



Minutes of the Roanoke Rapids City Council

A regular meeting of the City Council of the City of Roanoke Rapids was held on **Tuesday, March 4, 2025, at 5:30 p.m.** in the Council Chambers at the Lloyd Andrews City Meeting Hall.

Present: Emery G. Doughtie, Mayor
Sandra W. Bryant, Mayor Pro Tem

Andy Jackson)
Curtis Strickland)
Rex Stainback)
W. Keith Bell)

Council Members

Kelly Traynham, City Manager
Geoffrey Davis, City Attorney
Traci Storey, City Clerk
Carmen Johnson, Finance Director
Christina Caudle, Human Resources Director
Harold Phillips, Interim Police Chief
Kristyn Anderson, Planning & Development Director
Kelly Daughtry, Parks & Recreation Director
Jason Patrick, Fire Chief

Absent: Larry Chalker, Public Works Director

Mayor Doughtie called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Mayor Doughtie provided an invocation. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Adoption of Business Agenda

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

There being no conflicts, motion was made by Councilman Bell, seconded by Councilman Stainback, and unanimously carried to adopt the business agenda as presented.

Approval of City Council Minutes

Motion was made by Councilman Strickland, seconded by Councilman Jackson, and unanimously carried to approve the February 18, 2025, Regular City Council Meeting minutes as drafted.

Old Business

Emry Park Skate Park Update

Justin Kerr stated he has been working on the Emry Park skate park for the last year and a half now. When they received the initial quote, he secured the remaining funds they were short. He requested City Council get a new quote since it has been some time, and the price of concrete has gone up so they could move forward with the project. They've had a lot of people from the community pitch in and help. They have another skateboard contest/fundraiser on March 15th at the existing skate park. This will be their third one. It has been a big event, and it is awesome to see the community come together and help out with this. He can see that this new skate park is something the community really wants.

Councilman Jackson asked how much money he had raised. Mr. Kerr replied \$30,000.

Mayor Doughtie stated that it was very admirable that he has been able to raise that amount of money. Mr. Kerr said he could not have done it without all the generous people in this community. That is what has been so awesome, seeing how giving this community can be to have something like this. This is not just for his kids, but hopefully for the next generation of kids and something for this community to have.

Mayor Doughtie asked if the City had contacted the tourism office or anything like that to help with this project.

City Manager Traynham stated they have made the request to tourism and the response has been that the project does not meet their legislation. The City still has \$15,000 in the budget to put towards this project as well. There is a difference that needs to be made up through fundraising or other appropriations that could be obtained. An updated quote would help figure out how far apart they are at this point. The tennis courts there have been closed for a number of years, and it is unsightly blight. This project would improve the appearance and functionality of the park and still provide additional room for improvements where the current tennis courts are located.

Mayor Doughtie asked if they had explored any grant opportunities. City Manager Traynham replied there could be some available, but it depends on the season and application criteria.

Councilman Jackson asked if City personnel had to weed eat and do maintenance out there. City Manager Traynham replied they would need to ask the Parks & Rec staff, but the tennis courts have been closed and locked; they have not been utilized. The courts are far beyond any maintenance of cracks and holes at this point. They have a 30-year lifespan, and they are about 50 years old now. Mr. Kerr added that the grass gets pretty tall in the summer.

Councilman Jackson stated that concrete is easier to maintain than grass and weeds over a long period of time.

City Manager Traynham said the courts have outlived their lifespan so maintenance of them was essentially discontinued.

Mayor Pro Tem Bryant asked how much was the previous quote. Mr. Kerr replied it was \$70,000. They have a private contractor willing to do the demolition and lay the base layer of rock for free. There is a company in town that is donating the lights so it can be lit at night. He has talked to multiple people at Dominion Energy about having the electricity hooked up since this is a charitable fund. Everyone has recommended he wait until the project starts. Dominion is more than willing to help with things like this, but they need to see the project is happening.

