



Minutes of the Roanoke Rapids City Council

A regular meeting of the City Council of the City of Roanoke Rapids was held on **Tuesday, February 6, 2024, at 5:30 p.m.** in the Council Chambers at the Lloyd Andrews City Meeting Hall.

Present: Emery G. Doughtie, Mayor
Wayne Smith, Mayor Pro Tem

W. Keith Bell)
Sandra W. Bryant)
Rex Stainback)
Curtis Strickland)

Council Members

Kelly Traynham, City Manager
Geoffrey Davis, City Attorney
Traci Storey, City Clerk
Carmen Johnson, Finance Director
Shane Guyant, Police Chief
Christina Caudle, Human Resources Director
John Simeon, Parks & Recreation Director
Kristyn Anderson, Interim Planning Director
Larry Chalker, Public Works Director
Jason Patrick, Fire Chief

Absent: Tony Hall, Main Street Development Director

Mayor Doughtie called the meeting to order. He provided an invocation and then 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 Councilwoman Bryant, seconded by Councilman Stainback, and unanimously carried to adopt the business agenda as presented.

Special Recognitions

Police Department

Police Chief Guyant said he was excited because this was an opportunity to highlight the City's greatest asset, the City's employees. He reported that currently the Police Department has two vacancies. When he first came onboard with the City seven months ago they had twelve. They have worked hard to correct that and make the city safer. His key word to his staff is to be seen.

He introduced two of the department's new employees. Scott Pate could not attend due to illness. He came from the Halifax County Sheriff's Office. The second was Antonio Seward. He previously left and went to Warren County but has returned to the City. He returns as a firearms instructor and as a Sergeant on the Patrol Division.

Chief Guyant recognized Daryl Newsome who was recently promoted to Lieutenant of Patrol Division.

He recognized Master Officer Nicole Powell. She recently earned her Intermediate Law Enforcement Certification. He presented her with the framed certificate. He also presented her with the Purple Heart Award. On July 12, 2022, Officer Powell responded to a disconnected 911 call where the dispatcher said in the background, they heard fighting and disturbance going on. Upon knocking on the door, she noticed a female was in distress and a male subject was agitated. Officer Powell made her way inside and saw the female had been assaulted. When she went to take the male subject into custody, he swung at her. She raised her arm, and he damaged the ulnar nerve in her arm which required surgery.

Chief Guyant recognized and presented Officer Isaac Nielson with the Purple Heart Award. On October 1, 2023 around 2 a.m., Officer Nielson and other officers were chasing a suspect who had several warrants. In the process, Officer Nielson stepped into an area on the pavement and tearing his ACL in his right knee. While under extreme pain, Officer Nielson still fought to get the subject into custody. He recently had surgery. He has retained a positive attitude.

He recognized PACE Officer Jay Conrad. In this job, sometimes you win some, sometimes you don't. Sometimes you save a life and sometimes you don't. What matters is coming to the battle and trying with everything you have to save a life. On December 4, 2023, Officer Conrad responded to an incident. He noticed a bystander was doing CPR. Officer Conrad has First Responder and EMS background. He knew exactly what needed to be done and did not waste any time. He performed CPR and applied AED until rescue arrived. He did everything he could to try and save her life.

Chief Guyant noted the victim's family was in attendance. Katelyn and Chris Tripp came to him and asked if something could be done to recognize Officer Conrad. He informed them of the Commendation Award. They wrote in a letter that they would be forever thankful to Officer Conrad for what he tried to do for them. He presented PACE Officer Conrad with the Commendation Award.

He recognized Matt Hunsucker who was recently promoted to Lieutenant. He has been a leader since day one. Lt. Hunsucker was awarded his Advanced Law Enforcement Certification on November 17, 2023. It takes a lot of time, education, and dedication to receive this certification. He presented Lt. Hunsucker with his framed certificate.

Chief Guyant recognized Animal Control Officer Pete Wilson. He said he spoke with the three captains about coming up with an awards program for the officers and wanted to create an award specifically designed for the department's core values, SHIELD (Service, Honesty, Integrity, Excellence, Leadership and Dedication). He stated Officer Wilson was it. He does so much with the resources he has to work with providing animal control services to the city. He never gets complaints about what he does, and he follows through with what you ask him to follow through with. He comes up with innovative ideas. This is the first time they have presented the SHIELD Award, and it is designed for the employee that is exemplary in every single facet of their core values. He presented Officer Pete Wilson with the SHIELD Award.

