

A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF
COMMISSIONERS OF THE CITY OF
SODDY-DAISY, TENNESSEE WAS HELD
ON THURSDAY, MAY 16, 2024 AT 7:00 P.M.

INVOCATION BY: REV. JACKIE PENNEY

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER BY:
MAYOR EVERETT

MEMBERS PRESENT:
MAYOR EVERETT
VICE-MAYOR COLEMAN
COMMISSIONER KEITH
COMMISSIONER PENNEY
CITY MANAGER JOHNSON
CITY ATTORNEY ELLIOTT
ASSISTANT RECORDER DOLBERRY

MEMBER ABSENT:
COMMISSIONER SHIPLEY

STAFF AND OTHERS PRESENT:
SEE ATTACHED COPY OF SIGN IN SHEET

Mayor Everett said that Commissioner Shipley is at Sale Creek High School's graduation representing District 1 Commission.

The minutes of the regular meeting held May 2, 2024 were approved as presented.

OLD BUSINESS:

NONE.

NEW BUSINESS:

**AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF SODDY-DAISY, TENNESSEE,
ADOPTING THE ANNUAL BUDGET AND TAX RATE FOR THE FISCAL
YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2024 AND ENDING JUNE 30, 2025.
PUBLIC HEARING AND FIRST READING.**

City Attorney Elliott said that action on the Ordinance would be deferred to the Special Called Meeting on Wednesday, May 22, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. due to a technical defect in the notice.

No action can be taken tonight.

City Attorney Elliott stated that action on the tree removal request would also be deferred to the Special Called Meeting on May 22nd for the same reason as the Ordinance.

Mayor Everett said that he understands the large attendance at the meeting is due to concerns over the proposed tax increase. He said workshops are held during the day with all department heads. He said these are advertised and open to the public. He said this Commission has nothing to hide from anyone and that he announces the workshops during the Commission meetings. He said this Commission is transparent and there are no backroom deals being made. He said those who spew this are doing an injustice to this City. Mayor Everett said that if no federal funds were received last year the City would have operated at a \$700,000.00 deficit. He said Soddy-Daisy has twice the residents of Collegedale and Collegedale has a lot more sales tax revenue than Soddy-Daisy. He said no City government can raise taxes more than 5 percent (5%). He said the City Manager is also the Finance Director. He said until a few months ago, City Hall was operating with less people than in 1993. He said he would like to see more interest from volunteers. He expressed his appreciation for volunteers. He said since 2018 we have averaged 3.5 percent inflation. Mayor Everett said the City has \$800,000.00/month in reoccurring expenses.

He said the public works employees are currently hauling brush from the storms as they cannot mow due the weather. He said that department needs more employees. He said the City needs a codes enforcement officer because people will not take care of their property. He further stated that the City, if lucky, would get federal funding to repair the bridge. He said the City recently spent \$1,000,000.00 on the paving of Dayton Pike which had a total cost of \$4,000,000.00.

Mayor Everett said that a new fire truck is on order. The fire department currently has three 1991 model trucks and the newest truck is a 2007 model. He said the two new trucks are at a cost of \$700,000.00 each. He said the same truck today is over \$1,000,000.00.

Mayor Everett said we have one bridge that is in need of repair and if the inspection fails, TDOT can close it. He said when he ran for the Commission, he wanted to make an impact here at home. He informed the audience that there was a handout packet placed in each seat which shows Soddy-Daisy and the surrounding municipalities tax rates and other information. He said it is easy to get online and second guess what to decide. The only improvement that might possibly be cut from the capital outlay is the Holly Park Improvements. He said all other capital expenses are necessary.

Commissioner Keith said the three firefighters are necessary as the government regulates the number per area. He said if we do not have the required number of firefighters then the fire rating could be affected. He said this rating affects everyone's insurance rate. He said that he also owns property in the City and this is a hard decision. He said he is not sure how he will vote, but if we do not vote for it this time it will have to be done soon.

Vice-Mayor Coleman said several people contacted him regarding those on social security and living check to check due to the current economy. He said he wanted the proposed increase explained to them. Vice-Mayor Coleman questioned if the tax increase could be placed on the November ballot. City Attorney Elliott said no, the State says referendums are for liquor only.

Commissioner Penney said it is important to understand that the taxes are based on the assessment and not the appraisal. He said City Hall has had the same number of employees since forever. He also stated that the Commissioners are not paid, but recently voted on paying Commissioners to begin after the election in 2026. He said it is important for the City to thrive

and not just survive. He said an HR Professional is needed. He commended City Manager Johnson on the many jobs that he does. He asked how many employees does the City have? City Manager Johnson replied 71 full-time.

