Crossett City Council met in regular session April 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

Councilmembers: Robert Freeman, Eddie Rowe, James Knight, C.T. Foster and

Lynn Rodgers

Absent: Clerk/Treasurer Jesse Walthall, Councilwoman Candace Jeffress

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

Motion by Councilman Foster, seconded by Councilman Freeman to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of March 16 and the special meeting of April 13, 2015. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Motion by Councilwoman Rodgers, seconded by Councilman Freeman to approve the financial statement for March 2015. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Mr. Bill Flowers, representative from Media 3 Cable Company, was introduced to the council by Mayor McCormick. Mr. Flowers was present to answer questions concerning service and to come to an agreement concerning the franchise. The council has agreed on a 5-year contract, but had questions in regards to service. Mr. Flowers informed the council that the company had been upgrading their system since November 2014. Most lost channels have been added back to the network, and internet service is being upgraded. Mayor McCormick inquired from City Attorney Hamilton how to proceed with this franchise agreement. Mr. Hamilton stated that an ordinance to codify the 5-year extension of the current contract would be prepared and presented at the next regular meeting.

Mayor McCormick presented proposed Ordinance 2015-4, finalizing the 2014 budget. Motion by Councilman Freeman, seconded by Councilman Foster to have City Attorney Hamilton read the proposed ordinance for the first reading in it’s entirety. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed and Hamilton read the ordinance. Motion by Councilman Freeman, seconded by Councilwoman Rodgers to suspend the 3-day reading rule and read the proposed ordinance for second reading by title only. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed and Hamilton read by title only. Motion by Councilwoman Rodgers, seconded by Councilman Knight to further suspend the rules and read for third and final reading by title only. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed and Hamilton read by title only for the third reading. Motion by Councilman Foster, seconded by Councilman Freeman to adopt Ordinance 2015-4. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Ordinance 2015-4 is adopted.

Mike Smith, director of Crossett Economic Development Foundation, updated council of projects. He stated that the grant for development at the Crossett Industrial Park is near completion. Mr. Smith requested that the road into the park be renamed to Beby Reed Drive in honor of the years of service Mr. Reed provided to the city of Crossett, Crossett Chamber of Commerce, Crossett Economic Development Foundation and other civic organizations. Motion by Councilwoman Rodgers, seconded by Councilman Foster to rename the street as requested. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed. Mr. Smith added that they are in the process of building a parking lot off of the street in order to alleviate traffic congestion in and out of the Industrial Park. He also stated that the Crossett Economic Development Foundation would like to officially donate the “Welcome to Crossett” signs purchased by the foundation to the city of Crossett. Mr. Smith said they are working out some of the problems with lighting of the signs, but those issues should be resolved soon. Mr. Smith advised the council of upcoming events including the First Friday’s Event in Little Rock to be held in June and the hosting of the AR Economic Development Foundation commissioners in July.

Ms. Sylvia Harris petitioned the council to designate part of Texas Avenue, from Hwy 82 through 601 Texas Street (approximately ½ mile), as Industrial Park West. She added that all the business owners in the area are in agreement and that no physical addresses would change. This is needed because truck drivers are getting lost trying to distinguish between the Industrial Park on Texas Avenue and other Industrial Parks in the area. All council members agree that this needs to be done. Mayor McCormick did ask that the business owners make sure they are in compliance on any signage that will be erected in the area. Motion by Councilman Freeman, seconded by Councilman Rowe to name the mentioned area as Industrial Park West. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Fire Chief Leroy Higginbotham informed the council that the Ashley County Quorum Court has approached him asking if the Crossett Fire Department would consider taking over ambulance service for the county. Chief Higginbotham stated that the county has secured a consultant to do a feasibility study. Preliminary discussions have indicated that the county would be willing to pay a subsidy ranging from $600,000 - $800,000 per year and extra billing could generate between $300,000 - $400,000 annually. Chief Higginbotham also stated that the Crossett Fire Department would have to station one truck in Hamburg to service that area and the east end of the county. This would be a civilian EMS department and no firefighters would be used to staff the Hamburg station. He added that he would like to give the employees of Fast Ambulance Service the opportunity to staff that station, but they would work directly for the Crossett Fire Department Ambulance Service. Councilman Rowe stated that he doesn’t think that one truck to service that large of an area would be sufficient. Motion by Councilman Knight, seconded by Councilwoman Rodgers to consider the results of the feasibility study and discuss further with the county. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Councilman Knight asked if any revenue was found to give raises to fire department employees. Chief Higginbotham stated that something is going to have to be done soon. He added that they are significantly understaffed and both he and Assistant Chief Todd Freeman are having to cover shifts for employees to have time off. Higginbotham stated that he has filled 2 of the EMT positions, but without pay raises he will not be able to hire the quality personnel that the department is accustomed to.

Councilman Freeman stated that if ways can be found to bring in a portion of the outstanding debts that could help alleviate some of the budget strains. Asst. Chief Todd Freeman said that generally only 20% of billed amount is collectible because of insurance adjustments and write-offs. Councilwoman Rodgers stated that she feels that a letter from City Attorney demanding payment be made and offering a payment plan could generate some revenue. Attorney Hamilton replied that he would be willing to write the letter, but feels that this has been done before with no good results. Motion by Councilwoman Rodgers, seconded by Councilman Knight to have City Attorney Hamilton write collection letters for accounts more than 90 days past due, and to include that payment arrangements are available. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Chief Higginbotham asked permission to promote 3 officers to the position of lieutenant. He added that this position would pay between a top paid paramedic and captain. This would also allow for someone to be in charge when the new stations are open and the crews are split. Motion by Councilman Freeman, seconded by Councilman Foster to allow Chief Higginbotham to promote to lieutenant position. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed.

Mayor McCormick stated that he does realize the problems the fire department is experiencing now with hiring new people, but that the money is just not there for raises. Mayor added that all city employees are deserving of raises, but before this can be done, revenue sources need to be found.

Police Chief JW Cruce asked the council to allow a charge for fingerprinting in accordance with new law passed by state of Arkansas. Chief Cruce recommends a $10 charge for individuals with an exception for school related cards. For these a $5 charge is recommended. Motion by Councilwoman Rodgers, seconded by Councilman Freeman to immediately begin collection of the stated fees. Roll call vote. All vote yes. Motion passed. A resolution will need to be adopted to codify this. City Attorney will draft one to present at the next regular council meeting.

Mrs. Jewel Toliver and Mr. Jeff Woodberry addressed the council with concerns about unsightly property. She stated that several homeowners in Oakhurst addition around the old Price School building have voiced complaints. The property is dilapidated and the grounds around the structure are out of compliance with city codes. Mr. Woodberry added that neighbors are mowing what they can to keep it from getting out of control, but that the property is bringing down value of their homes. Mayor McCormick stated that he and Director of Public Works Jeff Harrison have discussed that property and other structures in the city. Mayor recommended to the council that the Ordinance 535 be revised to allow for stiffer punishment when residents refuse to bring the property into compliance. He would also like for the ordinance to speed up the process of having properties cleaned. All council members agree that this needs to be addressed and each agreed to individually look at the property in question.

Councilwoman Rodgers reminded everyone of the budget meeting scheduled for the 2nd Monday in May.

 With no other business, the meeting adjourned.

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