



# Minutes of the Roanoke Rapids City Council

A regular meeting of the City Council of the City of Roanoke Rapids was held on **Tuesday, September 15, 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. 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 \*  
Larry Chalker, Public Works Director  
Jason Patrick, Fire Chief  
Christina Caudle, Main Street Director

**Absent:** John Simeon, Parks & Recreation Director

*\*Denotes those joining remotely using Zoom.*

Mayor Doughtie called the meeting to order and announced Councilwoman Sandra Bryant was joining the meeting via Zoom as allowed by the City’s Remote Participation Policy. He said City Council would use “roll-call” voting in tonight’s meeting.

Mayor Doughtie offered an invocation.

## 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, a motion was made by Councilwoman Scarbrough, seconded by Councilman Bobbitt and unanimously carried to adopt the agenda as presented.

## Special Recognitions

### **Resolution of Appreciation – Chris Wicker**

Mayor Doughtie read and presented the following Resolution of Appreciation to Chris Wicker:

Resolution No. 2020.10

**City of Roanoke Rapids  
RESOLUTION OF APPRECIATION  
Chris Wicker**

**WHEREAS, Chris Wicker** was appointed to the Roanoke Canal Commission on April 12, 1988 and resigned December 31, 2019 after serving over 31 years; and

**WHEREAS,** during his dedicated 31-year tenure **Chris Wicker** served as Secretary of the Roanoke Canal Commission, making him the longest serving secretary in the history of the Commission; and

**WHEREAS, Chris Wicker** was instrumental in developing and promoting the Roanoke Canal Trail greenway and the Roanoke Canal Museum into a tourist destination attracting visitors and locals alike; and

**WHEREAS, Chris Wicker** worked diligently to bring the Roanoke Canal Trail Bike Loaner Program to fruition in 2016; and

**WHEREAS, Chris Wicker** has given years of his time and effort to the Roanoke Canal Trail and Museum as well as its many programs and events.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the Mayor and City Council of the City of Roanoke Rapids to publicly recognize and extend its sincere appreciation to Chris Wicker for the valuable service he has provided to this community for over 31 years.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that this Resolution be spread upon the minutes of the City Council in testimony thereof and a copy be presented to Chris Wicker in token of the respect and appreciation from the Mayor, City Council and citizens of Roanoke Rapids.

**ADOPTED** this 15<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2020.

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*Emery G. Doughtie, Mayor*

ATTEST:

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*Traci V. Storey, City Clerk*

Mr. Wicker thanked City Council and stated it had been an honor to be in Roanoke Rapids since 1983. He and his wife thought they would be here for five years, but this is home and they plan to be here for the rest of their days. He would be happy to work with them in any way.

Motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee, seconded by Councilman Smith and unanimously carried to adopt Resolution No. 2020.10.

**Resolution of Appreciation – Mike Green**

Mayor Doughtie read and presented the following Resolution of Appreciation to Mike Green:

Resolution No. 2020.11  
**City of Roanoke Rapids**  
**RESOLUTION OF APPRECIATION**  
**Mike Green**

**WHEREAS, Mike Green** was appointed to the Roanoke Canal Commission on July 13, 1999 and resigned July 17, 2020 after serving 21 years; and

**WHEREAS, Mike Green** served as Chairman for 17 years, which is the longest serving chairman in the history of the Roanoke Canal Commission; and

**WHEREAS, Mike Green** has been instrumental in developing and promoting the Roanoke Canal Museum as well as projects to improve structures and signage along the Canal Trail; and

**WHEREAS, Mike Green** spearheaded and researched the 1949 airplane crash into the Roanoke River which has led to site improvements at the crash site and development of a new exhibit in the museum in honor of the pilot; and

**WHEREAS, Mike Green** will continue to share his knowledge and abilities by serving as an Ex Officio Member of the Canal Museum Advisory Committee.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the Mayor and City Council of the City of Roanoke Rapids to publicly recognize and extend its sincere appreciation to Mike Green for the valuable service he has provided to this community for the past 21 years.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that this Resolution be spread upon the minutes of the City

Council in testimony thereof and a copy be presented to Mike Green in token of the respect and appreciation from the Mayor, City Council and citizens of Roanoke Rapids.

**ADOPTED** this 15<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2020.

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*Emery G. Doughtie, Mayor*

ATTEST:

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*Traci V. Storey, City Clerk*

Mr. Green thanked City Council for allowing him to serve for 21 years. He has enjoyed every minute of it. He thanked a friend of his that is not here who got him involved in the Canal Commission back in the 1990s, Pete Luter. He will do anything he can and will continue to work with the City as far as the museum and the Canal Commission at any time he is needed.

Motion was made by Councilman Smith, seconded by Councilman Bobbitt and unanimously carried to adopt Resolution No. 2020.11 recognizing Mike Green for his dedication and valuable years of service for the Canal Museum.

