



Minutes of the Roanoke Rapids City Council

A Work Session of the City Council of the City of Roanoke Rapids was held on Tuesday, **January 4, 2022** in the Council Chambers at the Lloyd Andrews City Meeting Hall.

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

Council Members

Kelly Traynham, City Manager
Geoffrey Davis, City Attorney
Traci Storey, City Clerk
Bobby Martin, Police Chief
Christina Caudle, Human Resources Manager/Interim Main Street Director

** Denotes joining meeting via Zoom*

Mayor Doughtie called the meeting to order.

HCIA 2022 Legislative Goals

City Manager Traynham stated the City develops its own set of legislative goals and priorities to be presented to the State Legislature. They have learned through the passage of the State budget that these efforts go a long way since the allocation made to the City of \$3.5M, \$250,000 for Main Street and \$1M for storm water improvements. She announced the City would be hosting the January 26, 2022 HCIA meeting at Kirkwood Adams Community Center where the primary discussion will be on the common legislative goals. She referred to the municipal goals from 2021 for the City: Local Revenue Flexibility; Powell Bill Funding; Economic Development Support; Residential Housing Improvement and Covid-19 Financial Assistance. She suggested the Covid-19 Financial Assistance be listed under the HCIA common goals not under Roanoke Rapids' goals. She believed the State and Federal government has followed through. She made the following recommendations to add to the City's goals:

Transportation Improvements:

1. US Hwy. 158/Julian Allsbrook Hwy & Premier Blvd – Pedestrian safety improvements at that intersection. There has been a few fatalities there of pedestrians trying to cross six

lanes of traffic. It is a state maintained highway and they would like to see the intersection improved to reduce that risk.

2. Premier Blvd. & Fourth Avenue – Congestion at the intersection where Chick Fil A and Starbucks is located. A Highway 55 restaurant is in the process of locating there as well. They've had recent conversations with Halifax County Economic Development Director, Cathy Scott about what they can do. It is a NCDOT maintained road and there are some engineering principles that have to be followed but they would like to try to pursue some greater attention there.

3. Affordable Housing – Especially for multi-family. The City has a lot of substandard housing due to the age of the housing. It would be helpful for the State to incentivize affordable housing developments.

City Manager Traynham asked for City Council's input and added the HCIA has asked for municipalities to turn in their legislative goals by January 14th.

Councilman Smith asked if they had given any thought on what needs to happen at Fourth and Premier Boulevard and had Chief Martin given her any ideas or talked to her about it. City Manager Traynham replied they had not specifically met about it. She had met a couple of times with Cathy Scott, Greg Keeter with NCDOT and Public Works Director Chalker where they discussed some engineering. Since it is a state-maintained highway, the State has the ultimate authority on how to proceed no matter what the City suggests.

Councilman Wayne Smith asked if they were thinking about a stoplight there. She replied it was a traffic calming device and will be glad to include Chief Martin in any upcoming meetings; they do not have one scheduled yet. Incorporation of a stoplight or anything like that would be up to NCDOT to make the decision. The same would go for Julian Allsbrook and Premier Blvd. The City cannot install it themselves. They would like the State to take a greater role in addressing the transportation impacts there.

Councilman Carl Ferebee stated they had talked about that area quite a bit. He agreed with City Manager Traynham with what happened at the crossing not long ago that some type of crossing light with a button would be nice. He sees people walking from the hotels to eatery type places and they almost have to walk in the street. This might be a good opportunity to use some monies to help get that done. He said the Police Chief would definitely have an impact and give some good ideas on that.

Mayor Doughtie asked City Manager Traynham if she knew of any other businesses that were going out there at this time. She reported there was another possible development going on the vacant property between the Starbucks and former Harley-Davidson building.

Mayor Doughtie said those types of businesses are going to create sales taxes and jobs. He said since it is economic development they could look to their legislators and get some favorable attention from NCDOT. City Manager Traynham said a lot of the time those types of transportation improvements are at the expense of the developer. The City wants to be business friendly and proactive in economic development. It's an overall issue that should not be born at the expense of the next developer, it should be something that is addressed today or with the current situation. The state is investing millions of dollars into the extension of Premier Blvd. out to Hwy. 125. There are some constraints with the right-of-way widths, but that is why she recommends they encourage the State to try to fund some alternatives to improve access.

