



Minutes of the Roanoke Rapids City Council

A regular meeting of the City Council of the City of Roanoke Rapids was held on **Tuesday, May 21, 2024, at 5:30 p.m.** in the Council Chambers at the Lloyd Andrews City Meeting Hall.

Present: Emery G. Doughtie, Mayor

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

Kristyn Anderson, Interim Planning Director

John Simeon, Parks & Recreation Director

Larry Chalker, Public Works Director

Jason Patrick, Fire Chief

Absent: Wayne Smith, Mayor Pro Tem

Tony Hall, Main Street Development Director

Mayor Doughtie called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. 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 Bell, and unanimously carried to adopt the business agenda as presented.

Public Comment (Unscheduled)

Jonathan Benthall

Mr. Benthall distributed a document to City Council and City staff. (On File in Clerk's Office). He said he worked for the Roanoke Rapids Police Department from 2008 – 2020. He wanted to share his comments about the debate concerning the tax proposal. He wrote a letter to Lance Martin, the editor of RRspin.com and he published it. He received some feedback from different people so he figured he would come out and respond to that and let them know his opinion.

He stated the on handout he distributed were basically screenshots from the documents the City provided to Lance Martin a couple weeks ago. He referred to the first page of the document, General Fund Revenue, Ad Valorem Taxes and said under FY24, the City hopes to receive \$7,599,702. He said under Examples of Tax Rate Impacts on Revenues, it shows the proposal, the rate, and the dollar amount. Under that he just did some simple math. Taking the proposed FY25 tax revenue \$9,216,172 less FY24 tax revenue \$7,599,702 equals \$1,616,470 which results in 21.27% increase in revenue.

Mr. Benthall said after his letter to RRspin.com was published, he received some feedback. It was suggested he take these numbers and apply it to him personally and it hit his pocketbook. So, he did that by going to the Halifax County Tax website and pulled those numbers. He referred to page 2 of the handout. After the revaluation, his property is valued at \$111,400. Taking the previous value and new value results in a 8.44% increase in the value of his house. Next, he broke down the dollar amounts of what he had to pay last year and what he would be expected to pay under the new proposed rate. He reviewed his calculations. Last year his city taxes were \$674.22. The proposed tax levy for this year would be \$714.07, for a difference of \$39.85. He stated his \$40 may be somebody else's \$400. It is a broad brush to paint with to assume somebody else's circumstances and the dollar amounts and how that affects that person. He stated \$40 was not that big of a deal to him, he could afford that.

He said it also struck him as funny that it was only \$40 when there is still \$1.6 million they hope to come up with. He decided to look at some properties and how the revaluation and rates would affect somebody else. He referred to the back page of the handout. He said he lives a block from his parents and in the same neighborhood so it should be a comparable change in property values, you would think. Both of his parents worked but are now retired and on a fixed income plus they care for his elderly grandmother who is over 90 years old with health problems. The comment was that not doing this increase is only going to benefit the super wealthy or who own a lot of property. His parents are not very rich. The value of their property went from

\$137,400 to \$170,500 for a difference of \$33,100. They got hit with a 19.41% increase in their property value. After doing the math, their city tax amount will go from \$908 to about \$1,100 which is a 20% increase for them. That's \$200 for them. There is a wide disparity between how these properties are being valued across town. What doesn't hurt one person, will hurt another person. He encouraged everybody to get on the tax website and do the math themselves to see if it's going to hit them for \$40 or \$200 or wherever in between and let City Council know how they feel about it so they are all informed and City Council can make a better decision for everyone.

Approval of City Council Minutes

Motion was made by Councilman Stainback, seconded by Councilman Strickland, and unanimously carried to approve the May 7, 2024 Regular City Council Meeting minutes as drafted.

New Business

Consideration of Budget Ordinance (Storm Drain Chaloner Drive)

Public Works Director Chalker stated the City was notified by the Roanoke Rapids Sanitary District earlier this month concerning a large and deep sink hole located at 1432 W. Chaloner Drive. After inspection, it was determined the storm drainage pipe collapsed in the City's street right-of-way. That collapse was a result of the City's eroded storm drain system which was installed in the early 1950s. When the pipe collapsed, the water backed up until it found its way out of the system causing a large hole. Rightmyer Machine Rentals has given an estimate of \$45,000 for the repair.

He reported that because of its emergency status, they pulled Rightmyer to the site. They were available and have already started working. He presented Budget Ordinance No. 2024.09 for their consideration.

Ordinance No. 2024.09 **CITY OF ROANOKE RAPIDS** **BUDGET AMENDMENT**

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ROANOKE RAPIDS:

SECTION 1. The following additional amounts are hereby appropriated for the operation of City Government and its activities for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2023 and ending June 30, 2024, according to the following schedule:

SCHEDULE A – PROJECT FUND REVENUES

Fund Balance – Public Works – Storm Drain System @ 1432 W. Chaloner Drive

Project Revenues – To Fund Storm Drain at 1432 W. Chaloner Drive	\$45,000.00

FUND PROJECT TOTAL	\$45,000.00
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SECTION 2. The following additional revenues and reductions in appropriations are available for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2023 and ending June 30, 2024, in order to meet the foregoing appropriations, according to the following schedule:

SCHEDULE B – PROJECT FUND EXPENDITURES

Funding to General Fund – Public Works – Storm Drain System at 1432 W. Chaloner Drive

Project Expenditures - To Fund Storm Drain at 1432 W. Chaloner Drive	\$45,000.00

FUND PROJECT TOTAL	\$45,000.00
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SECTION 3. This ordinance shall become effective upon adoption.

Emery G. Doughtie, Mayor

Mayor Doughtie stated with events such as this and the one last year lets them know why the City needs to have a pretty good fund balance. He recalled the one last year was \$70,000 and this one is \$45,000; it can take away money quickly.

Motion was made by Councilman Bell, seconded by Councilman Stainback and unanimously carried to adopt the Budget Amendment, Ordinance No. 2024.09, in the amount of \$45,000 to repair the storm drain on Chaloner Drive.

Presentation of Proposed Fiscal year 2024-2025 Budget

City Manager Traynham stated they would further discuss the recommended Fiscal Year 2024-2025 budget that has been presented to City Council during the May 13, 2024 Budget Work Session. There have been some minor adjustments here and there within their budget notebooks, but nothing to substantially change at this point. She has updated the budget message as well which they have in front of them. (See May 21, 2024 Budget Message revised from 5/7/2024).

