

## **Our City Government – “Of the People, By the People, For the People”**

In 1863 President Abraham Lincoln envisioned a government of the people, by the people, for the people. Although an act of the Georgia Legislature, signed by Governor John Milledge, created the town of Statesborough on December 19, 1803, it was not until 1866, three years after the famous Gettysburg Address, that the town was first incorporated. The new charter appointed H. Myley, W. H. Coleman, C. Preetorius, J. Zeterrower, and C. E. Fletcher commissioners of the town to hold office until the first Monday in January of 1868 when an election would be held. This Charter was repealed on September 2, 1889 when a new Charter provided for the election of a Mayor and five Councilmen to hold office for one-year terms. All six seats were elected at large, annually on the first Friday in December. Prior to the election each year a town meeting was held to give the citizens the opportunity to nominate the candidates that would run for those seats.

At the first meeting after each December election the Mayor and Council would take the oath of office, appoint city employees, appoint standing committees, and set salaries for the coming year. Until January 3, 1962 the newly elected body would annually appoint and swear in the City Recorder/ Clerk, City Marshall, City Attorney, City Physician, Police Chief, Police Officers, and Fire Chief. One of the most stable of these positions throughout our City's history has been that of the City Attorney. On December 22, 1959 George M. Johnston was appointed City Attorney. Today, forty-three years later, Sam Brannen originally of the law firm Johnston, Brannen, and Mikell continues to serve as our City Attorney.

Standing committees for Finance, Streets, Cemetery, and Sanitation were also appointed annually. This practice continued until the City Manager form of government was adopted in 1999. Although the first interim City Manager was hired in 1999 the City actually adopted an ordinance on November 27, 1946 calling for a special election to determine if the City of Statesboro should adopt the City Manager form of government. Later, on December 17, 1946, that ordinance was rescinded.

On April 4, 1892 the governing body adopted an ordinance requiring any person hauling goods or articles of any kind to pay a license fee of \$5.00 for a one horse wagon and \$7.50 for a two-horse wagon. This ordinance served two purposes. It generated revenue through a tax to provide for maintenance of the dirt streets and it regulated the traffic that traveled those streets. In order to provide for adequate transportation and to properly maintain the dirt roads an ordinance was enacted in July of 1894 requiring all male citizens between the ages of 18 and

50 to work on the roads. All workers were required to provide the implement or tool needed to perform the work and if they were unable to perform this work, they were fined .50 cents for each day they missed.

The people of the town were concerned about the traffic that traveled on the streets of Statesborough and through the years they have addressed those concerns through speed limits, paving assessments, bond issues, and petitions. Shortly after automobiles began to travel the streets of the town more than one hundred citizens petitioned the town council to “prevent the running of the automobiles within the limits of this City because the operation of these vehicles is dangerous to life and property. They spoil the disposition of docile family nags and prevent trade from coming to town.”

Through our City’s history successive councils have had their own unique issues to deal with concerning transportation. On May 23, 1941 the Mayor and Council jointly with the Roads and Revenue Commission of Bulloch County adopted a resolution tendering the use of the Statesboro Airport and adjacent land to the U.S. Government to use to train pilots and as a landing field. In October of that same year, in support of the U.S. Selective Training and Service Act a proclamation was signed by the governing body declaring an official holiday to allow all young men to register for service.

While the ordinance adopted on April 4, 1892 to address the transportation and road concerns provided for a tax or business license fee to be levied by the City, it was not until November 30, 1917 that the first business license ordinance was enacted to provide for and to regulate the registration of all businesses exercised within the corporate limits of the town. This ordinance required these businesses to pay a tax annually. Today, in 2003, the City of Statesboro continues to levy an occupational tax where the revenues generated are accounted for in the city’s general fund that provides for the construction and maintenance of our streets and sidewalks.

In the early 1900’s many merchants, peddlers, and drummers traveled to Statesboro either by way of the roads or the railroads to sell their wares. They would often spend the night at the Jaeckel Hotel and store their merchandise in the adjacent drummers building. On July 21, 1902, on Jaeckel Hotel stationery bearing the hotel’s logo and the words, “The Drummers’ Home, Statesboro Georgia,” Mr. C. E. Nolan wrote a letter to the “honorable Mayor and Council of Statesboro, Georgia” petitioning them to return to him the sum of one dollar that he had paid to the City Marshall for the privilege of piano tuning. He stated that no work was completed nor

any money collected therefore he requested the return of his money. How fitting that this historic hotel should now house our City government and be the focal point of the City's Bicentennial Celebration.

