

A Message from the Mayor and Blue Ridge City Council
Issue One, January 11, 2018

On behalf of Mayor Donna Whitener and the Blue Ridge City Council, thank you to everyone who attended our January meeting on January 09. Per Section 3.11 of the City Charter, we are ordered to have an organizational meeting at the first regular meeting in January following an election.

It was a full house, and we greatly appreciate your support. Thank you to Dairy Queen, Sweet Shoppe of the South, and others who so generously donated food for the event.

We broadcasted the meeting via the City of Blue Ridge Facebook page on Facebook Live. We know that you have busy lives and may not be able to attend our monthly meetings, so we intend to bring each month's meeting to you in this manner. We will also be working diligently to improve our broadcast video and sound quality as we move forward because we know this month's meeting was a challenge to watch and hear.

As our meeting began, Mayor Donna Whitener welcomed guests and asked Matthew Colbert to open the meeting by blowing the shofar, a ram's horn trumpet. Everyone then stood for the prayer led by Pastor Asa Dockery followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Mayor Whitener then welcomed Blue Ridge City Clerk Kelsey Ledford to preside over the meeting, who is given this authority by the Charter.

"Good evening, thank you all for joining us tonight for our first city council meeting of 2018," said Clerk Ledford. "...Tonight, it is my pleasure to welcome three new elected officials to our Council alongside three of our returning elected officials. Ms. Cornelius, Mr. Fitts and Mr. Gaddis, I am excited for you as you begin your journey of a council member serving the City of Blue Ridge. Mayor Whitener, Mr. Herndon and Mrs. Haight, I am happy to watch you serve again for your third term. It is an honor to be up here with you and to administer your oaths of office. At this time, I officially call this meeting to order."

Ledford then invited our loved ones to gather around us as she administered our Oaths of Office, first to Mayor Whitener and then to council members collectively. With our right hand raised and left hand placed on the Bible held by our loved ones, we repeated the following:

"I do solemnly affirm that I will faithfully perform the duties of (mayor)(councilmember) of this city and that I will support and defend the charter thereof as well as the Constitution and laws of the State of Georgia and of the United States of America."

Following the oaths, Ledford presented the Mayor and Council to everyone and then turned the meeting over to Mayor Whitener to preside. We then continued with the business portion of

the meeting. Once we approved the Minutes of the December Council meeting, we moved into Action Items, which require council approval.

As set forth in Article 3 and 4 of the City Charter, the Mayor and/or the City Council "shall" appoint certain City leadership positions. This must be accomplished every four years and is properly completed after the oaths of office and at the first meeting.

The council first appointed a mayor pro tempore. In the event the mayor is absent from a meeting, the mayor pro temp would handle the mayor's responsibilities. Councilman Fitts made a motion to appoint Rhonda Haight. His motion was seconded by Councilman Gaddis and all voted in favor.

We then moved on to appointment of the city attorney. Per Section 4.12 of the Charter, the city council shall appoint a city attorney who shall be a member of the State Bar of Georgia and shall have actively practiced law for at least one year. The Charter also explains that the city attorney shall serve at the pleasure of the city council and shall be responsible for representing and defending the city in all litigation in which the city is a party.

Councilman Fitts made a motion to appoint as city attorney James Balli of Sams, Larkin, Huff and Balli. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Rhonda Haight. Before the vote, Councilman Herndon asked about the rate for the new attorney. Mayor Whitener informed him that the rate was \$175 per hour. Herndon also asked if there was a retainer fee, and the Mayor clarified that there is no retainer fee. With no further discussion, the council voted. Council members Gaddis, Fitts, Haight and Cornelius voted in favor of the motion to appoint Balli; Councilman Herndon voted in opposition.

The council also voted unanimously to appoint the following: Kelsey Ledford – City Clerk; Alicia Stewart – City Treasurer; and Robert Snead - Municipal Court Judge.

The next appointment was for chief of police, and Mayor Whitener asked Attorney Balli to explain our options for the appointment of this position.

Balli's response: Under the Charter, because this is a new mayor and council, you must appoint a police chief for it to be valid for any person to hold office, so you basically have 2 options tonight: You can nominate and appoint a permanent police chief, or you can make a motion, and if it passes, to allow someone to act as interim chief until such time as the mayor and city council approve a permanent chief. So that would be the 2 options. If you didn't do that tonight, it (the position) would be vacant and I would not recommend that. Someone needs to be available 24 hours a day.

After hearing Balli's response, Mayor Whitener called for a motion. Councilman Gaddis made a motion. He moved that, until the Mayor appoints and the Council confirms a permanent Police Chief, the previous Chief, Johnny Scarce, be allowed to fulfill the duties of Police Chief on an interim basis only.

The motion received a second, and Mayor Whitener called for a vote. Council members Gaddis, Fitts, Haight and Cornelius raised their hand voting in favor of the motion. Councilman Herndon then spoke and admitted he did not understand the motion, so the motion was clarified for him. Herndon then raised his hand. Mayor Whitener asked him if raising his hand was indicating if he was voting yes or no, and he said yes. All five council members voted in favor of the Gaddis motion.

The council also voted unanimously to appoint the following: Joseph Hudson - Prosecuting Attorney for the Court; Welch, Walker and Associates, CPA - City Auditor; and David Goodspeed - Zoning and Land Development, Permits and Inspections.

In addition to these appointments, many other items of business were discussed and/or approved. The official record of the January Meeting, including each of these items, is being prepared by the City Clerk and will be available in the near future. Until then, we welcome you to review the video of the January meeting on the City of Blue Ridge Facebook page for reference.

As the meeting neared its end, Cesar Martinez, President of the Blue Ridge Business Association, spoke during the Public Comments portion. We then went into executive session to discuss personnel, but no action was taken.

In closing, thank you for the opportunity to serve you. Please join us for each monthly meeting at Blue Ridge City Hall or on Facebook Live and then read *A Message from the Mayor and Blue Ridge City Council* for a recap of the meeting. It is a new day, and we thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Donna Whitener, Mayor of Blue Ridge
Harold Herndon, Blue Ridge City Council Post 1
Rhonda Haight, Blue Ridge City Council Post 2
Ken Gaddis, Blue Ridge City Council Post 3
Robbie Cornelius, Blue Ridge City Council Post 4
Nathan Fitts, Blue Ridge City Council Post 5