

Special Meeting - Council Retreat

The City Council of the City of Roanoke Rapids held a Special Meeting (Retreat) on **Wednesday, February 7, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.** in the Kirkwood Adams Community Center, 1100 Hamilton Street, Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina.

Present: Emery G. Doughtie, Mayor
Wayne Smith, Mayor Pro Tem
W. Keith Bell)
Sandra Bryant)
Rex Stainback)
Curt Strickland)

**Council
Members**

Kelly Traynham, City Manager
Traci Storey, City Clerk

Mayor Doughtie called the meeting to order.

City Manager Traynham welcomed City Council to the retreat and reviewed the agenda.

The Mayor, City Council members and staff gave a brief introduction about themselves.

City Manager Traynham stated over a year ago City Council started some strategic planning with a consultant. Some members could not be there and now there are new Councilmembers. She distributed the notes prepared by the consultant Rick Rocchetti. She reminded City Council of the draft mission statement developed during the strategy session.

Mission Statement: The City of Roanoke Rapids provides reliable services to enhance daily living for citizens in a caring and professional manner.

She continued to review the notes.

Vision Themes: Fishing/Hunting/Lakes – Recreation; Housing; Safety; Shopping Entertainment District; Tourism/I95; History; Education; Medical Services; Convenient Location.

Accomplishments/City invested in: Reducing debt, good budget, people are taken care

of; capital outlay; leadership/administration; federal ARPA funds; \$5M from State Representative; \$3.5M to pay down debt; Main Street money; the meeting.

Values: Integrity; transparency; responsibility; teamwork; safety and welfare; accountability.

City Manager Traynham stated, keeping these things in mind, she would like them to participate in a S.W.O.T. (**S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, **T**hreats) exercise.

Strengths

- I-95 Corridor
- Entertainment District
 - Jobs/Revenue
- Leadership (Has made a big difference)

Weaknesses

- Need to focus on housing
- Need to hire more code enforcement
- Safety
- City properties need to be spruced up.

Opportunities

- Clean-up/revitalization
- Community Pride
- Clean Sweep
- Halifax Resolves

Threats

- Attitudes/Behavior
- Crime
- Drugs/Substance Abuse
- Declining Population/Aging Population
- Income Disparities

Councilwoman Bryant suggested a city/community-wide clean-up week or month. Need to get homeowners, renters and everybody to buy into it. City needs to start it and help encourage the citizens to get the city cleaned up.

City Manager Traynham said starting this year and until 2026 Halifax County is going to be on the map for the 250th anniversary of the Halifax Resolves. Visitors will be in Roanoke Rapids for the celebrations and activities. This gives the City something to

strive for. They cannot get it done overnight, but they can do little things intentionally. She reported the last time they did a clean sweep was in 2011 when they received a grant. She reminded City Council that the City has to pay the landfill fees for all the items they pick up and carry to the dump. Also, some people do not want to let go of items. The City has gone to repeat houses. City staff will clean it up and within a week it looks like it did before.

Councilmembers mentioned a few areas of concern or imposing fines on offenders.

Councilwoman Bryant said she met Natalie Sykes who has an office in the old *Herald* building. She is working with a program to help homeowners rehab their homes. It is the USDA Rural Development 504 Home Repair Loan or Grant. She did not know all the details but has encouraged citizens to contact Ms. Sykes.

Priorities

- Community Appearance
 - (Stakeholders) – City, Businesses, Landlords, Residents/Citizens, School System, Civic Organizations, Churches, Beautification Committee, Community Service Hours, Solid Waste/Private (Waste Mgt)

City Council took a 15-minute break.

City Council discussed some focus areas for the City.

Focus Areas

- Infrastructure/Facilities
- Public Safety/Health
 - Housing
- Staff/Organization
- Economic Development/Planning
- Outreach/Involvement

City Manager Traynham asked City Council to discuss some tasks for the focus areas.

Infrastructure/Facilities

Goal: *Improve facilities and services*

- Inventory facilities - List of needs/evaluate, manicure grounds/upkeep; clean park signs
- Streets - Inventory, condition survey/report, Roanoke Rapids Sanitary District (new administration wants to work together)
- Property - Surplus, maintaining, lot liens/foreclosures
- Facility Age
- Sidewalks

Public Health & Safety

- Housing Condition Survey
- Reduce Liability (City)
 - sidewalks, signage, litter, lighting
- Police/Fire
 - Maintain current level of service
 - Salaries – Police is now competitive; Fire is below most areas
 - Cars/Presence
- ADA

Staff Organization

- Salaries/Living Wages
- Recognition (Employee of quarter; citizen nomination of employee going above & beyond, gift card, written acknowledgement)
- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI)
- Succession Planning
- Recruitment/Retention
- Department Culture

Planning & Economic Development

- Housing
 - Housing Authority (City reimburses their City property taxes to reinvest into housing programs). Mayor appoints to RR Housing Authority Board. City should get informed of activities.
- Comprehensive Development Plan Update (2014)
- Halifax Co. Economic Development
- Codes/Ordinances

City Council paused for lunch.

