



# 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 19, 2020 at 5:15 p.m.** in the Council Chambers at the Lloyd Andrews City Meeting Hall

**Present:** Emery G. Doughtie, Mayor  
Carl Ferebee, Mayor Pro Tem  
Ernest C. Bobbitt)  
Sandra 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  
John Simeon, Parks & Recreation Director

**Absent:** Bobby Martin, Police Chief

*\*Denotes those joining remotely using Zoom.*

Mayor Doughtie called the meeting to order and stated 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 prohibiting mass gatherings and practicing social distancing. City Council members and limited staff are present here in the Lloyd Andrews City Meeting Hall. Although the public was not invited to physically attend tonight's meeting, they were invited to join the meeting via Zoom, listen by telephone or watch on Spectrum Channel 193

Mayor Doughtie offered an invocation.

## **Adoption of Business Agenda**

Mayor Doughtie asked Council members about any known conflicts of interest with respect to the matters before them this evening.

There being no conflicts, motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee, seconded by Councilwoman Scarbrough and unanimously carried to approve the business agenda for May 19, 2020 as presented.

## **Public Comment (Unscheduled)**

### **Jan Morgan**

City Clerk Storey read the following written comments submitted by email from Jan Morgan:

I agree with the points made by Jan Wicker in the letter to the May 8, 2020 letter to the RR Spin editor. This facility factored strongly in my decision to move to this area 2 years ago. It provides a valuable service to the citizens of Roanoke Rapids by providing a year round facility which enables citizens to maintain and improve their physical health with low impact wellness and recovery classes coupled with the availability to swim laps or work independently.

In addition, this facility is necessary for the local swim teams to exist and continue to train and compete. With many school enrichment programs constantly being cut let us not eliminate yet another program for our students.

I believe this is an important benefit to the community and strongly encourage a better solution to the budget issues than closing this facility.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Jan Morgan  
802 Halifax St.  
Roanoke Rapids, NC

## **Approval of City Council Minutes**

Motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee, seconded by Councilwoman Bryant and unanimously carried to approve the May 5, 2020 Regular City Council Meeting Minutes as drafted.

## New Business

### Presentation of Detailed Proposed FY 2020-2021 Budget

Finance Director Etheridge said she had a few housekeeping items on the budget as a result of the May 12, 2020 meeting she missed. They made the following changes to the budget per City Council's recommendations:

- No furloughs
- \$20,000 added to Planning & Development for demolition
- \$8,000 added to the Fire Department for annual physicals
- \$5,500 added to the Police Department (\$5,000 training; \$500 for ammo)

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if she would cover what changes were made to the total budget for the items listed above. Finance Director Etheridge said she would be reviewing the Administrative department and answer any questions they may have. They rebalanced the budget by basically giving a second pass at the revenues. In some cases they had to increase them to where they think they will end the year, but due to COVID-19, they don't know. They may have to come back to City Council next year as they see this budget is going to be a dynamic moving budget; month by month, quarter by quarter.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said he may ask that question again as he was looking for a dollar figure for what the cost of the no furlough would be, adding \$20,000 for demolition etc. Finance Director Etheridge replied the no furlough dollar figure was \$470,000.

Councilman Smith asked questions about the revenue. He asked if the City leases vehicles to people. She replied no, that is through the tax department. People that lease vehicles, the City receives a portion of tax paid on behalf of the State and the County. He asked about the sweeping agreement. It states \$10,000 but the budget has \$9,000. She replied the agreement is for not to exceed \$10,000 but the City actually only billed NCDOT for \$9,000. They budget actual.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if there would be any loses due to COVID-19 that they may not be able to recover. She replied there could be, but they do not have any information or trending at this point. The ad valorem taxes are configured at .651, they do not include a tax increase at our current collection rate.

Mayor Doughtie asked about the payments in lieu of for \$33,000. Finance Director Etheridge replied they receive taxes from the Halifax County Tax Department on

behalf of the Housing Authority properties. As an economic incentive to the Housing Authority the City pays that to them so it is a pass through.

City Council reviewed the revenue section of the budget.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked about Penn Credit and Collections for \$5,000. He noticed there was nothing in the budget or actual from the previous year. Finance Director Etheridge said this was a new process that City Council and the City Manager entered into for collections of old liens. At the present time with it being a slow start up, this is what we have collected year-to-date. In lieu of COVID-19, they were keeping it the same as prior year. If the City receives more than that, it is always good. She clarified this was expected revenue they would collect. Penn Credit is a company that collects old debt.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked about privilege license collections. Finance Director Etheridge replied it is the basis of what the City can charge which is a \$20 business registration fee since the NC statute went away in 2014 to allow billing of privilege licenses. It was a large revenue loss for municipalities.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked about interest earnings. Finance Director Etheridge said this was lowered due to the current economic conditions and the feds have lowered the interest rates three times in the past year. He asked if any of this was due to COVID-19. She replied it could be. She stated they would include this in the segregated line item for COVID-19.

City Council discussed increases in revenue for lot cutting, fees, fines and insurance reimbursements from prior years. Finance Director Etheridge said they were trending this to actual to balance the budget. They may have to bring it back to City Council once they see what the results of COVID-19 does to the revenue. She said since they have to balance the budget they either cut more, bring revenues down or look at other options. Some of the other options they are looking at were other furlough options (not the entire city) or the possibility of receiving federal or state funding from the County.