Councilman Bell asked Mr. Kerr if he had checked with companies such as Lowe's that may donate or have grants to assist with a project like this. He recalled some of the schools have requested grants and donations in the past. These types of companies may be able to help with some of the construction costs.

Mr. Kerr said he has looked into some of that and has been told they mostly donate materials. With this project using mixed concrete, that is out of their domain. He has gone about every route he could find to get where he is now. He believes he has been in about every local business and asked and talked to people on the street about it.

City Manager Traynham stated Mr. Kerr's efforts were to be commended. She thinks they can get to a point where they can max out fundraising efforts. He has far surpassed expectations in that. Unfortunately, if they do not act and do something and the more they continue to ask for money from local businesses, people will say they have given money and question what they have done with it. It would be in the best interest of acting sooner than later to try to get this project implemented.

New Business

Consideration of NCDOT Aerial Utility Easement

City Manager Traynham reported the City was recently approached by NCDOT concerning the bridge replacement project BR-0021. The bridge will replace the current bridge on Hwy. 48 that crosses the Roanoke River in Halifax and Northampton counties. It is state funded, and they have been working to obtain right-of-ways. The new bridge on new alignment will remove the existing bridge and there will be a new truck route installed for trucks entering the papermill property. As part of this, the intersection where the papermill road splits off and a crosswalk in place, there is a small area of land that is owned by the City adjacent to Hwy. 48. NCDOT is requesting an aerial utility easement and planning to give a consideration of \$3,375 for this permanent easement.

She said City administration does not see any impact on the City's use of its property at the site of this easement. NCDOT activities would be all that is permitted within the NCDOT easement. She asked for City Council's consideration to approve the conveyance of the aerial utility easement.

Motion was made by Councilman Stainback, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Bryant and unanimously carried to approve the conveyance of the aerial utility easement for the NCDOT BR-0021 project parcels 010 owned by the City of Roanoke Rapids and authorize the mayor to execute the required documents.

Consideration of Amendment to the City of Roanoke Rapids Code of Ordinances (Chapter 96)

Attorney Davis stated this was a simple change to bring the City ordinances into conformance with an agreement with Halifax County that was adopted in September 2024. He reminded City Council that in the September 17, 2024 meeting, they adopted a new interlocal agreement with the County for collection of ad valorem taxes and for the County to accept the City's nuisance abatement liens as something they would collect by default in their tax foreclosure actions. Prior to that there had been a long-standing dispute between the City and County regarding whether the County had to collect on those liens in foreclosure actions. He said when referring to nuisance abatement liens, it is usually grass-cutting by the City of a derelict lot. The landowner is not cutting the grass on it or paying the taxes, so the County comes in and forecloses on the property. The County was taking the position that because of the wording of the City ordinances and because of the fees the City was charging related to that, they did not have to collect them as ad valorem tax liens. They were not given the same dignity.

He said the priority given to liens is important especially for properties that may be abandoned or neglected. Often when those properties sell, they sell for very low amounts. Sometimes there may be all kinds of creditors and liens involved. It is important that to the extent they can, the liens have as much priority as they can. Part of the agreement entered into in September, the County agreed the nuisance abatement liens were of the same as a lien for ad valorem taxes so they are collected at the same extent. Prior to that when the County would do a tax foreclosure action, he would come in as City Attorney to go into court to argue it to get the City's liens held in the same dignity. This makes the process a lot simpler. It also makes it simpler for purchasers because over the years purchasers of these properties in a tax foreclosure believed the foreclosure wipes everything out although there were still nuisance abatement liens against the property.

Attorney Davis said last month the Finance Department brought to his attention that the City's ordinances need to be brought into conformance with the new interlocal agreement and that is what these amendments do. Essentially, it is striking the administrative fees that were set up in the ordinances. The County has always taken the position that those administrative fees were the problematic part of the City's liens. What the City can attach as liens if given the dignity of an ad valorem tax lien, is very restrictive in the law. Looking back, he can see what the County has said over all these years, and it does seem like some problematic language that could be an issue in court. The City is still collecting nuisance abatement liens and collecting the full costs to the City to abate those liens.

Motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Bryant, seconded by Councilman Bell and unanimously carried to adopt Ordinance No. 2025.07 amending the City of Roanoke Rapids Code of Ordinances Chapter 96, Sections 96.01, 96.05 and 96.06.

City Manager's Report

City Manager Traynham reported they get questions about the impact of the federal government tax cuts and how that would impact their local government services and in turn the citizens. To date, the City administration has not been notified of any interruptions or delays to federal funding sources that the City of Roanoke Rapids receives as a unit of local government.

She stated it is important to note that the City of Roanoke Rapids has routinely engaged in grant and contract work from federal and state agencies, philanthropic organizations, and other donors. The revenues generated help to diversify the City's revenue streams and to create additional programs and services that help local government leaders address emerging challenges. They are diligently complying with

all federal, state and local grant criteria. In many grants it is what they may refer to as “red tape” and there is a lot of due diligence involved. The City will continue to identify potential opportunities and challenges that may arise along the way.

She emphasized that they do not anticipate any significant or negative effects on City services as a result of the federal cuts in spending. The City will remain transparent and continue to notify City Council, staff and citizens should that change. At this point, it is business as usual, and they do not anticipate any impact from that in the upcoming budget preparation. She has full faith and confidence in City Council, staff and administration to adjust to any changes that come their way.

City Manager Traynham highlighted the following from her report:

- Last week, many City staff members completed a 6-week AI Academy hosted by the UCPCOG. They learned a lot about the responsible use of artificial intelligence in local government on different platforms. The use of AI is becoming more prevalent especially with younger persons. They can only assume employees are using it and responsible use is the intending goal.
- Last Saturday, March 1st, she served as a volunteer judge for The American Legion Department of NC National High School Oratorical Scholarship Program. She recognized Councilman Bell and Councilman Strickland who also attended and assisted.
- She received a presentation from Withers Ravenel consulting firm to provide services for a Pavement Condition Survey (PCS) that would evaluate and prioritize the maintenance and resurfacing needs for all city streets. Funding options would be identified for implementation that would lead to longer life out of projects. They were looking at that for incorporation into the FY2025-2026 budget.
- The proposed rescheduled date for the Strategic Planning Workshop is Wednesday, March 19th. She asked City Council to confirm their availability with the City Clerk. The consultants plan to be in town that week and were interested in interviewing stakeholders or local community leaders for anonymous input to what the strategic plan and vision for the future of Roanoke Rapids should look like.
- The City has completed closeout documentation for the FY19 CDBG-NR program. Planning staff along with the Fire Marshall and Fire Department staff are working to help with the environmental review documents to get the release of funds for the FY22 CDBG-NR program which includes revitalization of qualifying owner-occupied homes.
- Tomorrow, March 5th, the Halifax Economic Development Commission Board of Directors will meet at 5 p.m.

- Early Sunday morning, March 2nd, firefighters responded to an apartment fire on Old Farm Road. They were successfully able to contain the fire to one unit with minimal damage to the adjacent residents.
- There is a temporary closure of the Canal Trail in the River Road area due to unauthorized access and bridge crossing by a motor vehicle. This was further complicated with attempts to remove the car. Staff are accessing the condition of the foot bridge and any maintenance needs. Additionally, along the Canal Trail, some unsafe conditions have been reported in an area that was recently repaired by the Roanoke Rapids Sanitary District. The City relies a lot on citizens' complaints and they do welcome them especially for safety concerns. She reminded the public that motor vehicles are not allowed on the Canal Trail. This includes 4-wheelers, electric bikes, mopeds, etc. Enforcement action will be necessary to maintain compliance with those rules.
- The library is planning for its Summer Reading Program with the theme, "Color Your World." Registration begins June 10th.
- The scoreboards at the baseball fields will be shipped by the provider on April 10th and installed soon after by maintenance staff.

