



# Minutes of the Roanoke Rapids City Council

A regular meeting of the City Council of the City of Roanoke Rapids was held on **Tuesday, October 6, 2020 at 5:15 p.m.** in the Council Chambers at the Lloyd Andrews City Meeting Hall.

**Present:** Emery G. Doughtie, Mayor  
Carl Ferebee, Mayor Pro Tem  
Ernest C. Bobbit)  
Sandra W. Bryant)  
Suetta S. Scarbrough)  
Wayne Smith)

## Council Members

Joseph Scherer, MPA, MS, City Manager  
Geoffrey Davis, City Attorney  
Traci Storey, City Clerk  
Leigh Etheridge, Finance Director  
Bobby Martin, Police Chief  
Christina Caudle, Main Street Director  
Jason Patrick, Fire Chief

**Absent:** Kathy Kearney, Deputy City Clerk/Human Resources Manager  
Kelly Lasky, Planning & Development Director  
Larry Chalker, Public Works Director  
John Simeon, Parks & Recreation Director

Mayor Doughtie called the meeting to order and opened the meeting with prayer.

## Adoption of Business Agenda

Mayor Doughtie asked Council members if there were any additions, corrections or any known conflicts of interest with respect to the matters before them this evening.

There being no conflicts, motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee, seconded by Councilwoman Scarbrough and unanimously carried to adopt the business agenda for October 6, 2020 as presented.

## Special Recognitions

### Police Department

Police Chief Martin recognized the following for receiving their Advanced Law Enforcement Certificate:

- ◆ Lieutenant Adam Salmon
- ◆ Captain Jamie Hardy
- ◆ Lieutenant Bruce Norton

Lt. Moseley presented each of them with their framed certificate and pin.

Police Chief Martin introduced the following recent New Hires:

- ◆ Officer Jared Melvin (hired March 2020), pinned by his mother Cheryl Melvin.
- ◆ Officer Andrew Radford (hired December 2019), pinned by his grandmother Dean Taylor.
- ◆ Officer Austin Bradley (hired December 2019), pinned by his mother Crystal Temple.

## Approval of City Council Minutes

Motion was made by Councilwoman Bryant, seconded by Councilman Smith and unanimously carried to approve the September 15, 2020 Regular City Council Meeting and September 28, 2020 Special Meeting minutes as drafted.

## Committee Reappointments

### Senior Center Advisory Committee

City Clerk Storey stated the term for Sandra Clements on the Senior Center Advisory Committee expired August 2, 2020. Ms. Clements is interested in continuing to serve on this committee and would like to be considered for reappointment. She has served the maximum number of two consecutive terms allowed by the City policy, but City Council has the authority to waive this section of the policy.

She reported a ballot vote was taken earlier and Ms. Clements received a unanimous vote. She requested City Council make a motion to waive the City policy and re-appoint Sandra Clements to the Senior Center Advisory Committee.

Motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee, seconded by Councilman Smith and unanimously carried to waive the City policy and reappoint Sandra Clements to the Senior Center Advisory Committee.

## New Business

### **Halifax County Convention and Visitors Bureau Annual Report**

Ms. Lori Medlin, President and CEO of the Halifax County Convention & Visitors Bureau gave a presentation on the Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Annual Report. She stated their Mission was to promote the growth of tourism in Halifax County. Their goal is to realize the potential of this industry to the community that depends on it, delivering a marketing message that Halifax County is an excellent stop over point along the I-95 corridor and they have something to offer everyone that would stop at their exits.

