



# **Minutes of the Roanoke Rapids City Council**

A Work Session of the City Council of the City of Roanoke Rapids was held on **Tuesday, March 2, 2021 at 5:30 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. Bobbitt)  
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  
Kathy Kearney, Deputy City Clerk/Human Resources Manager  
Bobby Martin, Police Chief  
Kelly Lasky, Planning & Development Director  
John Simeon, Parks & Recreation Director  
Larry Chalker, Public Works Director  
Jason Patrick, Fire Chief  
Christina Caudle, Main Street Director

Mayor Doughtie opened the meeting and offered an invocation.

## **Corridor Planning & Zoning Study for NCDOT**

Planning & Development Director Lasky said they have had several meetings since last November. This has been a long-term interest of the City of Roanoke Rapids since the mid-to-late 1990s when the City took in these areas as ETJ and had the zoning along I-95 and Hwy. 125. What they are looking at is not just about land use and zoning. A corridor study is study of the transportation corridor and looking at the land uses and transportation and trying to make sure they are very well coordinated. It is not just about a roadway that is brand new and zoning classifications but also infrastructure such as water, sewer, electric, etc. During a meeting today via Zoom, they are looking at some potential changes to the zoning map that would help align current commercial classifications that were assigned back in the late 1990s to the alignment of the new road. Back in the 1990s when the commercial corridor was established parallel to I-95, the proposed hypothetical new Premier Boulevard at the

time was anticipated to run exactly parallel to it. But due to environmental conditions, wetlands and floodways, the road has a curvature in it so there is some separation between the commercial district and the new roadways that are under construction. They are moving forward progressively with this study group. She said the group was made up of local government stakeholders. What they intend to do in the next few steps are to include the landowners who own property within the corridor where Premier Boulevard is extended and American Legion Road. They will talk with them about their intentions and include them in the process so they can have a greater understanding. This will make it a cohesive process that the transportation investment being made by NCDOT can have some coordinated redevelopment and economic development along the corridor. The next meeting is scheduled for early next month and in between now and the next meeting, there will be some infrastructure meetings taking place between Halifax County and Roanoke Rapids Sanitary District for the provision of water/sewer services in the area. In this particular area there are several entities that have jurisdiction. It's the City's ETJ and the City has some city limits. The area is served by both the Roanoke Rapids Sanitary District and Halifax County Public Utilities and also with Dominion Power and Roanoke Electric. There is a lot of coordination that has to be involved to make this a successful project area. Their intentions are to continue to provide updates as they move along in the process. They are looking to bring some discussion to the Planning Board level in either April or May.

Councilwoman Scarbrough asked if the area they were talking about was the same area where several ladies came to a City Council meeting to express their concerns about what was going out there. Planning & Development Director Lasky replied if she recalled correctly, it was for the rezoning for American Legion and Hwy 125 properties. American Legion Road is being extended eastwardly toward where Premier Boulevard is being extended. Eventually when they move into zoning map amendments, they will follow the General Statutes guidelines in the City Ordinances on owner notification within 100 feet. Potentially there could be up to 100 affected property owners. At this point they are taking it one step at a time and their next step is to involve the landowners that own the property that is being impacted. As required, any potential zoning changes that would occur and be presented would follow the public hearing guidelines for notification.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if she foresaw any issues in this process in relation to rezoning and also asked who was in the study group. Planning & Development Director Lasky replied as far as any issues, with typical rezonings people want to know what is going to be there and what is it going to be. Right now they do not have a specific applicant because the road is under construction and as government entities are doing their due diligence in order to prepare to serve those areas.

There is the potential for any comments when they go into a public hearing setting. They are hoping to make this an amicable process that involves citizen participation with probably more than one meeting and people are informed of the process and owners themselves are willing to participate. Upon receipt of any comments, they will be prepared to respond and provide answers and responses to the best of their abilities.