### **Approval of City Council Minutes**

Motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee, seconded by Councilwoman Scarbrough and unanimously carried to approve the September 1, 2020 Regular City Council Meeting Minutes as drafted.

### **New Business**

#### **Consideration of Amendment to the City Personnel Policy**

Human Resources Manager Kearney presented an amendment to the City's Personnel Policy. She asked for City Council's consideration of Article X, which is the Grievance Procedure and Adverse Action Appeal, Sections 1-7. She said the current policy has been in place since 2008 so the policy does need updating. The proposed amendment clarifies the steps one goes through when filing a grievance. It makes it clearer for the employee to understand.

She presented Resolution 2020.12 for their consideration and adoption.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked for the difference between the two policies. Human

Resources Manager Kearney replied the updated policy breaks it down. The policy the City had before was really condensed – it was not detailed. This policy is detailed, defines having a grievance and what the procedures are.

Mayor Doughtie stated it appears that in Section 6 - Steps 2 and 3, it puts a finite time limit, but in (D) it states “a decision in writing as soon as practical.” He realizes there are situations that can make that vary.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if that was in the eyes of the beholder or did it mean one year, six months or what. Human Resources Manager Kearney replied no, they try to resolve a grievance as soon as possible; within 30-45 days at the most. If they do go past the 30-days they notify the employee that they need an extended amount of time.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if they should put that in the policy. She replied it is in the first part of Step 3. It allows a 15-day response time in many parts of the policy.

Mayor Doughtie stated the 15 days is where the employee may appeal to the City Manager. It says the “City Manager shall respond to the appeal stating the determination of decision in writing as soon as practical after receipt of the appeal.” So if a practical time had gone by maybe it should say something about the City Manager having some kind of contact with that person whether stating they were working on it or some extenuating circumstances and cannot offer a decision at this time. He asked Attorney Davis for his opinion.

Attorney Davis replied if City Council wanted to put that in the policy they could. He did not see in the policy where it places that obligation on the City Manager to get in touch with them immediately once they give an appeal.

City Council discussed the matter on what “as soon as practical” meant and placing a definite timeframe for the City Manager to make a decision on the appeal.

Human Resources Manager Kearney asked if they would like to make it 15 days. Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee replied the amount of days did not matter to him, but believed there needed to be a number of days in the policy.

Attorney Davis referred to Section 6 – (H) where it contemplates the City Manager retaining outside parties in the case where there may be a conflict or complex legal issue and it states the City Manager would promptly notify the employee in writing of decision to engage an outside party. He said 15 days may be a tight time frame under that scenario.

Mayor Doughtie said he did not mind if it was 30 days, but there needed to be a date.

Human Resources Manager Kearney asked if City Council wanted to table the matter and bring it back with a date.

Councilman Smith asked if Attorney Davis had reviewed the policy. Attorney Davis replied he had.

Mayor Doughtie asked Attorney Davis if he thought 30 days was too long. He replied the 15 days may be too short. In the situation referred to in (H) where an attorney, for instance, would be retained as a third party. He said 30 days would be reasonable if they were trying to give due process and apprising the potential aggrieved employee of when they can expect a resolution which is what Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee's concern seems to be.

Councilman Smith stated that was his concern too. He did not know why since the City had a Human Resources Manager and attorney on record it could not be taken care of in-house. In his opinion, it seems like the decision Human Resources Manager Kearney needs to be making is taken away from her position as the Human Resources Manager.

Attorney Davis addressed the matter of retaining an outside party. This only comes in when the City Manager is dealing with a situation where an employee has been through all the steps and it becomes the City Manager's determination on a situation involving a department head. The City Manager could ask the City Attorney to serve. In certain situations where there could be potential litigation involved in a grievance, by the City Attorney being the one involved in an investigation, they would make themselves a witness in some cases. That would be why a City Manager may want to retain an outside party.

Councilman Smith asked if the supervisor, Human Resources Manager or City Manager made a decision and sought legal advice from the City Attorney, would that still make the attorney a witness. Attorney Davis replied it all depends on how they would have gotten to that point. Presuming they would review those cases with him and discuss whether this was a case where they would need to retain an outside party in a brief scenario without doing an actual investigation which involves talking with the aggrieved employee or witnesses.

Councilman Smith expressed his concern on costs for retaining an outside party when the City has qualified people that should be able to handle the situation with an employee with the City Attorney's guidance. Attorney Davis presumes retaining an

outside party would be used on a discretionary basis, not something that would happen in every case; only in extraordinary circumstances.

Councilwoman Scarbrough agrees with Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee that there needed to be a certain amount of days. She suggested a compromise of 25 days.

Motion was made by Councilwoman Scarbrough, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee and unanimously carried to adopt Resolution No. 2020.12 with the amendment under Section 6, (D) Step 3, the second sentence should read: "The City Manager shall respond to the appeal stating the determination of decision in writing within a period of 25 calendar days after receipt of the appeal."