She reminded City Council and as the Mayor said, a strong financial reserve is something that is recommended especially with fluctuations in different agencies. Economists are telling them to hold tight to reserves but be conservative with that. This proposed budget does not include any use of unassigned fund balance. The budget helps to meet many of the demands of needs that have been deferred for years.

It helps to restore some of the maintenance levels in the departmental budgets. She summarized the following revised budget message:

May 21, 2024, revised from 5/7/2024

Mayor Doughtie and City Councilmembers,

Pursuant to the North Carolina Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act and General Statutes 159-11, I am pleased to present the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 (FY25) Budget for your review and consideration. The following message summarizes and highlights significant elements of the budget, particularly in those areas where notable changes have occurred from the FY2023-2024 budget.

Planning for the FY25 Budget included a city council retreat, a department head retreat, routine management meetings. Overall, the Council's desire is for community revitalization to improve the quality of life for our residents in a fiscally responsible manner.

The FY25 Budget is faced with the need to find a balance between affordability and increasing revenue to meet our outstanding financial needs. However, we must also consider the strain on resident budgets as cost increases are impacting consumer choice. Data indicates that consumer confidence is declining due to rising prices for items such as groceries and gasoline, costs associated with housing are increasing.

Moody's 2024 Outlook for Cities & Counties

According to Moody's Investors Service (5 December 2023), the stability of US cities and counties is dependent upon "strong financial reserves and effective governance, which will balance upward pressure on wages and capital costs in the absence of revenue growth adjusted for inflation" (U.S. Public Finance).

Job vacancies and inflation will accelerate salary growth, reducing governments' financial flexibility. Cities and counties have no other option than to increase wages and benefits to fill positions. Growth in private-sector employment outpaces local government employment due to the public-sector's less competitive wages and wage growth over the last few years of high inflation. In 2022, the local government employment sector grew 1% while the private sector grew by 5% (Moody's, 2023, us bureau of labor statistics).

The City will continue to benefit from **strong, professional management** which leads to preserving credit quality in changing economic conditions. The City has a favorable track record of balancing budgets while providing essential services and minimally maintaining infrastructure, multiyear financial planning and debt affordability.

The current FY 24 Budget provides the bare minimum in city service levels. Despite the stability of property tax as a revenue source, the City has maintained a fixed tax rate by making significant budget cuts and deferring maintenance by seeking grant resources or a better budget outlook. The city should consider appropriate adjustments to the tax rate on an annual basis to adjust spending to match fluctuations in revenue.

Review of Current Year Revenues & Expenditures

Fiscal Year 2023-2024 (FY24)

On June 20, 2023, City Council adopted Ordinance No. 2023.05 establishing a **\$17,760,726** general fund budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2023 and ending June 30, 2024. The operating budget was amended during FY24 to carry forward capital projects from FY23, to increase the budget to fund expenses for the public works storm drain repair, acceptance of grant awards, purchase of firetruck upfit equipment, and for building/facility emergency repairs. The FY24 budget after amendments and prior-year carry forwards is approximately ***\$19,390,302.01** as of May 16, 2024. *Note: this increases to **\$19,435,302** pending approval of Ordinance 2024.09 (Item #11 below).

FY 2023-2024 Budget Amendments

1. On July 18, 2023, City Council approved **Ordinance No. 2023.07** which amended the FY24 budget by transferring \$69,882 from Fund Balance to General Fund for the emergency repair of the stormwater drainage system in the area of Jackson Street and 1st Street.
2. On July 18, 2023 City Council approved **Ordinance No. 2023.08** which amended the FY24 budget to appropriate revenues in the amount of \$10,000 to the General Fund for the Fire Department's award of a Vidant grant.
3. On July 18, 2023, City Council approved **Ordinance No. 2023.09** which amended the FY24 budget by transferring \$1,262,548.25 as a capital outlay carry forward from the previous fiscal year.
4. On September 19, 2023, City Council approved **Ordinance No. 2023.13** which amended the FY24 budget by transferring \$12,000 from Fund Balance to General Fund for the city's 1/3 contribution to the Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) for the provision of water and sewer utility services in the land area surrounding the extensions of Premier Blvd. and American Legion Rd.
5. On December 5, 2023, City Council approved **Ordinance No. 2023.16** which amended the FY24 budget by transferring \$150,000 from Fund Balance to General Fund for expenses related to the equipment upfit necessary for the new fire engines.
6. On January 16, 2024, City Council approved **Ordinance No. 2024.01** which amended the FY24 budget to appropriate revenues in the amount of \$1,986.50 to the General Fund for the library's award of increased aid from the State of NC.
7. On January 16, 2024, City Council approved **Ordinance No. 2024.02** which amended the FY24 budget to appropriate revenues in the amount of \$12,624 to the General Fund for the Fire Department's receipt of donated funds.
8. On January 16, 2024, City Council approved **Ordinance No. 2024.03** which amended the FY24 budget to appropriate revenues in the amount of \$8,524.80 to the General Fund for the Police Department's receipt of donated funds.
9. On February 20, 2024, City Council approved **Ordinance No. 2024.06** which amended the FY24 budget by transferring \$15,000 from Fund Balance to General Fund for additional expenses necessary to make urgent repairs of government buildings.
10. On March 19, 2024, City Council approved **Ordinance No. 2024.08** which amended the FY24 budget by transferring \$64,340 from Fund Balance to General Fund for expenses related to the final audit of FY23 Workers Compensation Insurance.
11. On May 21, 2024, City Council *will consider* Ordinance No. 2024.09 to amend the FY24 budget by transferring \$45,000 from Fund Balance to General Fund for expenses related to emergency repair of storm drainage system on W. Chaloner Drive.

The FY24 expenditure budget after amendments is **\$19,435,302**.

Analysis of the current tax levy

Prior Year (FY 2023): Per the City’s independent auditor’s report (p. 79), the city-wide levy for the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2023 was based on a Total Property Valuation for Real Estate & Personal Property at \$1,112,528,139 and Registered Motor Vehicles at \$154,113,616 resulting in a **total property valuation of \$1,266,641,755**. At the end of Fiscal Year 2023, the Net Levy city-wide was \$8,372,502 (property and registered vehicles) of which **\$8,301,876 was collected** (99.16 % collection, *less \$70,626 uncollected taxes*). See Table # below.