Planning & Development Director Lasky said the following are participants in the group: representatives from the City including the City Manager, Mayor Doughtie and herself; Cathy Scott with Economic Development; Halifax County Manager Tony Brown; Halifax County Public Utilities Director Greg Griffin; Halifax County Planning Director Chris Roundtree; Halifax County Assistant County Manager Dia Denton; Dan Brown and Justin Blackman with the Roanoke Rapids Sanitary District; Kirby Jordan with Roanoke Electric; Gene Minton – Property Owner. The study group is primarily a local government interest group who have direct impacts in the area before they cast the net wider. Right now the infrastructure is the greatest obstacle that needs to be overcome. It is served by both Halifax County and the Roanoke Rapids Sanitary District. For the County, it is at the end of their water lines. Questions will arise as to whose customers they will be and so forth. Electricity and water/sewer are their money generators so that is why they are having other meetings. There are studies that need to be conducted and a large expense that would be needed to provide water/sewer in this project area. Currently it is primarily served by septic. That is the reason they have larger lot sizes in the area. There are some sewer main lines along I-95. The zoning and land use aspect of things can be done on a conceptual basis. Some of the proposed changes that they discussed would not render any properties non-conforming. The changes they have looked at would be for properties that are undeveloped and vacant at this point. If someone owns a property with a residence on it, they can continue to maintain a dwelling, if it is farmland they can continue to maintain farming/agricultural. People would not be hindered as far as what they are currently doing with their property.

Mayor Doughtie added that from the meetings they've had, they seem optimistic about getting the funding for the infrastructure. Planning & Development Director Lasky said Ms. Scott is very familiar with a lot of the funding programs for the water/sewer infrastructure and is working with both Halifax County and the Roanoke Rapids Sanitary District closely.

### **Centennial Clock Update**

Parks & Recreation Director Simeon reminded City Council that a donor has committed to replace the clock mechanisms. He and Main Street Director Caudle have worked together to solicit these funds. They also have an additional donor that has

solidified multiple donations for the LED backlighting to all the four faces of the clock and the chimes that will ring on the hour. All the donations have been committed. They anticipate these charitable contributions should be collected within the next two weeks and they can then move forward to get the clock back into working order.

### **Cyber Security Review**

Finance Director Etheridge reported several members of the management team met last week to discuss the safety and security of the City's IT networks. Recently, municipal leaders have been hearing more and more reports of IT criminals hacking into servers, causing great disruption to an organization. Malware and Ransomware attacks threaten an organization's data by perpetually blocking access to data files unless a ransom is paid. This created a major concern to them and a need for the City to look at its own security measures to ensure there are no breaches for virus attacks. She stated Public Works Director Chalker will discuss additional measures they have taken and will continue to take with the City's IT consulting team to minimize these risks.

Public Works Director Chalker stated there have been several local examples of businesses, state-wide businesses and municipalities who have been attacked by Ransomware. He explained that Ransomware is where an attack takes over a network and all attached devices such as servers, desktops, laptops and cell phones that could be connected at the time of the attack. The hackers then encrypt all software and storage devices demanding a ransom be paid. Usually that ransom is demanded to be paid in a virtual currency such as bitcoin. You have to pay to get everything returned to service and trust that the criminals will do so after the ransom is paid. At times it can be large gamble.

He said the City's best defense is to be diligent with the network defenses and hope they can fend off attacks. Recently, they met with the City's IT vendor and put together a team to take a look at where they were at and where they need to be based on the information they know today. They have restructured all the WiFi logins, even in the Lloyd Andrews Building. They are encouraging more use of a "guest" login that is not connected to the City's servers. If someone wanted to login to WiFi and did not have the proper credentials they would be pushed to login as a guest or public interface so it would not have exposure to the network. An example would be if one of them were to travel somewhere and pick up some type of malware on their cell phone and it might not become active until they come back here and log onto the network.

Public Works Director Chalker reported they have reached out to all departments to check that all desktop PC's are running VIPRE antivirus/anti-malware software. This particular trade name is the brand the IT vendor has encouraged them to use and

has done a very good job. All of the network switches in every building are now compliant. These switches were upgraded when the City upgraded the desk phones a few years ago. The switches constantly monitor the network for anomalies and will also identify an attack. These switches are capable of shutting down portions of the City's network should they come under attack.

He said at the end of the day, they want to be in a better position with the City's network and data security. It is constantly a moving target so as prepared as they are today, they have to be vigilant and keep checking their position. It's been a big review for the City and he thinks they are in a better position.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if the City backed up their data and is it stored elsewhere. Public Works Director Chalker replied yes, the data is backed up every night. That happens automatically without human interface. It is backed up to two different server farms in two different parts of the country. It is not attached to the City's network so if they were attacked, the plan is that it would hopefully not be part of the attack.

