



**“The mission of the City of Safford is to make Safford  
a great place to live, work, and visit”**

**CITY OF SAFFORD  
SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES  
Thursday, October 15, 2015 @ 6:30 PM  
Safford Library Early Literacy Room, 808 S. 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Safford, Arizona**

**PRESENT:** Wyn “Chris” Gibbs, Mayor; Mary Bingham, Vice Mayor; Councilmembers, Kenneth Malloque, Gene Seale, Arnold A. Lopez, James D. Howes and Richard Ortega.

**STAFF PRESENT:** Horatio Skeete, City Manager; Leslie Norton, Executive Secretary; Joe Brugman, Police Chief; Randy Petty, Public Works Director/City Engineer; Lance Henrie, Assistant Public Works Director/City Engineer; Dustin Welker, Planning and Community Development Director; Jenny Howard, Utilities Director; Alma Flores, Interim Finance Director; Leanne McElroy, Library Director; Cliff Davis, Human Resources Officer; Sam Napier, I.T. Administrator; Tamara Webster, Clerks Office Administrative Assistant. Dale Clark assisted with the audio recording of the meeting.

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Pedro Ramirez, Adriana Ramirez, Neil Karnes, Beau Allred, Steve Garcia, Burt Watkins, Mel Graham, Tracy O’Donnal, Dale Holladay, and other “illegible” signatures and others who did not sign in. Jon Johnson, represented Eastern Arizona Courier.

- 1. WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER:** Mayor Gibbs called the meeting to order at 6:25 p.m.
- 2. ROLL CALL:** A Quorum of the Council was present (7).
- 3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG:** Mayor Gibbs led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.
- 4. OPENING PRAYER:** Councilmember Arnold Lopez offered the Opening Prayer.
- 5. CITIZEN COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS:** Dale Holladay, Beau Allred, Adriana Ramirez, Mel Graham, and Tracy O’Donnal submitted a request to address the Council.

**6. NEW AND OLD BUSINESS: Discussion of termination of current golf course contract with Springbok Development, LLC and give City Manager direction to explore all alternatives for the future of the golf course.**

City Manager Skeete asked the Council to provide direction to him regarding a letter (attached) of request from Jeff Holt to terminate the golf course contract with Springbok Development, LLC. Mr. Holt requested a discussion to begin an orderly transition of the Golf Course from him to another entity or to the City of Safford as quickly as possible. Mr. Skeete provided some options to the Council to pursue when considering the development of a new management agreement. He believes the City's primary option should be the ongoing operations of the Golf Course in the Valley. The Golf Course is a valuable asset to the Community and the City should do everything it can (within reason) to continue to facilitate the operations of the Golf Course. He briefly discussed the history of the Golf Course and noted that golf courses, like many recreational facilities, are very challenging operations for municipalities. They tend to be a drain on the coffers of the community. However, most municipalities that own and operate golf courses are not operating them exclusively for the purposes of making money, but because they recognize the value of the recreational amenity to the community. Often times the council has to make tough decisions to continue providing these services. Yet, it's not financially feasible for the city to exclusively be the ones owning and operating the golf course. That decision was discussed 5-6 years ago when the contract was developed with Springbok to continue to provide the amenity and the asset of the golf course to the community. He believes the contract adequately protected the continued operations and availability of that contract to the community. However, it also provided a lot of restraints and constrains on the ability of the contractor to benefit financially.

Mr. Skeete stated that Mr. Holt has respectfully requested the City of Safford take back the golf course. He stated there are several options to consider to go forward with to keep the operations of the golf course going. He believes the citizens of the community want to keep the golf course open. A time-line, evaluation and assessment of the golf course needs to be done to determine what it will take for the City to transition and to keep the golf course open. As eager as the City is to keep the golf course open for the community, the Council must consider whether or not the City really wants to continue to operate the golf course. The golf course provided a recreation facility for Eastern Arizona College and Safford High School for their golf teams. Should the City consider developing a Parks and Recreation Department that will include the operation of the golf course? What other sacrifices will the City have to make to take over the operations of the golf course? The City should work to make the golf course something to be proud of.

It is a very unique arrangement and situation – it is a City of Safford asset that resides in the Town of Thatcher, which must be part of the discussion and consideration. He noted that the golf course itself sits on about 230 acres, but, the entire golf course property consists of about 500 acres, leaving a significant amount of land that needs to be included in the discussion. Is there someone that will agree to manage the golf course and its entire operations without financial contributions from the City; but, with the expectation that the golf course delivers some financial returns to the City of Safford?

Next week staff will provide a list of supplies and equipment along with the value so that he can provide an accurate report to the Council.

Mayor Gibbs mentioned selling the Golf Course as an option to consider.

