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Athens City Council Meeting Ends Early After Dispute

The Athens City Council's regular meeting Tuesday ended in controversy after a disagreement over an unscheduled personnel-related discussion led to the loss of a quorum and forced the meeting into recess.

Most of the council's scheduled business proceeded routinely. Members recognized Tennessee Wesleyan University's 3RD NAIA National Championship baseball team, honored community volunteer Johnny Coffman with a VIVID Award, approved several purchases and contracts through the consent agenda, authorized additional funding for the McMinn Senior Activity Center, and approved an amendment to the city's ARP stormwater project contract.

The tone of the meeting changed, however, after the conclusion of new business.

Mayor Eaton introduced two additional topics that were not listed on the published agenda. The first involved a request that the city attorney investigate several issues. The second centered on a message from a contracted employee assigned through a temporary agency who had resigned and allegedly raised concerns regarding workplace issues.

Mayor Eaton stated that he and Councilmember Duggan had been improperly accused of creating a hostile work environment and sought to discuss the matter publicly. He attempted to read from the communication sent to council members, describing the message as defamatory.

Interim City Manager Bridget Roberts objected, arguing the matter was administrative in nature and not a council issue. Roberts said the communication had been shared with council as information rather than for council action.

City Attorney Matt Dunn also advised against continuing the discussion, stating the matter involved pending human resources issues.

…..CONTINUED on Page 2

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(Continued) Athens City Council Meeting Ends Early After Dispute

Several council members then pushed back against the mayor's attempt to address the issue publicly. Vice Mayor Jordan Curtis said the discussion was being handled in an inappropriate setting and should take place through a different process. Councilmember McCowan agreed, stating the council was not responsible for managing day-to-day operations and that continuing the discussion would be improper. Councilmember Duggan also advised the mayor not to proceed.

Despite those objections, Mayor Eaton indicated he intended to continue discussing the matter.

Curtis and McCowan then moved to adjourn and, after further disagreement, announced they would take no further part in the proceedings. Both members left the meeting chambers.

Following their departure, Mayor Eaton again attempted to continue discussing the issue. Roberts again urged him to stop, citing what she described as common decency and the nature of the personnel matter.

With only two council members remaining since Councilmember Sherlin was absent for medical reasons, the council no longer had a quorum to conduct business. The meeting was subsequently recessed.

The council is scheduled to reconvene at 5:45 p.m. Oct. 20 before its next regular meeting.

Community News You Can Use

- **Athens Kiwanis Club's 74th Annual Barbecue Sale** will be held Friday, Sept. 18, from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. (or until sold out) at Market Park Pavilion in downtown Athens. A pound of Barbecue or 2 bottles of Gus Bagley's Famous Sauce will be available for $12. Proceeds support local youth programs, scholarships, classroom donations, AmTryke purchases, and other community initiatives. **See more on Page 4**
- McMinn County Schools is installing 45 Halo Smart Sensors in all elementary and alternative schools using funding from the McMinn County Opioid Abatement Grant. The sensors detect vaping, smoking and THC use in real time without cameras or audio recording, expanding a technology already in use at the county's high schools to support student safety and substance-use prevention district-wide.
- The Athens Utilities Board Budget and Finance Committee will meet on Thursday, September 17 at 11:30 a.m.

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McMinn County Arrest Reports

September 15, 2026

Walter Baez, 46, of Athens, charged with drug paraphernalia.

Kenneth Allen, 51, of Niota, charged with failure to appear for misuse of 911 calls.

Benny Spann, 36, charged with criminal trespassing, and public intoxication. Bond $6,000.

Leslie Coleman, 40, of Englewood, charged with domestic assault. Bond $6,000.

Charles Lament, 64, of Athens, charged with driving on a suspended license, and traffic violations. Bond $2,000.

Tina Starr, 40, of Athens, charged with violation of probation for schedule 2 meth, schedule 2 fentanyl, simple possession casual exchange of schedule 4 gabapentin, and drug paraphernalia.

Jody Klein, 32, of Riceville, charged with violation of probation for DUI. Bond $2,980.

Zamari Clary, 18, of Englewood, charged with burglary of a motor vehicle, and felony vandalism. Bond $6,000.

Those accused are considered innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.
Information gathered using public sources.

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Madisonville Police Officer Shoots Armed Individual at DHS Office

A Madisonville Police officer shot an armed individual Tuesday afternoon after responding to a report of a former employee carrying a firearm inside the Department of Human Services on Anderson Street.

According to police, officers arrived within a minute of the 4:53 p.m. dispatch call and encountered the individual, who was armed with two pistols and refused commands. During the encounter, an officer fired their service weapon, striking the individual.

Officers immediately rendered aid until Monroe County EMS arrived. The individual was later flown by UT Lifestar to the University of Tennessee Medical Center. The person who was shot was 41-year-old Rosa Barker who later died. The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation has been requested to investigate the officer-involved shooting. The officer has been placed on paid administrative leave in accordance with department policy. Authorities said no further information will be released while the investigation remains active.

Source: Madisonville PD / WVLT

Obituaries

Wanda Starkey, 84, of Athens, passed away on Tuesday, September 15. She was a faithful member of Goodsprings Baptist Church and a beloved pillar of the Goodsprings community. For 30 years, she drove a school bus for McMinn County Schools. She leaves behind a lasting legacy of service to her church, her community, and the many children she influenced throughout her life. Funeral service will be held on Friday, September 18 at 2:00 p.m. in the chapel of Bordwine Funeral Home. Family will receive friends Friday from 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m., Friday prior to the service. Interment will follow in Goodsprings Cemetery. **Bordwine Funeral Home** is in charge of arrangements.

We encourage you to e-mail community events, church news, or other items of interest for possible use in the Morning Fax. If you take a newsworthy photograph, send it to: wyxiradio@gmail.com