



Minutes of the Roanoke Rapids City Council

A Special Meeting of the City Council of the City of Roanoke Rapids was held on **Monday, September 28, 2020 at 5:15 p.m.** 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
Wayne Smith)

Council Members

Joseph Scherer, MPA, MS, City Manager
Traci Storey, City Clerk
Bobby Martin, Police Chief
Larry Chalker, Public Works Director

Absent: Suetta S. Scarbrough, Council Member

Mayor Doughtie called the meeting to order.

He stated there was only one item on the agenda for this called meeting which was to consider an amendment to the FY 2020-2021 budget. He asked Public Works Director Chalker to come forward to make a presentation to City Council on the damage to the tower behind City Hall.

Public Works Director Chalker said the budget amendment presented during this special meeting is needed to move contingency funding from the Fund Balance into the General Fund. A result of a lightning strike from a very severe thunderstorm that occurred at City Hall on September 10, 2020.

He said the funding is required to cover material expenditures to City Hall communications. Including the removal and replacement of the damaged communications tower in the back parking lot of City Hall. A structural engineer met with him on Wednesday, September 16th, and deemed the structure very unsafe and at risk for additional liability to the City if not taken down. He was working on this with said engineer.

Public Works Chalker reported Human Resources Manager Kearney is working on the insurance claim for this incident to cover all incurred expenditures as a result

of this damage. Insurance proceeds, when received, will be posted back to the General Fund revenue and then back to Fund Balance to offset the required funding per this request tonight. Finance Director Etheridge is handling the budget side of this contingency situation for required funding and equipment replacement.

He further explained on the night of September 10th, the city experienced a tremendous electrical storm. Sometime during the night, the Police Department discovered they were having communication difficulties. The seriousness of the situation was discovered the next morning when the Public Works Department was notified that all the phones and computers in the City Hall building were not working. He presented a document entitled, Lightning Damage from 9/10/2020 Storm, which was a list of equipment they have identified as 100% bad or possibly bad. They feel the majority of the items on the list will be covered by the City's insurance policy. The policy has a \$2,500 deductible and after meeting that deductible for this event, they should cover any losses beyond that related to this storm. That is what they expect, but the insurance company has a voice in this as well so they have sent one representative from the company. That person was a forensic engineer.

Public Works Director Chalker continued the story and said initially they did not realize the communications tower had suffered damage. They have had lightning strikes on this tower and lost communications equipment before, but never had physical damage to the structure. He was actually the one that discovered the damage and sent a picture to the tower vendor. The vendor's response was, "that is not good." That caused him to call the vendor on the telephone for a more in depth conversation.

He stated this was something they never thought they would face. A concrete structure suffering a lightning strike that would weaken the concrete. It was a very direct and powerful strike. He called their attention to the second handout, a letter from Dion Viventi, PE out of Elm City, NC which included photos of the damaged concrete tower. Since they are not experts on concrete towers, they called someone that knows more about it. The vendor recommended this engineer because they use him in the communications industry and he is familiar with these types of structures. He did visit the tower on September 16th and performed an inspection of the tower. In his letter dated September 22, 2020, it is his professional opinion that the tower has been damaged and it is in a weakened state. Public Works Director Chalker said the City only has his expert opinion to go on. Subsequently, the insurance carrier now has decided to send some other people of a more specialized nature to do non-destructive testing. He does not have a date of their arrival yet. That part of the claim (tower) has not been satisfied so they are still

waiting to hear on that one.

Mayor Doughtie asked who was Steve Smith. Public Works Director Chalker replied he was the City's vendor. If they needed someone to climb this tower, they would call him. Any structure that has an antennae on it or if they have an issue with an antennae, need to replace an antennae or the cable that goes up the side of the tower or any type of communication antennae or transceiver they are going to put on a tower, this is their guy. He has all the insurance, training and he is the specialist. Mr. Viventi did not know the City's address so he sent it to Mr. Smith and he then forwarded the letter to us.

Mayor Doughtie asked if they have heard anything back from the insurance company. Public Works Director Chalker replied they have heard they want to do further nondestructive testing. He was not sure what they were going to do. He doesn't know whether they will x-ray the tower or what, but they want to make sure since it is \$70,000-\$80,000. They want to do their due diligence. Until they hear from the insurance company, the only professional opinion the City has is from Mr. Viventi who is a structural engineer and in his opinion the tower is beyond repair.

Mayor Doughtie asked Attorney Davis that since the City found out from a professional that the tower has been damaged, is the means Public Works Director Chalker is moving forward what they should be doing right now for liability purposes. Attorney Davis said having this meeting and having these issues heard are a big part of that. This is some pretty strong language from someone with these credentials. He read from Mr. Viventi's letter, "It is my professional opinion that additional nondestructive testing would reveal integral structural components of the monopole were most likely seriously compromised." That is about as strong of an opinion you will get from a structural engineer. He also referred to other statements made in the letter such as "it is an obvious safety hazard if my observations prove to be correct." Attorney Davis said there is an apartment building located adjacent to the tower and if something were to happen, just from a liability perspective, if that tower were to fall and damage it somehow. He believes the City is doing what they need to be doing at this stage by addressing the issue.