Mayor Everett said they understand it is often difficult to attend the workshops, but asked people to get involved and run for office. He asked those participating in the citizens participation portion of the meeting to limit their comments to 3 minutes and to refrain from using profanity.

Citizen's Participation:

Diane Walker, 9986 Lovell Road, said she appreciated the Mayor's comments on transparency, but asked that he not be so defensive when speaking. She said that intimidates some from speaking. She said she understands why you want to raise taxes. She said Soddy-Daisy is different from other municipalities in the amount of roads they maintain and she does not feel that the 13,000 citizens should maintain the infrastructure when others are using that infrastructure. She said there are other ways to raise this money. She said Hamilton County and the City of Chattanooga cannot find employees to fill vacancies. She said she does not understand the courts operating in the negative and does not feel she should pay for court people who break the law. She asked how many police officers does the City have? Police Chief Petty said 28. She said that she felt 8 officers is sufficient for a City this size as that would be one officer for every 1,600 citizens and that Hamilton County can provide backup as needed. She said property values are assessed high right now. Mrs. Walker said that 21% of the city limit population is over the age of 65, on a fixed income, and the income median is approximately \$54,000.00. She said stagflation is happening. She suggested raising taxes half now and half next year. She said she feels the City can find other ways to raise money.

City Manager Johnson said they are looking at alternative tax and trying to attract a restaurant and hotel to offset costs. He said we do look for other alternatives. He said with 400

new houses built over the past 10 years the City receives approximately \$28,000.00 per year. He said in his 13 years with the City there have always been 28 officers. Mayor Everett said our police department is proactive not re-active. City Manager Johnson noted that there is property tax assistance available to some over 55 years of age through the State.

Commissioner Keith said with an elderly population the fire department answers a large number of lift assist calls and if tied up on a call, they cannot respond to the next one simultaneously. He said we need additional firefighters and cannot hire them with a tax increase. He said everyone wants them to answer their call.

James Berry, 8921 Springfield Road, expressed his appreciation for the open dialogue. He said he would like to see the total assessed and total appraised values. He asked that the Commission delay the increase until the new assessment is received. He said park improvements are needed. He said he agrees with everything presented tonight, but not with the timing. City Attorney Elliott said it will take two readings and two votes to pass the Ordinance. He said there are two School Resource Officers (SRO) and the State will cover that cost next year. He commended the Commissioner for furnishing the equipment for the SROs. He implored the Commission to wait until after the reassessments next year to make a decision on a tax increase.

Mayor Everett said after the last assessment in 2021 the Commissioners voted to lower the tax rate from \$1.35 to \$1.1159. He said if this was not done, then we would be considering a 10 cent increase from \$1.35 to \$1.45. Mr. Berry said that he felt if the total appraised and assessed values in Soddy-Daisy were published it would be helpful. Mayor Everett said to address Mrs. Walker's comment, he did not intend to intimidate anyone, but prefers to look people in the eye when addressing them.

Derek Kukura, 1045 Trojan Run Drive, suggested the Commission consider a property tax freeze for senior citizens on fixed incomes. He suggested to create a task force to identify and recruit tourism. He also suggested that the task force create a campaign called "Welcome

Back Trojans” to send out alumni letters to ask that former alumni of Soddy-Daisy High School to formally invest in the City. He said sales revenue also helps to keep taxes low and suggested building a team to find investors.

Tony Morales, 12070 Mare Court, asked if a cap could be placed on taxes. Mayor Everett said that he felt a cap would hamstring future boards. City Attorney Elliott said that the State does not allow municipalities to cap taxes. He said we are a creature of the State, if the State tells us to cap then we are capped, but we cannot do it ourselves.

City Manager Johnson said the Soddy-Daisy Wal-Mart provides the City with \$700,000.00 per year in sales tax revenue. He said they help this City. He further stated that you never know when a national disaster will hit and if the City lost the Wal-Mart we would have to cut services as the reserve would only last approximately 3 months. He said the last increase was 17 years ago.

Eddy Bell, 1020 Trojan Run Drive, said she moved here and feels at home here. She asked if homestead exceptions were available. City Attorney Elliott said not in property tax here. Ms. Bell questioned exceptions for the elderly, veteran, disabled or blind. City Attorney Elliott said if there are exceptions they are in State Law. Ms. Bell said there is an influx of people but they see the houses as an investment and are using them as short-term rentals. She asked if they pay the same rate as homeowners. City Manager Johnson said they pay a 4 percent Hotel Motel Tax, but he is not sure if they are assessed at 25 percent (residential) or 40 percent (commercial).