**RESOLUTION NO. 2020.12**  
**Resolution to Amend**  
**City of Roanoke Rapids Personnel Policy**

**Whereas**, the Mayor and City Council of the City of Roanoke Rapids, recognizing the importance of its municipal employees in meeting the service needs of the City residents, adopted Resolution No. 2007.21 which adopted the current Personnel Policy; and

**Whereas**, it has been necessary over the years to amend the City's Personnel Policy by City Council action; and

**Whereas**, it has been determined that Section X. Grievance Procedure and Adverse Action Appeal needed to be revised and updated for better clarification of the grievance process; and

**Whereas**, an amendment is being proposed to amend Article X, Sections 1 through 7 of the City of Roanoke Rapids Personnel Policy to read as follows:

**ARTICLE X. GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE AND ADVERSE ACTION APPEAL**

**Section 1. Policy**

The grievance procedure is designed to ensure an employee of fair, impartial and prompt consideration of a problem or dissatisfaction without fear of reprisal. The procedure also encourages employees at all levels to express themselves regarding conditions of work. The grievance procedure is intended to promote better understanding of policies, practices and procedures; to instill confidence in employees that fair and impartial treatment will be received; and develop in supervisors a continuing sense of responsibility for maintaining effective working relationships with subordinate employees.

All employees, including supervisors and department heads, are expected to discuss their problems and misunderstanding with their supervisors. Open, two-way communication is a proven factor in reducing and resolving grievances.

**Section 2. Grievance Defined**

- (A) A grievance is a claim or complaint by an employee based upon an event or condition, which affects the circumstances under which an employee work, allegedly caused by misinterpretation, unfair application, or lack of established policy pertaining to employment.
- (B) Employees should understand that the following items are not subject to the grievance procedure:
  - 1) Conditions of employment and law and policy established by the City Council.
  - 2) Wages, salaries and fringe benefits. However, the application of interpretation of the items listed above are subject to the grievance procedure. If there is a question whether or not an employee's concern is clearly a

grievance, the Human Resources Manager must contact the City Attorney who have full and final authority to settle this question. The City Attorney shall respond within ten (10) calendar days.

(C) In addition, it is to be understood that the establishment of this procedure shall in no way remove the right of the City government to do the following, provided, that none of these rights may be exercised in an arbitrary or capricious manner:

- 1) Direct the work of its employees.
- 2) Hire, promote, transfer and assign employees.
- 3) Demote or dismiss employees for cause.
- 4) Maintain the efficiency of governmental operations.
- 5) Relieve employees from duty because of lack of work or for other legitimate reason.
- 6) Take action necessary to carry out duties of an agency in emergencies.
- 7) Determine the methods, means and personnel necessary to carry out operations.

(D) Grievances are limited to the following:

- 1) Safety or health matters.
- 2) Unsatisfactory physical facilities, surroundings, materials, or equipment.
- 3) Alleged unfair or disciplinary (including demotions and suspensions) or supervisory practices.
- 4) Alleged unfair treatment by fellow workers.
- 5) Unreasonable work quotas, or
- 6) Any other grievance related to conditions of employment.
- 7) Discrimination on the basis of disability.

### **Section 3. Role of the Human Resources Manager**

(A) Throughout the grievance procedure, the role of the Human Resources Manager shall be as follows:

- 1) To advise parties (including employee, supervisors and City Manager) of their rights and responsibilities under this policy, including interpreting the grievance and other policies for consistency of application;
- 2) To be a clearinghouse for information and decisions in the matter including maintaining files of all grievance documents;



- 3) To give notices to parties concerning timetables of the process, etc.;
- 4) To assist employees and supervisors in drafting statements; and
- 5) To facilitate the resolution of conflicts in the procedures of the grievance at any step in the process.
- 6) To help locate other sources as needed (e.g., mediation).

(B) The Human Resources Manager shall also determine whether or not additional time shall be allowed to either side in unusual circumstances if the parties cannot agree upon extensions when needed or indicated.

#### **Section 4. Grievance – Employee Qualification**

This policy applies to all employees after the successful completion of their initial probation period.

#### **Section 5. Purposes of the Grievance Procedure**

The purposes of the grievance procedure include, but are not limited to:

- 1) Providing employees with a procedure by which their complaints can be considered promptly, fairly, and without reprisal;
- 2) Encouraging employees to express themselves about the conditions of work which affect them as employees;
- 3) Promoting better understanding of policies, practices, and procedures which affect employees;
- 4) Increasing employees' confidence that personnel actions taken are in accordance with established, fair, and uniform policies and procedures; and
- 5) Increasing the sense of responsibility exercised by supervisors in dealing with their employees.
- 6) Encouraging conflicts to be resolved between employees and supervisors who must maintain an effective future working relationship, and therefore, encouraging conflicts to be resolved at the lowest level possible of the chain of command through collaboration and/or mediation;
- 7) Creating a work environment free of continuing conflicts, disagreements, and negative feelings about the City or its leaders, thus improving employee motivation, productivity, and creativity.