FY 2023 Ad Valorem Tax Levy from Independent Auditor's Report				
	Real Estate / Personal Property	Registered Motor Vehicles	Combined Property Valuation	After Discounts estimates
Total Valuation	\$ 1,112,528,139	\$ 154,113,616	\$ 1,266,641,755	
Levy at 0.661 rate	\$ 7,353,811	\$ 1,018,691	\$ 8,372,502	\$ 8,301,876
NOTE: Halifax County receives a collection fee of 2% of all City Tax Payments. Halifax County works with taxpayers for payment plans and incentives (discounts) for early payment, etc. Therefore, the <u>actual</u> levy received by the City of Roanoke Rapids varies from the initial billed amounts.				

The FY23 General Fund Budget was prepared with an ad valorem tax revenue estimate of \$7,221,507, and \$7,283,185 was actually collected at the close of the fiscal year on June 30.

While developing the current year budget (FY24), the city initially estimated \$7,599,702 in ad valorem tax revenue. As of May 1, 2024, the city has received \$7,437,215 in ad valorem tax revenue or 96.8% of budgeted revenues.

Assessment and Revaluation of Property Values

Effective January 1, 2024, Halifax County completed a revaluation of property values. The preliminary revaluation estimates were finalized on March 7, 2024. The Tax Base overall growth in the reappraisal year increased by **16%** (or by \$215,625,672) from FY24 to FY25 from \$1,309,182,154 to \$1,524,807,826. The average annual increase in Tax Base since 2020 Revaluation is only 1.34%. One penny on the tax rate is estimated to yield \$150,000. The City’s tax base (real property and personal property) was estimated to be \$1.524 billion after adjustments by Halifax County.

On the years when there is a revaluation completed, the revenue neutral tax rate (RNTR) is required to be published by the Municipality as part of the budgeting process and budget message. The Governing Board does not have to adopt the RNTR. Per NCGS 159-11(e), in each year in which a general reappraisal of real property has been conducted, the budget officer shall include in the budget, for comparison purposes, a statement of revenue-neutral property tax rate for the budget. The RNTR is the rate that is estimated to produce revenue for the next fiscal year equal to the revenue that would have been produced for the next fiscal year by the current tax rate if no appraisal had occurred.

Tax Rate

Based on the information provided by Halifax County and including a small growth factor, the RNTR with growth is 57.86 cents per \$100 assessed value for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2024. The current tax rate is 66.1 cents per \$100. The FY25 budget presented is balanced utilizing a rate of 64.1 cents per \$100 valuation. The combined collection rate is predicted to be 98.97%.

The following Table reflects the revenue impact of alternative tax rates utilizing 2024 property values.

Examples of Tax Rate Impacts on Revenues

	Rate	Difference	Revenue Estimate	Above RNTR
Current	0.661	\$ -	\$9,517,992	\$1,243,500
Neutral	0.5786	\$ 0.08	\$8,274,492	\$0
	0.651	-\$0.01	\$9,367,082	\$1,092,590
	0.641	-\$0.02	\$9,216,172	\$941,680
	0.631	-\$0.03	\$9,065,262	\$790,770
	0.621	-\$0.04	\$8,914,351	\$639,859
	0.611	-\$0.05	\$8,763,441	\$488,949
	0.601	-\$0.06	\$8,612,531	\$338,039

The revaluation year requires that the City publish a Revenue Neutral Tax Rate (RNTR) along with the ad valorem tax rate proposed for the upcoming fiscal year beginning July 1.

The City has not effectively raised taxes in 10+ years despite the cost of living continuing to increase and substantial increases caused by inflation and the worldwide economy. The City Departments have leveraged other funding sources and competitive prices to manage costs or deferred maintenance due to lack of funds.

Proposed FY25 Budget – General Fund Overview

The General Fund Budget, which includes all tax supported governmental activities, is proposed to be \$19,852,046 which represents an increase of \$2,091,319 or 10.53% from the current year adopted budget effective July 1, 2023. The proposed budget includes a revised tax rate of \$0.641 per \$100 in value (2-cents less than current tax rate of \$0.661). **As of May 21, 2024, the FY24 expenditure budget is \$19,435,302 and the recommended FY25 budget is 2.14% higher than the FY24 amended budget.**

The budget provides sufficient funds to maintain the current level of City services while beginning to think strategically about future needs and capital projects. The budget was prepared in accordance with the City’s mission, vision, and values and advances the City forward for the next several years. Some of the budget highlights are as follows:

- The revenue neutral rate for the coming year is 57.86 cents. The budget proposes a tax rate of 64.1 cents compared to 66.1 cents in the current/prior year which allows the City to cover increased costs, includes funds for necessary capital projects, and deferred maintenance.
- The budget prepares the city for future growth and service needs and begins planning for future capital projects.
- The budget advances the City’s information technology and broadband availability to include improving security measures and cameras, refreshing end-of-life network components, transitioning to streamline operations.
- The budget invests in the growth, retention, and compensation of our greatest resource – our employees. The budget provides a cost-of-living adjustment to offset inflation, continues an educational program that encourages employees to excel, funds department head leadership

training and employee professional development and introduces additional ways for recognizing employees and contributions.

- The budget prioritizes employee and resident safety through investments in public safety equipment and replacements while meeting the need for the fleet vehicle program.
- The budget focuses on community appearance through dedicated city initiatives to include litter cleanup, property maintenance, and installation of energy efficient fixtures.

General Fund Revenue Highlights

Ad Valorem Tax Revenues

The FY 25 Recommended Budget was prepared utilizing a tax rate of **0.641 (2-cents less compared to the current tax rate of \$0.661) per \$100 assessed value**. This generates **\$9,673,346** in ad valorem tax revenue based on a collection rate of 98.97% and 2024 assessed values estimated by Halifax County at \$1,524,807,826 for real and personal property.

Per the Halifax County Tax Department's *Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Revenue Neutral Report*, 1-cent (or \$0.01) is expected to generate \$150,905 in revenue after collection costs are deducted. The ad valorem tax revenue includes anticipated motor vehicle tax proceeds.

The proposal to use a tax rate above the revenue neutral rate will generate funds that can be used for outstanding, deferred operational and capital needs while anticipating declining Sales Tax Revenues. The FY24 and FY25 tax base will fluctuate until all revaluation appeals are finalized and until the City's audit is complete for each respective fiscal year.

Local Sales Taxes

Sales tax revenue is the City's second largest source of revenue. Sales tax collections increased significantly through the pandemic (FY21 and FY22) and were impacted positively when the state began collecting sales tax on internet purchases. *Sales tax revenue is showing signs of cooling off and will be dependent upon consumer behavior*. Staff is projecting conservative, but stable, sales tax revenue in the upcoming budget. Total sales tax revenues are projected at **\$3,887,200** for FY25. The FY25 budget recommends a rate above revenue neutral to offset a portion of this future loss in revenue.