Councilman Smith asked what the percentage sales tax revenue is expected to be down. She replied they have not received any guidance which is making the budget difficult to manage. Sales tax collections runs two months behind. We will not know impacts until June 15<sup>th</sup> for April sales. They will then be able to trend for next year.

City Council continued to discuss revenue budgets for General Purpose, State Aid Per Capita (Library funding), Contribution from Tourism (occupancy tax, concession sales

and canal trail maintenance), Residential Solid Waste, and Commercial Solid Waste.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked for the total dollar amount in General Fund. She replied the Undesignated Fund Balance is \$2.8M. He asked about the decrease in revenue for the Aquatic Center; was it due to reduced hours and if the hours increased would revenues increase. She replied she had not made any changes since first preparing the budget. They reviewed NCLM guidance on recreation budgets and decreases across the board in revenues due to COVID-19.

Councilman Smith said since they were asking for department heads to cut, he asked City Council to consider not taking a salary this year to help out. This would add \$45,000 back into the budget.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said if all the other City employees wanted to do without a salary, he would do without a salary; he was an employee. He said although it was a small stipend, he would have a problem with that.

Councilman Smith said they volunteered and were elected to serve the city. He wanted to put it on the table to discuss it.

Councilwoman Scarbrough stated she did not mind giving up her salary, but believes it should be an individual decision.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said there were some statutes that would require a 100% agreement to put that in a form of a motion and passed. Councilman Smith stated he did not put it in a form of a motion.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if revenue from municipal ordinances went to the state or would it all come to the City. Finance Director Etheridge replied there are certain components the City keeps but other components that Acting Chief Hardy would know about.

Finance Director Etheridge stated they trend revenues based on NCLM guidance and where they think the City is heading based on how revenues have come in during the current year. Now with COVID-19 being the big question mark, when they look at all revenues, they will need to know when they get into first quarter next year how much they will need to reduce of what they adopt potentially, if they do not reduce them now. They are trying to be conservative with revenues.

Mayor Doughtie asked if the \$60,000 Fund Balance was to balance the budget. She replied yes, that was another area they had to use on this pass of the budget.

Councilman Smith made a motion that they not furlough any employees of the City.

Finance Director Etheridge stated there were no furloughs in this budget. They have some scenarios they could bring to City Council if trying to balance on the next pass. It looks at different salary levels with shorter days and it does not impact anyone that makes under \$30,000 annually.

Councilman Smith confirmed with Finance Director Etheridge that there were not any furloughs in the budget. Being true, he withdrew his motion.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said he would like to look at them. Finance Director Etheridge said she would provide that data.

City Council began reviewing the Expenditures in the budget.

### **Administrative**

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said in the last City Council meeting, they discussed E-911 and the City looking into doing it themselves since the cost has gone up. He asked what would that mean for the City, would the cost be more or less.

City Manager Scherer stated the City has looked at it in the past preliminarily and had discussions with the State 911 Board about the revenue that could be provided for that operation. He said they plan to take another hard look at that and what it would cost the City to set up and run that operation and what kind of revenue could they expect to get from the State 911 Board for that.

Councilman Smith asked was there any way the City could get the phone tax. City Manager Scherer replied that was a question of the State 911 Board who they asked before and how much the City could receive. They will have to ask them again because right now all that revenue goes to the County.

City Council continued to review the Administrative expenditures.

Finance Director Etheridge stated unfortunately there would be no funding under 6700 Miscellaneous (Rescue Squad, Boys & Girls Club, Beautification and Halifax Co. Crime Stoppers).

Mayor Doughtie asked for an explanation of the \$1,256,000 and how it relates into past Theatre payments. Finance Director Etheridge replied approximately \$952,000 is for the City's tax exempt loan 2017A and approximately \$304,000 of that remaining balance is the taxable loan 2017B.

Mayor Doughtie stated that was a significant decrease in the amount the City has been paying the last eight or nine years due to the refinancing. Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said if looking at this one page, it does not show that savings. It appears the City is paying more, but that is not the case. He asked could it be shown differently.

Mayor Doughtie said the City had one long-term note and one short-term note and when it was refinanced it created a higher total payment. Finance Director Etheridge said the City is saving in interest; the interest payment is where they will see the savings.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if there was some way to show this. Finance Director Etheridge stated she could put a spreadsheet behind it.

City Council called upon Public Works Director Chalker to review the Public Works Department budget.

### **Public Works**

Public Works Director Chalker provided City Council with handouts showing information requested in the last meeting. The first handout was a census of public works employees. He said in 2006 public works had 41 full-time employees and there were a tremendous amount of part-time workers for different tasks during that time. Moving forward over the years there was a little fluctuation and it gradually increases with 46 employees going into this year. They have some positions that they will freeze with retirements.

The next handout was a comparison between the number of City Public Works Department employees and other city's public works departments by population. He noted there was a variation in the number of employees. Some may have water and sewer employees. He called their attention to the Town of Stallings who have 2 employees because they contract out everything. Public Works Director Chalker stated he did not know the cost to the citizens because he did not have time to dig that deep, but did talk to one of the employees.

He presented a third document which was a detailed Public Works Department census from 2007-2008. At that time they had 46 full-time positions, 8 full-time part-time positions, 25 full-time part-time seasonal positions. Also at that time they had 18 dedicated workers in the street department. Today, they have 6-7 depending on the season. The other street department employees have to help out property maintenance because they do not have many property maintenance employees. Cutting grass and picking up leaves is labor intensive work. He stated they had a ton of positions they could make use of back then and of these positions was a total

restructure after some financial problems from the creation of the Theatre.