Mayor Doughtie asked what the *Visit Halifax* naming rights for the scoreboards meant. City Manager Traynham replied it is because the funding for four (4) of the scoreboards were provided through occupancy tax; it is essentially an advertisement. It does not change the name of the field. The four scoreboards will be at Ledgerwood Field.

- Additional occupancy tax funding will fund pickleball courts at Rochell Park. That project has been awarded to Rians Paving and Patching. Awaiting the contractor to schedule work to begin.
- The multi-purpose room at TJ Davis Recreation Center has been repainted. The appearance is much improved. This room is frequently rented out by citizens for various events such as parties, showers, etc.
- Industrial League basketball games are occurring on Tuesday and Thursday nights. The City of Roanoke Rapids has a team, and she encouraged City Council and the public to attend the games.
- On March 20th, the Planning Board will meet at Lloyd Andrews to discuss some strategic planning efforts and identify training opportunities.
- The NC Code Qualification Board has revised credentials for code enforcement officers which limit the ability of Level 1 to inspect commercial properties. This will not have an immediate impact on City services due to the training and certifications held by their inspectors. Statewide it could be an issue, especially in a field that is struggling with new people entering the field of code enforcement.

- The MAPS Group is contracted with the City for the Employee Position Classification and Compensation Study. They are working now to develop implementation cost planning. The findings of the study will be presented to the City Council during the April 1st meeting.
- Starting tomorrow through next Monday, she and Finance Director Johnson will be meeting with department heads about their FY2026 budget requests. They expect them to far exceed the available balance but will summarize the findings and present them to City Council in April. She noted they still do not know what the projected revenues will be at this time.
- The RRPD Citizens on Patrol will host a Fish Fry fundraiser on Friday, April 11th from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. Plates are \$10 each and include fish, french fries, coleslaw, and bread. To place your order, please contact Captain Gorton Williams at 252-533-2810.
- She recognized the Public Works Department for their efforts throughout the winter weather they have experienced in the last six weeks. Their commitment and dedication to the City and services was outstanding. They not only brined the streets and cleared the roads but were also able to collect the refuse and trash as well. She thanked them for keeping the city safe and getting things back to normal as quickly as possible.
- Loose leaf collection will continue a little longer due to the recent winter weather.

Other Business

Mayor Doughtie asked if any other business needed to come before City Council.

Tracy Story asked Mayor Doughtie if he could speak to City Council. Mayor Doughtie allowed it.

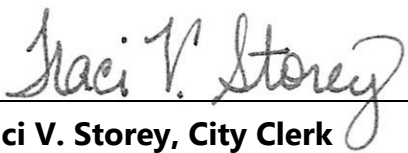
Mr. Story commended Justin Kerr for raising \$30,000; that is a lot of money for a small community. He does a lot of fundraising, and it is very hard to obtain \$30,000; he has never done that. He asked for anyone who has not visited Emry Park, they need to go see the condition of the park and what those tennis courts look like; it is sad. It is truly an embarrassment for the community. He knows what projects cost. When they have someone who went out and obtained \$30,000 to put towards the project, that is money the City doesn't have to spend. To just get the park to look better would cost every bit of that just to tear it down and start over. Once people start to go and be there, all of a sudden pride is taken. People will step up and they will do their part. It will also be less maintenance on the City and will improve property values. He asked them to think about the people that live around the park, and how they look out and see those tennis courts in that condition. The longer they wait the

more liability there is, not to mention the eyesore for the citizens and those wanting to enjoy the park.

Mayor Doughtie stated each month they receive the financial report, and it shows right now they have a sizeable amount of funds. He knows they still owe for the Theatre and other debt that will be paid off in a shorter time than that. He asked City Manager Traynham at the next meeting to provide how much of that money is encumbered by debt and how much exactly is in the undesignated fund balance.

Adjournment

There being no further business, motion was made by Councilman Bell, seconded by Councilman Stainback, and unanimously carried to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 6:08 p.m.



Traci V. Storey, City Clerk

Approved by Council Action on: March 18, 2025