#### **Section 6. Grievance Procedure**

When an employee has a grievance, the following successive steps are to be taken unless otherwise provided. The number of calendar days indicated for each step should be considered the maximum, unless otherwise provided, and every effort should be made to expedite the process. However, the time limits set forth may be extended by mutual consent. The last step initiated by an employee shall be considered to be the step at which the grievance is resolved. A decision to rescind a disciplinary suspension, demotion, or dismissal must be approved by the City Manager before the decision becomes effective.

(A) **Informal Resolution.** Prior to the submission of a formal grievance, the employee and supervisor shall meet to discuss the problem and seek to resolve it informally. Either the employee or the supervisor may involve the respective department head or the Human Resources Manager as a resource to help resolve the grievance. Most misunderstandings will be clarified and resolved during this free exchange of viewpoints.

- (B) **Step 1.** If no resolution to the grievance is reached informally, the employee who wishes to pursue a grievance shall present the grievance to the appropriate supervisor in writing. The grievance must be presented within fifteen calendar days of the event or with fifteen calendar days of learning of the event or condition. The supervisor shall respond to the grievance within fifteen calendar days after receipt of the grievance. The supervisor should, and is encouraged to, consult with any employee of the City in order to reach a correct, impartial, fair and equitable determination or decision concerning the grievance. Any employee consulted by the supervisor is required to cooperate to the fullest extent possible.
- The response from the supervisor for each step in the formal grievance process shall be in writing and signed by the supervisor. In addition, the employee shall sign a copy to acknowledge receipt thereof. The responder at each step shall send copies of the grievance and response to the Human Resources Manager.
- (C) **Step 2.** If the grievance is not resolved to the satisfaction of the employee by the supervisor, the employee may appeal, in writing, to the appropriate department head within fifteen calendar days after receipt of the response from Step 1. The department head shall respond to the appeal, stating the determination of decision within ten calendar days after receipt of the appeal. A copy of the Step 2 response will be sent to the Human Resources Manager.
- (D) **Step 3.** If the grievance is not resolved to the satisfaction of the employee at the end of Step 2, the employee may appeal, in writing, to the City Manager within fifteen calendar days after receipt of the response from Step 2. The City Manager shall respond to the appeal stating the determination of decision in writing ~~as soon as practical~~ **within a period of 25 calendar days** after receipt of the appeal. The City Manager's decision shall be the final decision. The City Manager should notify the City Council of any impending legal action.
- (E) The Human Resources Manager will maintain records of the grievance process confidentially and securely.
- (F) Employees may exercise all rights and procedures of this policy without being subject to reprisal, harassment, or retaliation. No hardship, no loss or benefit, and no penalty may be imposed on an employee as a punishment for:
- 1) Filing or responding to a bona fide complaint of discrimination or harassment.
  - 2) Appearing as a witness in the investigation of a complaint.
  - 3) Serving as an investigator.
- (G) Filing a lawsuit or seeking any other administrative remedy against the City while one has grievance on the same issue will end their appeal under the City's grievance procedures.
- (H) In the case of Department Heads or other employees where the City Manager has been significantly involved in determining disciplinary action, including dismissal, the City Manager may wish to obtain a neutral outside party to act as a mediator to assist in resolving or investigating the conflict.

In this event, the City Manager shall promptly notify the employee in writing of the City Manager's decision to engage an outside party. The City Manager shall promptly secure the outside party's services. The City Manager and the outside party should attempt to reach their determination within fifteen days of the City Manager's notification to the employee of the City Manager's decision to engage the outside party.

#### **Section 7. Grievance and Adverse Action Appeal Procedure for Discrimination**

When an employee or former employee believes that any employment action is illegally discriminatory (i.e. Is based on age, sex, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, political affiliation, or non-job related disability), he or she has the right to appeal such action using the grievance procedure outlined in this Article (Section 6 above). While such persons are encouraged to use the grievance procedure, they shall also have the right to appeal directly to the Human Resources Manager or City Manager. Employment actions subject to appeal because of discrimination include promotion, training, classification, pay, disciplinary action, transfer, layoff, failure to hire, or termination of employment. An employee or applicant should appeal an alleged act of discrimination within thirty calendar days of the alleged discriminatory action, but may appeal for up to 180 calendar days following the action.

Nothing in this policy is intended to discourage or prevent an employee or former employee from filing a formal charge of discrimination or other illegal action with the appropriate State or Federal agency having jurisdiction.

**Now, Therefore, Be It Resolved** that the Roanoke Rapids City Council approves the foregoing amendment to the City of Roanoke Rapids Personnel Policy as presented to City Council on September 15, 2020, to become effective immediately.