Public Works Director Chalker reviewed the Public Works Department budget with City Council.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee expressed his concern on making cuts that were not realistic. Public Works Director Chalker said they had to make cuts to get the 20% based on their experience. Some maintenance items such as flooring and painting that are nice to have when there is funding, but they have to be cut out when making deep budget cuts. There could be some line items that they may have to bring back to City Council. Their attempt is to achieve a 20% cut and he feels strongly that they have the talented individuals on staff to get them there.

Public Works Director Chalker continued to review his budget cuts.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee again stated his concern over cutting line items such as automotive supplies because if they are working on something they will need supplies. Public Works Director Chalker replied he started in the garage as a mechanic or technician for the City so he is familiar with that operation. In the beginning there was no line for automotive supplies. Gradually they have added this account and have bought specialty tools. As automobiles are produced and each new year model comes out, there is a new specialty tool needed. But they will have to try to go a year without having to buy one of those specialty tools. They may have to wait on updating some software as well. He said they made cuts where they felt they could make cuts. His hands and his management teams' hands have been on these cuts. He stated although he has not come back before City Council about the budget in his tenure, he was not ashamed to do so if needed. He has a big budget so there is the possibility of transfers within his budget.

Public Works Director Chalker reviewed the Solid Waste budget. He stated the Landfill Tipping Fee cut of \$75,000 could be the biggest gamble out of his entire budget. It is budgeted higher than normal because they do not always know what the market rate is going to do. There could be a market fluctuation at the transfer station. They have to pay them based on the weight they dump out. They do not know of any increases, but today they feel it is a good cut.

Public Works Director Chalker continued reviewing his budget line by line.

Councilman Smith stated one of the City's best assets is the cemetery because they keep it so clean and asked how the cuts were going to affect it. Public Works Director Chalker replied the cemetery looks as good as it does because the employees care about what they do, so that is not going to change. They will not be cutting overtime.

They actually charge for after-hour burials and funerals so that money comes back into the General Fund for overtime.

Mayor Doughtie asked if the mosquito fogger line item was for a piece of equipment or to actually spray the city. Public Works Director Chalker replied the machine was a budget line item from last year that they did not need to resubmit for this year. They have two brand new machines and the service will still be performed as long as they can afford to buy the chemicals. Some of the line items where they buy the chemicals have been reduced so they may not be able to spray as much. It costs approximately \$5,000 a week if spraying at full capacity.

Public Works Director Chalker reviewed the Street Department budget cuts.

Councilman Smith asked what was the total dollar amount he cut out of his budget. Public Works Director Chalker replied \$917,002 plus three positions. It was over \$934,000 with salaries and fringes, he did not have that final amount yet.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if the three cut positions were by attrition or freeze. He replied they were going to be by attrition. One of the salaries was a full-time part-time position they were using as a hiring pool. It was empty so they froze it immediately. The other one was an employee that was injured and was not able to report to work and he did not have any more time. He was only getting very small pay amounts based on what he accrued between paychecks. They froze that position and he was basically laid off which allowed him to go get some benefits. A future position which is a retirement coming up July 1<sup>st</sup> will be attrition. Someone, hopefully internally, will be awarded that position and the job they are in would be frozen.

Mayor Doughtie confirmed all the part-time help was cut.

Councilman Smith stated Public Works cut their budget 20% this year and asked how much they cut last year. Public Works Director Chalker replied somewhere between 10-15%.

Councilwoman Bryant asked if the increase in salaries under Property Maintenance was due to an increase in personnel. Public Works Director Chalker replied he was not aware of any increase in personnel. He said it was not in this particular budget year, but he recalled increasing one department when they switched two employees between Public Works and Parks & Recreation. The new position was a Building Maintenance Supervisor. They went through a small restructure to keep building maintenance separate from property maintenance. Property Maintenance is mainly outside work – mowing, weed-eating etc. while Building Maintenance is more

technical work such as running ethernet cable, electrical, plumbing etc. That could be part of the difference.

City Council called upon Planning & Development Director Lasky to review the Planning & Development Department budget.

### **Planning & Development**

Planning & Development Director Lasky stated the budget before them has been modified with the requests from the previous meeting. The Demolition line item has been increased by \$20,000. All other line items remain the same.

Mayor Doughtie asked about the small increase under salaries. She replied last year they added a new employee, an administrative assistant so that salary reflects the difference.

City Council called upon Acting Police Chief Hardy to review the Police Department budget.

### **Police**

Acting Chief of Police Hardy said as discussed in the last budget meeting, he spoke with City Manager Scherer about what they could do to possibly keep some of their officers. They added their training budget back in which is a total of \$4,400. He said the officers always talk about going out to just shoot. They used to qualify twice a year, now they only do it once a year. He asked City Manager Scherer if they could put additional money in the ammo line to supply each officer with one box of ammo. It was only a \$600 increase to allow officers to shoot on their own time.

He said under equipment lease for printers and copiers, taking a cut on that would not hurt them. He said the software support line was cut to \$5,000. The actual cost for RMS is \$5,409 which is the reporting system for the department and it goes up every year. They also have a social media search tool that is \$2,388 a year. So with the budget of \$5,000 they will be \$2,797 short in that line item.