Prior to the adoption of the business license ordinance in 1917 an ordinance to provide for the first levy of property taxes was enacted on July 9, 1890. This tax was assessed on the fair market value of all real and personal property in the City on the first day of April each year. Early tax collectors were both aggressive and innovative with their methods of collection. It was common practice in the late 1800's to confiscate property of delinquent taxpayers to satisfy their debt with the City. Often a property owner's livestock was impounded until the council soon realized that the feed bill quickly exceeded the tax bill.

As important as transportation and trade were to the economic development of the community in the 1800's and early 1900's an even more vital concern was that of public health and the need to provide a healthy environment in which the citizens could grow and prosper. Today national headlines cover the debate over providing the small pox vaccination to our troops in the advent of biological war. On March 3, 1903 the mayor and council appointed Dr. A.L. R. Avant as the city physician to work "to prevent the spread of contagious disease" in the town. On that same date all residents of the City and all persons working or sojourning therein were required to be vaccinated against small pox. The governing body of the City continued to appoint a city physician annually until the death of Dr. Waldo Floyd on December 5, 1967.

On December 24, 1912 the Mayor and Council adopted an ordinance declaring a quarantine against the City of Midville, Burke County, and the adjacent territory infected with spinal meningitis. No person sojourning to or from that territory within the prescribed time frame would be permitted to enter the City of Statesboro. The Chief of Police was charged with the enforcement of this ordinance and, because of the severity of the situation, violators of the ordinance were fined \$1,000 and imprisoned for not more than 30 days.

The City issued quarantines against yellow fever on August 24, 1893, scarlet fever on November 11, 1900 and September 17, 1901 and small pox on March 3, 1903. In order to provide for the protection of school age children, on August 12, 1913 an ordinance was adopted to require all children to be vaccinated against small pox before admission to school.

Later, on February 21, 1920 an ordinance was passed as a result of the influenza epidemic that was prevalent in the City. All public gatherings places, including churches, schools, social clubs,

lodge meetings, and picture shows, were closed until the flu ban was lifted on March 13, 1920. City physician Dr. Mooney was asked to review the flu and pneumonia cases at the "Hotel" on East Main and report back to the Mayor and Council.

Another issue that the governing body feared endangered the welfare of the people in the late 1800's was the interment of the deceased. On May 17, 1890 the City purchased five acres of land from S. F. Olliff to provide for a cemetery. On February 20, 1899 Dr. M. M. Holland was allowed to move dead bodies buried near the Methodist Church to the public cemetery and in 1940 an ordinance was enacted prohibiting the burial of the dead within the corporate limits of the City of Statesboro except in the Eastside Cemetery.

The people of the town realized that even with properly maintained streets and a healthy environment the town could not prosper without an educated citizenry and on March 31, 1900 sixty electors of the City voted to approve a \$10,000 bond referendum to provide funding to purchase a site and build a school. There were 3 votes in opposition to the referendum and on November 13, 1900 the Mayor and Council adopted an ordinance providing for a Board of Trustees for the town academy. This Board of Trustees of the Statesboro Institute consisted of 5 members appointed by the Mayor and Council and empowered with the responsibility of employing teachers, setting tuition rates, and managing the school.

As the city grew so did the demand for education and proper school facilities. Twenty years later, on October 28, 1920, a second school bond referendum was held to provide \$75,000 in funding to build a new school. Of the 361 qualified voters in the City 303 voted in favor of the referendum while 10 electors were opposed to the measure. On February 10, 1921 the Mayor and Council voted to pay the Bulloch Land Development Company \$8500 for lots known as the Johnson property on Zetterower to be used as the site for the new school. Later, however, on September 9, 1921 it was decided not to purchase this property but rather to build the new high school on the same lot near the old school building facing Grady Street.

