

City of Thomasville Council Meeting, April 14, 2025

The Council of the City of Thomasville met in regular session on the above date. Mayor Todd Mobley presided, and the following Councilmembers were present: Councilmembers Scott Chastain, Royal Baker and Lucinda Brown. It shall be noted that Mayor Pro Tem Terry Scott was not present at this meeting. Also present were the City Manager, Chris White; City Attorney, Timothy C. Sanders; Chief Financial Officer, Ashley Cason; other city staff; citizens and members of the media. The meeting was held in Council Chambers at City Hall, located at 144 East Jackson Street, Thomasville, Georgia. Simultaneous access to the meeting was provided to those members of the media and citizens unable to attend the meeting via the City of Thomasville's online live stream feed located at www.thomasville.org.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Todd Mobley called the meeting to order at 6:10 PM. It was noted that Mayor Pro Tem Terry Scott was absent from the meeting and that Councilmember Baker was enroute to the meeting.

INVOCATION

Mayor Mobley gave the Invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Councilmember Chastain led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Councilmember Chastain moved to approve the Regular Council Meeting Minutes of March 24, 2025, as presented. Councilmember Brown seconded the motion. There was no discussion. The motion passed 3-0, with the following votes recorded: AYES: Mobley, Chastain and Baker.

PROCLAMATION

Mayor Mobley joined Georgia Municipal Association and its member cities in conveying to all citizens of Georgia that they can shape and influence government through their civic involvement by declaring April 20-26, 2025, as Georgia Cities Week. Citizens were encouraged to do everything possible to ensure that this week is recognized and celebrated accordingly.

RECOGNITIONS

1. Fire Chief Tim Connell and Thomasville Fire Rescue honored both Lieutenant Bennie Palmer III and Firefighter Brandon Smith with Life Saving Awards for their heroic actions on March 8, 2025, in saving a citizen during a recent structure fire. Chief Connell noted that their selfless actions ensured that a life was saved amidst the fire emergency.
2. Mayor Mobley reported that Thomas University has an outstanding International Student Athlete program and is home to numerous International Student Athletes during their college careers. The City of Thomasville recognizes the rich diversity and cultural contributions that Thomas University students bring to the Thomasville community. He noted that the City Council is pleased to welcome students from 37 states and 20 countries and are proud to represent the State of Georgia and the United States of America to these students. Mayor Mobley commended those involved in the coordination of housing and sponsoring of students during this endeavor. City Council applauded those students for their time and studies while in Thomasville.
3. Representatives from the Juneteenth Committee presented a commemorative plaque to Mayor Mobley, City Council and City of Thomasville for their support of the annual Juneteenth Event held on June 21, 2025. The annual event celebrates and honors the legacy of Juneteenth with music, history, empowerment, and fun for the whole family.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

Mayor Mobley acknowledged the following citizens listed on the Citizens to be Heard Sign-In Form:

1. Keith Thomas, resident of Woods Gate Lane, Thomasville, Georgia, voiced concerns regarding the illegal dumping of solid waste within the City limits. He commended the City for eventually picking up the illegally dumped items, but suggested the City investigate reoccurring illegally dumped items in the areas of Grady Street, Short Broad and Westover Avenue.
2. Candee Henderson, resident of Thomas County Georgia, addressed Councilmembers regarding her mission to help Thomasville and Thomas County to reach 100% renewably resourced energy by 2035. She encouraged Councilmembers to learn about a new organization, Georgia Utility Watch, a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting Georgia consumers through utility oversight, reform advocacy and public education.

Councilmember Baker joined the meeting at 6:27 PM.

ADOPT AGENDA

Councilmember Chastain moved to adopt the agenda as presented. Councilmember Brown seconded the motion. there was no discussion. The motion passed 4-0, with the following votes recorded: AYES: Mobley, Chastain, Baker and Brown.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no Old Business to be considered by Councilmembers at this meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

First reading of an ordinance to amend the Code of Thomasville by creating a new section 11-22, captioned “Urban Camping”.

City Attorney, Timothy C. Sanders reported the U.S. Supreme Court decision *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson* opened the door for cities to enforce camping bans on public property. Under the *Grants Pass* decision, municipalities may cite, fine, and even incarcerate individuals for camping on public property without violating the Eighth Amendment. The goal of the proposed ordinance is to change behavior with respect to camping on public property and provide the City with a means by which to remove personal belongings from public property.

