



# Minutes of the Roanoke Rapids City Council

A regular meeting of the City Council of the City of Roanoke Rapids was held on **Tuesday, April 21, 2020 at 5:15 p.m.** in the Council Chambers at the Lloyd Andrews City Meeting Hall and electronically using Zoom software

**Present:** Emery G. Doughtie, Mayor  
 Carl Ferebee, Mayor Pro Tem \*  
 Ernest C. Bobbitt)  
 Sandra 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  
 Jamie Hardy, Captain/Acting Police Chief  
 Christina Caudle, Main Street Director  
 Kathy Kearney, Deputy City Clerk/Human Resources Manager \*  
 Kelly Lasky, Planning & Development Director \*  
 Larry Chalker, Public Works Director \*  
 Jason Patrick, Fire Chief \*

**Absent:** Bobby Martin, Police Chief  
 John Simeon, Parks & Recreation Director

*\*Denotes those joining remotely using Zoom.*

Mayor Doughtie called the meeting to order and the City of Roanoke Rapids will be keeping measures in place in an ongoing effort to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. These measures include barring physical attendance at City Council meetings by the public, employing social distancing, and implementing remote participation. City Council is conducting an electronic or virtual meeting using Zoom software this evening and will do so until further notice. The City of Roanoke Rapids has a Remote Participation Policy in place which allows City Council members to participate and vote in certain official City Council meetings.

He stated along with himself, two City Council members are present here in the Lloyd Andrews City Meeting Hall. They are Councilwoman Scarbrough and Councilman

Bobbitt, City Manager Scherer, City Clerk Storey, Finance Director Etheridge, Acting Police Chief Hardy and Main Street Director Caudle are also present. Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee, Councilwoman Bryant, Councilman Smith and City Attorney Davis are joining the meeting electronically.

He announced the meeting was also being live-streamed on the City Channel, Spectrum Channel 193. The public was invited to join the meeting via Zoom in order to listen and visually see the meeting taking place.

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 Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee, seconded by Councilman Bobbitt and unanimously carried to adopt the business agenda as presented.

### **Public Comment (Scheduled)**

Mayor Doughtie said the following procedures have been put in place to provide the public with the ability to address the City Council during the Public Comment Period by remote access.

- Registered participants were given a link to speak during the meeting via Zoom.
- Callers will be held in queue and will be muted until they are called on to speak.
- Speakers will be called in the order that they are registered.
- Individual comments are limited to five minutes for those who requested to speak during the Scheduled Public Comment Period and three minutes for those who requested to speak during the Unscheduled Public Comment Period.
- If a person participating remotely willfully disrupts the Council meeting, then upon direction by the Mayor, such person may be removed from electronic participation.
- The public was also given the opportunity to submit written comments to be read by the City Clerk during the Public Comment Period.

Mr. Jarrett Taylor who had requested to speak during the Scheduled Public Comment was not logged in, therefore was not available to speak.

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

Motion was made by Councilwoman Scarbrough, seconded by Councilman Bobbitt and unanimously carried to approve the March 17, 2020 Regular City Council Meeting Minutes as submitted.

### **New Business**

#### **Consideration of Contract with Gregory T. Redman, CPA to Conduct Annual Audit for FY Ending June 30, 2020**

Finance Director Etheridge stated in accordance with NCGS 159-34(a), City Council must approve a contract for the audit of the City's financial statements.

She said copies of the engagement letter and contract with Gregory T. Redman, CPA to conduct the audit of the City's financial statements for 2020 for \$19,900 were enclosed in City Council's packets. She asked City Council to consider a motion to authorize the mayor to execute the engagement letter and contract.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if the fee was in line with previous years. Finance Director Etheridge replied it was the same fee as in prior years so there was no increase.

Motion was made by Councilman Smith, seconded by Councilwoman Bryant and unanimously carried to approve the letter of engagement and contract with Gregory T. Redman, CPA to conduct the audit of the City's financial statements for 2020 for \$19,900.00, and to authorize the mayor to execute the engagement letter and contract.

#### **Consideration of Amendment to Chapter 96 of the Roanoke Rapids Code of Ordinances**

City Attorney Geoffrey Davis presented the following amendment to the noise ordinance:

ORDINANCE NO. 2020.05

**AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND CHAPTER 96 "NUISANCES" OF THE ROANOKE RAPIDS CITY CODE.**

**NOW, THEREFORE BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ROANOKE RAPIDS that:**

**SECTION 1. Chapter 96, § 96.36 (E) be amended to add funeral parlors and read as follows:**

**§ 96.36 PROHIBITED NOISE ENUMERATED.**

(E) The creation of any excessive noise on any street adjacent to any school, institution of learning, or court while the same are in session, or within 150 feet of any hospital or funeral parlor which unreasonably and unnecessarily interferes with the working of such institutions;

**SECTION 2.** This ordinance shall become effective upon adoption.

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Emery G. Doughtie, Mayor

ATTEST:

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Traci V. Storey, City Clerk

He stated City Council had discussed the matter before and it basically adds funeral parlors in this section of the ordinance.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if the City had a way to measure the noise. Attorney Davis replied the courts have placed some fairly defined constitutional limitations on what you can do in noise ordinances. The wording in the last part of E) states, “which unreasonably and unnecessarily interferes with the working of such institutions.” That is the kind of limitation and how it is measured. So for instance if a fire truck came by with its siren blaring going to a call, obviously it is necessary and reasonable. Also, the 150 feet distance from the source of the noise.