He recognized Sgt. Joey Spragins. He is the President of the Roanoke Rapids Police Club which is a non-profit. They have raised a lot of money for Christmas for the Kids and other projects. They have recently taken on the project of raising money for Project Lifesaver. He reported they've had their training, and it is ready to go. He said it was set up on the table for those who may want to see it after the meeting. He stated Sgt. Spragins is community engagement. Everything he does is about helping the community get better. He gives everything he can to make sure the community is strong. He presented Sgt. Spragins with the Community Service Award.

Mayor Doughtie asked Chief Guyant to share some of the information with the audience that he presented at the last meeting. Chief Guyant stated he did not have the exact figures with him, but they did have an 11% decrease in crime. He said one of the things he heard when he came on as chief was that they never see a police car. He hopes they see one every time they turn around. He hopes the lights are lighting up the street like never before. He hopes putting people on Facebook that break the law and the public gets to see how much crime they commit. Residents and businesses work too hard for their stuff. This City Council has been very supportive of the Police Department. He noted it was less than 1% of every interaction that results

in a use of force out of over 26,000 interactions they had in 2023. He said the Mayor wrote a hand-written not too long ago and he shared it with his staff about how much he appreciated what they did. He thanked everyone for their support.

Mayor Doughtie stated as Chief Guyant said, they should all be proud. He is and knows the City Council is. A town as small as Roanoke Rapids that has a police department that he thinks is on the cutting edge. He believes Chief Guyant has done a superb job since he's been here. They were fortunate as they came through a difficult situation to have some very good leadership in those individuals that maintained the police department while they did not have a full-time chief in place. Everybody working together has made it better for everybody. He added that people want to criticize a police department so much and what they do. Three or four of the individuals that received awards tonight did not have time to think about which way they were going to do this or that like most people. They got a call and had to go and act immediately. A couple of them sustained injuries. He is glad that there are people that enjoy that career.

Public Comment (Unscheduled)

Thomas Dixon

Mr. Dixon said he was running for District Court Judge for District 7, which is Halifax, Northampton, Hertford and Bertie counties. He wanted to introduce himself. He has been a lifelong native of Roanoke Rapids. He and his wife live and raise a family here and have a law firm on Roanoke Avenue. He announced the Primary is March 5th.

Approval of City Council Minutes

Motion was made by Councilman Bell, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Smith, and unanimously carried to approve the January 16, 2024 Regular City Council Meeting minutes as drafted.

New Business

Consideration of Hearing for Unsafe Building (201-203 Roanoke Avenue)

City Manager Traynham said the City has had a lot of concerns about the building located at 2nd Street and Roanoke Avenue. It was brought to their attention a couple of years ago and then the property changed hands. The City was going to try and work with the owner on this situation. She feels the City needs to move forward with an action plan for the removal of the unsafe conditions. Absent of any order, the City's hands are tied unless the building were to fall into the street prior to. The City has

had the street barricaded for about a year now to prevent any vehicular or pedestrian traffic alongside it. This situation is a little different than before. They have not had an unsafe building order come before City Council in a while that they have not had certain things in place first. They are asking for City Council to consider scheduling a hearing for the next meeting, February 20, 2024 for the consideration of a unsafe building order. The order would allow the City to move forward in planning for any emergency response. She would like to have a meeting with City staff (code enforcement, police, fire and public works) along with emergency management and other stake holders such as NCDOT since Roanoke Avenue is a state highway and see if there are any other funding revenue sources. She explained the order would not obligate the City to immediately do anything, but would allow them to move forward with bidding the project as far as removing the unsafe conditions. She stated demolition is probably the only option. Then they would further bid out to determine the costs and come back with a budget amendment because they know the costs would exceed what the budget would allow. She is hopeful that they may be able to explore some options to reduce the City's burden on this. There are unsafe buildings everywhere nationally and the City is not alone in having a threat to public safety as far as imminent collapse is concerned. She cannot imagine that the cities are the only ones born to solve the problem. She is trying to bring in other stakeholders to help solve this problem. It does require some action from City Council and direction procedurally to get to that point.