### **Fiscal Year 2020/2021 Budget Ideas**

City Manager Scherer stated previously he had expressed concerns that the City may have some revenue shortfalls and some budget issues. They sat down with the departments and looked at where they were at and what options they had for the rest of the fiscal year. In determining how the City looks financially for the rest of this fiscal year, they first looked at their revenue sources. They noticed a couple of things. Sales tax revenue is currently trending 4.2% above the same time last year. The NCLM also predicts sales tax revenue to trend upward the rest of this fiscal year. Based upon that, they estimated the City would receive an increase of 3% of sales tax revenue which would result in an increase of approximately \$102,000. They had conservatively estimated just 3%. Also, the motor vehicle tax is currently trending 4.3% above last year and again they estimated an increase of 3% in that revenue stream, resulting in an increase of \$23,000. Between those two sources, they should have a total revenue gain of \$125,000.

He announced Governor Cooper has increased the indoor events to a maximum of 250 people which should increase the rental income for the Kirkwood Adams Community Center for the rest of this fiscal year.

City Manager Scherer said they looked at department budgets for savings in the following categories: COVID related reductions in services, personnel savings especially with a hiring freeze and replacing full-time people with part-time people. They looked at some operational changes by trying to see if there were some innova-

tions or better ways to do things. For example, the Public Works Director is installing a local area network which eliminates a cable/internet bill with Spectrum at some of the City's facilities. The Police Department has looked at not having an officer on-call. They realized some debit change reductions in that the E-911 cost for this year was reduced \$24,000. Some other potential savings were the Police Department's K-9 program should see some savings by working out agreements with suppliers and other folks. The Police Department is also looking at doing virtual in-service training instead of their normal training which between the two should result in a savings of approximately \$28,000. The local area network the Public Works Director is working on will hopefully save \$4,000. Overall, these reviews resulted in a revenue increase of totaling \$125,000 and reduced spending levels of \$148,000 for an estimated total gain of \$273,000. In addition, there is an opportunity to receive governmental assistance resulting in a budget savings of approximately \$75,000 which would be over and above the other estimates. However, this is only a proposal at this time and has not been acted on. Overall, their budget review shows due to COVID and other factors, they should realize revenue gains and expenditure savings for approximately \$273,000. This would cover their estimated revenue shortfall of approximately \$250,000 of governmental assistance and the need to use fund balance to balance this year's budget. They will continue to monitor the revenue streams and expenditures for the rest of this fiscal year to see if they coincide with their estimates or if other adjustments will be needed. He said referred them to review the handout they were provided with the breakdown of the savings and reduction of budgets.

Councilwoman Scarbrough asked about the Police Department's no officer on-call. City Manager Scherer said they would normally have another officer on-call to fill in on shifts if someone calls in sick or something happens, but due to recruiting, Chief Martin has been able to increase the City's total police force. This fills in shifts enough to where they do not have to have an officer on-call standing by to fill in. The City would normally pay them for being on-call.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if moving positions from full-time to part-time was for savings and/or the need. City Manager Scherer replied they were balancing out the requirement and the need versus asking if they can utilize part-time personnel to do the same need and service. They were able to do that in some cases.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked how they were doing with overtime savings. City Manager Scherer said one example is they were able to save \$30,000 in overtime in the Fire Department. A lot of it was due to COVID-19. They normally do 18 hours of in-training at the burn unit but due to COVID they decided not to mix people and go through that training. They would normally pay overtime for that exercise so they saved \$10,000 alone.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee confirmed that a lot of the budget savings listed was due to COVID-19. City Manager Scherer replied that was correct. Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee stated it is early on and he was sure they would look at the budget a little later and hopefully it will get better. He questioned if they would just revisit these things such as part-time. City Manager Scherer said they would definitely have to revisit them in next year's budget planning, but for right now they anticipate they will continue on this track through this fiscal year unless there are some major changes in COVID restrictions.

