



Minutes of the Roanoke Rapids City Council

A regular meeting of the City Council of the City of Roanoke Rapids was held on **Tuesday, June 2, 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
Bobby Martin, 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*

**Denotes those joining remotely using Zoom.*

Mayor Doughtie called the meeting to order and 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.

Councilman Smith made a motion for Item 6 a) under New Business: Public Hearing for Proposed FY 2020-2021 Budget be tabled until the June 16, 2020 City Council meeting and for the City Manager to schedule a meeting on Monday, June 8, 2020 for budget review; seconded by Councilman Bobbitt and unanimously carried to adopt the meeting agenda as amended.

Public Comment (Scheduled)

Jarrett Taylor

Mr. Taylor was not present.

Public Comment (Unscheduled)

Martha Wearing

Ms. Wearing stated she was not sure if anything was going to come up tonight about the Aquatic Center again so that is why she was here tonight. She thanked those who voted to keep it open in the last meeting. As she understands it, until the budget is approved, things could change. The Aquatic Center and the library are the two things the public in Roanoke Rapids city gets the most out of. They are both there for every age and for all people. The Aquatic Center and outdoor pool, when it is open, have the ability to give life-saving skills. We have a lot of waterways. She is from Grand Haven, Michigan and all the public schools taught swimming to students K through however long you wanted to take it because it is a skill you need if you fell off a pier or here at the tail race. She was surprised the public schools of Roanoke Rapids or the community college or both don't use the pool to teach P.E. Maybe you can persuade them to give money to use the pool to teach that life-saving skill. You have to know how to swim to graduate from a lot of colleges these days so that would give kids from here a leg up who would not otherwise have those swimming lessons. It is also good for all ages. She was at the senior age with arthritis so it is nice to have the swimming and aerobics classes. Doctors give physical therapy so people can go to the pool to improve their physical and mental well-being. There is also the swim team for the young people and swimming lessons for everybody. She thinks it would be a horrible shame to ever close that particular facility. As long as we have the Aquatic Center, she could live without the outdoor pool because at least they would have some place to go. She asked if anyone had written a grant. With all the money that is available through the federal government for poor areas, for health. We have a lot of needs in this community. A lot people with arthritis and that are overweight and just need to get in shape.

Mayor Doughtie said as she mentioned talking to people and other different ways on how to keep the Aquatic Center open, they are doing it but they are not finished. They are working on it. They were able to revive the tennis courts through several conversations, coming together and pooling resources.

Mary Small

Ms. Small stated she could reiterate a lot of what Martha said but she would go into

further detail as far as people who use the pool for their back injuries, recovering from knee surgery, back surgery, ankle surgery and shoulder surgery. Yes, some of them have been to physical therapy but the doctors and physical therapists have told them to go to the Aquatic Center and keep up this therapy. This is something they can do 3-4 times a week. She goes 3-4 times a week. Several years ago when the pool came up, they had several doctors come speak. She reiterates what Martha says about the swimming lessons. People are swimming laps and everyone knows that is healthy. It would be horrible if the kids could not do the swim team. If it comes down to money, she was sure a lot of them would be willing to pay more for their passes. The pool is also a big draw as is the library for those moving to this city. We have a lot of good things but we need the pool. If families are moving in and they have children or teenagers who want to swim or if they are getting on in age as some of them are, they would want to use it for health reasons. Please do whatever you can to keep it open or you are going to have a lot of unhappy people.

Councilman Smith asked Ms. Small if she could give Council an idea of how much more they should consider charging. She replied she paid by the year. It is \$2.75 for a city resident and almost \$5 for non-resident per visit. They have right many people that come from the lake.

Ms. Wearing said she pays by the year, \$156 and it is a bargain; she would be happy to pay double that. Ms. Small added if they double it, she thinks people would still be happy to pay it.

Councilman Smith said in one of the other meetings, a majority of Council said they were not going to close it. He was trying to get some idea while working on the budget how much people were willing to pay to use the Aquatic Center. People from out of town should be paying more than the city residents. Ms. Small said non-residents do pay more.

City Manager Scherer said the day pass for residents is \$3; non-resident is \$6. An individual resident annual pass is \$200; individual non-resident annual pass is \$400. An annual family resident pass is \$365; annual family non-resident pass is \$750.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if those prices were the existing prices or what they were proposing. City Manager Scherer replied they were the current rates.