**Adopted** this 15<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2020.

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Emery G. Doughtie, Mayor

ATTEST:

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Traci V. Storey, City Clerk

### **Police Department Overview Presentation**

Police Chief Martin stated he wanted to give a review of 2019 to present in regards to some things that have been going on with the Roanoke Rapids Police Department. He gave the following report:

The RRPD takes pride in protecting and serving the citizens of Roanoke Rapids. We believe in being accountable for our department and have taken the necessary steps to ensure that the department's operational policies coincide with all best practices in law enforcement to better serve our community. As you know, Governor Roy Cooper has formed a task force for racial equity in criminal justice through Executive Order 145 in June of 2020. Some of the topics brought forward in this executive order are:

- (1.) Duty to Intervene: Officers have a sworn duty and obligation to protect members of the public. Officers intervene in cases where excessive force is being used and if an officer is treating the public in a manner that is inconsistent with the law or policy.***
- (2.) The Duty to Report: Officers have a duty to immediately report any conduct inconsistent with policy or misconduct they observe or have learned about.***
- (3.) The prohibition of the neck hold maneuver: Law enforcement officers shall not use chokeholds, strangleholds, Lateral Vascular Neck Restraints, Carotid Restraints, chest compressions, or any other tactics that restrict oxygen or blood flow to the head or neck unless necessary to protect the life of the officer.***

I personally hold all officers, including myself, to the highest of standards concerning officer accountability. The RRPD has ZERO tolerance for unnecessary excessive force or the mistreatment of any citizen that come into contact with the officers.

The RRPD has recently updated the body camera system as they are relied upon for officer safety and accountability. The body worn cameras assist officers in their day-to-day interactions with the

community. The devices help protect citizens from use of excessive force and misconduct by officers. Body cameras also help protect officers against false accusations. The devices depict exactly what happened during the interaction between a citizen and our officer.

The ultimate goal of the RRPD is to have accountability and transparency with the citizens of Roanoke Rapids. We have taken steps to help guard against any officer discriminatory practices or misconduct. Steps we have taken are as follows:

- *They have spoken with community leaders in the past few months and discussed some things to better the department's policies and procedures.*
- *They are working on de-escalation, taken classes for implicit bias, they have done a lot to make sure officers are prepared to de-escalate instead of using any excessive force by officers.*
- *They have looked at banning the choke holds and strangle holds. As he said earlier, the RRPD has not ever trained its officers to use that type of restraint. They have implemented a policy on de-escalation that utilizes de-escalation techniques such as time, distance, communication, etc. For instance if there is a situation where someone is totally inflamed with that officer, they try to give some distance or have another officer intervene.*
- *They have worked towards warning before shooting. They require before any deadly force is used; they will identify themselves to the subject to let them understand they need to stop their unlawful activity. This requirement is reinforced in officer training and is a standard practice and taught during in-service training. They go through this every year during in-service training with the officers. They require all alternatives before shooting.*
- *They also looked at the policy in regards to moving vehicles. The policy states firing at or from a moving vehicle is acceptable as a last resort where no other method of defense or avoidance is available.*
- *They also require comprehensive reporting. Any officer that uses physical force, weapons or devices against a person must complete a report. The report is passed up through the chain of command until it reaches Chief and he determines whether or not it was proper.*

Our policies have also been updated based upon the recommendations from the North Carolina Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice. This update includes the 8 Can't Wait recommendations.

The RRPD seeks community-oriented candidates of good character with a desire to protect and serve the City and its citizens to fill the role of a Police Officer within the department. The RRPD continuously seeks local applicants due to their ties in the community.

The RRPD strives for excellence each time we put on our uniforms. We are always ready and willing to take on the challenges that are presented before us and continue to provide outstanding service to the citizens of Roanoke Rapids in both an unbiased and professional manner on a daily basis.

I have lived in the Roanoke Valley all my life and I take pride that I have been chosen to lead what I consider the best department in Halifax County. The interaction between officers and the community is very important. We, as a department, will strive to continue making community policing one of our highest priorities. Several meetings with our community leaders have taken place over the last few months to discuss what the community would like to see from our program. Citizens are highly encouraged to reach out to us with any suggestions they may have in regard to community policing ideas. The idea is to work alongside our community so that together we can develop and improve the trust between the citizens and the officers. The trust of our community is vital and we will work together with our citizens and our community leaders to form strong community bonds along with truth and transparency. I have often thought about a quote that I heard many years ago and I have tried to base my career around this quote:

**"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." —Maya Angelou**

In conclusion, The RRPD will make every effort to provide the citizens with a safe community by maintaining a proactive approach in the prevention, detection, and investigation of criminal activity. This will be accomplished through the highest ethical and professional standards in partnership with the community we serve. The community must come together to combat criminal activities, especially the illegal sale, use and distribution of drugs in our community. In our community, too many senseless drug-associated deaths are occurring as well as many other crimes. As citizens, we need to stand shoulder-to-shoulder and let people that want to do harm to our community know that enough is enough. We can accomplish this by working together as one.

Police Chief Martin stated these were just a few things he wanted to talk to City Council about and to let them know where they were at in regards to current events that are going on in the U.S.

Councilman Smith said it was a good report, but asked why he did not have the report in print so they could follow along. It is a lot easier for them to see it on paper than to remember what he said at the beginning of the conversation to the end of the conversation. It would have been nice if he could have presented each of the Council members with a report.

