornton noted that there were 14 fire-related calls last month, but only one was a structure fire. The others were all brush fires. There were seven emergency medical calls, three assist-to-citizen calls, one search and one water rescue. Mr. Thornton noted that 2023 has been a very good year for funding, and also that several new members of the WRES have been added. He closed the report by stating that the recent rescue from a hillside of a stranded and injured goat – which was heavily covered by local media – was an excellent training opportunity for the WRES volunteers. All of the rescued goats have been relocated to a farm in a neighboring county.

### 4. BUDGET

No Report.

### 5. ROADS

Kristin Allen gave the report for the Roads Committee, noting several ongoing projects. First, the committee will begin working with a new engineering firm in 2024, CTI Engineers. CTI will work on researching data regarding excessive speeding by vehicles in Walden, possibly addressing this issue with some speed-abatement recommendations. This committee is also working on securing traffic studies in Walden for the feasibility of roundabouts at the top of the W (Anderson Pike and Taft Hwy) and also at the intersection of Taft Hwy and Fairmount, near the apple orchard. In closing, Ms. Allen encouraged drivers and pedestrians in Walden to be alert and aware of others at all times.

#### **6. PARKS AND RECREATION**

No report.

#### **7. BACHMAN**

Kim Rackel, Director of the Bachman Community Center (BCC), first thanked the Town of Walden for their recent donation to the BCC. These funds will go in part to the now-completed LED-conversion of light fixtures at BCC. Other projects ongoing at BCC include a recent roof repair and also some preventative maintenance to extend the life of the existing roof.

Director Rackel also noted that the BCC has been working to grow their volunteer base. This has been successful, in part, due to a partnership with the Hamilton County School System. Volunteers are always needed and welcomed, including upcoming vacancies on the BCC Board and several committees. Ms. Rackel invited members of the community to share their talents in various performances or workshops offered to the public. Specifically, there is a group of knitters who would like to get together for knitting circles at the BCC. In closing, please remember that BCC is available for private parties and events. From September through November this year, special events were booked for seven of the nine weekends. You can reach Kim Rackel at: [director@bachmancc.org](mailto:director@bachmancc.org) or reach out for general information at: [info@bachmancc.org](mailto:info@bachmancc.org)

#### **8. CIVIC LEAGUE**

The Civic League report, given by Karen Stone, is attached as an exhibit to these minutes.

#### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

There is no unfinished business.

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

- 1. CONSIDERATION OF FIRST READING OF ORDINANCE 2023-360, SHORT-TERM VACATION RENTALS AS RECOMMENDED BY THE WALDEN PLANNING COMMISSION.**

Tabled for further discussion until January 9, 2024.

- 2. CONSIDERATION OF FIRST READING OF ORDINANCE 2023-361 TO AMEND TITLE 9 OF THE WALDEN MUNICIPAL CODE RELATING TO SHORT-TERM VACATION RENTALS AS RECOMMENDED BY THE WALDEN PLANNING COMMISSION.**

MAYOR LEE DAVIS MOVED TO DEFER FIRST READINGS OF BOTH ORDINANCES 2023-360 AND 361 TO THE FEBRUARY MEETING, LEAVING THEM BOTH ON THE AGENDA FOR DISCUSSION IN JANUARY. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY VICE MAYOR LIZZY SCHMIDT, AND UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF MAYOR AND ALDERMEN.

**3. CONSIDERATION OF BOBBY HIGGINS FOR FULL-TIME PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT.**

Town Administrator Mariah Prescott stated that Mr. Higgins has been part of the Walden Public Works' team for six months and is doing an excellent. There is currently a full-time vacancy, and it is her recommendation that Bobby be approved to fill it.

VICE MAYOR LIZZY SCHMIDT MOVED TO APPROVE BOBBY HIGGINS FOR FULL-TIME PUBLIC WORKS EMPLOYMENT BEGINNING JANUARY 2, 2024, SECONDED BY ALDERWOMAN ANGELA CASSIDY, AND UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF MAYOR AND ALDERMEN.

**4. CONSIDERATION OF REGULAR EMPLOYEE HOLIDAY BONUSES.**

Mayor Lee Davis introduced this agenda item, noting that it has been a tradition of the current Board to approve an additional week's pay for all regular full-time and part-time Walden employees.

ALDERWOMAN ANGELA CASSIDY MOVED TO APPROVE CHRISTMAS BONUSES FOR ALL REGULAR FULL-TIME AND PART-TIME EMPLOYEES, SECONDED BY VICE MAYOR LIZZY SCHMIDT, AND UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF MAYOR AND ALDERMEN.

**5. CONSIDERATION OF QUOTES FOR TOWN HALL AUDIO SYSTEM.**

Mayor Lee Davis recommended that this item be tabled until the January meeting so that more research may occur.

ALDERWOMAN ANGELA CASSIDY MOVED TO DEFER THE CONSIDERATION OF QUOTES FOR THE TOWN HALL AUDIO SYSTEM UNTIL THE JANUARY MEETING, SECONDED BY VICE MAYOR LIZZY SCHMIDT, AND UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF MAYOR AND ALDERMEN.

**6. DISCUSSION ON TDOT TRANSPORTATION PLANNING GRANT.**

Town Administrator Mariah Prescott introduced this item, noting that the grant funding is only for use on the Taft Highway corridor. Mayor Davis asked Alderwoman Angela Cassidy to lead the research and discussion on this issue. She will work closely with Ms. Prescott and also Ashley Gates (of SETd) to finalize recommendations – which must be finalized at the January meeting. Vice Mayor Lizzy Schmidt suggested that the Roads and Safety Committee also be included in these conversations.

**7. ANNOUNCEMENT OF PUMPKIN PATCH FREE LIBRARY.**

Communications Director Ellen Young reminded all citizens of the children's free library box, located at the entrance to the Pumpkin Patch Playground, which was originally created as an Eagle Scout project. It was recently refurbished and filled with new books. Ms. Young invited everyone to visit the free library to take books as needed and also to donate books whenever possible.

**8. ANNOUNCEMENT OF WALDEN FOOD DRIVE FOR SIGNAL MOUNTAIN SOCIAL SERVICES.**

Communications Director Ellen Young noted that Walden is currently collecting non-perishable food items for individuals in need. During business hours, donations may be dropped off inside Town Hall. If Town Hall is closed, there is also a collection bin on the front porch of Town Hall. Collections will continue through December 21, 2023. Mayor Davis recognized Vice Mayor Lizzy Schmidt for setting up the collection partnership with Signal Mountain Social Services.

Prior to Communications from the Citizens, Mayor Lee Davis reminded all that there is an open seat on the Walden Planning Commission. Please submit letters of interest to Town Administrator, Mariah Prescott, at Walden Town Hall prior to December 31, 2023.

**COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CITIZENS**

There are no communications from citizens.

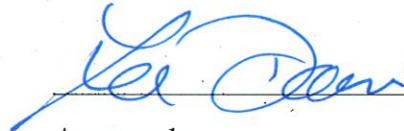
The meeting was adjourned by Mayor Davis.



Respectfully submitted:  
Stacy Stewart



Approved:  
Mariah Prescott, Town Administrator



Approved:  
Lee Davis, Mayor