Mayor Doughtie said they talked about people's doctors telling them to go swim. One of the avenues they have been going down to try and secure additional resources was to look to medical professionals that may could use the Aquatic Center and that could be tagged onto medical insurance and that type of thing. For example, if someone

breaks their hip and has to have rehab, Medicare pays for some therapy to a certain extent.

Ann Gibbs

Ms. Gibbs stated they have said most of everything, but she represents a lot of women in a rheumatoid arthritis support group along with one of the doctor's wives. A lot of these women are in the arthritis water aerobics group. This is what our doctors tell us to do. She can walk but it hurts her so bad, so our doctors tell them water aerobics is the best exercise so maybe they could do something so it would work with the insurance. It is vital to their bodies to get in the water to work out. They really need it; she cannot imagine closing it up. She thinks there are some resources they could all look at. She had women texting her all afternoon telling her they had to do something but so many of them could not be here so she told them she would come to the meeting to represent them. When she goes to class there are at least 20 women there. A lot of them are from the lake and it is mental therapy as well because for many of them, it is the only time they get out. She thinks it is vital to this city and is a big part of the community. There are not a whole of things to do in this town for older people. She hopes they can look at this and it is something they can continue.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said they are working on trying to keep the Aquatic Center open and right now he feels pretty good about where they are. He stated they want to be mindful to keep it affordable for all and appreciates those that can afford it. They need to look at the pool as a whole. They are looking at everything and will do all they can to keep it open and more hours.

Jim Garrett

Mr. Garrett stated he thinks the sentiment of these ladies was extremely nice and well-intentioned but not necessarily based in reality. Having medical needs met is extremely important but what is more important than that – eating. He said 25% of this city lives below the poverty level. Each time they increase the taxes one-cent, they bear the burden just as equally as everybody else. Some people think poor people and people that rent don't pay taxes, but they do pay taxes. He doesn't print money, he collects it from them and then he brings it to the city and hands it over. Every time there is an increase in the taxes, the poorest people in the community suffer far more than people that live above the poverty line. He does not think they really understand. When you live in a middle-class house, in a middle-class neighborhood and you can afford a tax increase they do not understand how that impacts someone that collects \$700 a month to live on. We have lost 4,000 residents in Roanoke Rapids and they have not cut the taxes one penny. The property taxes at \$15M divided between 17,000 people that suddenly gets reduced to 13,000 people is equivalent to a tax increase, so yes they did increase them. 13,000 people are now paying the taxes that 17,000

people used to pay. They did not reduce them to keep up with the population. Not to mention they have to pay an equivalent amount of tax to the county. Taxes are taking from this community nearly \$30M dollars a year and that is not fair to the poor people that live in this city. They cannot afford to continue to pay \$30M a year. That is ridiculous, they have got to cut the budget. If they want to balance the swimming pool fairly, you don't take it from people that can't buy medicine so people don't have arthritis or they feel better with arthritis. They have to charge the people using the swimming pool and any other services the City offers a fair amount. The fair amount is nearly five times, not twice the current rate. Because the pool cost about \$250,000 a year and they make less than \$50,000 on the pool income. That means they have to come up with another \$200,000 out of the poor man's pocket and that's not fair. It's not fair to the people living below the poverty level.

Approval of City Council Minutes

Motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee, seconded by Councilwoman Bryant and unanimously carried to approve the May 12, 2020 Special Meeting (Budget Work Session) and May 19, 2020 Regular City Council Meeting Minutes as drafted.

Committee Appointments

Senior Center Advisory Committee

City Clerk Storey said Wilma White has submitted an application for your consideration to serve on the Senior Center Advisory Committee. Currently, there is a vacancy and she is an eligible candidate. Mrs. White would serve the remainder of the term which expires August 2, 2022.

A ballot vote was taken earlier and Mrs. White received a unanimous vote to be appointed.

Motion was made by Councilwoman Bryant, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee and unanimously carried to appoint Wilma White to the Senior Center Advisory Committee.

Roanoke Rapids Area Planning Board

City Clerk Storey said Jarrett Taylor has submitted an application for your consideration to serve on the Roanoke Rapids Area Planning Board. Currently there is a vacancy on the Planning Board and he is an eligible candidate. Mr. Taylor would serve the remainder of the term which expires June 1, 2021.