The proposed ordinance prohibits camping on public property within the City of Thomasville. However, the ordinance specifically does not prohibit the normal customary use of parks and other public property and provides the following non-exclusive list of examples: (i) Children sleeping anywhere while being accompanied by a supervising adult or while sitting or lying in a stroller or baby carriage; (ii) Persons sitting down while attending parades; and (iii) Persons sitting down while attending performances, festivals, concerts, or fireworks or other special events taking place in any amphitheater, park or on any street or sidewalk closed by permit for such purpose.

“Camp” or “camping” is defined as the “temporary habitation outdoors as evidenced by one or more of the following actions: the erection or use of tents or other shelters; the laying down of sleeping bags, blankets, or other materials used for bedding; the placing or storing of personal belongings; the making of a fire; or the act of cooking.” This definition is taken from O.C.G.A. §32-6-6, which prohibits camping anywhere on the State highway system. “Public property” is defined as “public parks, buildings, grounds, streets, highways, sidewalks, or other property owned in whole or in part by, leased by, operated by, or otherwise under the control of the City of Thomasville or any other political subdivision.”

The ordinance provides for a mandatory, written warning for a first violation and an appeal process for the first written warning. After the written warning and appeal, if an appeal is filed, the ordinance provides for punishment as set forth under Code section 1-7. Section 1-7 provides for punishment by a fine, not to exceed \$1,000 or imprisonment for a period not to exceed six months (only thirty days of which may be served in confinement).

The ordinance prohibits the storage of personal belongings on public property and the prohibition is tied to the violation of the urban camping prohibition. The ordinance authorizes the removal of personal belongings and also allows for removal in situations in which no individual is present who claims ownership.

The ordinance requires notification of the removal of personal belongings. Specified minimum information is required in the notice, such as how to claim the belongings and that if stored for more than 30 days, the City is authorized to treat the property as abandoned and dispose of the property accordingly. However, the City is not required to store belongings that “are perishable; are in an unsanitary condition due to saturation or contamination from bodily fluids, whether human or animal, or other contamination; or are items that present a danger or health hazard to City personnel or the public.” In those situations, the City is authorized to dispose of the property immediately.

The ordinance does not provide for a fine or other punishment for violating the prohibition against storing personal belongings on public property when camping on public property. There is the likelihood that most of the people cited are likely to be homeless and therefore not likely to be able to afford to pay a fine. Again, these individuals would also be subject to punishment under Code section 1-7. Once removed from public property, the belongings are required to be stored in a secure indoor or outdoor location, until claimed by a person who can provide proof of ownership. Once stored for more than 30 days, the City is authorized to dispose of the property.

Councilmember Brown inquired about the method of notification to the owners of personal belongings left on public property. City Attorney Sanders reported that if the owner was present, the notification was immediate and in person; however, if owner was not present then notification would be left at location where the belongings were left. Councilmember Brown voiced concerns regarding the challenges in finding a more permanent, and equitable, solution to the growing homelessness concerns nationwide.

Councilmember Brown moved to order the ordinance to amend the Code of Thomasville by creating a new section, 11-22, Captioned “Urban Camping” as read for the first time, passed and carried over as presented. Councilmember Baker seconded the motion. there was no discussion. The motion passed 4-0, with the following votes recorded: AYES: Mobley, Chastain, Baker and Brown.

The title of the ordinance ordered as read for the first time, passed and carried over follows.

AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND THE CODE OF THOMASVILLE, GEORGIA, BY (1) AMENDING CHAPTER 11, CAPTIONED “OFFENSES,” TO CREATE A NEW SECTION 11-22, CAPTIONED “URBAN CAMPING”; (2) REPEALING ALL ORDINANCES IN CONFLICT HERewith; (3) PROVIDING FOR THE EFFECTIVE DATE OF THIS ORDINANCE AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

REPORTS

Councilmembers thanked citizens for attending and their participation in local government. They also encouraged the community to participate in the upcoming Rose show & Festival that will be held April 25 and 26, 2025.

ADJOURNMENT

Having no further business for consideration, the Thomasville City Council Meeting was adjourned at 6:33 PM.

CITY OF THOMASVILLE, GEORGIA



Mayor, Todd Mobley



ATTEST: City Clerk