She highlighted the following in her presentation:

- The City of Roanoke Rapids has a 1% occupancy tax dedicated to marketing and tourism development in Roanoke Rapids.
- Visitors to and within Halifax County spent \$106.52 million. Increase of 5% from 2018.
- State tax revenue generated in Halifax County totaled \$6.5 million through state sales and excise taxes, and taxes on personal and corporate income.
- \$2.58 million in local taxes were generated from sales and property tax revenue from travel-generated and travel-supported businesses.
- Visitor spending, in Halifax County, saved each taxpayer \$177.44 in taxes in 2019.
- March 2020 stopped us in our tracks! COVID-19 has caused an unprecedented crisis for the tourism industry.
- Tourist arrivals in North Carolina are projected to plunge by 60 to 80 percent in 2020, and tourism spending is not likely to return to pre-crisis levels until 2024.
- North Carolina has suffered a loss of about \$6.8 billion in travel spending from the beginning of the pandemic. The \$6.8 billion loss is a 57.9% decline in travel spending between March 1 and August 1 of 2020.
- The HCCVB estimates that our hotel's revenues are down 36.25% March through August 2020. Actual Halifax County occupancy tax collections are down 25.2% March through August 2020.
- Just off I-95 Yet Campaign.
- [www.bestexit.us](http://www.bestexit.us)
- Facebook: 65,841 engagements.

- Instagram: 31.3% new followers.
- Pinterest: 22,303 average impressions.
- Twitter: 125,997 tweet impressions.
- Attraction Visitation:
  - Medoc Mountain State Park – 127,600
  - Sylvan Heights Bird Park – 36,559
  - Roanoke Canal Museum & Trail – 42,440
  - Historic Halifax – 18,840
- City of Roanoke Rapids 2019-2020 Occupancy Tax Expenditures:
  - Roanoke Canal Museum - \$8,000
  - Roanoke Canal Trail Maintenance - \$15,000
  - Roanoke Avenue Promotions - \$1,003
  - Roanoke Rapids Marketing - \$49,000
  - Interstate Lighting & Admin - \$15,135
  - Roanoke Rapids Hotel Logo Billboards - \$27,000
  - TJ Davis Tennis Courts - \$20,000
  - Hotel Security - \$18,824

Councilwoman Scarbrough asked if the \$205 Sponsorship RRHS was for the tennis courts. Ms. Medlin replied no, it was for a banner they made for the high school. They consider things around Roanoke Avenue part of the Main Street district. So when they have events at the high school they feel like that impacts the restaurants and retail businesses on the Avenue.

Mayor Doughtie asked Ms. Medlin if she had any updated information on the Amtrak station. She replied they are still on track and talked with some consultants last week and think they have done everything they can do. They have raised the money that NCDOT said they needed to raise to match. She thinks things have slowed down a little bit because of COVID-19 but they are not letting up. Weldon has offered the building that they plan to renovate and they have the money in place. She thinks in the next 2-3 years it should be built.

Councilman Smith thanked Ms. Medlin and staff for all they do. He thinks they have done a good job for Roanoke Rapids and the County. Keep it up.

### **City Manager's Report**

City Manager Scherer gave the following report:

Powell Bill payments are being distributed this week, and we will receive lower amounts than expected. Here's why: In 2019, the General Assembly passed several

special “mini-budgets” – including one for transportation, HB 100 DOT budget for 2019-2021 Biennium. That 2019 budget was reason for celebration as it increased state aid for transit and included a 2020 increase in Powell Bill spending of \$7.375 million for municipalities under 200,000 in population, the first increase in years.

The celebration was short-lived. As 2020 got underway, the NC Department of Transportation (NCDOT) budget story changed dramatically. NCDOT reported increased unbudgeted expenses for natural disasters and legal settlements and, more recently, the added problem of an unexpected loss of revenue from the reduction in gas tax collections during the COVID-19 crisis. In July of this year, the General Assembly was forced to adjust the second year of the two-year transportation budget HB 77 DOT 2020-2021 FY Budget/Governance. (The governor didn’t sign the bill; it became law without his signature.)

So, in July of this year, HB 77 made dramatic changes to a number of transportation funding plans for fiscal year 2021, such as moving \$425 million out of the Highway Trust Fund’s new project program and completely deleting 2020 state aid to both rural and urban transit systems. It also deleted the planned annual \$7.375 million increase in Powell Bill funds – and further reduced them by a nonrecurring \$10.42 million (just for FY21). The total fiscal year 2020-21 Powell Bill amount currently set to be distributed is nearly \$132.7 million, which is less than the budgeted amount due to an “unanticipated expenditures” reduction of nearly \$4.4 million that NCDOT details on the Powell Bill website.