Acting Chief Hardy said the educational bonuses they give to officers that have degrees was budgeted at \$3,690 this past year and they are already at \$3,880. This budget was cut back to \$1,000. This may be something they have to do away with because they cannot afford it. It was an incentive for officers who have degrees. It is an extra \$25 in their paycheck.

Councilwoman Bryant asked once they get it do they continue to get it. Acting Chief Hardy replied yes that was correct. If they hire someone new, the department doesn't

have to offer it. It was a departmental policy, not a City policy. He had a few offer to give it up to help out.

Attorney Davis replied once officers have been hired and offered that unless they voluntarily gave it up, the City cannot take it away. The department could stop offering it to new employees.

Councilman Smith asked Acting Chief Hardy how much more was he requesting for the total budget. He replied he did not have a total amount, but with no requests for capital items, cutting overtime, one-time bonuses, on-call pay and part-time salaries, they were hoping to keep what they had.

Councilman Smith suggested Acting Chief Hardy to get back with City Manager Scherer and Finance Director Etheridge on the educational bonuses.

Mayor Doughtie asked if they were able to purchase ammunition cheaper than retail. Acting Chief Hardy replied yes they get it through State contract so it is a lot cheaper.

Councilwoman Scarbrough asked if the department still had drug dogs. He replied yes, they have five dogs. Actually this past week one of them was involved with a stop by the Halifax County Sheriff's office where \$25,000 was seized.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked about the body cameras and in car cameras. He feels that is important and asked if the \$3,000 was adequate. Acting Chief Hardy replied with the way their body cameras are now, they are buying parts to keep them running. They have received one quote from a company called Equature and it is \$90,000 to replace them. He talked with Axon because he was working on the taser contract and they offer body cameras. They would explore that more in the future. They just purchased three body cameras to hopefully get them through this year. Captain Vaught does a good job keeping them up and running. They purchased three cameras and four camera heads for a total of \$2,500.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said he thought someone donated some cameras in the past. City Manager Scherer said it was through grant and donations.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said they needed to keep those as well as they can because it not only protects them from what they are doing out there and feel safer to show what actually happened. From both sides, it is important to keep those intact to protect everybody. Acting Chief Hardy agreed and said the body cameras are crucial to law enforcement this day in time.

Councilman Smith asked how they were feeding five dogs, animal control putting food out and vet bill for \$6,500. Acting Chief Hardy replied some of the vet offices are donating food to animal control. As for the K-9s, it is an average of \$2,600 per year for food. Creekside Animal Hospital has been donating the flea and tick preventative as well as the heartworm preventative.

City Council called upon Parks & Recreation Director Simeon to review the Parks & Recreation Department budget.

**Parks & Recreation**

Parks & Recreation Director Simeon reviewed the Aquatic Center and TJ Davis outdoor pool analysis handout. He pointed out the outdoor pool hours and said they are open 54 weekly hours from June – August.

**Patron Count**

June 2019	2,067
July 2019	1,911
August 2019	432
<b>Total:</b>	<b>4,410</b>

**Revenues for 2019**

Outdoor pool revenue	\$3,084
Non-resident fees	\$3,303
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$6,387</b>

Parks & Recreation Director Simeon said some of the cost figures were not going to be exact because the outdoor pool utilities fall within the TJ Davis building. Also, the pool maintenance for the outdoor pool falls within the pool maintenance for the Aquatic Center. They are going to be close but not exact. Per Council’s request, closing the outdoor pool would be a savings of \$15,748. That includes lifeguards and chemicals but does not include the utilities and maintenance costs.

He said the second request was to add additional hours to the Aquatic Center to offset the outdoor pool and keep open swim and swim lessons. That cost would be \$15,000 to go toward part-time and chemicals.

Councilman Smith stated it seems the City would be better off opening both pools. Parks & Recreation Director Simeon replied part of his budget presentation was based on COVID-19 and the restrictions that come with opening a pool. The Governor is supposed to come out later this week and give very strict restrictions on opening a pool. There could be savings if the outdoor pool was closed and add additional hours

to the Aquatic Center and offer open swim, swim lesson and opportunity for the summer swim team.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if he thought the June patron numbers of 2,067 would not exist due to COVID-19. Parks & Recreation Director Simeon said that was correct and if they did, it would be very minute. Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said they had talked about revenues based on COVID-19 and this was revenue lost; he hopes that will be included on spreadsheet.

Parks & Recreation Director Simeon said according to State Parks & Recreation Association and the National Parks & Recreation Association, they are looking at best opening in mid-July and at that point it would be capped at 50 people. Other recreation programs around the state are already saying they would not be opening their outdoor pools due to budget concerns while others are talking about opening up and following restrictions and guidelines.

Councilman Smith stated that goes along with both pools. There is still going to be restrictions to the number of people. A certain amount of towns are not going to open their aquatic centers because of the virus. It is a lot of things City Council needs to think about too. He was not saying to shut the Aquatic Center down, but let the City Manager and Mayor finish negotiating with the people they are negotiating with about the Aquatic Center. Also, he expected him to come back tonight with increases in fees that was going to be charged. Parks & Recreation Director Simeon said he asked NC State Recreation Resources who gathers that type of information last week after the meeting and they are getting an overwhelming response. He expects to receive that information in a day or two and he will forward to City Council.