Mayor Doughtie said there are several state and federal people that have asked the City to apply for funding they can get. They can get money, but they are so strapped to what they can spend money for. They cannot spend it on things that are critically needed. If someone were by the building when it fell in, it could certainly cause a death. He thought they could write letters to representatives in Raleigh or Washington, DC to let them know this is a major problem in most older towns. He knows they would hear from some unhappy taxpayers about the City spending their tax money on a private individual's building to take it down. They owe it to the citizens to keep them safe, but people owe it to the community if they are going to own property to keep it up to a reasonable standard.

City Manager Traynham said through the minimum housing program and Planning Department where they reach out to property owners to ask what their intentions are of repairing/maintaining the building. The feedback is typically the repairs/costs to do anything about it far exceeds what they are able to do. The problem continues to persist. The thought of it is a tough pill to swallow because staff knows it will likely cost six-figures. They do not know the exact figures because of things such as tipping fees and contractor fees. They will have a better idea as they move forward in the process and get direction from City Council. She added there are grant opportunities

out there, but many require a redevelopment plan associated with it that will bring jobs and so forth. The piece they are missing is the private investment piece on many of the properties that are condemned. It is not a question of if this property collapses, it is more of when. The costs to abate this public safety matter is nothing compared to the value of a life.

Attorney Davis stated one of the things they need to consider with these deteriorated properties in the city is there a way the City can compel private owners/entities to take responsibility for them. Many times, the responsible party or property owner is a corporate entity. Some people may say they know who the owner is, but a lot of times that person is just a shareholder in a company. One of the reasons someone organizes a corporate entity is to protect their personal assets. That corporate organization protects the individual shareholders from liability. If a property is condemned and the City demolishes and cleans it up and attaches a lien for the full value of it onto the property, that lien is only going to be put against the corporate entity, not the shareholders. If it is the only property the corporate entity owns and it has no other assets, it means that is essentially what they are limited to as far as compensation. This is not the only property like this in the city. Its situation makes it more of an acute concern. The costs in these buildings make it very difficult to be able to budget for these costs and have a reasonable expectation of recouping those costs for the taxpayers.

Mayor Pro Tem Smith asked if they had checked to see if this LLC has any other assets.

Attorney Davis replied he did not think they did. He has been in discussion with the attorney for the corporate entity that owns the property even as recently as today. He believes the City should move forward with this process and take the proper steps.

Minimum Housing Officer Roger Bell presented photos via PowerPoint showing evidence of the unsafe condition of the building. (Copy of PowerPoint on file in Clerk's Office). He concluded the slide show with photos of the building posted with required notice. He stated the Code of Ordinances Condemnation, Repair and Demolition of Unsafe Buildings or Structures §150.57: Before any building or structure may be ordered to be demolished and removed as provided in §150.56, the Planning & Development Department shall notify the owner(s) in writing by certified or registered mail to the last known address of such owner, or by personal service of such notice by the Planning & Development Department or by posting notice as hereinafter provided, that such building or structure to be in such condition to constitute a fire, safety hazard, dangerous to life, health or other property.

Minimum Housing Officer Bell reported February 27, 2023 when Building Inspector Brian Duhadaway noticed what was going on. Public Works Director Chalker looked at the building and barricaded the West Second Street block. The owner was notified, and the Planning Department was told the owner indicated he would have the building demolished by contractor MJ Price. He and City Planning Kristyn Anderson worked on expediting the required state demolition permit which was issued on March 3, 2023. All the utilities were released by March 9, 2023. He stated on March 13, 2023, everything stopped. He said they were told the corporate entity was balking at the cost which was over six-figures. It was a lot more than the building is worth. On May 23, 2023, he spoke with the corporate owner on the phone, and he said the corporation does not have enough money to demolish the building. He sent a hearing notice in May. There was a lot of back and forth about demolishing the structure with a different contractor. An asbestos survey was done in May and that is when he got the pictures of the inside. They held a hearing at the property June 7, 2023. The property owner nor a representative attended. There has been no activity on the property since then. He reported getting City Council involved would help the Planning Department expedite the process and move towards a safer footing.