That is why nearly all municipalities will see a decrease in Powell Bill funds this year, with cuts averaging about 10 percent statewide. We anticipate a decrease of \$27,000, or 6%.

The Fire Department has received the funding from Enviva for the purchase of a thermal imaging camera. Chief Patrick is working with them on a date for a photo presentation in the next couple weeks.

Early voting for the upcoming election will be conducted at the Kirkwood Adams Community Center beginning Thursday, October 15<sup>th</sup>. The schedule for the early voting period is listed below.

#### One Stop Hours:

- Thursday, October 15 through Friday, October 16 – 8:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.
- Saturday, October 17 – 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- Monday, October 19 through Friday, October 23 - 8:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.
- Saturday, October 24 - 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- Monday, October 26 through Friday, October 30 - 8:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

- Saturday, October 31 - 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Halifax County residents who are not registered to vote may register and vote during the one-stop voting period.

Residents who are registering to vote during the one-stop voting period must provide a current valid ID as proof of residency. The ID must show your name and current residential address. The following types of ID are acceptable: a government document (i.e. passport, driver's license, etc.), utility bill, or paycheck.

Mayor Doughtie arranged a meeting with City and County officials to develop a sense of collaboration and a goal to accelerate public and private investment at Premier Boulevard/Exit 171. The \$35 million in road improvements underway by NCDOT at Premier Boulevard and NC 125 opens up tremendous economic development opportunities for the City of Roanoke Rapids and Halifax County.

Halloween will be celebrated by the City at its Trunk or Treat event at Doyle Field and Chaloner Recreation Center on Saturday, October 31<sup>st</sup> from 5:00 – 7:30 p.m. or until all the candy is gone. In accordance with Phase 3 of the Governor's Executive Order 163, only 50 people at a time will be allowed onto the field. Treats will be only handed out by the participants and not trick-or-treaters. Organizations wishing to participate need to contact the Police Department to register. The Department of Health and Human Services does not recommend participating in traditional trick-or-treating where treats are handed to children who go door-to-door.

I have formed a Christmas Event Committee to help determine the community's desires for and the best way to have a Christmas community celebration event while observing the health protocols for the COVID-19 virus and upcoming flu season.

The Police Department has initiated an aggressive plan to curb violence in several parts of the city. Additional officers are patrolling areas where illegal activities have occurred. These patrols will be conducted at different dates and times with the goals to either apprehend people in the act of committing crimes or encourage criminals to leave the area. Their initial actions were very successful this past week in apprehending wanted felons, seizing a large amount of drugs and other illegal items and receiving numerous thank you messages from neighbors.

Over a three day period the Police Department concentrated patrolling the area on Hwy. 158 and Church & Carter Streets. October 2 -3 they conducted 22 traffic stops which resulted in 20 charges, 5 arrests, 5 warrants served, 6 foot patrols, 5 State citations, 1 City ordinance, 1 search warrant completed. Charges included: carrying

concealed weapon, narcotics possession, narcotics trafficking, open container, littering, paraphernalia, assault on government official, driving with license revoked. During the two days, they seized 6 grams fentanyl, 8 grams meth, 16 grams marijuana and 1 firearm. On October 5<sup>th</sup>, they conducted 17 traffic stops which resulted in tickets issued for registration and speeding. They arrested 3 people including one that was wanted or B&E.

Also, there was a recent shooting incident in the area of Church and Carter Streets where a nearby church was hit by stray shots. Chief Martin met with the property owner in the area whose vacant house were allegedly being used by drug dealers and other alleged criminal elements. They have agreed to take the necessary steps to help clean up the neighborhood by demolishing houses and other activities to secure properties to keep people out of their houses. Additional police patrols will also be implemented in the area to help with the decriminalization of the neighborhood.

I met with the Peanut Belt Regional Transportation Organization (RTO) transportation planner last week to review the narrow sidewalk in the area of Bobby's Market and Rosemary Laundry on SR 48/Roanoke Avenue. He agreed the sidewalk is dangerous for people in the South Rosemary neighborhood who walk to these commercial locations. I'll work with him as a member of the Transportation Coordinating Committee (TCC) for the RTO to add the project on the next round of NCDOT project funding.