Councilwoman Scarbrough said at the Jo Story Senior Center, patrons sign in and out and asked if patrons do that at the Aquatic Center. He replied patrons do the same at the Aquatic Center for whatever type of activity they are there for.

Councilman Bobbitt asked if he had plans to fix the outdoor pool. Parks & Recreation Director Simeon replied yes, he talked with a contractor last week and they are supposed to come take a look at it shortly to give an idea on how bad of a leak it is. The leak could be one small leak or six large leaks. He will not know that until they come out. The amount of water that is dropping is not significant at this point, but there is some water being lost. Mayor Doughtie asked if they would inspect the mechanical part of it. Parks & Recreation Director said he can have them check that because they have a maintenance contract with this company and they come out and check it on a quarterly basis.

Parks & Recreation Director Simeon reviewed the Aquatic Center analysis.

Total usage (contacts) at the Aquatic Center for 2019 was 14,444.

**Revenues for 2019**

Aquatic Pool	\$29,636
Admission Fee Swim Meets	\$715
Non-Resident Fees	\$5,519
Aquatic Building Rental	\$6,474
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$42,344</b>

Complete closure of outdoor pool and Aquatic Center would be a savings of \$141,369. Close outdoor pool and maintain basic utilities and maintenance for the Aquatic Center would be a savings of \$66,869.

Close outdoor pool and add additional hours to Aquatic Center to offset would be \$15,000.

The proposed schedule would be:

- Monday – Friday 6 a.m. – 6 p.m.
- Saturday – 12 p.m. – 5 p.m.
- Total of 65 weekly hours

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if he thought the Aquatic Center could handle the additional patrons that usually use the outdoor pool. He replied yes because generally from 6 – 8 a.m. the patrons are lap swimmers. Then at 9 a.m. they start fitness classes which last until 1 p.m. At that time they would open the pool up for open swim which would handle the number of patrons from the outdoor pool. In the evening there could be a combination of open swim, lap swim and swim lessons.

Parks & Recreation Director Simeon explained the current fees for the Aquatic Center.

He stated they had three choices:

- Close the facility completely.
- Close the facility and maintain basic utilities and maintenance to protect equipment and facility.
- Extend hours to off-set outdoor pool closing to add open swim and swim lessons.

Councilwoman Scarbrough stated from what she is hearing via emails and phone calls from the citizens, she would not vote to close the Aquatic Center. She does not think the City should close the Aquatic Center. They may have to adjust days or times, but she thinks it would be a disservice to the citizens if it was totally closed.

Councilwoman Bryant said she would second that. She was the one who in the last meeting suggested extending the hours so that if they were to close the outdoor pool this year there would still be hours and times designated so the students that would normally use the outdoor pool would still have access to swim. If they can work the schedule out so seniors can use it plus have swimming lessons, open swim and the swim teams, then she thinks that is the way they need to go for this year.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said he did not disagree with that and asked if any of these suggestions were in the budget they were looking at tonight. Finance Director Etheridge replied no. Parks & Recreation Director Simeon added based on reduced hours in what he submitted in this year's operating budget, the total expenditures were \$143,570. He said \$15,000 would be added to the \$143,570 for the extended hours of the Aquatic Center because the savings would be offset by closing the outdoor pool.

City Manager Scherer confirmed they were saying to open the Aquatic Center for 65 hours a week, close the outdoor pool for a total of \$160,000 in the budget.

Parks & Recreation Director Simeon said he would submit a new budget with the proposed changes.

Councilman Smith asked about the budget for the municipal pool in the amount of \$36,000. Finance Director Etheridge replied that is special project funding and not general fund funding. This is monies carried forward each year for special programs and events so it is not general fund monies. Parks & Recreation Director Simeon added that this began in the 1980s for concessions and the name has never changed so he could understand how it would be misleading. This shows the sponsorships for youth basketball and flag football along with other special programs.

Councilman Smith made a motion to keep the Aquatic Center closed until the Mayor and City Manager can finish negotiations with someone interested in the Aquatic Center; seconded by Councilman Bobbitt.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said he hopes the negotiations would go quickly, but the Governor may allow people in the pool before the negotiations are finished so we may want to allow that. Parks & Recreation Director Simeon said in his last meeting with the state, Phase 2 may allow some small amount of swimming in a pool. Even if it limits the number to 10 people and practice social distancing, it would be easy to accommodate for activities such as lap swimming.

Mayor Doughtie called for a vote. Councilman Smith and Councilman Bobbitt voted in favor, Councilwoman Bryant, Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee and Councilwoman Scarbrough voted against. Motion failed.

Councilman Bobbitt said his point was not to wait until the outdoor pool gets like Chaloner and he would like to see it fixed as soon as possible. Parks & Recreation Director Simeon said he would bring them the figures when he gets them.

Parks & Recreation Director Simeon moved forward with reviewing his budget cuts with City Council.

Councilman Smith asked about the increase in salaries at TJ Davis Recreation. Finance Director Etheridge replied that was due to unfreezing a position that was approved last year. Parks & Recreation Director Simeon said it was an Administration Assistant position at TJ Davis. She was permanent part-time and became full-time. Her duties include answering phone, greeting patrons, taking reservations, handles money, registrations etc.

Mayor Doughtie asked for clarification of permanent part-time. Parks & Recreation Director Simeon replied she worked 30+ hours a week and received benefits so for a small increase she could become full-time. Mayor Doughtie said he was under the impression that she was not receiving benefits because that is a huge additional cost.