Powell Bill Funds

Powell Bill funds are received from the state and used to maintain, repair, construct or widen streets, bridges, bike paths, greenways, sidewalks, or drainage areas. The North Carolina General Assembly provides an annual allocation of Powell Bill funding for distribution as revenue to municipalities (NCGS 136-41.1(a)). Powell Bill proceeds are distributed twice during the fiscal year, on or before October 1 and January 1. The City's expected revenue is based on a distribution formula that provides 25% based on local street miles, and 75% based on population. The factors negatively impacting the city's Powell Bill allocation include little to no new growth in street mileage and a declining population.

During FY25, the City expects to receive approximately \$521,793 in Powell Bill Fund revenue. The General Assembly's approved budget provides for a per capita rate of \$23.77 per person (2023 estimated population provided by OSBM) and a Per Mile Rate of approximately \$1,850 (certified mileage reported annually). The City of Roanoke Rapids maintains 91.70 miles of maintained streets and the approximate annual population was 14,808 ([State Street Aid Allocations to Municipalities Report, 2024](#)).

Other Revenues

As we near the end of FY24, investment earnings continue to outpace budgeted amounts due to recent interest rate increases. We anticipate receiving \$240,000 in FY25. Investment earnings have increased significantly from \$2,500 two years ago, although we believe growth will slow down as the federal interest rate is lowered.

Alcoholic Beverage Tax

The City expects to see another increase this year with a revenue budget estimate of \$90,000 from state-collected alcoholic beverage taxes, the annual distribution occurs within 60 days of March 31.

General Fund Balance

The proposed FY25 budget is balanced using zero dollars (\$0.00) from the general fund balance. The General Fund operating budget retains current fiscal year staffing levels. Uses of the general fund balance should be limited to one-time or non-recurring expenses.

General Fund Expenditure Highlights

Debt Service.

The City of Roanoke Rapids continues to improve its borrowing capacity by satisfying debts and from not taking on new long term debt since 2021. The NCGS limits the amount of general obligation debt that a unit of government can issue to eight percent (8%) of the Total Assessed Value of Taxable Property located within the government’s boundaries.

The City will enter FY25 with an annual budget of approximately \$1,087,519 in currently obligated tax supported debt among three financial instruments, which includes the annual payment of \$952,137 on the 2017 Series A Bond Loan and \$135,382 on the remaining debt service. The City will satisfy two debt instruments during FY24 freeing up approximately \$210,000 in FY25.

FY25 Tax Supported Debt				
Purpose	FY Payoff	Principal (\$)	Interest (\$)	TOTAL FY (\$)
2017 “A” Bond Loan (Theatre District)	FY 2032	784,990	167,147	952,137
2021 FCB: (5) Police Durango SUVs, (1) Fire Dept. Pickup Truck	FY 2027	38,915	1,946	40,861
2013 FCB, Fire Station 2 refi. USDA loan	FY 2032	74,616	19,905	94,521
TOTALS		\$ 898,521	\$ 188,997	\$ 1,087,519

Long-Term Schedule of Tax-Supported Debt (current obligations).

The following Table entitled “Long-Term Schedule of Tax Supported Debt” reflects the financial obligations, or debts encumbered by the City of Roanoke Rapids in prior fiscal years. As you can see, if the City does not take on any additional debts, then in year 2033, the City will have zero debt payments. *Is this likely?* No, it is realistic to expect the City to choose debt financing instruments to fund capital projects and equipment into the future.

Long-Term Schedule of Tax-Supported Debt (current obligations)				
Fiscal Year (FY)	Principal	Interest	TOTAL	Difference from Prior FY
2021-2022	\$ 1,153,442.45	\$ 275,072.85	\$ 1,428,515.30	
2022-2023	\$ 1,158,080.02	\$ 246,161.28	\$ 1,404,241.30	\$ (24,274.00)
2023-2024	\$ 1,080,565.04	\$ 217,013.26	\$ 1,297,578.30	\$ (106,663.00)
2024-2025	\$ 898,521.10	\$ 188,997.20	\$ 1,087,518.30	\$ (210,060.00)
2025-2026	\$ 921,849.78	\$ 165,668.52	\$ 1,087,518.30	\$ -
2026-2027	\$ 904,924.87	\$ 141,731.93	\$ 1,046,656.80	\$ (40,861.50)
2027-2028	\$ 928,474.67	\$ 118,182.13	\$ 1,046,656.80	\$ -
2028-2029	\$ 952,638.71	\$ 94,018.09	\$ 1,046,656.80	\$ -
2029-2030	\$ 977,433.13	\$ 69,223.67	\$ 1,046,656.80	\$ -
2030-2031	\$ 1,002,874.13	\$ 43,782.67	\$ 1,046,656.80	\$ -
2031-2032	\$ 1,028,978.99	\$ 17,677.81	\$ 1,046,656.80	\$ -
2032-2033	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ (1,046,656.80)

Personnel Expenses

The largest General Fund expense for local governments is personnel. Due to the face-to-face nature of their work, the goal of all municipalities is to attract, train and retain a workforce that understands their jobs and provides service in a professional and personable manner. The challenge for the City is to continue funding competitive salaries and benefits when the cost of living is rising faster than the City’s tax base. The recommendations in this budget will stabilize the pay scale and allow for improved recruitment and retention.

In the upcoming year the City’s personnel costs are increasing due primarily to increasing costs to the retirement system, benefits, and cost of living adjustments (COLA). The proposed budget includes a 3% cost of living adjustment for employees with a full year cost of approximately \$500,000. This percentage is based on the **consumer price index for the South Region of the United States** and the salary and benefits survey conducted by the *North Carolina League of Municipalities*. No new full-time positions are included in the budget.

Employer-Mandated Health Benefits

Full-time employees are covered at 100% cost to the City. The City supplements the dependent coverage to reduce the overall costs to the individual employee electing coverage for children, spouse, or family members at an estimated cost of approximately \$60,000 based on current enrollment.

The City will continue its relationship with Blue Cross Blue Shield as the provider for employee medical insurance and after being quoted a double-digit increase, our insurance carrier and staff negotiated this down to an approximate 7% increase for the coming year. Additional options provided by our local insurance broker G.W. Hux & Co. allowed City Administration to consider changing its health plan to a 70/30 cost share with a \$3,500 deductible, which allowed us to further reduce the city’s cost share in elective dependent tiers. The change in health plan allows us to increase the City’s Health Reimbursement Account (HRA) from \$2,000 to \$3,000 with minimal impact to the budget. This is a positive change for our employees because it will keep their deductible liability to \$500 each year even though the deductible increased by \$1,000.