Mayor Doughtie asked was Mr. Viventi saying that further testing like the insurance company was planning to do would be irrelevant. Attorney Davis said Mr. Viventi was saying he believes more testing was going to confirm his opinion. He thinks it would be a different story if the City did not have this professional opinion.

Councilman Smith asked if they had a total cost of what this was going to be. Public

Works Director Chalker replied at this time, other than the tower on the list, they have spent \$20,715 on this lightning strike. That is Ethernet switches, telephones, computers, monitors, televisions and a lot of other network type items. They were lucky not to lose a main frame server but they did lose the Public Works repeater. Public Works uses this for communications every day. It also serves as a backup repeater for both Police and Fire as well as the City OPS repeater which is on the same tower. Since their antennae was on top, he believes it caught the brunt of the strike.

Councilman Smith asked if insurance would pay for all of this. Public Works Director Chalker replied it was not a question so far from the insurance company for anything on the list. Councilman Smith confirmed the insurance company should pay for the \$20,700 they had already spent. Public Works Director Chalker said absolutely, they expect them to and they sent a forensic engineer that looked at each piece of equipment of the list.

Councilman Smith asked if they had an actual cost, not an estimate. Public Works Director Chalker replied they were working on that now. He explained if you were going to buy a new radio tower which appears to be the position they were facing, you would call the tower company. The first thing you would want to tell them is how tall it is and what style tower you would want. Obviously, he was not in favor of putting up another concrete monopole since they have seen what lightning can do to it; that's off the table as far as he was concerned. They are looking at a metal structure much like the other towers they see around town. It is free-standing, does not have guide wires and is certified to withstand a certain amount of wind with a certain amount of antennas on it. That is an engineered process. They have a quote from the tower vendor and it was something that he pushed him to give him. He told him that it was just an estimate. The estimate for a tower of similar type that the vendor has put in somewhere else is \$71,904.

Councilman Smith asked with the price at \$71,000 for the tower, would it cost \$30,000 to tear the existing one down. Public Works Director Chalker said no, the tower removal was included in that quote. The actual labor to remove the monopole is \$2,000, use of a 210 ton crane at \$10,000 and other equipment at \$5,700 comes to \$17,700. So it will take close to \$20,000 to take the existing structure down. That price is included in the roughly \$72,000 quote so they were looking at approximately \$42,000 for the new structure. He reminded Council that this was something they did pretty quickly. If they find out they have to do this, they will go back and take another look at it to make sure they are getting the right structure for what they need. The tower is engineered for whatever you request.

Councilman Smith stated he understands the City needs a tower and City Council needs to fix it where they can get a tower. His concerns were as tight as the money is, they were talking about a budget amendment of \$100,000 and it was only \$72,000 to get it fixed. So that was \$28,000 left on the table. He understands that if they don't spend it that money will go back, but he has yet to see, and he may be wrong, when Council says they can spend \$100,000 that it is pretty close to being spent. That's how government works. If they okay \$100,000, they are going to spend it. That's why he would like to see what it was going to cost to get it done and let Council approve the money. And, to find out how much insurance is going to pay.

Mayor Doughtie asked if Public Works Chalker was saying the \$71,900 for the tower plus the \$20,715 would be submitted on the insurance claim. Public Works Director Chalker said they would be submitting everything that was damaged from this lightning strike. Mayor Doughtie said if they pay, it should be the total of those two less \$2,500 for the deductible not \$28,000, if they did \$100,000. Councilman Smith stated he understood that. Mayor Doughtie said it was up to Council, but they could just add those figures together and do it for \$91,000-\$92,000 instead of doing an \$8,000 cushion.

Public Works Director Chalker said generally, if the City was financially healthy and just decided they were going to take out an old structure and put in a new structure, this is how they would budget that. They would not put it to the penny, they would leave a contingency amount there because that is the prudent thing to do from a department head standpoint. As the Mayor said, it was up to Council as to what they want to allow on this budget amendment and he would make no attempt to sway that. The reason there is an \$8,000 pad is for contingency funds just in case so they do not have to keep coming back to Council for every couple hundred dollars it could run over. They have no intention at all of spending any of the City's money they do not feel they need to spend.