Mayor Doughtie said Public Works cut all their part-time positions in the budget and asked why he could not operate without part-time help. Parks & Recreation Director Simeon said because of the time frames, how long they are open, additional duties and they are at a facility. It may take more on nights at TJ Davis to assist with a basketball league where a full-time person needs to be on the floor but someone still needs to answer phone and be that front-line person and someone needs to supervise the back game room. They are not assigned a certain task and it allows the facilities to be open the length of time and assist in programs.

Mayor Doughtie said they received a lot calls about those using the Aquatic Center and now they are getting calls from others concerned about the costs of operating that facility. He would like to know how many households are using that facility. In his proposal from the last meeting, there was a massive amount of summertime programs that were going to be cut. He asked if he reached out to the community to see if there were any volunteers or organizations like the little league baseball to run those types of summertime activities. Parks & Recreation Director Simeon said several years ago a gentleman stepped up who had insurance and ran the adult softball league. There is the possibility of speaking to him again about doing that. The

summer programs are basically surrounded around part-time employees.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if these part-time employees were on staff all year or just students working during the summer. Parks & Recreation Director Simeon said they are typically college students home and works 200 hours during the summer and goes back to school.

Councilman Smith asked if they could stagger the hours of full-time people. During the daytime there could be four employees sitting behind the desk not doing anything. If they staggered the hours of full-time, they could do away with the part-time. Parks & Recreation Director Simeon replied he did not think it was a fair statement to say they were not doing anything. There is a lot of administrative work that goes on. One of those employees at TJ Davis also oversees Kirkwood Adams Community Center. They have multiple duties than just there at TJ Davis.

Councilman Smith asked whether he had enough employees to stagger their hours. Parks & Recreation Director Simeon said if they have summer softball, basketball, flag football and have athletics going, they stagger hours.

Parks & Recreation Director Simeon said under parks, the majority of cuts there is an employee who is retiring in December so that position will be frozen December 1<sup>st</sup>.

Councilman Smith said they have a part-time employee that goes to pick up prisoners and asked if a full-time person could take an hour to go there and back. Parks & Recreation Director Simeon said it takes more like 2 hours since many times they have to wait. Typically is a 4 hours per day job.

Councilwoman Scarbrough asked if prisoners still come help with grass cutting. He replied they do still have a contract, but the prisoners are not working at this time due to the pandemic.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked what was the savings using that service. He replied if you take 14 employees and add it up, it comes to \$225,000. The City only pays them \$1 per day so the savings is significant.

Parks & Recreation Director Simeon said they reduced part-time salaries for the splash pad. They had a part-time lifeguard there last year when they got started to make sure everyone knew the rules and enforcement. They feel everyone understands the operation of the splash pad. Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if someone would still be monitoring it. He replied yes they would be in the building.

He said it was difficult to cut anything from the Jo Story Senior Center budget because of the grants they receive. It would reduce their funding. It is also a Center of Excellence and they are required to maintain certain aspects of the building and programs.

Councilman Smith asked what the General Purpose Fund was. Parks & Recreation Director Simeon replied it is a grant from the Upper Coastal Plain and is based on their certification level. Since it is a Center of Excellence they get the most amount of money available. It is spent on building maintenance or anything the center needs.

He explained the Transportation Grant allows picking up for any programs, for congregate meals or the van to take seniors shopping. This was a permanent part-time person and he has reduced it by making two part-time positions for a significant savings while not losing services. Councilman Smith asked for the amount of the grant. Finance Director Etheridge replied it was approximately \$30,000. Parks & Recreation Director Simeon said he would provide a list of all the Senior Center grants to them at the next meeting.

Parks & Recreation Director Simeon said he cut about every line item for the Lloyd Andrews building. At the Kirkwood Adams Community Center, the HVAC control panel was replaced this year but the fire alarm system was not so that money has been saved. Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if there was a need for a fire alarm system. He replied there is. In order for them to operate they are required for every event they have there, an employee signs a fire watch form. They talked with Chief Patrick about it and he is okay with that.

Parks & Recreation Director Simeon reported a significant savings at the Library due to a position that will remain frozen. Mayor Doughtie asked how many full-time employees they have at the library. He replied three and in order to continue receiving state aid they have to remain open for 35 hours per week. With the frozen position and reduction of part-time, they will have to go to that 35 hours per week. Mayor Doughtie asked how much the state aid was. He replied \$13,000.

Mayor Doughtie expressed concern over the budget expenses of the library; they seem high for the library. Parks & Recreation Director said he was concerned about the HVAC units there and they have a boiler heater.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked for a spreadsheet showing contributions and revenues for the library.

Parks & Recreation Director Simeon reviewed cuts from the Canal Museum.

Mayor Doughtie stated he saw the revenue for the museum for \$1,800 for this year and asked when buses of school kids go there do they pay anything. He replied yes, either the Friends of the Canal or school pays for them to come.

City Council called upon Fire Chief Patrick to review the Fire Department budget.

## **Fire**

Fire Chief Patrick reviewed the Fire Department budget. He said they cut the part-time Fire Marshal position.

