



Minutes of the Roanoke Rapids City Council

A Work Session of the City Council of the City of Roanoke Rapids was held on **Tuesday, February 2, 2021 at 5:30 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 W. 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
Jason Patrick, Fire Chief
Christina Caudle, Main Street Director
Larry Chalker, Public Works Director
John Simeon, Parks & Recreation Director
Kathy Kearney, Deputy City Clerk/Human Resources Manager

Absent: Kelly Lasky, Planning & Development Director

**Denotes joining via Zoom*

Mayor Doughtie opened the meeting and offered an invocation.

Mayor Doughtie stated that Item 3 on the agenda needed to be omitted from discussion since Planning & Development Director Lasky was not able to attend.

Police / Fire Vehicle Lease

Finance Director Etheridge presented the most recent information they have received regarding the request for public service vehicles. They have received quotes as of February 1, 2021 for the following options for vehicle purchases:

1. Allow City Manager to purchase (5) 2021 Durango's from White Motors at State Contract pricing of \$30,070 each, and (1) 2021 Ford F-150 for \$33,664 outright by way of a Budget Amendment to move funding from Fund Balance. These

funds are not in current year budget ordinance. The vehicles would cost \$190,000 total as a purchase to FY 2020-2021 budget. (This would bring City's Fund Balance to an estimated 14%.)

2. Allow City Manager to purchase same vehicles in this fiscal year through an installment financing instrument; which will take considerable time, but nonetheless would return a City debt payment of approximately \$44,000 annually when completed. This would also require a Budget Amendment to transfer funds from Fund Balance since the expenditure and revenue for an installment financing project is not included in the 20-21 budget ordinance. Time is also needed to acquire financing. Vehicles would cost \$190,000 in total, just like in option 1. Additionally, per audit requirements, all must be completed by June 30.

Mayor Doughtie asked how many years was the \$44,000 payment. Finance Director Etheridge replied five years.

Councilman Smith said he thought it was said at the last Work Session they could make monthly payments without going into the fund balance. Finance Director Etheridge replied no; that would be if the City was going into a leasing situation which they were not looking at doing at this time. He asked what the bank would charge on a monthly payment. She replied the estimate they received was 2.5% interest. He asked what was the monthly payment on \$190,000. Finance Director Etheridge said when the City goes out for installment financing instrument, they pay annually. So it is \$44,000 annually as a governmental financing instrument.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked Finance Director Etheridge what was her recommendation. She replied if they were looking at purchasing vehicles which is not helpful to operations at this time. But if they were looking at purchasing this many vehicles at this time and since it was not in the current year's budget, she would recommend to take a hard look at this before they get into FY 2021-2022 budget discussions. Then it would flow as part of the budget outline and budget compilation.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked Finance Director to explain what she meant by take a hard look. She said she means to take a look at making sure they are budgeting that without utilizing fund balance.

City Manager Scherer clarified with Finance Director Etheridge if they go with the option 2 on their sheet, the loan the City would go out for would replace the funds used from fund balance to initially purchase the vehicles. She replied it will over time and then in the out year they would have to budget and find funding to pay the loan

at \$44,000 annually for five years. City Manager Scherer said option 2 will replace the initial fund balance.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said initially they would be taking \$190,000 out of the fund balance but the loan itself will replace the \$190,000 so it will be awash in that respect and then the \$44,000 be the annual payment on the loan. City Manager Scherer said that was correct and it would begin in the next fiscal year. Finance Director Etheridge added they would add it to their debt service.

Mayor Doughtie asked if they went with option 2 they would not have to take anything out of the budget this year; they would not have to make a payment until next year. Finance Director Etheridge replied yes they would if they wanted to purchase the vehicles now because they would have to take \$190,000 out of fund balance; they do not have this project in the budget.

Mayor Doughtie said he thought if they went with option 2 and borrow the money, they would not have to make a payment until next year. City Manager Scherer replied that was correct on the loan, but they would have to do a budget amendment to take the \$190,000 to put into the budget so they could order the vehicles. Finance Director Etheridge said they would have to wait until they receive financing from the bank to replace fund balance and would have to be done very hastily before June 30th.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if they saw any issues with getting financed for \$190,000. Finance Director Etheridge replied not issues financially, just need to make sure it is done by June 30th.

Mayor Doughtie asked if the rate was low. Finance Director Etheridge replied 2.5%.

Councilman Smith asked if they do option 1 how would they replace \$190,000 in fund balance next year. Finance Director Etheridge replied they would have to cut to the tune of \$190,000 somewhere.

Councilman Smith stated he felt option 1 would be better for them. When working out the budget for next year, City Council needs to make sure the \$190,000 gets put back into fund balance.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee stated they did not know where they were going to get it or cut it from. He asked about the percentages of fund balance. Finance Director Etheridge replied the approximate percentage in 2018 was 20%; in 2019 it went down to approximately 18% and the audit that will be presented to City Council on February 16th the fund balance is 16%. Therefore, taking \$190,000 will drop it to 14%.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said he was not sure he wanted to do that.

Councilman Smith stated he was not sure the City was having the shortfall in sales tax and all as predicted. Finance Director Etheridge said at the present time they were holding their own, but they also have several quarters of bond payments to Bank of American and a lot of fourth quarter administrative requirements that they have not seen. As they start to see revenues decrease as they typically do in third and fourth quarters, then they would have a problem. That is why their fund balance is diminishing from year to year because they need it to operate.

Councilwoman Scarbrough confirmed that the State mandates an 8% fund balance. Finance Director Etheridge replied that was correct.