The Parks & Recreation Department is participating in a Food Drive from October 11-17 to collect canned food and non-perishable items for the Angel's Closet and the Rewritten Story Foundation. Donations can be left at any Parks & Recreation facility.

We have not received a final decision from the liability insurance company on the City's communications tower hit by lightning. They are supposed to conduct non-destructive testing on the tower before their decision; the testing is scheduled for tomorrow.

We recently contacted the property owner of Premier Landing regarding the large number of semi-trucks and trailers parking in the lot south of the Walmart lot. We had worked with them in the past about the situation as we have no jurisdiction on parking on private property. The property owner representative finally agreed it is their responsibility to take action to have the trucks stop parking there, as they are creating an unsafe situation. Chief Martin has agreed to work with them to help with the notification about no parking to the truckers.

Councilman Smith said he had a question that comes from the last Council meeting.

He was still concerned on how much money the City anticipates they will be short in last year's budget. He would like to know how much money they got from the County and exactly how much money they got from sales tax. The exact amount was not disclosed to Council. City Manager Scherer replied he did not have those numbers in front of him. He would provide those numbers to them tomorrow when he gets back with the Finance Director.

Mayor Doughtie asked in reference to the testing on the communications tower, did they indicate how long it would take for the City to get an answer. City Manager Scherer replied the testing will be done tomorrow and the answer would be Thursday.

Mayor Doughtie asked Attorney Davis since the City has the opinion from the structural engineer that the tower is unsafe, what does the City do if the insurance company doesn't pay for it. Attorney Davis replied the insurance carrier's initial opinion conflicts with what the structural engineer has said. He feels the City needs to let them continue with this process. When they do the testing and if they can issue the City with some kind of opinion that they do not believe the tower needs to come down or if there is some other kind of remedial measure that can be taken. At that point, the City can evaluate the information and make a decision based on that. He said they would have to see what the carrier comes back with. They may do the testing and it confirms what the previous engineer has said. In that case, they will cover it and the City can take steps to take the tower down.

Mayor Doughtie asked City Manager Scherer if the decrease of \$27,000 in Powell Bill funding was information they received since adopting the budget. City Manager Scherer replied yes, that just came out in the past couple of days. Mayor Doughtie confirmed that the decrease was not accounted for in the budget. City Manager Scherer said that was correct. He was working with Finance Director Etheridge to determine how they would absorb that decrease.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee thanked the Police Department for their increased efforts and patrols in the Carter and Church Street area. It is much needed and they are doing a great job. He asked in relation to cities and towns, is there any anticipated additional dollars coming in for the CARES Act. City Manager Scherer replied the only information he has seen was where the House of Representatives passed a \$2.2 trillion assistance bill that included counties and cities, but that has not reached the Senate. Unless the State releases more money, he was not aware of any more funds that would be made available.

Councilman Smith asked Attorney Davis if for some reason the insurance carrier declines to pay for the tower, what recourse does Council have to go back on the

\$100,000 they allocated to spend. Attorney Davis replied City Council could take it up at another meeting.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Other Business/Closed Session</b></p>
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Motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee, seconded by Councilwoman Bryant and unanimously carried go into Closed Session to consult with the City Attorney to discuss legal matters as allowed by NCGS 143-318.11 (a)(3).

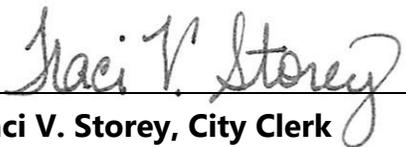
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*Minute Book Pages 20058 - 20064 contain Minutes and General Account of a Closed Session which have been sealed until such time as public inspection of those minutes would not frustrate the purpose of the Closed Session.*

**Adjournment**

City Council returned to open session. They consulted with the City Attorney on legal matters in closed session; no action was taken.

There being no further business, motion was made by Councilman Smith, seconded by Councilwoman Scarbrough and unanimously carried to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

  
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Traci V. Storey, City Clerk

**Approved by Council Action on: October 20, 2020**