No increases were allocated for Dental premiums nor for vision insurance.

Employer-Mandated Retirement Benefits

The City continues to contribute funding for the employer share of employee benefits including the Local Government Employee Retirement System, North Carolina 401K, FICA, and Workers Compensation Insurance. The City's state mandated retirement contributions continue to increase with the rate going from 12.85% to 13.6% for general employees and from 14.1% to 15.1% for law enforcement.

The Police Department's law enforcement officers receive a 5% 401K contribution as mandated by state law. During the 4th quarter of FY 2022, salary enhancements were approved by City Council to increase the entry-level pay to improve recruitment, retention, and longevity. Retirement contributions are planned to increase by approximately 1% each year until 2026.

Positions. The FY25 Budget employs 156 Full-time Equivalent (FTE) positions of which 5 are currently vacant. There are approximately 10 FTE positions that are unfunded in the proposed FY 2023 Budget and have been "frozen" since the 2008 Great Recession. The City's Public Works and Parks & Recreation Departments frequently utilize permanent part-time (PPT) staff to assist in year-round operations. The Parks & Recreation Department funds seasonal part-time staff, primarily lifeguards at the pools while the Police Department retains seasonal part-time for occasional duty or special events (i.e. Christmas Parade).

General Fund Allocation by Department

General Government and Administration. Because the City is a service provider, personnel costs are our greatest expenditure. The proposed budget includes a **3% cost of living increase** for City employees and maintains a \$250 holiday bonus for all full-time employees. Benefits costs have increased due to retirement contribution percentage increases mandated by the State Treasurer's Office. Funding is requested to continue the City's longevity program and a 401(k) supplemental compensation program of 3% for non-law enforcement personnel.

The General Government and Administration budget totals **\$4,673,505** (or **24%** of general fund budget) and includes *legislative, general government, administration, human relations, elections, finance, information systems, revenue collections, legal, miscellaneous contributions, debt service, and capital reserve departmental budgets.*

Police. The proposed budget for the department is **\$4,379,030** (or **22 %** of general fund budget).

Fire. The proposed budget for the department is **\$2,829,655** (or **14%** of general fund budget). The department will be able to maintain service levels for fire prevention, fire response and first responder activities.

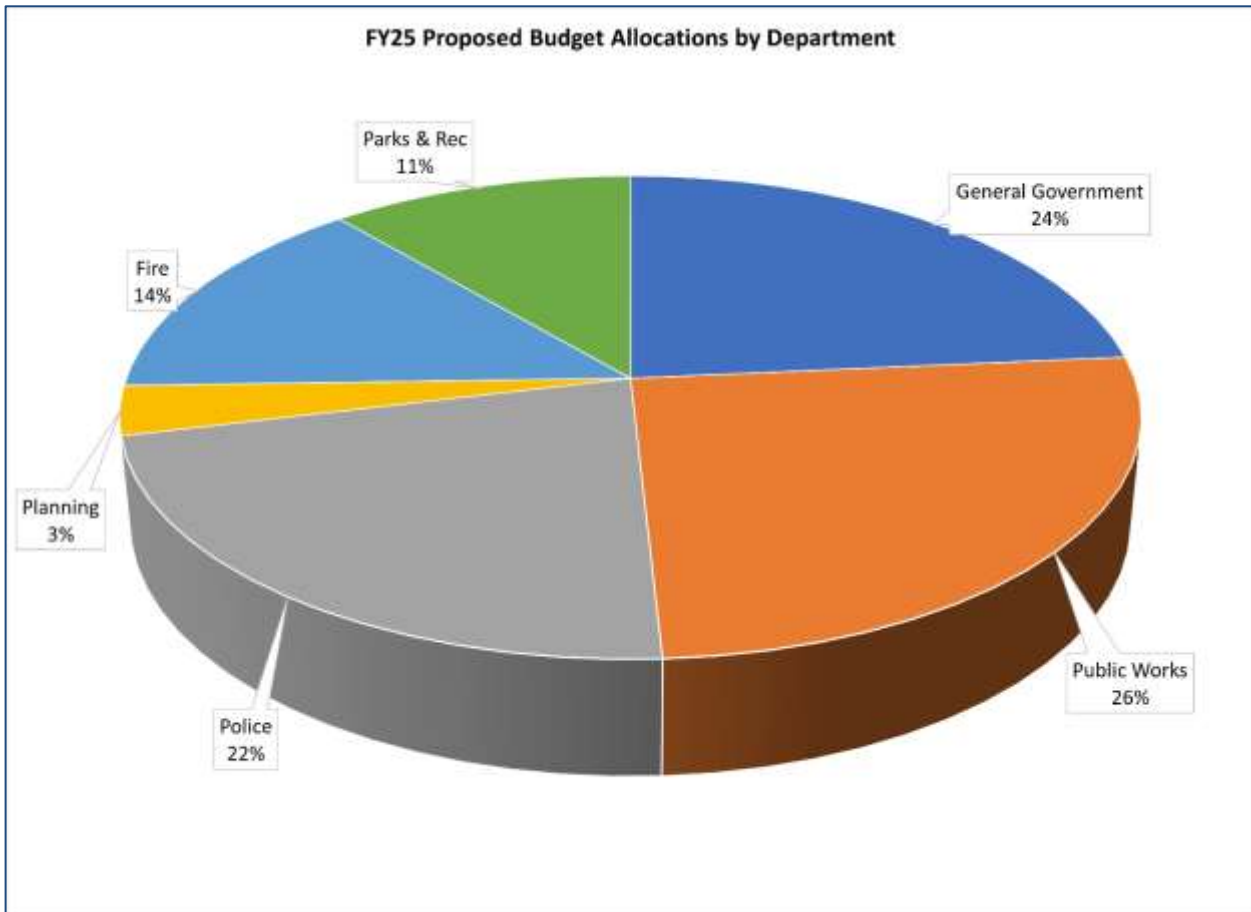
Public Works. The proposed budget for all facets of Public Works is **\$5,083,751** (or **26%** of general fund budget). It does not include any street resurfacing funding but does fund minor street repairs and patching. Funding for inmate labor is included. The Public Works Department overall budget includes divisions into *government buildings (except recreation dept. facilities), central garage, streets, solid waste, refuse, cemetery, and property maintenance.*

Parks and Recreation. The proposed budget for all departments under Parks and Recreation is **\$2,228,705** (or **11%** of general fund budget). Funding is provided to maintain operations at all facilities and increasing funding for part-time staff to ensure adequate staff coverage. Funding for the Library may continue to increase with grants, State aid and donations.