Motion was made by Councilman Smith, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee and unanimously carried to adopt Ordinance No. 2020.05 amending Chapter 96, Section 96.36(E) of the Roanoke Rapids Code of Ordinances.

<p><b>City Manager’s Report</b></p>
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City Manager Scherer gave the following report:

First, neither the Governor nor us has issued a mandatory wearing of gloves and a mask while out in public. However, it is a very good idea to do so if you can. Even a handkerchief or bandanna around your nose and mouth will help control the spread and infection rate of the virus. I ask everyone to please continue social distancing actions wherever you are as much as possible.

Please check out our City of Roanoke Rapids Government Facebook page for virus

information, videos, and other news.

During the virus restrictions we continue to provide full-service trash/refuse pickup with our dedicated employees. Be sure to give them a smile and a wave when you see them out and about, as they provide a service that is vital but few of us want to do. Also, our Police and Fire Departments are fully staffed and prepared to provide effective public safety services whenever needed.

Like every other city in North Carolina, the COVID-19 virus has had a negative impact on our economy. This means our City revenue will be reduced, leading me to determine spending reduction measures to implement for the rest of this fiscal year. While the total economic impact of the virus cannot be measured yet, I know next year's budget will be negatively impacted as well so we are looking at a very restrictive budget for the City in FY 20/21.

Finally, I'm asking all our citizens to please complete your Census 2020 information request. The amount of Federal financial aid the City and County receives is directly based on the Census information. It is only 9 questions and can be completed online, in the mail, or by phone. The data collected from the US Census helps determine political representation for our state and the amount of funding invested in our community. Census data helps decide how more than \$16 billion in federal funding gets used each year. What does the census data do?

- a) Determines the number of representatives in Congress for North Carolina.
- b) Allocates federal funds in North Carolina.
- c) Provide information needed to improve schools, roads, health care, emergency response and other services in our community.

Councilman Smith expressed his concerns about the small business people in town. He said a lot of stores are shut down. Most of the major stores like Walmart and food chains are able to function such as grocery stores, liquor stores, car dealers and some furniture stores. The only ones shut down are the small business people on the avenue and other small businesses around town. In his personal opinion, he thinks it is time for the City to send a letter to the governor asking him to start giving these small business people some relief. He hopes older people such as himself know better than to go out into it. He feels the City needs to do something to help these small business people in town.

City Manager Scherer reported that Main Street Director Caudle pointed out to him that one of the businesses on the Avenue requested to be deemed essential by the Department of Commerce and got their approval 24 hours after submitting their

request. She is reaching out to other businesses as well to see if they want to do the same thing.

Councilman Smith asked if that was the business that started selling wine. City Manager Scherer replied that was correct. Councilman Smith stated if you sell alcohol the governor will let you do whatever you want to do, but people that don't drink would like to go to other businesses around town. Maybe with Main Street Director Caudle working on it maybe we can get some other things going in town. We cannot afford to let the businesses go out.

Mayor Doughtie asked Attorney Davis if he knew of any upcoming press conferences or any reports that the governor may have on his schedule where we might hear some changes in these conditions. Attorney Davis replied he was not aware of any and the governor is the one that gets to call the shots. If the governor were to relax some of the restrictions, the next natural step would be for the City to take a look at its emergency declaration and what we would need to do to bring that in line or revise it. But as of right now he did not know of anything on the horizon.

City Manager Scherer said he agrees with Councilman Smith that maybe a letter should be sent to the Governor's office, but he believes it would be more effective if it came from the County Commissioners that asks for the entire county to be considered for relief as soon as possible.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee stated he would like to go on record thanking the City for the different contributions made to the hospital during this pandemic episode. There were things donated and done so he wanted to thank the City for that effort and all other individuals as well.

Councilman Smith asked if the Mayor, Attorney Davis or City Manager Scherer discussed whether or not it was time to lift the curfew and let people start moving around.

Mayor Doughtie said he's had some discussion with the County about trying to be on the same page when making decisions on that. That was one reason he asked Attorney Davis if he had heard that the governor may relax some of the restrictions soon.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said he had mixed emotions about that and he has seen the petitions in Raleigh, but in his personal opinion he believes opening a little too early could create some issues there. At the same he believes with some sort of guidance that reopening some of the businesses could be done adequately. Lifting the entire

ordinance may create an issue.