Police Chief Martin said he agreed and would prepare a packet for each of the Council members so they can refer back to what he talked about.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said he understands that all the officers were being trained for de-escalation, but referring to watching television, there always seems to be someone with special training. He knows all the officers have good training, but it's always that one guy that comes in and de-escalates and talks someone out. He asked if there was somebody that could be that one person.

Police Chief Martin responded that in a perfect world that would be great. But where one person can do it, he wants all his officers to do it. Instead of focusing on one person, he wants all the officers to be able to de-escalate any situation so they do not have to rely on one. Because they are many, they can do great things. With just one, they are limited to what they can do.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee agreed with that statement and said usually there is someone that is a little better at something than somebody else.

Police Chief Martin made a PowerPoint presentation giving an overview of the department, summary of 2019 statistical data and departmental programs. (PowerPoint presentation on file in Clerk's Office).

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked Chief Martin to go back to graphs showing traffic stops and searches. He said looking at the numbers, it looks offset. He would like know what was creating this.

Chief Martin said if you look at the population in Halifax County, there is 59% African American and 39% Caucasian. Within the city limits of Roanoke Rapids, it is the opposite, 59% Caucasian and 39% African American. Roanoke Rapids is the center hub of Halifax County because it is the largest municipality. We have the population from Northampton County, Warren County and population from the county coming into the city and northern Virginia as well. The statistics do not reflect just the citizens of Roanoke Rapids. The city draws from all these communities and that is what contributes to what appears to be off with percentages on the graphs.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked Chief Martin to break out Roanoke Rapids from the stats he presented. Chief Martin said he could do that because they track every traffic stop they do.

Mayor Doughtie said it was a very good report. They have a very young force, they have lost some veteran officers the past few years. He applauded Chief Martin for working with these young individuals. He stated City Council has been trying to work with the Police Department to improve the package to attract people. He agreed with Chief Martin that for a small town, they have a very high level police force.

Chief Martin stated with his command staff: Captain Jamie Hardy, Captain Charles Burnette and Lt. Mike Moseley, they are tremendous in aiding him along with the Administrative Assistants. Without them, he would not be able to provide this information.

## City Manager's Report

City Manager Scherer gave the following report:

City Hall sustained some damage from the storm late last week from the lightning that struck the concrete communications tower behind City Hall. It knocked out our Internet and telephone system, along with other electronic devices. Electronics at Public Works was also affected. Public Works has been able to put together a temporary repair until new parts are received. An insurance claim with our carrier is in the process of being filed once all damage has been identified.

With regard to planning City Christmas holiday events, this is a challenge like most things have been in 2020. Our original plan was to acquire a large commercial Christmas tree planned for installation in Centennial Park, which would be used for the tree lighting ceremony and be the centerpiece for an outdoor holiday display for families to view during the month of December. This would be in lieu of the annual parade, as the virus pandemic has eliminated all entertainment groups and bands from participation. We feel the parade would not be as entertaining as it usually is without these participants, plus we don't know what the potential COVID-19 virus and flu season restriction will be by parade time.

However, the funding for the commercial tree we wanted may not be available for us to acquire the tree in time for December. We are looking at a less expensive commercial tree to utilize for the Centennial Park display and tree lighting, still with no parade. I respectfully ask Council if you approve of our current plan or if you have other guidance for us to implement for the Christmas holiday events.

As the department heads are all here, except Ms. Lasky, and Mr. Simeon who is ill, to present their reports, this concludes my report.

Mayor Doughtie asked City Manager Scherer if City Council needed to approve the current plan for the Christmas event tonight. He replied no, he did not need approval tonight, but would like their guidance on whether or not they are proceeding as they would like or if they have any ideas to just let him know.

Councilman Smith asked City Manager Scherer if he had asked any citizens about plans they would like to have for the parade or tree. He replied they have not specifically asked citizens, they are just trying to determine what their best options were with their resources.

Councilman Smith asked how much resources they were planning to put in it. City

Manager Scherer said basically the purchase of the tree and what is needed to put together a holiday display in Centennial Park. Councilman Smith asked for the amount of money. He replied around \$10,000, based upon donations they anticipate receiving.

Councilman Smith said he did not know how they could use any City funds to do this. City Manager Scherer agreed and staff has been told verbally that they would have to look for contributions for this event.

### **Finance Director's Report**

Finance Director Etheridge presented the August 2020 Financial Report. She reported the trend continues into August with expenditures well exceeding revenues at the beginning of the fiscal year. August is another of the City's lowest revenue months, but also a second month with high expenditure requirements. During August 2020, the City has still not recognized the first material allotment of its Ad Valorem Tax Revenue or Sales & Use Taxes for FY 2020-2021. Some of the mandatory expenditure obligations during August are:

General Liability and Workers Compensation:	\$328,606
Theater Quarterly Debt Service	\$313,123
Energy Costs (Higher Usage Month)	\$54,367
Tennis Court Project – RRGSD	\$25,000

She said the auditors return on September 17<sup>th</sup> to complete additional State LGERS (Local Government Employee Retirement System) benefit testing as required. Mr. Redman will present the audit to Council after both completion and approval of the City's annual audit by the Local Government Commission.