Mayor Pro Tem Smith asked when the owner inquired about COVID relief money or other funding, did he say how much money the corporation had to put into it. Minimum Housing Officer Bell replied he did give him a figure on the amount that was in the bank account and recalled it may have been around \$400.

Mayor Doughtie confirmed that it appears a second demolition contractor was contacted, and nothing happened with them either. Minimum Housing Officer Bell replied that was correct. He was the one who got the asbestos survey done; the City did not pay for that. The contractor ran into the same asbestos abatement issues as the first contractor did. There is a lot of asbestos on the property and apparently the state is requiring an on-site abatement expert during the demolition.

Mayor Doughtie asked Minimum Housing Officer Bell if he kept a log on the amount of time he spends on these types of situations. He replied not by the minute.

City Manager Traynham reminded City Council that these are processes that are in place to allow the opportunity for the landowner or any other interested party to remediate the situation. In this particular case, a demolition contractor did apply for a demolition permit, but the final permit was never issued because they did not complete the steps. It came down to the anticipated costs. The City has spent time on this process, but no City funds have been spent. They cannot do anything like that until they have City Council's approval with an order.

Attorney Davis added even if City Council schedules the hearing and holds the hearing on February 20, 2024, if the City were to spend any money, they would bring a budget amendment back to City Council letting them know all the financial costs the City was about to incur. City Council would not be taking any action tonight that would obligate the City to spend money, if it gets to that point.

Councilwoman Bryant said City Manager Traynham indicated the City was looking to work with some type of partnership and asked if someone was interested in the building or the lot that maybe they would work with the City and possibly obtain the property.

City Manager Traynham replied she would like to bring in a tabletop exercise to determine what they would do if either a voluntary demolition took place or an involuntary collapse. With it being a state highway, either way Roanoke Avenue would have to close for a certain period of time for any demolition or clean-up efforts to take place. She would like to bring stakeholders to the table that would be involved in the collapse or emergency situation. Coordination is important especially with the public health part of it. The City does not have a copy of the asbestos report but based on the age of the oldest part of the building (1901), they believe there is asbestos containing materials there. What makes it dangerous is when those asbestos materials produce particles into the air. There is a very strict process in place by the state. Whether it is the City leading the efforts or someone else, they are going to have to take a lot of significant precautions because of the airborne contamination impacts. It is not going to be like a car accident where they sweep stuff to the side of the road and they are done. It will require personal protection equipment (PPE) and wet methods. The building is in such a dangerous condition, the asbestos cannot be removed prior to demolition. Typically, they issue the demolition permit once the asbestos has been removed, but in this case, they will have to treat the entire structure as hazardous waste. Hopefully the Fire Department can bring out a truck and hose everything down. That is the best method to prevent airborne particulate matter.

Councilman Bell asked if they would also have to look into what permits may be required on the federal level for asbestos. City Manager Traynham replied it was all through the state and they have heard that based on the condition of the building, a certified asbestos inspector would have to be on site throughout the entire demolition and clean up process at a rate of thousands of dollars per day. This is not a one- or two-day job. They are working to get more information and to see what other resources are out there, especially on the basis of a public health concern.

Mayor Doughtie asked what will they do if the building collapses. It will be in a big

pile with all the asbestos, brick and wood will all be mingled up. The particles she spoke about will be everywhere.

City Manager Traynham stated this is where having a meeting about emergency response goes. She warned if anything does collapse, do not go picking any materials up with PPE on. Ultimately everything has to be removed, they cannot leave a pile of rubble.

Mayor Doughtie stated if it collapses onto Roanoke Avenue, he did believe it would keep the road closed for very long. The state is not going to allow it to be closed for long.

Councilman Strickland asked if Cr1017 LLC was a local group. Attorney Davis replied yes. Councilman Strickland asked if they owned any other property on Roanoke Avenue. Attorney Davis replied Cr1017 LLC does not.

Motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Smith, seconded by Councilman Bell and unanimously carried to direct the Planning Department to schedule a hearing during the regular City Council meeting on February 20, 2024, for consideration of an unsafe building order for property located at 201-203 Roanoke Avenue.