Councilman Smith said he believed she was going about it the right way by getting Mrs. Scott and Public Works Chalker involved and believes discussions with Chief Martin would be advisable. He knows how the traffic is especially if you go to Starbucks and Chick-fil-A; it's a madhouse out there sometimes.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if that was going to be added to the legislative goals or would it be under another item on the legislative goals. City Manager Traynham recommended it as a new goal but it was at the discretion of City Council.

The consensus of City Council was to add it as a new legislative goal.

Mayor Doughtie stated the housing situation is vital to them in order to recruit new people to move to the community. A lot of the time they hear people do not move here because they cannot find suitable housing. He believes that needs to be a priority.

City Manager Traynham read the existing Residential Housing Improvement goal and stated a separate item needed to be added to seek legislation that would provide more enabling incentives for affordable housing in rural cities such as Roanoke Rapids. Small cities may miss the mark because the Housing Finance Agency is the primary agency that controls a lot of it. Roanoke Rapids may get one housing apartment complex out of that every few years. She would like to see priority be given to the area to improve housing.

Councilman Smith said they may need to look at the City's house zoning and lot size so maybe people could build on smaller lots. City Manager Traynham said they had already started addressing that with some adjustments after the 160D changes that would encourage development. They need the develop attention here and it is the State that could give financial incentives or tax credits that really increase the potential for it.

Councilman Smith said if they show some initiative to do that the State would be willing to look at it and help the City. He added there was a lot of vacant land they have liens against. They may need Halifax County to go ahead and foreclose on it so the City can take it.

City Manager Traynham stated having some state support or something to help with the cost of private development could be a motivating factor.

Mayor Doughtie said it would be good if it could be used for multi-family housing. He believes most people that live in multi-family housing do not care about having a big yard to keep up with. The ones that were new are old now; nothing new has been built in a long time.

City Manager Traynham said everything that has been built had the tax credit financial incentives. With private development they look at the number of units and it comes down to the cost benefit. They want to get more units on a small amount of space and not just break even on their investment. The tax credits program is a competitive program through the Housing Finance Agency. They typically only award one every few years in this area.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if they were planning to add another item for housing. City Manager Traynham said under the topic of residential housing improvement they can amend that to include incentives for affordable housing. She added one of the major needs is family development because the Finance Agency has age-restricted developments and family development. There has not been a family development constructed in over ten years. The last one was off Smith Church Road.

Councilman Smith asked if this could be due to being land locked. There is no land in the city to make a development like that now; they would have to go outside the city limits. City Manager Traynham said there are still several that exist. Potentially there was one a few years ago behind DrugCo. There are a few other sites that have been potential multi-family sites through the competitive program, but they have not been funded.

Councilwoman Bryant stated she would like see that included because there is a definite need for it.

Councilwoman Scarbrough said a number of years ago behind Fire Station No. 2 the land out there was to be developed. Nothing happened on the left-hand side of the road. On the right-hand side there is housing and there are apartments. Her understanding was on the left-hand side of the entrance road there was supposed to be a big boom in building. She asked what happened to that. City Manager Traynham replied it was because of the housing market but it was not completely gone yet. The owner of that property has been looking at different options. As far as the reason why nothing has actually come to fruition comes down to either people are working on different projects in different areas or its supply and demand and costs and benefits. She reported they've had some limited interest in it of different types of development in that area as well as expansion of the townhomes (Cross Creek Villages).

Councilman Smith stated he was trying to figure out why the City of Roanoke Rapids can't get contractors to build here. He has been going around Tarboro and they are building houses down there left and right. In Rocky Mount they are building houses; same for Ahoskie and Franklin, Virginia. Roanoke Rapids is not building anything. He has been going with the person building all these trusses going to all these houses everywhere but Roanoke Rapids. It has to be some reason why they are not interested in building in our town. He questioned whether they had too many restrictions or what the problem could be. He believes they need to look to see if the restrictions are too tight by checking with other towns.

City Manager Traynham said at the Cross Creek community there has been a developer out of Raleigh that has purchased a number of homes on Appleberry Court and they also brought the remaining portion of the townhome development site. There is some interest here and a lot of it has do with jobs. That part of town ideal for someone who may work not only in Roanoke Rapids but in Rocky Mount or Raleigh area due to quick access to I-95.

Councilman Smith said the big sawmill plant is about to be built in Weldon so those people have to live somewhere. He was glad she was city manager now; the City is moving forward. This is something they will have to continue working at.