Councilman Smith asked how many police officers were they short right now. Chief Martin replied currently they have three frozen positions. Through recruiting, they have six members per squad and three BLET students that will round their squads out to seven per squad. They will still have the three frozen positions: 2 detectives and the P.A.C.E. position.

Mayor Doughtie asked if the three BLET students would be filling the three frozen positions. Chief Martin replied no, as far as their patrol division goes they had three open positions. Those three BLET students will be filling the three squad positions that were left. Later in the year they will have some open positions due to retirement but right now once the BLET students successful pass BLET and the state exam they will be put on the patrol division. They will have 28 officers on the street.

### **Miscellaneous**

City Manager Scherer reported the agenda items thus far for the March 16<sup>th</sup> meeting as follows:

- ◆ Sons of the American Revolution Awards to Police and Fire
- ◆ New Business:
  - Consideration of an Amendment to the City's Personnel Policy.
  - Finance Director Etheridge will bring the vehicle loan proposal for the purchase of the police and fire vehicles.
  - Resolution authorizing the City Manager to solicit sealed bids for the sale of old Fire Station No. 2.
- ◆ City Manager's Report
- ◆ Finance Director's Report

Mayor Doughtie asked if once the sealed bids were opened, did they still have 10 days for upset bid. City Manager Scherer replied there was no upset bid period with sealed bids. They will bring that information to City Council for their approval to either accept the price for the property or decline it.

City Manager Scherer informed City Council of an issue regarding the upcoming Fall election. The City is required after every census to look at the districts the City Council members are elected in and determine whether or not the districts have gotten out of population balance over the course of the 10 years since the last census. If that is the case, City Council will need to redraw the voting districts to bring them back into balance. Failure to do so is a violation of the US Constitution. Normally census information is available in the March or April timeframe. However, the Federal Government has said it appears the census information will not be available until September 2021. This means the filing period in the election will not be held as normal. He informed them the filing period for municipal elections is July 28 – August 13, 2021. What this means is they will have to wait for the General Assembly to make some determination of what to do. The General Assembly by state statute sets the time of municipal elections and the candidates filing period. The General Assembly may decide to delay the 2021 municipal elections and extend current member's terms who are up for election if that happens.

He reported the General Assembly's options are as follows:

- They could direct the elections be held at the time of the March 2022 Primary (candidate filing period would be in December). It would still be tight for the City to get the census information in September and try to turn that around to look at the districts to see if there were any changes.
- They could move the March Primary to May 2022 (candidate filing period would be in February).
- They could say for municipalities to hold their 2021 elections using old districts and redistrict in time for the 2023 election.

City Manager Scherer said right now they just don't know. The General Assembly could say to just hold elections in November with the filing period in July and August. They could say they are going to move the elections to a different time frame next year. The City does not have the authority to delay the election. At this point, the City needs to see what the General Assembly is going to do on this issue. He wanted to bring this to the City Council's attention now. He said he has heard that the head of the State Elections Board has recommended that they move all municipal elections to 2022; even cities/towns that do not have districts.

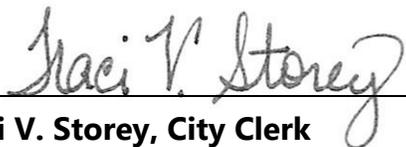
He reminded City Council of the NCLM Town & State Social virtual event tomorrow beginning at 5 p.m. for those who have registered. He was not certain if they could still register. He presented them a copy of the agenda for the virtual event.

City Manager Scherer announced the Jo Story Senior Center is bringing back Bingo starting Wednesday, March 17<sup>th</sup> at 1:30 p.m. It will be limited to 25 participants so those interested will need to contact the Senior Center to register.

He also announced the following calendar of events:

- 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Child Abuse Awareness March will be held virtually this Saturday, March 6<sup>th</sup> from 1 – 2 p.m. He reminded City Council the City dedicated the first Saturday in March as Elijah Lee Child Abuse Awareness Day.
- Daylight Savings Time begins March 16<sup>th</sup>.
- He and Councilman Bobbitt will be participating in the next Peanut Belt Regional Transportation Planning Organization meeting on March 18<sup>th</sup>. They will get updates on what NCDOT is doing locally and around the state.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:06 p.m.

  
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Traci V. Storey, City Clerk

**Approved by Council Action on: March 16, 2021**