Planning and Development. The proposed budget for the department is **\$657,400** (or **3%** of general fund budget). Minimal funding was provided for expenses related to future demolition needs.

EXPENSE SUMMARY

The City of Roanoke Rapids General Fund Budget includes appropriations across six departments or department divisions.



<i>GF Expense Category</i>	<i>Allocation and % of total GF Budget</i>	
<i>General Government</i>	<i>\$ 4,673,505</i>	<i>24 %</i>
<i>Public Works</i>	<i>\$ 5,083,751</i>	<i>26 %</i>
<i>Police</i>	<i>\$ 4,379,030</i>	<i>22 %</i>
<i>Planning</i>	<i>\$ 657,400</i>	<i>3 %</i>
<i>Fire</i>	<i>\$ 2,829,655</i>	<i>14 %</i>
<i>Parks & Rec</i>	<i>\$ 2,228,705</i>	<i>11 %</i>
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>\$ 19,852,046</i>	<i>100%</i>

In Closing

The City has experienced significant change in the last year with new council members, a new City Manager and new Department Heads. **The City has a rich history and diverse culture and we must recognize how the City is evolving, growing, and advancing forward.** The FY25 budget positions the City well for the future and sets several things in motion planning for its future growth. The increased values from the revaluation have created an opportunity to set aside funds for future capital projects while planning for minimum increases in revenues.

The costs of services, materials and supplies have impacted operational expenditures despite staff efforts to monitor expenditures, find efficiencies and plan for the future.

The Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Budget is balanced in accordance with the Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act. We have attempted to address maintaining minimum service levels while maintaining our current tax rates. As always, we will continue to explore ways we can minimize our costs and improve efficiencies.

Many of our departments have major capital needs that have been delayed over the years and will need to be seriously considered for resourcing in future years. Infrastructure maintenance and upgrades, especially street repairs, need to be programmed for funding as well. **Also, continued minimum department manning and the inability to offer meaningful starting salaries or increases will have an impact on recruitment and retention of City employees.**

I would like to thank the City Administration staff for their efforts in preparing this proposed budget. As always, I offer a special “thank you” to Finance Department Staff who worked hard to provide the financial information needed to prepare this proposed budget, especially Finance Director Carmen Johnson.

Despite the immediate funding challenges the City of Roanoke Rapids faces, I remain confident and hopeful that the City will overcome these immediate challenges with innovation, technology, and engaging employees in quality services.

Budget Adoption

The City of Roanoke Rapids’ annual operating budget is adopted by ordinance in accordance with the North Carolina Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act (LGBFCA) which states that estimated revenues and appropriated fund balances equal appropriations. The budget is developed on a cash basis, including only expenditures and revenues expected to be realized during the fiscal year. State statute also sets the fiscal year as beginning July 1 and ending June 30; therefore, the City Council must adopt a budget prior to July 1st of each year.

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General Fund Revenues by Source	FY25	FY24	FY23	FY22
Ad Valorem Taxes *Alt. rate FY25*	\$ 9,673,346	\$ 7,599,702	\$ 7,221,507	\$7,134,672
Ad Valorem .01 Tax for Rescue Squad	\$ 88,000	\$ 85,000	\$ 85,000	
Prior Years Ad Valorem Taxes & Penalties	\$ 134,000	\$ 115,000	\$ 96,000	\$98,100
Payments in Lieu of Taxes	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 40,000	\$35,000
Credit & Collections Lien Accounts	\$ -	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000	\$5,000
Motor Vehicle NC License, Tax and Tags	\$ 764,000	\$ 870,024	\$ 870,024	\$869,189
Lease Vehicles	\$ 40,000	\$ 30,000	\$ 27,500	\$19,251
Business Registry Collections	\$ 2,500	\$ 4,000	\$ 4,000	\$2,000
Powell Bill Street Allocations	\$ 522,000	\$ 500,000	\$ 487,000	\$404,091
Sales Tax	\$ 3,887,200	\$ 4,090,000	\$ 3,845,000	\$3,853,758
Solid Waste Disposal Tax	\$ 12,000	\$ 12,000	\$ 12,000	\$11,214
ABC Profits	\$ 90,000	\$ 80,000	\$ 50,000	\$45,000
Christmas Parade	\$ 14,000	\$ 14,000	\$ 14,000	\$3,000
Police Grants and Donations	\$ 65,000	\$ 65,000	\$ 35,000	\$4,200
Fire Grants and Donations	\$ -	\$ 200	\$ 200	\$200
Recreation Grants	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$-
Senior Center Grants and Donations	\$ 55,225	\$ 43,625	\$ 61,625	\$71,625
Library Grants and Donations	\$ 16,000	\$ 13,910	\$ 26,600	\$4,192
Roanoke Canal Museum Grants and Donations	\$ 93,000	\$ 98,000	\$ 23,030	\$23,000
Solid Waste User Fees and Penalties	\$ 2,143,500	\$ 1,818,515	\$ 1,690,935	\$1,415,087
Court Costs	\$ 3,200	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,200	\$2,200
Animal Control	\$ 2,000	\$ 500	\$ 500	\$2,000
Inspection Fees	\$ 134,900	\$ 130,680	\$ 114,680	\$98,182
Lot Cutting Revenue	\$ 20,000	\$ 20,000	\$ 10,000	\$18,000
Cemetery Revenue	\$ 136,000	\$ 150,000	\$ 180,000	\$182,550
Recreation User Fees	\$ 64,550	\$ 48,600	\$ 42,500	\$70,362
Roanoke Canal Museum Fees	\$ 2,300	\$ 2,500	\$ 2,500	\$1,830
Community Center Receipts	\$ 55,000	\$ 35,000	\$ 35,000	\$35,000
Lease Revenue	\$ 18,000	\$ 14,732	\$ 14,732	\$14,732
Planning/Zoning Fees	\$ 14,000	\$ 12,000	\$ 12,000	\$16,209
Public Works Fees	\$ 3,575	\$ 9,200	\$ 10,000	\$8,700
Library User Fees	\$ 6,250	\$ 6,150	\$ 6,425	\$7,900
Utility Franchise Taxes	\$ 1,415,000	\$ 1,144,000	\$ 1,300,000	\$1,302,544
Beer and Wine Tax	\$ 70,800	\$ 63,000	\$ 63,000	\$63,000
Miscellaneous Grants	\$ -	\$ 10,000	\$ -	\$10,000
Miscellaneous Revenue	\$ 11,500	\$ 11,050	\$ 13,050	\$26,030
Insurance Reimbursement	\$ 2,500	\$ 2,500	\$ 2,500	\$25,000
Interest Earnings - General Fund	\$ 240,000	\$ 240,000	\$ 2,500	\$1,000
Sale of Wreck Reports	\$ 8,200	\$ 7,000	\$ 7,500	\$9,000
Occupancy Tax	\$ 4,900	\$ 5,600	\$ 4,100	\$4,100
Sale of Surplus Property	\$ 30,000	\$ 40,000	\$ 45,000	\$45,000
Restitution	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 300	\$600
Municipal Ordinance	\$ 9,600	\$ 15,000	\$ 25,000	\$27,735
	\$ 19,852,046	\$ 17,409,488	\$ 16,483,908	\$ 15,970,253