City Manager Traynham stated in order to get more competitive they need to improve their service delivery as a whole. Also service deliver with online transactions with online applications. She was told that a developer had to drive from Charlotte to Roanoke Rapids because the City would not take payment over the telephone by credit card and he did not trust to give one of his subcontractors a check to make that payment. Having more modern conveniences where having an improved service delivery with technology because today everyone wants to conduct their business in the palm of their hand on a cell phone or tablets. They are in a digital age and this is something they can discuss during budget time.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee agreed and said there are not many places where you can't pay online. Some may choose not to do that, but a lot people are doing transactions online. He believes the City's bank can help them with that piece.

City Manager Traynham stated that was not a legislative goal; that goes more into our budget planning. If it was a consensus of City Council as a budget priority they can draft a budget to try to meet some of those goals. They have been doing some unofficial polling of local contractors to see if they would use the service if they offered online permitting. Responses were favorable and they said it would save hours and they could get more work done.

City Manager Traynham asked if they had any other local priorities or were they comfortable at this point.

Councilman Smith stated the existing goals and the two additional goals City Manager Traynham suggested were satisfactory.

City Manager Traynham said she would draft these up and send out for their review prior to submitting them to HCIA by January 14th.

Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Budget Review Schedule

City Manager Traynham stated the budget is part of the City's daily operations. Preparation of the upcoming fiscal year budget is something they need to start doing now. Typically, the City Manager and Finance Director will send out instructions and ask departments to draft their budgets and needs to submit back to them for review. They will then meet with the department heads individually about their submittals and then draft a budget for review by City Council. City Council will have meetings with department heads where they will hear a lot of wants, needs and priorities. Typically that has been later in the process. She would like to propose they have a special meeting with City Council to discuss some specific priorities for the budget. She would like them to hear all the needs of those departments before they get shuffled out rather than hearing just the ones that have been selected. The earlier on City Council and department heads have those conversations then they will be able to ultimately look at what those needs are. There are a lot of needed expenses and realize they cannot fund everything.

She asked City Council to let them know if there was anything they wanted to work towards such as improved service delivery. They also have the ARPA funds they can look at during this process together to see what can be funded with those funds and what can be funded by the General Fund. They need to look at the big picture, not just from the immediate upcoming year. She would like to be close as possible to a balanced budget by the second/regular meeting in May.

Councilman Smith he would like each department head to get their needs together and hold a workshop where they can tell City Council what their needs are. This will allow City Council a chance to look at these needs before they really get into the budget. They can include their wants as well. It may take two or three meetings. This will give them a chance to talk to them.

City Manager Traynham agreed. She will be meeting with many of the departments this week and visiting each of the facilities and going through their needs.

Councilman Smith asked if it was possible to have a get together with them in February. She replied yes they could. He appreciated the City Manager bringing this up the beginning

of January to give them time to think about it.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee agreed. He would like to see their list of needs and they prioritize that list. They may only be able to fund one of them or any of them, but at least they know what they want and address it.

Councilwoman Bryant liked that idea too because if they gave them list of four things for this year and maybe they were only able to fund one. If it's really critical, then next year when they are going through the budget, the other three items may come back up. This way they can start addressing those needs year to year.

City Manager Traynham asked on general terms, what are some things City Council that perk their interest.

Councilman Smith said he had some general ideas he would like to see done at Public Works, Police Department and City Hall. He believes some of these things, if they ever get the final ruling, could be funded with ARPA funds and the department heads could go ahead and purchase what they need. Some things may take six months to get or longer.

City Manager Traynham said they were putting out guidance right now they can use, but any further information that comes out will be less restrictive perhaps. That is what she had heard through UNC School of Government. They feel good about what they could spend the funds with, but it's documentation that needs to be followed. That is why she believes they need to look at the department's specific needs rather than for her to determine what is a priority. She wants City Council to hear all of it. It is not her budget, it is what the taxpayers are funding. When they look at all of they can determine which needs can be funded with ARPA funds and which ones can be funded with the General Fund. They should identify the needs without saying they cannot afford it.

Mayor Doughtie stated he believes they were going to be ready to look very seriously at the budget this year considerably earlier than they have been. They have a lot of capital projects they have put off and now they have the opportunity to be able to do some of those things. It would be good to do them before they became an emergency.

Councilman Smith asked to go back and talk about the City's outdated systems the City Manager brought up earlier. He asked if she could get City Council the figures of what it would cost to update our system. Maybe this would be the first step. He knows the City's systems are outdated.