City Manager Traynham asked City Council what were some questions they get from their constituents.

Questions

- Theatre Debt
 - Explain Debt Infrastructure
- Main Street Activities
- Trees on Roanoke Avenue
- Tax Revaluation/Tax Rate

Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Budget

- Rules of Engagement – commitment to behavioral/ground rules.

- Current year's budget is lean, baseline. Impossible to have the exact same budget for the upcoming year.
- Funds in Budget: Operational, Special/Restrictive (municipal swimming pool, Fund 17), Capital
- Debt Service (Expenditures: Tax Supported Debt handout on file in Clerk's Office). Doing a great job with debt. After this fiscal year, two debt instruments will come off in the amount of approximately \$210,000.

Councilmembers said they were receiving calls about what the City plans to do about the tax rate since the recent tax revaluation from Halifax County. City Manager Traynham said the City did not have the final data yet, but would be discussing it further during the budget process. Staff will give City Council different scenarios to help them make a decision.

City Council discussed the increasing budget and how would they continue to fund it. Retirement rates were increasing every year. They talked about the possibility of not continuing the policy of paying retiree insurance with future employees as a way to reduce expenses.

City Manager Traynham stated the City has contracted the MAPS group through the NCLM to conduct a comprehensive review of the Personnel Policy. City Council discussed employee holidays, library hours and Canal Museum programs.

City Manager Traynham said they would conduct budget work sessions with the departments as done in the past starting in April. She gave a summary timeline of the budget process. The budget is required to be adopted before July 1st.

Councilwoman Bryant informed Councilmembers that the ABC2 group would be holding a watch party for a City Council meeting in April. They have been conducting these type of audit/evaluations throughout the county.

City Manager Traynham said with the Halifax Resolves 250th Anniversary coming up, what does the City want to do to acknowledge that.

Councilwoman Bryant said she serves on the at-large committee for the 250th Anniversary. They want every town to do something to get people to come to their town. Halifax will start April 12, 2024, with a 3-day event to lead up to April 12, 2026 which will be a national event. They would like to put together a calendar of events going on. She suggested something with the Canal Museum and Canal Trail. That story needed to be told, but she was not sure what the City could do.

City Manager Traynham asked City Council what did they want the City to be known for.

History – 250th Resolves

- Oral stories/genealogy
- Mills – established commerce
- I-95
 - Theatre/Entertainment District
- Commerce Center: Region
- Roanoke Rapids High School – architecture
- Outdoor sports/hunting/fishing

Priorities

- Theatre Debt
 - Manage best as possible
 - General Assembly
- Workforce Development
 - UNC Fellows Program – Apply for a college student to perform certain job/task (City Cost \$14,000)
- Community Appearance/Pride
 - Priority Areas:
 - Hinson Street/10th Street
 - Behind Sheetz
 - Gateways
 - Mill Village neighborhoods
 - Vine Street/Hodgestown

City Clerk Storey reported due to new City Council members, the Advisory Committee City Council Liaisons needed to be assigned. Councilmembers volunteered to serve as the liaisons for the following committees:

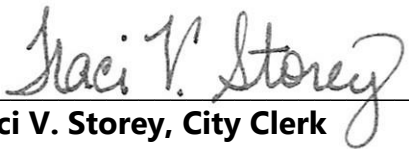
- Beautification Committee – Sandra Bryant
- Canal Museum Advisory Committee – W. Keith Bell
- Library Advisory Committee – Curtis Strickland
- Parks & Recreation Committee – Rex Stainback
- Roanoke Rapids Area Planning Board/Board of Adjustment – Wayne Smith
- Senior Center Advisory Committee – Rex Stainback

City Council asked City Clerk Storey to give City Council copies of any by-laws for the committees.

City Manager Traynham stated she would take information from today and create a report for City Council to review and set some timelines to achieve priorities and goals.

Mayor Doughtie closed the meeting with prayer.

The retreat adjourned at 2:45 p.m.



Traci V. Storey, City Clerk

Approved by Council on: February 20, 2024