Councilman Smith stated he had a lot of concern about the Health Department because they will not tell us where the virus is – whether it is in Roanoke Rapids, Halifax, Enfield or nothing. They only tell us that we have cases of it. He believes it is now 39 cases of it and 19 of those 39 have now recovered from it. If the people were aware of the area that the virus was in they could stay out of that area. If it is in Roanoke Rapids, then we need to stay shut down. We don't even know how many cases are in Roanoke Rapids. We are being left in the dark. The County should at least let the leaders know what is going on.

City Manager Scherer said he had this discussion with the County Health Director and indicates by law he is not allowed to provide that information to us or anyone.

Councilwoman Bryant added that has been her understanding also, based on HIPAA they are not allowed to release that information. Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee stated that was correct. He said there has to be some order in that because if it is opened up and say Roanoke Rapids doesn't have that many then everybody is going to come to Roanoke Rapids and it could start. From watching some the news and what other states are doing, he thinks the governor is looking at that carefully. Personally, the City needs to go with what is being done by our leaders and if the City were to do something, to do it strategically.

Mayor Doughtie asked City Manager Scherer to continue to be in conversation with the County Health Department and anything we can gain from the hospital. They are the health care professionals and we need to consider what they are telling us. That is all we can do other than waiting to see what the governor does and hope it will be in good time.

Councilman Smith asked Attorney Davis if this had anything to do with the HIPAA laws because he thought that law just has to do with the individual address and the person, not the county or city.

Attorney Davis replied that although the Health Department could explain their reasoning better than he could, he suspects that part of it is even if they do not reveal the person's name or address, when you start revealing that kind of information it becomes easy in small communities and neighborhoods to identify a person. Even if they are not revealing specific pieces of information from the different kind of points, it may reveal or show who that person is. He would defer to the Health Department or the City Manager may be able to speak to this as well, that if someone does test positive, he understands that there is an attempt to contact the individuals that they

have come in contact with to try to track down if there has been any more spread or let people know it might be a good idea to keep a watch on things.

City Manager Scherer reported this afternoon the Senate passed a \$450 billion relief bill for small businesses. So maybe this next round of relief funding will help some of our local businesses.

Councilman Smith said he saw that and asked if any of the businesses in town received any of the money. City Manager Scherer replied that he knew of one or two that had received some of the federal funding from the first round.

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

Finance Director Etheridge presented the March 2020 Financial report. She reported the General Fund year to date receipts totaled \$12,655,390. The percentage of actual money collected of adopted budgeted figures is 73.6%. General Fund year to date expenditures totaled \$12,172,237. The percentage of actual monies expended of adopted budgeted figures is 70.8%. After the month of March, 75.00% of the budget year has been completed. As a result, year-to-date revenues exceeded expenditures by \$483,153.

As a result of the current COVID-19 virus pandemic, we will recognize revenue shortfalls due to loss in Sales & Use Taxes, Revenue from Service Fees, and all Parks and Recreation revenue. Facility revenue is being refunded to Citizens who had reserved venues before the closures. We are not sure the overall revenue impact on our 4<sup>th</sup> quarter as we move into April and May; however, it will be decreased.

Additionally, no one is sure how long this mandatory shut down will last, or how long this may also negatively impact financial operations going into FY 2020-21. We remain focused on providing services to our citizens while keeping our employees safe. Financial staff are also continuing to monitor both our revenues and our expenditures very closely during this unprecedented time.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said she indicated there was not a dollar prediction of the shortfall due to the virus and asked if there were any monies that could be sought after in relation to that.

Finance Director Etheridge replied they would absolutely look for any monies that would help assist them during this crisis and pandemic. At the present time, it is too soon to know the complete economic impact on our budget since many of our revenues run several months behind on the actual month with collections.



City Manager Scherer said the NC League of Municipalities has been advocating on behalf of the City and all the cities at the State and Federal level to receive aid from those agencies to help offset revenue shortfalls.

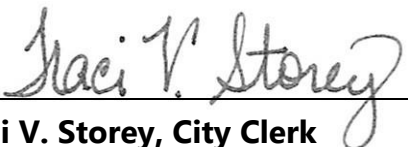
Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said hopefully something can come in for the small cities. He sees things for the larger cities so hopefully the smaller cities will be able to receive some of those dollars.

Councilman Smith asked when City Council would be getting together with the Finance Director and City Manager to start discussing the budget. City Manager Scherer replied he would provide City Council a recommended calendar later this week and confirm dates for them to discuss the development of next years' budget. Councilman Smith stated he wanted to get started before June.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if there was a way for City Manager Scherer to present a somewhat complete package and City Council could preview it early since he knows what is going to be hit more than he would. City Manager Scherer replied yes he could.

<b>Adjournment</b>
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There being no further business, motion was made by Councilwoman Bryant, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee and unanimously carried to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

  
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**Traci V. Storey, City Clerk**

**Approved by Council Action on: May 5, 2020**