Finance Director Etheridge stated the operating cash and investment reserves will continue to remain at low levels until the City begins to receive monthly Ad Valorem taxes, Sales & Use taxes, and quarterly Utility Franchise tax revenue. These funding sources are very critical in offsetting the current expenditure over revenue deficits from operations during July and August, 2020.

Councilman Smith asked if the City had received the \$400,000 they were expecting from Halifax County. Finance Director Etheridge replied yes. He clarified that would be put in last year's budget. She said it was revenue that was accrued to last year's budget, the cash impact is in July.

Finance Director Etheridge reported the City received Sales & Use Tax revenue yesterday and it seems to be running close to prior year to date.



Councilman Smith asked what does that leave us in a deficit in last year's budget. She replied last year's budget is still being audited. This is what they hope to meet with Greg Redman about once he returns. The sales tax number she was speaking about was what they currently received.

Councilman Smith said the report she gave them it was \$800,000+ in the hole. She replied that was before July and August revenues were accrued so this is still being audited at this time. He asked when City Council was going to find out about this. Finance Director Etheridge said once Greg Redman returns and completes the audit and has an exit interview with City Manager Scherer and staff. He asked when that would be. She replied after September 17<sup>th</sup>. He asked if Mr. Redman would come before City Council in October. She said he would have to come before City Council after the State approves his completed audit at the LGC level, then he can present to City Council. She added Mr. Redman is not out briefing them on September 17<sup>th</sup>.

Councilman Smith said he is interested, as he sure other Council members are too, in how much deficit the City was going to run from last year. Finance Director Etheridge stated they were all concerned, but it is just not completed at this time. He said would like some idea. He cannot continue to sit here and wonder; they should have some idea about the figures. She said she would contact Mr. Redman tomorrow.

## Departmental Reports

The following Departmental Reports were given.

### **Public Works**

Public Works Director Chalker presented the August report. He reported the department has been cutting a lot of grass. They have several properties within the city that has grass that is too tall and is out of compliance per the nuisance abatement ordinance. The department has sent out 640 letters to property owners. They have cut 142 properties already. They have about 60 properties today that need to be cut. They are cutting grass as fast as they can. Every day they are 14 people in the hole, meaning they do not have the 8 inmates from Caledonia and they have 6 frozen positions per the budget. Today they have 2 open positions so that makes it 16. It has been a struggle and their service levels are down in certain areas across the board. The employees are doing a very good job working from behind. They will get to the 60 lots that need to be cut. Hopefully, the people with the tall grass will get out there before they do; it will take a little burden off the department.

He said the cemetery had a busy month in August. There were 17 openings/closings. They sold 4 lots and collected \$18,939 for the month and for the year they have

collected \$35,493.

Public Works Director Chalker reported they have an active project on Old Farm Road between two residences in an easement the City just accepted two years ago. That project is about 90% complete. They have some landscaping and grass restoration work to be done as weather permits.

He said there has been several trees down in the past couple of months city-wide due to storms and wind. They have been out a few nights cutting trees, but they are doing a good job keeping up with that.

Mayor Doughtie stated they have asked him several times about when the Public Works Department repeatedly cuts grass and it builds up a significant amount as a lien on the property. To his knowledge the City does not have any active cases where they have pursued trying to collect that money. Public Works Director Chalker replied they have engaged the services of a collection agency that actively go after it and believes they are seeing some funds coming in. They are also having more citizens contact the Public Works office now when they send the letters. The Public Works Department does not actually collect the money, but the Finance Department has a mirror image of what they are doing so they see those bills and the ones that are extremely behind. They are now actively pursuing those, where they had not done that before last year.

Mayor Doughtie stated he did recall previous mention of that service. He asked if the collection agency was not successful could the City move to the next step of trying to force a sale to collect that money. He asked if Halifax County had to initiate that. Councilman Smith said he thought it cost \$700 to get the County to do it.

Attorney Davis said he was not sure on the cost of it, but Halifax County does have to initiate that and it happens in conjunction with a tax lien. Mayor Doughtie said his concern was if Public Works continues to cut grass and have a high bill built up on that property and they are also not paying the taxes; the tax lien is collected first correct? Attorney Davis replied that is a current dispute with the County. The City's position is that they are the same dignity. That normally is not an issue if there is a tax sale and the property brings in more than tax liens and grass cutting liens. The question comes when it brings in less than that. The question is does the City divide that with the County or do the taxes come first and the City gets what is leftover on the grass cutting liens. That is a matter that is going back and forth in court. He expects they will have a decision on it soon.