Mr. Skeete stated the situation provided a unique opportunity to explore the development of a regional recreational district that includes the entire Valley. He envisions the schools, Eastern Arizona College, residents of Thatcher, residents of Pima, and residents of Graham County are all welcome to participate and benefit from the Golf Course. We need to consider what regional recreation amenities that Valley residents enjoy that could be managed by a recreation district (i.e., Golf Course, Dry Lake Park, Fairgrounds, Frye Mesa Dam, Discovery Park, Pima Rodeo Arena). Pooling funds to keep the maintenance of such parks will improve the operations and maintenance. State, Federal and private grants would become available. Consider implementing “User Fees”. He provided several options to consider to keep the Golf Course operational. He asked the Council to give him some time to explore an interim solution and long-term development solutions.

At this time the Council accepted comments from the public.

Adriana Ramirez stated that her husband was employed with the City of Safford and then continued employment with Mr. Holt. Mr. Holt has had problems providing pay checks to the staff for the last three pay periods. She supports the City taking over the Golf Course. She will pray for Mr. Holt, because he has affected many lives, the community and the golf course itself.

Mr. Beau Allred stated that he owns a business in Safford and has grown up playing golf at the golf course. The golf course is run down, neglected and unfortunately the City has to make a decision to take it back. He hopes the City explores all options and makes the best decision for the City and the Community. He talked about how the equipment is run down and not operational. Refreshments are being served out of an ice chest. He noted

that an individual purchased the golf carts to keep the course operational and is not being paid for the carts; lost suburb golf community; the restaurant has not been open on a regular basis; large (i.e. Gov Aker, Mining, Hospital Foundation Bd. are just a few) golf tournaments are no-longer played at the Safford golf course. There needs to be some stability to the golf course and hopes the City can provide that stability.

Mr. Dale Holladay, Holladay's Photo Emporium, stated that he spends a lot of time coaching the youth on the golf course for years. There has been several young men and women excel because of the golf course. Comments: Restaurant closed; overheard discussion that Mr. Holt is selling discounted memberships (concerned the City will have to honor fees); Winter visitors (7-8 yrs ago) you couldn't get on the course because of the winter visitors (because of reasonable rates and beautiful course). He stated that his brother-in-law (OB Sports) has graciously offered to help the City in any way that he can to maintain the golf course in the interim (it may not be too late to over seed the course). OB Sports manages over 45 golf courses throughout the nation.

Tracey O'Donnal stated that she is from the community and was on the golf team in High School. The golf course is a huge asset to the communities, to the families, to the schools, to the fundraisers, and is an asset to attract people to live in our community. She understands that the golf course would be a financial burden to the City, but encouraged the City to consider the needs of the community, keep the golf course open, until another option is considered to keep the course open.

Mel Graham encouraged the City to keep the golf course open in the interim until the City decides what to do long-term. Golf courses are a big asset to a community that attracts industries. Since Mr. Holt took over the operation of the golf course, the golf course has deteriorated tremendously. He asked how Mr. Holt has title to the equipment at the golf course?

It was the consensus of the Council to take back the golf course, consider an interim plan agree that the City should go forward and develop an interim solution until a long-term solution can be evaluated. Does the City have the ability to retain current employees? Why should the operations of the golf course just rely on the City of Safford? In the interim, approach other entities like Eastern Arizona College, Safford High School, Thatcher High School, Graham County to assist with the operation and maintenance of the golf course.

A motion was made by Councilman Malloque, seconded by Councilman Howes to direct the City Manager and staff to take the golf course back with the dissolution of the current golf course contract with Springbok Development, LLC, create an interim operational plan for the golf course and pursue the possibility of a regional recreation district in support of the golf course and other entities. **MOTION ADOPTED**

7- Mayor Gibbs, Vice Mayor Bingham, Councilmembers Kenneth Malloque, Arnold Lopez, Gene Seale, Richard Ortega, and Jim Howes.

**7. COUNCIL REQUESTS FOR AGENDA ITEMS: NONE**

**8. MEETINGS/ACTIVITIES HELD OR TO BE HELD BY COUNCIL OR CITY STAFF:**

- October 17 - Harvest Festival and SHS Reunion
- October 19-24 General Plan Update Charrette
- October 24 - CORE Event
- October 26 – Council Work Session

**9. CITIZEN COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS: NONE**

**10. ADJOURN:** It was moved by Councilman Ortega, seconded by Vice Mayor Bingham, and carried unanimously to adjourn at 7:45:35 p.m. **MOTION ADOPTED**

APPROVED:

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Wyn "Chris" Gibbs, Mayor  
City of Safford

ATTEST:

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Tamara Webster, Administrative Assistant  
Office of the City Clerk

STATE OF ARIZONA    )  
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County of Graham    )

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the Special Council Meeting Minutes of the Safford City Council, Graham County, Arizona held Monday, October 15, 2015, and approved at a Regular Council Meeting on Monday, November 9, 2015. I further certify the meeting was duly called, held and that a quorum was present.

November 9, 2015 \_\_\_\_\_

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