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Allocations Revised May 10, 2024

General Fund Expenses by Department	FY24 Budget Ordinance 7/1/23	FY25 Department Request	FY25 Manager Recommendation	\$ Difference FY24 to FY25	% Difference FY24 to FY'25
Legislative	\$ 52,544	\$ 87,000	\$ 91,700	\$ 39,156	43%
General Government	\$ 1,667,500	\$ 1,742,940	\$ 1,925,840	\$ 258,340	13%
Administrative	\$ 240,571	\$ 276,388	\$ 276,650	\$ 36,079	13%
Human Resources	\$ 218,764	\$ 290,965	\$ 291,190	\$ 72,426	25%
Main Street Development	\$ 74,340	\$ 84,755	\$ 86,570	\$ 12,230	14%
Elections	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000	\$ -	0%
Finance	\$ 343,155	\$ 397,407	\$ 397,625	\$ 54,470	14%
Information Systems	\$ 30,900	\$ 33,650	\$ 47,150	\$ 16,250	34%
Revenue Collections	\$ 321,372	\$ 348,254	\$ 348,255	\$ 26,883	8%
Legal	\$ 35,000	\$ 30,000	\$ 30,000	\$ (5,000)	-17%
Planning	\$ 576,216	\$ 657,807	\$ 657,400	\$ 81,184	12%
Government Buildings	\$ 90,632	\$ 130,489	\$ 140,490	\$ 49,858	35%
Police	\$ 3,732,268	\$ 4,499,324	\$ 4,379,030	\$ 646,762	15%
Fire	\$ 2,504,087	\$ 2,806,591	\$ 2,829,655	\$ 325,568	12%
Public Works	\$ 640,044	\$ 866,334	\$ 819,940	\$ 179,896	22%
Central Garage	\$ 336,205	\$ 241,547	\$ 243,110	\$ (93,095)	-38%
Street	\$ 1,324,174	\$ 1,367,822	\$ 1,364,000	\$ 39,826	3%
Solid Waste	\$ 920,964	\$ 869,573	\$ 885,350	\$ (35,614)	-4%
Refuse	\$ 525,741	\$ 672,235	\$ 699,915	\$ 174,174	25%
TJ Davis Recreation	\$ 448,571	\$ 559,627	\$ 537,980	\$ 89,409	17%
Aquatic Center	\$ 201,339	\$ 256,614	\$ 254,855	\$ 53,516	21%
Parks	\$ 573,485	\$ 627,491	\$ 644,200	\$ 70,715	11%
Chaloner Recreation	\$ 65,150	\$ 91,771	\$ 93,570	\$ 28,420	30%
Jo Story Senior Center	\$ 120,263	\$ 128,663	\$ 122,425	\$ 2,162	2%
Transportation Grant	\$ 11,950	\$ 12,350	\$ 17,350	\$ 5,400	31%
Andrews Meeting Hall	\$ 8,100	\$ 14,800	\$ 18,850	\$ 10,750	57%
Miscellaneous Grants	\$ 22,000	\$ 31,200	\$ 31,200	\$ 9,200	29%
Community Center	\$ 40,600	\$ 71,604	\$ 76,630	\$ 36,030	47%
Library	\$ 295,019	\$ 302,225	\$ 302,085	\$ 7,066	2%
Cemetery	\$ 179,266	\$ 199,968	\$ 209,725	\$ 30,459	15%
Property Maintenance	\$ 593,392	\$ 300,209	\$ 304,246	\$ (289,146)	-95%
Building Maintenance	\$ -	\$ 427,932	\$ 416,975	\$ 416,975	100%
Misc/Contributions	\$ 85,000	\$ 88,000	\$ 88,000	\$ 3,000	3%
Roanoke Canal Museum	\$ 126,300	\$ 129,300	\$ 129,560	\$ 3,260	3%
Transfers (Required)	\$ 952,140	\$ 952,140	\$ 952,140	\$ -	0%
Debt Service	\$ 400,675	\$ 135,383	\$ 135,385	\$ (265,290)	-196%
Capital Reserve	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	0%
TOTAL GENERAL FUND EXPENDITURES	\$ 17,760,727	\$ 19,735,358	\$ 19,852,046	\$ 2,091,319	10.53%

As of May 21, 2024, the FY24 expenditure budget is \$19,435,302 and the recommended FY25 budget is 2.14% higher than the FY24 amended budget.

City Manager Traynham stated the action requested tonight is for a motion to set the public hearing for Tuesday, June 4, 2024 at 5:30 p.m. to receive public comments. As part of that, it is required to advertise the proposed tax rate and reflect the totals for the proposed budget. She reminded City Council that although they advertise the budget, changes may be made up until the adoption of the budget which is scheduled during the June 18, 2024 Regular City Council meeting. She reminded City Council that a balanced budget has been presented, therefore any changes will need adjustments of revenues and expenditures to go with it. What they cannot do is advertise a tax rate and then have an increased rate upon adoption of the budget.

Mayor Doughtie referred to page 12 of 14 and read the second sentence in bold print. He said during this same time period, they received an email that the latest census reported the City of Roanoke Rapids had lost 200-300 more people since the last count and that has been the trend. He stated in the last meeting they had not generated any new revenue other than what they are going to try to do on the backs of the taxpayers. He equated that to other businesses that increase their pricing to try to keep their revenue neutral or increasing some. Eventually, it usually turns out not to be very good.

