Crossett City Council met in regular session July 20, 2015 at 6:00 p.m. in the Crossett Public Library.

Roll call vote was taken as follows:

Present: Mayor Scott McCormick, City Attorney James Hamilton,

Clerk/Treasurer Jesse Walthall

Councilmembers: Candace Jeffress, Eddie Rowe, James Knight, C.T. Foster,

Lynn Rodgers

Absent: Councilmember Robert Freeman

Mayor McCormick called the meeting to order with prayer and Pledge of Allegiance.

Motion by Councilwoman Jeffress, seconded by Councilman Foster to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of June 15, 2015 and the special meetings of June 22 and July 15, 2015. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Motion by Councilwoman Rodgers, seconded by Councilwoman Jeffress to accept the June 2015 financial statements. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Mayor McCormick introduced Ashley County Quorum Court member Carlton Lawrence to discuss and answer questions regarding the Crossett Ambulance/County proposal. Mr. Lawrence explained that currently Fast Ambulance Service answers emergency calls for outside of Egypt Township, but they are having financial difficulties and will not be able to sustain much longer. A committee was established by ACQC to look at alternative ambulance service to cover the entire county. They have found that the best feasible option is to ask Crossett Ambulance Service to cover the area. In order for this to be possible, a financial source will have to be found. The most likely source would be a one-quarter percent sales tax. Mr. Lawrence added that this proposal will have to first be approved by the ACQC board, the Crossett City Council, and then be presented to the Ashley County citizens for a vote. The Quorum Court has already approved to support this proposal and Mr. Lawrence is asking the Crossett City Council for approval. He explained that if the tax passes approximately $640,000 would be generated annually. Of this the city would be paid ½ of the amount received to continue to cover the Crossett Ambulance Service for the territory it is currently serving. The remainder of the monies collected would be put into an account for the county ambulance service. Ambulance runs that generate in the city of Crossett’s designated coverage area would continue to be handled exactly as they are now. All receipts from those ambulance runs will be paid to the City of Crossett. Any runs outside the city’s current area will be made by the county service and revenues collected from those runs will be deposited into the county ambulance fund. All capital purchases for the county ambulance service will be made from money generated from their ½ of the quarter percent tax they will receive and the revenue from insurance runs.

When asked about the city residents being charged again for services they already receive, Bo Higginbotham, Crossett Fire Chief, explained that as an incentive for Ashley County residents they will be given a “membership” into the ambulance service. This will allow that anyone carried by the ambulance service will not be billed in excess of the amount paid by insurance. If there is no insurance coverage, a discounted amount will be offered. For non-residents, the amount not covered by insurance will be collected.

Chief Higginbotham explained that if this proposal doesn’t pass, and the county contracts with a private ambulance service, the city stands to lose much of their current coverage. This will cut current revenues substantially. While the city now covers the entire Egypt Township, for a private service to consider coming to the area, they will likely be given everything but the city limits of Crossett. Chief Higginbotham estimated that around half of the current runs are for outside the city limits. This could also affect the transfers out of Ashley County Memorial Hospital, as it is a county run hospital. Higginbotham stated that he feels that the Crossett Ambulance Service can only benefit from the current proposal.

Councilwoman Rodgers inquired as to the cost to the city in going forward with this proposal. Mr. Lawrence explained that all election expenses and counsel will be paid by the ACQC. If the proposal passes, the City Council and the Quorum Court will then negotiate a contract agreeable to all.

Mayor McCormick stated that he was reluctant when first hearing this proposal, but feels that the council needs to look at this option. A decision will need to be made at the regular council meeting of August 17. All council members agree.

Councilwoman Rodgers stated that earlier in the year, Fire Chief Higginbotham had presented a proposal for raises for the fire department employees. The council had not made a decision on that and she would like to give them a definitive answer. Although the council realizes how valuable the employees are to the city and appreciates the great job they do, the city doesn’t have the financial assets to give raises at this time. Motion by Councilwoman Rodgers, seconded by Councilwoman Jeffress to deny the request for raises. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Jennifer White, Crossett Water Commission office manager, presented 2nd quarter 2015 reports and 2014 audit report.

Mayor McCormick introduced Mr. Jack Netherland with Crossett chapter of American Legion. Mr. Netherland informed the council that American Legion is the oldest wartime veteran’s organization in the United States. The local chapter is working on building up membership and is currently at around 45-50 members. On behalf of the chapter, Mr. Netherland is asking the council to consider leasing the old fire department building to them for a meeting place. They are currently meeting at the Presbyterian Church, but are looking for a place that they can have different activites and promote more membership. He added that the legion is a family-friendly group allowing no alcohol, tobacco, or foul language. Council members appreciated Mr. Netherland’s presentation and stated that they would consider the option.

Mayor McCormick presented a proposed resolution to the council for consideration. This resolution authorizes the mayor to apply for a grant. Police Chief JW Cruce explained that this is a $76,355 grant to purchase department weapons, tactical equipment and training equipment.

Motion by Councilwoman Rodgers, seconded by Councilman Foster to have City Attorney Hamilton read proposed Resolution R-2015-4. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed. Motion by Councilman Foster, seconded by Councilwoman Rodgers to adopt R-2015-4. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed and resolution is adopted.

Councilwoman Rodgers revisited the issue of enforcement of local ordinance 535. She stated that city ordinance has everything in place to be able to enforce, but just doesn’t seem to be working. Director of Public Works, Jeff Harrison, explained the expenses involved with razing a structure. He also told council of a previous court judgment against an individual home owner who appealed the case and was fined a total of $300.00. The property is still in violation of city ordinance. The city has acquired at least 2 properties which home owners abandoned, city has cleaned and paid back taxes on. These lots are of no use to the city and are having to be maintained by city crews. Mr. Don Rodgers stated that he was formally on the Crossett Housing Authority Board and there may be funds available for public housing. This is something to be looked into.

Mike Smith, Crossett Economic Development Director, invited the council to the trade show on August 12 with dinner to follow at the Prairie Country Club at 6:00 p.m.. Mr. Smith stated that the “Welcome to Crossett” signs are disconnected because of no capacitors. Parts are ordered and this should be fixed soon.

Councilwoman Rodgers thanked the Mayor for allowing council members the opportunity to attend Arkansas Municipal League Conference. Mayor McCormick stated that this year there will be 3 conferences instead of 2 due to the winter conference being moved from January to December. He asked, because of city’s financial situation, council members who wish to go to this conference do so at their own expense.

With no other business, the meeting adjourned.

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Jesse Walthall, Clerk/Treasurer Marshall S. McCormick, Mayor