Councilman Smith asked about the overtime salaries. Chief Patrick explained a firefighter works 216 hours in a month. Fire Labor Standards says anything over 212 is overtime. So every 28-day cycle, a firefighter earns 4 hours of overtime. Whether it is paid at time and a half or straight time is determined whether or not the firefighter has worked or taken time off. They maintain a minimum staff which is seven on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

He continued to review the department budget cuts. He noted they put monies back in the budget for annual physicals as requested by City Council in the last meeting. He said they reduced the turn out gear line. They have been on a rotation so the replacement does not hit them all at one time. Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if there was any safety concerns in doing that. Chief Patrick said they would be okay if they can get the one set this year, but in the future will need to stick to the rotation.

Chief Patrick said they were suspending the career development for this year, but hoped to bring it back next year.

## **Consideration of Action to Set Public Hearing Date on Proposed FY 2020-2021 Budget**

Finance Director Etheridge stated the proposed FY 2020 – 2021 budget was presented to Council this evening.

In accordance with the North Carolina Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act, a copy of the proposed FY 2020-2021 budget will be put on display for public inspection at the Clerk's Office and on the City's website.

A public hearing needs to be scheduled for June 2, 2020 in order to seek citizen input.

Councilwoman Scarbrough asked by June 2<sup>nd</sup> will the public be allowed in this building. City Manager Scherer replied it depends on what Governor Cooper and State staff decide on guidance in Phase 2 and they hope to hear that later this week. He hopes they will, but cannot guarantee that. Councilwoman Scarbrough asked if they

had a plan B if the public would not be allowed in the building and how they would be able to participate in the public hearing. He said they would have to work out how they can call in or submit their comments.

Councilman Smith stated he would like to invite the public to attend even if they have to allow one at a time while others wait outside. He would like to see the public be able to speak at the podium.

Mayor Doughtie stated it has been very seldom for people to come speak at the budget public hearing in the past, but he would like to offer that as well.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said if it is an issue based on space and the number of people, he suggested the meeting be held at the Kirkwood Adams Community Center.

City Manager Scherer said depending on what Governor Cooper's guidance is, they will make arrangements to have the maximum amount of participation whether in person or via electronic means at the proper location.

Mayor Doughtie asked if there needed to be some changes to the budget between now and June 2<sup>nd</sup>, could that be done or does it have to be done the night they adopt the budget. Finance Director Etheridge replied recommendations made tonight they have the opportunity to make those changes before it goes on display. Anytime the budget is updated, she will send those affected department budgets to replace in their notebooks.

Motion was made by Councilman Smith, seconded by Councilwoman Scarbrough and unanimously carried to set the public hearing on the proposed FY2020-2021 budget on June 2, 2020 in location designated by the City Manager.

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

Finance Director Etheridge presented the Financial Operations Report for the City of Roanoke Rapids for the period ending April 30, 2020. General Fund year to date receipts totaled \$13,026,279. (The percentage of actual money collected of adopted budgeted figures is 75.7%) General Fund year to date expenditures totaled \$13,146,206. (The percentage of actual monies expended of adopted budgeted figures is 76.4%) After the month of April, 83.34% of the budget year has been completed.

As a result, Year-To-Date Expenditures exceeded Revenues by (\$119,926).

During the month of April, the City received

- Ad Valorem Tax Revenue
- Sales & Use Tax Revenue for the service month of February

As a result of the current COVID-19 virus pandemic, the City is beginning to recognize revenue shortfalls due to losses in Sales & Use Taxes, Revenue from Service Fees, and Parks and Recreation revenue.

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.

### **City Manager's Report**

City Manager Scherer gave the following report:

North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper spoke yesterday about the possibility of the state entering Phase 2 of reopening by the weekend in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Phase 1 executive order ends Friday, May 22, but Governor Cooper says officials continue to monitor data and metrics laid out for the state before making the decision to either enter Phase 2 or extend Phase 1.

State officials are expected to ease restrictions and move to Phase 2 only if the state is headed in the right direction with available data. He understands Governor Cooper plans to implement Phase 2 on Friday and they should hear information from him by tomorrow or Thursday on this.

State officials say as Phase 2 potentially looks at allowing services like barber shops, hair salons and other facilities to reopen, but there must be an expansive set of guidelines in place for it to be as safe as possible.

We are reviewing how we might modify our operations based on Governor Cooper and his staff's recommendations. Plexiglass shields have been installed at several public business windows; masks are available to employees and are encouraged to wear them, especially when dealing with the public, public safety forces have recently received a large donation of disinfectant hand sanitizer, and appointments may still be required by some departments.

Memorial Day is this coming Monday, but no public ceremonies are planned at this point. In honor of this special day, I would like to quote General Patton, who said of this day: "It is foolish and wrong to mourn the men who died. Rather, we should thank God that such men lived."

### **Other Business/Adjournment**

Mayor Doughtie stated we are looking at a \$1.8M reduction in the budget. He was shocked by the information Public Works Director Chalker provided tonight where the 2020 population for the city was a little over 14,000. We were about 18,000 ten to twelve years ago so whatever we are doing to draw people to our community is not working. People in the community ask him what kind of plan do we have. He said we could raise taxes which would only affect the people that own property and that percentage of people has continued to go down in the community; we have less homeowners and that is not a good thing. We could cut services. That is okay but don't cut any that I benefit from or I use. Why don't you pave the streets and repair the potholes? We can't because we are being forced to cut budgets. The streets and the back alleys are not like the house is on fire so we are able to continue putting them back. People comment to him that their back alley is so bad that they can't even get down it to get to their backyard. People say there are several vacant houses that are falling down in my neighborhood and ask why can't they do something about it and take them down. How much more do we owe on the Theatre? We all know the answers to these questions. Please try to get the two old textile mills taken down. That is an eyesore for the community. It is a multi-million dollar project that we are trying to get a Brownfield grant because that is the only way we can get anything done on it because it is such a huge undertaking.