He said her presentation also mentioned that sales tax was down because people do not have as much disposable income. During the pandemic people were getting money and that had a big effect on tax revenue being up. Most of that has gone away so people do not have as much income. Realistically everything has gone up more than what they say it's gone up.

Mayor Doughtie believes the bill is in the legislature now about a casino would be a windfall for the City. If the people at the theatre can make that come to a reality it would create more sales tax, more property tax and revenues from that. That could have an extremely big effect on the City. The other thing that concerns him is the money that would go towards making it easier to carry out their business, but they are here to do whatever they can for the citizens also. He mentioned to the City Manager a couple of times about paving and she commented that maybe at the end of the year they would have some monies leftover and possibly move it into next year's budget. There are a lot of places in town that need attention as far getting around on a reasonable road to ride on. He said they talked with the Interim Planning Director at the last meeting about demolition and although she did not give them a number, they all know there are a lot of properties in town. They have heard from citizens that gave their opinion about not wanting the City to take down other people's property and he has that same feeling. If it is a health or fire hazard or an eye sore that is the kind of thing he feels could keep people from moving to this community. Maybe the legislature will see at some point how they might give the City a little more leverage

to extract some money from the people that own those properties.

He said in the presentation, she reported the City would be out of debt if they did not incur any more debt in about eight more years. When he came onto City Council 15 years ago, it was twenty-some years before they would get to that point. They can see the end of the tunnel now. They could probably pay it off in less than that. He asked the members on City Council to think about how they are going to be charged with the budget they accept, not the City Manager or department heads, it will be himself along with them that either get the praise or criticism. He knows the City Manager is charged with bringing a budget to them, but there's nothing that says they have to accept it exactly as it is; they can make changes.

Councilwoman Bryant stated based on the four years she has been on the City Council prior and this budget, it has become obvious to her that there have been a lot of needs that they have tended to neglect or not address in the past. Nobody likes to feel they are raising taxes but there also comes a time when they have to address and fix this infrastructure if they are ever going to be able to be the city they want that is going to attract people and maintain people. They cannot do that without maintaining employees. Their employees are their greatest asset. She has quoted in the past that she believes the City has good benefits and she still stands by that. But she also understands that when a person wants to come to work they want to have descent equipment to work with. When she came on City Council they addressed implementing this computer system and made a good start. She remembered receiving a call from someone out of town who was interested in putting in a proposal for a hotel and she was not going to be able to get it in by 5:00 p.m. because the City did not have a system where they could communicate and submit after hours. They have made the initial investment, heard from the different department heads how they would benefit and be more efficient, and hopefully have more time to devote to making the city better in the areas they are maintaining.

Motion was made by Councilwoman Bryant, seconded by Councilman Bell and unanimously carried to schedule a public hearing on the proposed Fiscal Year 2024-2025 budget during the June 4, 2024 City Council Meeting at 5:30 p.m.

City Manager's Report

City Manager Traynham stated they had the departmental reports enclosed in their packets. Their primary focus has been on this budget process. They look forward to the day when they will reduce their manual errors in lieu of a system that will help them with more accuracy and efficiency in the budget development process.

She recognized Parks & Recreation Director John Simeon as this is his last City Council meeting as a department head. He will move on to being a retiree June 1st. She thanked him for everything he had done, and he would be impossible to replace. He has been a joy to work with and jokingly said as Human Resources Director Caudle stated, he was the golden retriever of the group. When times were stressful, he always found a way to make everyone laugh. The City has had a lot of changes in leadership of the elected council and department heads. Every time there is a change they have to adjust and regroup. She did not look forward to having to change anything, but she does hope he enjoys every moment of his retirement. She announced on Friday, May 31st at TJ Davis Recreation Center from 11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m., a retirement reception will be held where Parks & Recreation Director Simeon will be recognized and presented with his plaque.

Councilwoman Bryant stated she wanted to publicly acknowledge Parks & Recreation Director Simeon service and thanked him for all he has done. She stated she would not be in town on May 31st. Her children grew up here and participated in all kinds of camps and different services such as swimming, basketball, soccer and all of that during his tenure. She appreciated it and they did too. Her son Kevin regards him highly. He remembers how he was treated and the students his age were treated. He said he was always fair, and she believes that sticks out and says a lot. She thanked him again for his service to the City and they will miss him.

Finance Director's Report

Finance Director Johnson reported for the period ending April 30, 2024, general fund year-to-date receipts totaled \$15,858,021.95. Year-to-date expenditures totaled \$14,650,104.85. As a result, general fund year-to-date revenues exceeded expenditures by \$1,207,917.10. After the month of April, 75.6% of the budget year has been completed.

She reported the following revenues were collected during the month of April:

- Current and Prior Year Ad Valorem Tax
- Motor Vehicle Tax
- Sales Tax
- Hold Harmless Revenue
- Residential Solid Waste Fees
- Commercial Solid Waste Fees
- Interest Revenue
- Grants & Donation Funds

Finance Director Johnson stated the City still has revenues to collect for FY 2023-2024, which have not been received, which include:

- Ad Valorem Tax for May & June
- Motor Vehicle Tax for May & June
- Sales & Use Tax for March – June
- Hold Harmless Tax for March – June
- Utility Franchise Tax Quarterly Payment in June
- Beer & Wine Tax Payment in May
- Residential and Commercial Solid Waste Fees for May & June

She stated overall she feels they are in good financial standing.

Mayor Doughtie asked how much money would they have at the end of the year. Finance Director Johnson replied she believed they would be in good shape especially with the interest earnings; they have done very well with that this year.

Other Business

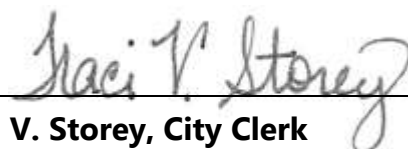
Police Chief Guyant reported the Boy Scouts asked the Police Department for assistance with placing 1,800 small American flags out in Cedarwood Cemetery on Saturday morning at 7:00 a.m. He encouraged anyone wishing to help to join them Saturday morning.

City Manager Traynham announced City offices will be closed on Monday, May 27, 2024 in observance of Memorial Day. She said the AmVets would be having the Memorial Day Ceremony at Cedarwood Cemetery on Monday at 10:00 a.m.

Mayor Doughtie stated on behalf of City Council, he wished Parks & Recreation Director Simeon a long and happy and prosperous retirement.

Adjournment

There being no further business, motion was made by Councilman Bell, seconded by Councilman Stainback and unanimously carried to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 6:36 p.m.



Traci V. Storey, City Clerk

Approved by Council Action on: June 4, 2024