City Manager Traynham stated she was confident that ARPA monies could be used to do that because the intent was to reduce the face-to-face interaction. The way the City does business was great 25-30 years ago in some situations. They had at least one

demonstration on one part of things. Those numbers will be presented as part of these budget meetings. She said it is expensive, especially to start up. That is what has deterred them in the past. She gave an example of a building permit system the Planning Department looked into a few years ago. The startup cost was about \$30,000 but would be \$10,000 per year afterwards. That is one of the benefits of the ARPA money. Some of the upfront cost would be covered.

Councilman Smith said he knows \$30,000 is expensive because they never had it to throw away, but it's not a big expense compared to an employee leaving their job to run up to the central office or an employee leaving office to run upstairs. Actually, they are spending more than \$30,000 to get everything done.

City Manager Traynham said they could have much great efficiency with modern programs and technology. Councilman Smith asked to find out if the ARPA money can be used for it and that could be the beginning of changing things that they need to change.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if that would come under Administration for funding. City Manager Traynham replied yes. He asked if she could break out the percentage of monies they currently use for the City's budget for every department and use that same percentage for the ARPA money. He would like to see that; it would just be a starting point

Councilman Smith stated he did not think that could be done. Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said it couldn't, but it's a starting point. He would like to see it on paper.

Councilman Smith brought up that the Fire Department has needed a new fire truck for years and he thought they could use \$350,000 out of this year's money and \$350,000 out of next year's money. He understands the ARPA funds can be used to buy new police radios. The fire department is in a grant with the other fire departments where they can get money for radios. The public works department needs a vacuum for the manholes to vacuum all the debris that is stopping up the storm drains.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee was in agreement with that. He still would like to see the percentage and there may be enough monies for that.

City Manager Traynham said she looked at the budget pie chart and has found a lot of expenses that are interrelated across all departments. That is one of the main reasons you can't say for Public Works to use their money the way they want or Planning you do this. They have compatible products that work across the board for all. Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said he understood that but asked if she would provide that information at the next meeting. The breakout of the ARPA money by the departmental budget percentages. He is not saying they would try to use it that way, he would just like to see that way.

City Manager Traynham stated their government spending is what they serve everyone; the departments are all interrelated. When they look at monies and spending they need to consider how this benefits the taxpayer and improve the community as well as make them more efficient.

Councilman Smith said he knew there was \$100M in recreation grants out there and asked if they had started to apply for any of those yet. City Manager Traynham said she has a meeting scheduled with Parks & Recreation Director Simeon on Thursday to discuss some upcoming plans and projects. Councilman Smith said they need a bath house at Chockoyotte Park and updated lighting a Ledgerwood.

City Manager Traynham reported when grant programs are available staff has been active in applying for grants and has been successful as of late. The CDBG Neighborhood Revitalization grant the City was awarded typically has taken six months from application to funding and this time it's been almost two years and they were still waiting on the State to release funds. She has heard from them and they are getting close to finishing their due diligence so they should be able to move forward with the project which includes a new bath house facility at Chaloner Recreation and owner-occupied home improvements. She said the Parks & Recreation, the Fire Department and Police Department try to find grants. She received an email from the new head librarian about a grant program. City staff is actively looking for grants and making applications to offset the City's contributions for those programs. It is important to send correspondence to their legislators and representatives at the state and national level to try to get that advocacy there.

Councilman Smith said he would like to find out if they can go ahead and spend the ARPA money for police radios, put money aside for the Fire Department and Public Works Department. He feels they can spend the money for these things. They should go ahead and spend that money on the things they need rather than wait until July to do it.

City Manager Traynham said they could start looking at and going through the documentation on how to procure items and the plan for disposal of them. At the next work session they could get more specific on some items City Council may want go ahead and start funding.

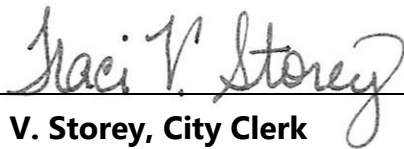
Miscellaneous

City Manager Traynham announced highway marker dedication and unveiling for Sarah Keys Evans will be held Saturday, January 15th at 2 p.m. The dedication ceremony will be at 1118 Roanoke Avenue and a reception will follow at City Hall. Congressman G.K. Butterfield plans to attend and give remarks at the reception.

The library will hold an Open House on January 13th, she does not know the time yet, to

welcome new Head Librarian Leigh Ann Brodsky and thank Jackie Moore for her tenure and work as Interim Head Librarian between Mr. Watson retiring and Mrs. Brodsky coming on board.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:35 p.m.



Traci V. Storey, City Clerk

Approved by Council Action on: 2/15/2022