Talking Points for South Pittsburg City Commission Meeting – July 8, 2025

1.  Introduction and Purpose (30 seconds):

•  “Good evening, Mayor Henson, Commissioner Duggar, commissioners, and residents. My name is Daniel Hinderliter, a South Pittsburg resident concerned about our City’s financial transparency around the National Cornbread Festival. I’ve requested public records from the City of South Pittsburg and the nonprofit, filed TN Office of Open Records Counsel complaints, sent follow-up emails , and requested a state audit from the Tennessee Comptroller on May 17, and June 25, 2025. I urge the council to address these issues to restore trust.”

2.  Lack of Financial Transparency for the Festival (1 minute):

•  “The National Cornbread Festival, raising over $1.4 million since 1997, relies on city support like police and maintenance workers, yet the 2024 Annual Financial Report shows no related costs. On May 17, 2025, I requested records of these expenditures, but the city claimed ‘no financial records’ exist and ignored my May 27 follow-up. I then followed up in person and spoke with City Administrator, Michael Hudson, who has yet to get back to me. These costs, like police overtime, City Maintenance Workers (in kind support) should be in the General Fund or proprietary budgets. Why are public expenditures unreported, and when will the city respond to my latest request?”

3.  Potential Conflict of Interest (1 minute):

•  “IRS Form 990s show Mayor Shawn Henson as Vice President and Commissioner Beth Duggar as President of National Cornbread Festival, Inc. from 2020 to 2024, prior to their November 2024 election. They may still serve in 2025, though I lack the current board list. This creates a potential conflict of interest under T.C.A. § 8-50-502 and § 6-54-107, as their roles (past or potentially present) could influence undocumented city support. The city’s claim of ‘nothing to do with’ the festival undermines trust. Will they confirm their current board status and recuse from festival decisions?”

4.  City and Nonprofit Non-Compliance (45 seconds):

•  “The city’s Reponse to my May 17, 2025 request and failure to respond to my May 19 2025, records requests violates the Tennessee Public Records Act’s seven-day rule. I filed OORC complaints on June 9 and June 25, 2025, National Cornbread Festival, Inc. ignored my May 17, 2025 request for Form 990s, violating IRS rules. I also sent them a follow up request on June 25, 2025 in addition I have asked for a current list of the Board of Directors. This suggests opacity. How will the city comply with the law and help ensure nonprofit accountability?”

5.  Broader Financial Concerns and Audit Request (45 seconds):

•  “The 2024 audit reports $738,925 in unearned grant revenue and delayed record closure, indicating accounting weaknesses. These, with festival transparency gaps and conflicts, prompted my May 17 and June 25, 2025, state audit requests. A state audit would ensure accountability. Will the council support this audit and commit to transparent reporting, including festival costs?”

6.  Call to Action and Closing (30 seconds):

•  “I ask the council to: disclose festival expenditures, address the conflict of interest, respond to my records requests in full, and support a state audit. Transparency benefits our community. After a recent property tax hike of 138%; I urge residents to request Form 990s from the National Cornbread Festival, Inc and contact the State of TN Comptroller of the Treasury and request a state audit for the City of South Pittsburg. Thank you, and I’m available to discuss further.”