Councilman Smith said he knows Public Works and other department heads do a good job on managing City money. It's always that little extra that somebody wants to put on something. He does not have any problem with Council approving the tower.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked Public Works Director Chalker if he felt the tower would be more robust or as good as. He replied the concrete monopole that Vepco placed there in 1981 has been a very robust structure. They have never considered it could be damaged the way this engineer is telling them it is. They did not have a contingency plan for this. His initial conversation with the tower vendor was they

do not want the most light-weight and cheapest tower that may not be as strong as what they have, but they probably don't want the most expensive one either. They need to find something comparable to what they have that is not made of concrete. That was the conversation and the request and that is where the line items on the estimate from September 17th came from. It was a very quick conversation and he pushed the vendor pretty hard to get him something as quick as he could. He honestly had no idea because he had never paid to build a radio tower so he did not know what they cost. He did this so he could let the City Manager and Finance Director know and he would know how bad of a loss this was. They would have liked to have known tonight as to whether insurance was going to pay or not.

Mayor Doughtie asked if the insurance company had asked the City to get another quote or is there anyone else available to give them a figure. Public Works Director Chalker replied there are many companies available to give them figures. As they move forward with this process and they decide they are definitely going to build a new structure, they will pursue that. He believed there were some finance regulations that control that based on what it is and the cost of it. Mayor Doughtie stated he thought that would be a good idea.

Mayor Doughtie asked if there were any other types of facilities that they can get the communication that the City needs. Public Works Director Chalker replied there were a lot of different types of communications and municipalities use a lot of different things. The most prevalent thing for the City has been VHF high-band which is a two-way radio, private radio system that you have to have a license to operate and the City does; they have all their frequency licenses. They have over 200 mobiles and hand-held radios city-wide that are already programmed to these frequencies. So if they were to make a major sweeping change all of that would have to change and these radios they already own may not work on something new. Financially, they are better off to stay the same if at all possible. It has been suggested in the past to use cell phones, but that does not always work and they have no control over that. They do have control over this radio system. They have redundancies built in and have worked hard over the years to maintain those redundancies. The Police Department's frequency went down this morning and they automatically switched over to City OPS repeater. That repeater was put in about five or six years ago for that very reason. Any City agency can go to it or they all can go to it commonly to talk on the same frequency.

He stated there is another one that is not always optimum for us. They are forced to use the VIPRE system which is a state and federal system that is on a higher frequency. The VIPRE radios cost about ten times more than the radios the City buys. VIPRE works great in Raleigh, but does not work the best in Halifax County.

They have used it and know the difference in it. Police Chief Martin added that as far as VIRPRE goes they have what they call dead spots. An officer could be in trouble and when he tries to key up, he only hears a beeping sound which means he's not transmitting. They agree that what the City has now is working and they don't want to change it as far as going to VIPRE. They were looking at officer safety.

Public Works Director Chalker said this tower was put into use by the City of Roanoke Rapids around 2004. They have had really good service from this tower since then. From a topographical standpoint, it is the same ground elevation as the water tower at the top of the hill in Gaston. It is a really good location for a communications tower and they have received a lot of good service out of it. Unfortunately, it appears this lightning strike may have done it in. Hopefully the insurance company will concur with this engineer's report and they will be able to move forward.

Public Works Director Chalker stated he would have passed out the estimate to Council, but he does not think this was written in stone yet. He may want to go back and refine it to make sure they were all on the same page to what they were planning to construct. The Police Department, Fire Department and Public Works would possibly meet and then run it by the City Manager and come up with a final product. Again, these towers are not premade, they make to what you order.

Motion was made by Councilman Smith, seconded by Councilwoman Bryant and unanimously carried to adopt Ordinance No. 2020.07.

Ordinance No.: 2020.07
CITY OF ROANOKE RAPIDS
BUDGET AMENDMENT

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

SECTION 1. The following additional amounts are hereby appropriated for the operation of City Government and its activities for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2020 and ending June 30, 2021, according to the following schedule:

SCHEDULE A – PROJECT FUND REVENUES

Fund Balance – Emergency Expenditures Required from lightning strike on September 10, 2020.

Project Revenues	<u>\$100,000</u>
FUND PROJECT TOTAL	\$100,000

SECTION 2. The following additional revenues and reductions in appropriations are available for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2020 and ending June 30, 2021, in order to meet the foregoing appropriations, according to the following schedule:

SCHEDULE B – PROJECT FUND EXPENDITURES

Contingency Funding to General Fund – Emergency Expenditures Required from lightning strike on September 10, 2020.

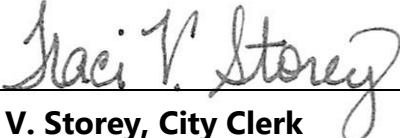
Project Expenditures	<u>\$100,000</u>
FUND PROJECT TOTAL	\$100,000

SECTION 3. This ordinance shall become effective upon adoption.

Emery G. Doughtie, Mayor

September 28, 2020

There being no further business, motion was made by Councilman Smith, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee and unanimously carried to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 5:45 p.m.



Traci V. Storey, City Clerk

Approved by Council Action on: October 6, 2020