Acknowledging the responsibility to provide educational opportunities to all children, on October 15, 1922 the Mayor and Council voted to accept the colored school and on November 14, 1922 they voted to pay the payroll of the colored teachers. Later on March 10, 1925 the Mayor and Council approved the building of a one-story brick veneer colored school building not to exceed \$10,000 in cost.

Our forefathers realized that providing schools alone would not meet the educational needs of all the community and on April 12, 1923 a committee was appointed to meet with the Women's Club to consider a proposal for a public library. As a result of this meeting, Miss Ariel Groover was hired as Librarian at a rate of \$25.00 per month. The City continued to provide funding in support of the public library until the implementation of the Statesboro/ Bulloch County joint Service Delivery Strategy Agreement adopted on June 2, 1998.

On August 21, 1951 a Special election was held in the City to determine whether the Special School Law Creating the Independent City School System should be repealed to provide for a merger of the City School System with the Bulloch County School System. One hundred ninety three electors voted in favor of the repeal while 22 voters opposed the merger.

In the late 1940's the City began to support the development of a structured recreation program and on February 10, 1948 Max Lockwood was appointed the first director of the Statesboro Recreation Department. Later that same year on September 28, 1948, the City owned park where the Women's Club building, football field, and swimming pool were located and that was bounded by Fair Ground Road, Zetterower Avenue, and the Central of Georgia Railroad was named Memorial Park. The recreation department, now also bounded by Max Lockwood Drive, received its first budget appropriation from the City government on December 11, 1951 in the amount of \$10,970 with the provision that a complete budget be submitted showing all expected income and expenses, that the treasure of the recreation fund be bonded, and that books and records be kept in order to enable an audit of the books kept and furnished to the Mayor and Council at year-end. Until this time the Mayor and Council would annually authorize the City Clerk to pay the bills of the recreation department as necessary to provide the services required.

At the December 17, 2002 meeting of the Statesboro City Council the Mayor and Council approved a landscape plan of Triangle Park that was recommended by the Statesboro Beautification Committee. In 1903 Statesboro voters approved issuance of bonds to establish a water system and light plant to be built where Triangle Park is located today. Neighboring landowners objected to the plans and offered to buy another lot to give to the town for the location of the water works and electric light plant provided the town would never allow a building to be erected in Triangle Park. The town accepted this offer and was given a lot purchased by the citizens for \$4,000 located on Hill Street close to the Central of Georgia Railroad tracks. This property currently houses the City's Gas and Water Departments.

As the City's population grew so did the people's demand for services such as police and fire protection, and engineering and planning. Electricity and water were the first utility services provided by the City government. On February 10, 1903 a bond referendum was approved to issue \$30,000 in bonds to provide for a city water and electric company. Both enterprises were successful and provided adequate services to the residents of the City. In the mid 1920's a company interested in purchasing the City's electric service approached the mayor and council and, after a marathon council meeting that ran past 2:00 a.m. in the morning, reconvened later that afternoon, and met until 12:15 a.m. the following day, on April 14, 1926 the Statesboro City Council approved the sale of the City's electric light and steam plant distribution system to Georgia Southern Power Company for \$125,000 in cash and \$2,400 in credit for electric service.

Several years later, on July 8, 1947 the City voted to enter into a contract to have a survey performed to determine the feasibility of a system for the transportation and distribution of natural gas. On May 18, 1954 the City entered into an agreement with Thornton, Mohr, and Parish to obtain an allotment of gas and to provide financing for the City of Statesboro Natural Gas Distribution system. This system not only continues to provide natural gas to the residents of Statesboro but also to the neighboring City of Metter.

Our forefathers had a vision of what this town and this government could be and should be. It is because of their determination and unselfish dedication to public service that we are the City we are today. When asked about voting, John F. Kennedy once said, "the margin is narrow but the responsibility is clear." The margin is narrow as we are only here a short time while the decisions we make in our city government and the actions we take will impact those to follow for generations to come. We are the people. We are the government. It is now our responsibility to preserve the rich heritage that we inherited from our ancestors and to continue to provide a safe and healthy environment in a progressive and prosperous City Government.

**200 Years! More than two lifetimes for most of us. Happy Birthday Statesboro!**