Public Works Director Chalker reported City Manager Scherer accompanied Councilwoman Bryant on a visit to Public Works a couple of weeks ago and thanked her for taking the time to see what they do and their operation.

### **Human Resources**

Human Resources Manager Kearney presented the August report. She reported they had the following openings: Police Officer, Sanitation Worker and Sanitation Equipment Operator.

She said they only received four (4) applications and hired two (2) full-time employees. One is a police officer who started BLET in August. They re-hired Marvin Purnell who recently retired from the City because they needed someone with a CDL; it's hard to fill a position that requires a CDL. She reported they were not getting the influx of applications like they were and did not know if it was due to additional monies from the federal government paying those on unemployment or what it could be. They continue to advertise and stated they receive a lot of applications by word of mouth. She recently had a call from someone saying they knew a person that needed a job and that person started work for the City today.

### **Fire**

Fire Chief Patrick presented the August report. He reported the department ran 83 calls for service and received 1095 hours of training during the month of August. A majority of the training was medical training because each year they have to have continuing education to maintain their certifications. They had 43 inspections which was on target to what they typically average.

He called their attention to the Notable Incidents. They had a couple of successful administrations of Narcan which was a plus to help someone that had overdosed. He said the Fire Department along with the Police Department and Public Works stayed on-scene for the natural gas leak on Julian Allsbrook for 8 hours waiting for a gas line to be repaired by Piedmont Natural Gas. This called for a lot of extra manpower to stand by while they made those repairs.

Fire Chief Patrick announced the Fire Department was awarded the Factory Mutual Grant. They applied for \$4,500 to purchase a laptop and projector to help with the Fire and Life-Safety Educator to do fire prevention activities. They were also planning to get a tablet and software. They were awarded \$2,000 so they will probably do away with purchasing the software, but purchase the laptop, tablet and projector.

He said today the department was presented with a check in the amount of \$9,753 from the Roanoke Valley Chamber of Commerce. This was the extra funds from the

fundraiser for the bedding that the citizens, businesses and community pitched in for the Fire Department. He was amazed by the outpouring of support from the community for that project.

Fire Chief Patrick also thanked Councilwoman Bryant for visiting the fire stations. He hoped they opened her eyes to what the fire service does and what each of the stations means and what everyone does.

He also thanked City Council for allowing not only the Fire Department, but all the departments the time to recognize co-workers for the outstanding jobs they do.

### **Main Street**

Main Street Director Caudle presented the August report. She reported Governor Cooper announced they have started Phase 2.5 of reopening. Only a couple of things have changed. The face covering requirements are now for people 5 years and up where before it was age 11 years and up. The mass gathering limits have changed to 25 indoors and 50 outdoors. Movie theaters and bars remain closed, however gyms and indoor exercise facilities (bowling alleys included) were able to open at 30% capacity. That started Friday, September 4<sup>th</sup> at 5 p.m. It should go through to early October but it depends on what Governor Cooper announces. Hopefully, Phase 3 will begin October 2, 2020 at 5 p.m.

She stated the three phases of reopening has been quite a lengthy process and they are approaching the holiday season which is a big deal for retailers. The last six weeks of the year really make or break them from a financial perspective. Some of those businesses really rely on holiday events and additional foot traffic to make it through the end of the year. They have started polling and surveying the Avenue businesses to get a feel of what they want this holiday season and also what they are seeing from a local consumer spending perspective. Because what happens here is not really what is happening in Raleigh or Charlotte or even the national average. They are hoping to have that information by the end of September. There are over 300 businesses in the district and on average they get 50-75 responses, but they are putting a lot of effort in getting this so they make good, informed decisions.

Main Street Director Caudle added to what Finance Director Etheridge reported on sales tax. Even with things being shut down and/or partially open, a lot of the retail stores in the district are reporting sales on par to what they were doing last year or reporting their monthly revenues are higher than even holidays of 2019. She stated that was great information that proves this was not an economic recession, that it was a medical based event. Even on a local level they were seeing consumer spending at levels pre-COVID. She hopes that trend will continue and they will have high sales

the last six weeks of the year. They want to make sure they are as helpful as possible through that process. She hopes by the second meeting in October or with an announcement in November, they will be able to share some of these results and also make really good decisions about what they are going to do for the holidays.

<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 discuss Personnel as allowed by NCGS 143-318.11 (a)(6).

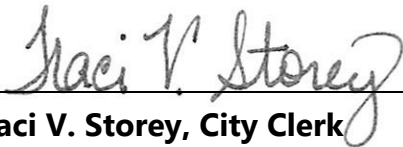
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*Minute Book Pages 20032 - 20039 contain Minutes and General Account of a Closed Session which have been sealed until such time as public inspection of those minutes would not frustrate the purpose of the Closed Session.*

**Adjournment**

City Council returned to open session. They discussed a personnel matter in closed session; no action was taken.

There being no further business, motion was made by Councilman Smith, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee and unanimously carried to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

  
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Traci V. Storey, City Clerk

**Approved by Council Action on: October 6, 2020**