City Manager's Report

City Manager Traynham announced that tonight the Public Works Department would be conducting its quarterly evening street light survey. Residents may see Public Works vehicles driving around the city making sure the streetlights are working correctly. If they find one that is dull or burned out, they will report it to Dominion Energy for replacement or repair.

She reported the Southgate flood abatement project that was funded through a state grant is about 95% completed with the exception of a few driveway improvements and asphalt. This project has changed the landscape for many of the neighbors that have had severe issues with flooding. This project was made possible through a State grant from Representative Wray. The City and residents are very pleased with the outcome.

She said the sinkhole that persisted at First and Jackson Streets has been repaired and completed this week.

City Manager Traynham gave an update on the McCrory Building located at 1000 Roanoke Avenue. They were fortunate for a new owner to come in with the intent to revitalize the property and has benefited from economic development incentives from

the City. Since it is in the Historic District and is a historic property, there is a lot of governmental “red tape” that is involved in trying to get the National Park Service to approve certain parts of the plans. The owner cannot do certain activities until they have all the approvals in place because they cannot risk it losing its historic character for the purpose of the tax credit program. The owner and developer have been in communication with the Planning Department as recently as this week for assigning addresses, which is one of the first steps in applying for permits. They expect architectural drawings to be submitted in the near future. The owner is working to secure funding from banks that invest in these types of projects. The building next to it, 1006 Roanoke Avenue, is expected to be completed in the spring. It will be a multi-use building as well with commercial space and a 2-bedroom, 2-bathroom apartment that will be available for rent. Mr. Hurt expressed to her that he has been in contact with the hospital about making some of these apartment opportunities furnished for traveling nurses and such. They all have heard there is a need for rental housing in the city.

She reported the Stateside Landing Family Apartments, a proposed multi-family apartment development located at the intersection of Hwy. 158 and Roanoke Avenue have notified the City they anticipate submitting their site development plans any time now. She believes they are proposing 64-65 apartment units. It will be funded through the NC Housing Finance Agency Tax Credit Program which secures the site under their inspection for at least 20 years and usually up to 30 years to ensure quality controls and affordable rents are being charged to the qualifying occupants.

City Manager Traynham stated there has been some recent activity with the former WestPoint Stevens mill at 1200 Henry Street. They just got their power released to the property today. There is a Brownfields agreement that is a deed restriction on the property so there are only certain activities that are allowed for the reuse. The site is zoned industrial. Everything would have to comply with the Brownfields agreement. At this point, they have only made preliminary inquiries pertaining to processes and requests for local contractors. Staff are not sure which phase of the project they would want to implement first.

She said there continues to be interest in the Cross Creek subdivision. They’ve heard about the possibility of expanding the townhome community. That is one of the two subdivisions in Roanoke Rapids that still has land available for development. She believes it comes down to what is required as far as having to expand the highway in front of the subdivision for a turning lane.

She reported the City received preliminary notification that the application for the Community Development Block Grant Neighborhood Revitalization Program was a

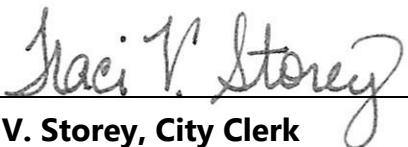
approved for up to \$950,000. That will benefit the qualified homeowners who have applied to this program. They have not received the grant award packet yet, but the first few months consists of a lot of due diligence.

City Manager Traynham said one of the two fire trucks on order by the City is rolling off the production line and is ready for inspection in Florida. As part of the agreement, the manufacturer allows four employees that are part of the truck committee to go to Florida to inspect the truck. It is important to have it inspected there and approved per the City's specifications. The truck will then go to Rocky Mount for upfit at the vendor. The good news is this truck is the one made possible by the FEMA grant. Once the City receives the truck, they can submit the documentation to apply for reimbursement in the amount of approximately \$357,000. The City should receive those funds before June 30th.

She reminded City Council of their retreat being held from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. tomorrow.

Adjournment

There being no further business, motion was made by Councilwoman Bryant, seconded by Councilman Stainback and unanimously carried to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 6:40 p.m.



Traci V. Storey, City Clerk

Approved by Council Action on: February 20, 2024