He said we also get compliments. We appreciate you getting Roanoke Avenue paved. Well, we did not get Roanoke Avenue paved, NCDOT paved the Avenue. The Julian Allsbrook project started in 2008 when the economy went down. It got to Virginia Avenue and it stopped and remain stopped for 10 years. When they started it up a year and a half ago, it was such an enormous project that people would call me wanting me to do something about all the traffic being closed off. When I would tell them we could not do anything about it because we have nothing to do with it, they would say you do have something to do with it, it's your town. I would tell them to be patient it was going to be better with no open ditches and a center turning lane. It is a nice project now. The extension of Old Farm Road and Hwy 125 will be a boost for the area. We will have a loop between Exits 171 and 173. Again, NCDOT looking favorably upon us. The bridge from Roanoke Rapids into Gaston is supposed to be replaced in the next couple of years, about \$30M. He feels the projects NCDOT has done was because all the trips we have made to Raleigh and working with the City

Manager, City Attorney, Councilman Smith and Finance Director Etheridge. Those people in Raleigh know what we do with our money and know we do not spend it frivolously. We don't get a lot of money from other places, we are limited on how we can raise our income. We have a 99% tax collection rate and the auditor tells us every year if we did not have that debt, we would be making money and not having a tax increase in the last ten years.

He said look at the private business: Ollie's, Harbor Freight, Dunham's, Hardees tore down and built a new place, Popeye's, Sheetz and a new car wash going up. Vidant is one of the largest benefits our community has as far as bringing people to our community in my lifetime. When you ride by and see that sign Vidant means a lot. The splash pad, skateboard park and tennis courts are things we have been able to partner with other groups in the area that we may not have gotten done by ourselves. The old police station and old train depot are coming back to life. The new housing complex for senior citizens. I know some people did not like what happened out there and I admit it is a large building but it is much more conducive to those who live in our community verses them living in substandard housing. That is a huge benefit for them and our community. We labored a lot with attorneys and the City Manager and everybody else to try to get the Forrest Hills Shopping Center done but we finally got it done and it looks nice now. We continue to be stressed by the debt, but I still think we are in the bottom of where we are going to be for a period of time. I see us moving back up, hopefully it won't be so long. With the economy going well I think we were all very excited for the next few years of our town. I told people that I felt better about our town six months ago than I had felt in a long time. It looked like we were getting some breaks and moving forward. We've had a big setback and I hope our City employees can carry out the plan with the cuts they are going to have to do and maybe by the third quarter things will start rebounding some. I think they will be real excited to see that sales tax revenue because that revenue lets you know that people feel like spending their money. When the consumer feels good it makes everything work so much better.

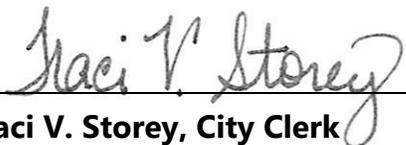
Councilman Smith stated I appreciate what you said. I think one thing we need to look at as a Council is that we cannot let fifty people put pressure on us and spend money when we need it in other places. I know when you get into politics and have to run for re-election you start worrying about it. But you can't do it. If you don't get re-elected, the world is not going to come to an end. As we sat here, I've had twelve emails. We need to do the things in this town that is going to benefit 13,000 people instead of 50 people. The Council is the only ones that can do it. The City Manager can't do it, the Finance Director can't do it, this Council is going to have to do it. We need to make up our minds to bite the bullet and get some stuff done. We have to act

like business people up here instead of just Council people. It is a city, but it is a business.

Mayor Doughtie stated when I was being pressured by somebody a few days ago, I told them we represented the 14,000 not 100, not 500, not 5,000 but the 14,000 and that is what we do.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee stated I agree with the overall comments and as far as the re-election part, I do not plan on running again after this term. We have to look at the overall in all the items and sometimes they are hard, but again there are things that appear to us not important because we are business people. But it is important to our citizens whether it is going to a park or a pool. If it is important to them, it is important to us. Sometimes we do have to bite the bullet but if it is important to them, we should look at that. Where is the magic line? One thing as Council members we will not do if we can help it is increase our tax by one-cent. We will not do it, but if we take a poll at the people that are out there and the services they have, probably most would not mind giving one-cent. I've been on Council for a long time and I've seen where we have not done that because we can't raise taxes. I'm not advocating raising taxes but what I am saying I know for a fact a person would be willing to pay one-cent now rather than three cents later. They can absorb that easier. As Council members sometimes we wait until the last line and we can't do anything else so therefore we have a three cent increase. I've seen that happen and I don't want to see that happen so let's look at the whole thing. Like Councilman Smith said, if it's tough, it's tough. Of course there are other items that may come in later that will offset. I've seen us where we increased, but also decreased. If you go back and look at the records, we've decreased taxes too. He's not saying to increase taxes because I know that is no man's land for Council folks but what I am saying is we don't want to wait until the last minute and have to do something drastic and/or totally not do or just take away from an overall quality of life in Roanoke Rapids.

There being no further business, motion was made by Councilman Smith, seconded by Councilwoman Bryant and unanimously carried to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

  
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Traci V. Storey, City Clerk

**Approved by Council Action on: June 2, 2020**