Adam Smart, 1035 Holland Johnson Road, said that he feels the City needs more officers as you have to take into account how many of the officers are dispatchers, detective, as well as how many work on each shift. He said that he feels the industrial and commercial zones in the City should be increased. He suggested that more businesses be recruited to provide activities for teens. He also asked that Sequoyah Road be repaired.

Commissioner Keith stated that he feels one of the reasons businesses are not interested in Soddy-Daisy is because of the condition of the properties along Dayton Pike. He said if the City is cleaned up then it will draw businesses. He also said that people are asking too much for their property. Diane Walker asked how do we get properties cleaned up? Commissioner Keith said call City Hall and give the address. He said the City now has an Administrative Hearing Officer that can impose fines on those who do not comply.

Commissioner Penney questioned the hotel study. City Manager Johnson said that the study determined that the City could support a hotel.

Christopher Murray, 11204 Captain's Cove Drive, said that the ditch at the entrance to Captain's Cove Subdivision and Hixson Pike is in need of repair and rip rap. He asked for permission to make the necessary repairs. He said he called the County and they told him Hixson Pike is a State road. He said the State keeps putting it off. City Attorney Elliott verified that this is a State right-of-way and is State Route 319, not a City right-of-way. Public Works Director Grant asked Mr. Murray to see him after the meeting and he would give him a contact number for the State.

Sean Sims, 244 Sabakewell Lane, Sale Creek, Tennessee, said he feels that if taxes are not raised, the City will be passed by. He said he appreciates the Commission and all they do for the City. He said that he sees FedEx and UPS trucks running over each other with deliveries every day in the City. He suggested that people need to get out and into the stores in Soddy-Daisy and spend their money in town rather than on a keyboard.

Joseph Tidwell, 828 Lovelady Road, said that he and his dog have been attacked by other dogs 4 to 5 times while walking on Lovell Road and he has filed two reports. He asked if there is a leash law and if there is an ordinance against barking dogs. He said he feels the City needs a codes enforcement officer. Mayor Everett said he should contact the Human Society and report these incidents as the City has a contract with them. Commissioner Keith asked if the owners of

the dogs could be cited? Police Chief Petty said yes and he will research the ordinance. He asked Mr. Tidwell to contact him tomorrow.

Ryan Jenkins, 2052 Flattop Lane, he said he felt the documents provided tonight help to close the gap between the city and the citizens. He said in 2026 Soddy-Daisy High School will host the State Convention. He said he wished the workshops were not during the day as he would like to attend them, but as a student cannot. Commissioner Keith said the workshops are held during the day as the department heads also attend, it is not to eliminate anyone. Mayor Everett said that if students are interested in government they should attend the workshops as they are our future. Mayor Everett suggested that the school might be willing to allow students to attend the meetings occasionally in conjunction with school classes. City Manager Johnson said his door is always open for budget questions.

Robert Cothran, 10175 Dallas Hollow Road, said that he has lived in Soddy-Daisy all his life and thanked the Board for the in depth information. He said we have to give the City a raise to address the things we need. He said the police department does a good job.

City Manager Johnson said that last year the cost of patrol vehicles increased 21 percent, dump trucks increased 40 percent, squad trucks 53 percent, knuckleboom increased 21 percent in 2-1/2 years.

Commissioner Keith thanked everyone for coming. He said tax increases are not an easy discussion to have, but we either have to raise taxes or remain stagnant. He said all departments did a great job during the recent storms. City Manager Johnson said over 60 trees fell during the recent storm.

Vice-Mayor Coleman thanked everyone for coming and said the handouts were helpful. He said he feels this is a bad time to raise taxes but we have to look at what is needed. He said the City needs four additional firefighters and additional personnel in Public Works. He

suggested that air pollution ease up on their restrictions with burning to allow individuals to clean up from the storms as this would help considerably. He said tress services are swamped.

Commissioner Penney said he is excited for the new football field at Soddy-Daisy High School. He said we need to do a much better job of informing the public with social media.

Mayor Everett said the fire department is very important when recruiting businesses as the ISO rating is very important. He said the ISO rating also affects the rate homeowners are charged for insurance. He said the permits issued are for construction valued at an average of one million dollars per month. He said the new Soddy-Daisy Full Service Emergency Room is a 16.5 million dollar project. He said growth helps and sales tax revenue is key. He thanked everyone for attending. He said if he votes to raise taxes it is because he feels he has to do what is best for the City.

Adjourned 8:27 P.M.

Burt Johnson