Council took a ballot vote earlier and Mr. Taylor received a unanimous vote to be appointed.

Motion was made by Councilwoman Bryant, seconded by Councilwoman Scarbrough and unanimously carried to appoint Jarrett Taylor to the Roanoke Rapids Area Planning Board.

New Business

Consideration of Offering the Option of Providing Health Insurance to City Council Members

Human Resources Manager Kearney said she received a request for the City to offer the option of providing health insurance for the Mayor and/or a Council member in lieu of getting their stipend.

NCGS 160A-64 states Council may fix its own compensation of the mayor and any other elected officers of the city. After consultation with the UNC School of Government and the City Attorney, the option must be offered to all City elected officials and limited to the elected official's term in office. Also, it cannot exceed the allowed compensation which is the cost of the insurance itself.

She provided Council with a copy of the health insurance rates.

Councilman Smith clarified that Council members over the age of 65 years old will not qualify for this insurance. Human Resource Manager Kearney replied that was correct. The City does not cover anyone over the age of 65. He asked if the person that elects or takes the option to get the health insurance will be responsible for their amount of the health insurance and it would not come out of the City's budget. She said that was also correct.

Mayor Doughtie stated he wanted to make a comment on the matter as it affects him directly and asked the City Attorney if he needed to excuse himself from his seat or could he speak from there. Attorney Davis replied it would affect everyone on City Council below the age of 65 equally so he believes it would be okay for him to stay there.

Mayor Doughtie said he had an interest in being able to purchase health insurance through the City's group plan. Human Resources Manager Kearney and Finance Director Etheridge had researched the matter. He was told it would need to be presented before the entire Council and they would have to vote on it. The amount of funds that he receives as a stipend for being the mayor at this time would cover the expense of paying for the insurance. He was certain it would not cost the City additional monies out of the budget, but he was hoping it might actually save some

on the budget with FICA. He asked that question but had not received an answer on that yet. It would be good if it saved some. He had one or two people contact him to say they were concerned because we were asking the tax payers to pay for our health insurance. That is not what we are asking and he wanted to speak up and make a statement about that. If it passes, he was going to purchase the insurance but it will not be any additional cost to the City. If the insurance costs were to exceed the compensation of a Council person or me as the mayor, they would have to put in additional funding so there would be no cost to the City. He asked Human Resources Manager Kearney if he had said anything that she did not agree with as far as the information about it. She replied no.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said in reference to his comment about putting in additional funding, hypothetically it costs \$5,000 a year for the insurance and the next year it goes to \$6,000, could that person pay the \$1,000 out of their pocket or what were they saying. The allowed compensation was not clear to him.

Human Resources Manager Kearney said they would be able to pay the difference and stay on the insurance. The City would not pay anything over that, they would have to make up the difference.

Councilman Smith asked when that Council member or Mayor came off of City Council because they were not re-elected, would they automatically lose the insurance. She replied they could stay on it through COBRA for up to 18-months, but it would cost a little more. That gives them an opportunity to find other insurance. They would have to pay the premium themselves when they came off of City Council.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee stated he wanted to make a motion, but saying “the City of Roanoke Rapids to pay for their health insurance” is kind of misleading. They would be paying for their own health insurance, they would just be joining the pool of the City’s insurance. Human Resources Manager Kearney said it is in lieu of getting their stipend. The City would be paying the insurance for them but they would not be getting a stipend.

Councilwoman Bryant said she wanted to verify that if the compensation they receive does not cover the cost of the insurance, that person can pay the difference. Human Resources Manager Kearney replied that was correct.

Motion was made Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee; seconded by Councilman Smith and unanimously carried to allow City Council members the option for the City of Roanoke Rapids to pay for their health insurance as all or a portion of their compensation as long as it does not exceed the allowed compensation.

Human Resources Manager Kearney stated if anyone was interested to let her know.

City Manager's Report

City Manager Scherer gave the following report:

The City has recently experienced some demonstrations over the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25. So far, the demonstrations have been peaceful and not resulted in any violence toward our dedicated police department, our citizens or business properties. I commend the participants and the police department for showing restraint and respect during the demonstrations while honoring the memory of Mr. Floyd. I would also like to commend Chief Martin, along with his command staff, for their thorough planning and prompt response to this challenging situation in keeping the peace while standing with the demonstrators in support of their cause.

The County Manager and his staff have recently contacted us about finalizing the procedures for possible use and receipt of the \$1M they received from the Corona Virus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Broadly speaking, these funds must address measures or expenses directly related to the needs due to COVID-19. They are for expenses incurred between March 1, 2020 and December 30, 2020. They cannot be used to supplant local government budgets, including replacing lost revenue. Counties also have the option of making allocations available to municipalities, which is their intention. We have a conference call with them Wednesday morning to discuss their plan and receive further guidance.

The ongoing responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have had a major impact to our local economy. The following County level information was provided by Cathy Scott, the County Economic Development Director. As of May 2020:

- a. The number of small businesses open decreased by 22.9% compared to early January 2020.
- b. The total small business revenue decreased by 24% compared to early January 2020.
- c. The total time spent by consumers at retail and restaurant locations decreased by 8% compared to early January 2020.
- d. During the period March 16th through May 10th, the total weekly visits to our local hotels were down an average of 58% compared to the number of visits at the end of February 2020.

The staff and I met this morning with Bruce Robistow, the County Health Director, to discuss how we need to plan for reopening our facilities to the public as safely as possible for both the public and our employees, in accordance with Governor Cooper's Executive Orders. At a minimum, we need to insure we are practicing the 3 W's (wear

a mask, wait at least 6' from others and wash hands frequently). The Aquatic Center and Splashpad have already opened in accordance with State guidelines. Mr. Simeon has spoken to Michelle Wells, North Carolina Parks and Recreation Association Executive Director, along with Mr. Robistow, about guidelines for conducting a youth baseball season this summer. He has discussed their guidance with Todd Lockamon, youth little league baseball director and I believe they are proceeding to put together a plan to have a youth baseball league this summer.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if they had a list or amount of expenses the City has incurred from COVID-19. City Manager Scherer stated currently they have accumulated over \$9,000 in expenses that would be reimbursable to us.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said he sees the percentages referring to losses from COVID-19 and asked City Manager Scherer what kind of dollars would that equate to. He replied unfortunately a lot of that information is going to be related to our sales tax revenue and that runs 2-3 months behind. It will be awhile before they have a better idea on how much impact that will have on us.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee stated he understood they had not gotten there yet, but could they use what they actually did last year and take that percentage and asked City Manager Scherer what that would equate to using last years' figures. He said he did not have to give him that information now, he could send it to him later.

Councilman Smith asked if the next sales tax report was coming out around June 15th. City Manager Scherer replied yes, they would have the Finance Director's report then. It would have the sales tax from April.

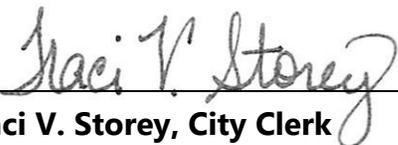
Mayor Doughtie asked City Manager Scherer if the City Hall was still closed to the public. He replied that was correct. They would be meeting later this week to discuss when and how to open the City Hall back up. They have a number of issues they need to take a look at to make sure both the public and employees feel safe coming into the building and interacting with us.

Mayor Doughtie stated that most businesses are trying to get back open such as banks. He agrees they need to use precautions, but get them back operating as soon as possible so at least the public can come in and speak to someone. Coming to City Hall and the door being closed is not good. City Manager Scherer agreed and stated they intend to open as soon as they can. Please be aware that the Planning Department does arrange for appointments so people can come in and talk with someone if they need to.

Councilman Smith asked if most of the places where the public comes in at the front of the building have shields up now where they actually come in and conduct business. City Manager Scherer said yes, they have already put the Plexiglas shields up at the front windows. Councilman Smith asked couldn't most of the business for the Police and Planning Departments be conducted at these windows rather than going in the offices and open these places back up. City Manager Scherer replied yes, that is where most of the business is conducted and that is why they want to make sure the City employees feel safe. Just because those measures are in place, it doesn't necessarily mean we have everything ready for employees to feel they can safely interact with the public because they have a shield at the window.

Other Business/Adjournment

There being no further business, motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee, seconded by Councilman Bobbitt and unanimously carried to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 6:03 p.m.


Traci V. Storey, City Clerk

Approved by Council Action on: June 16, 2020