Mayor Doughtie asked Councilman Smith if his thought pattern for going with option 1 was to buy the vehicles outright and not have to pay the \$44,000 annual payment and take that money from somewhere that is not needed as badly as police vehicles. Councilman Smith said that was his thought pattern because if the City can pay the bank \$44,000 per year at 2.5% interest then why couldn't the City take \$44,000 per year and put it in fund balance.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if there was any penalty for paying it off early in option 2. Finance Director Etheridge replied no.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked what happened to the lease they were getting from both parties. White Motors and Enterprise were going to do a side-by-side lease that they were going to look at. Now they were saying they were going to do their own thing which he was not opposed to; he just did not like 14% fund balance. If they are able to do that, then let's see where they are and pay it off early.

Councilman Smith stated one of the things they were looking at was buying local instead of leasing out to a company from Arizona. These are local merchants, they pay taxes here and has property.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said he was referring to a proposal from White Motors with a lease; he said he could match anything Enterprise had. Councilwoman Bryant added she thought he said that also. Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said he did not know if he could or not but he hasn't seen saying differently.

Police Chief Martin stated they reached out to White Motors about a side-by-side comparison to match Enterprise's lease. Unfortunately, they never received the document with the side-by-side Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee requested.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said he understood, but was not satisfied they couldn't get it. If they want to do business, they should provide it.

Mayor Doughtie said he has never been highly favorable towards leasing. They put restrictions on it most of the time. They were told by Enterprise the City would have a base they would have to pay off on the vehicle. It has been difficult because he believes they have been looking at apples and oranges between the two leasing packages. If they buy the vehicles from White's, they could monitor them as to when it was a good time to sell the vehicle. The biggest thing they are trying to avoid getting back into if they are fortunate enough to get out of the situation they are in now is having a whole fleet of old vehicles. It is like other capital projects in the community, if they are not high importance during budget time, they get pushed back. First thing you know is that there are streets that need paving and capital improvements needed and then they end up like they are now.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee stated he was not opposed to it, but when they left here they were looking at one thing and when they came back they were looking at something totally different. White's said they could do the same thing and sell it back to the City for \$1. He liked buying too, but reducing fund balance to 14% and getting it back for an unknown year; he did not like that one bit. He said if they were going to do something, let's do option 2, but if they want to pay it off in a year then let's pay it off and be done with it. Once they see where they are in the budget period. At least they would know what they had or they would know they could cut here and there to pay it off. If it was his money that's what he would do and he considers it his money.

Mayor Doughtie asked Finance Director Etheridge how much would they be paying for closing costs and that type of thing they would never recoup. She replied it was typically approximately \$5,000.

Councilwoman Scarbrough asked if White Motors had given a reason for not replying to their request. Police Chief Martin replied no. Finance Director Etheridge sent an email out requesting the information so they could have a comparison contractually so they would have side-by-side to do apples to apples. They did not receive it.

Councilman Smith presented Chief Martin with a document and stated he believed Chief Martin had received a copy of it from White Motors. Chief Martin said it was a spreadsheet comparing what they would do versus Enterprise not a contract that the City would enter into with them. He stated he did have that spreadsheet.

Councilwoman Bryant asked if that spreadsheet for the lease. Chief Martin said this was a side-by-side comparison between Enterprise and White Motors. The City was

requesting a contract as they had the City Attorney review so they could have an apples to apples comparison. White Motors supplied a spreadsheet with what Enterprise offered versus what they would offer, but not in a contract form.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if option 2 would take a lot more time than option 1 to acquire the vehicles. Finance Director Etheridge replied option 2 would take more time on the back end trying to replace the money. If City Council chose option 2, it would still require a budget amendment at the next meeting to allow her to move \$190,000 to operations from fund balance. He asked if they had anything coming due that would offset next year. She replied they did not; the first item they have coming off after the fiscal year end 2022. The amount coming off is \$48,548. City Manager Scherer added that would come off in August of next year.

Mayor Doughtie asked Finance Director Etheridge why they had to move the entire \$190,000 since it was over a five year period instead of the \$44,000 for the annual payment. She replied no per the Local Government Commission and the auditing standards per the City's budget ordinance requires them to have the funding revenue source and the expenditures to encumber to fund this purchase. Whether they pay this upfront or ask for reimbursement through a loan proceed, they did have to fund the initial purchase.

Councilman Smith confirmed no matter which way they go, they have to find \$44,000 in the budget next year. Finance Director Etheridge said that was correct. He said that was why he was in favor of option 1 so the City would pay the \$44,000 back into the fund balance instead of paying the 2.5% interest. Either way they will have to put it in the budget for next year. The City was financing its own debt.

Mayor Doughtie said according to the information in their packet, City Council is asked that they move forward to the next meeting, please advise City Manager and staff which option they choose. He asked if that meant between now and Thursday, February 4th (scheduled Special Meeting). Finance Director Etheridge replied yes.

Councilman Smith asked Finance Director Etheridge and City Manager Scherer which option they felt was best. Finance Director Etheridge stated in her financial opinion because this was not in this year's budget to purchase the vehicles, would be to table this and initiate this in the upcoming budget process. However, with that being said, they have an immediate need for the first responders and their vehicles. If they choose to do something now, she would select option 2. Option 2 guarantees a replacement of fund balance which is better on cash flow to pay \$48,000 over the term even if they can pay it off early. She likes the idea of option 1 to not have the interest payment but if they have a major contingency that could prevent them from

putting the money back, then fund balance would remain at 14%.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked Finance Director Etheridge to equate 6% of the budget in dollars. She said she would get back to him on that figure; she'd rather not try to do that in her head.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee stated he liked what Councilman Smith was saying, but for the unknown part, if it was his money/budget, he would do option 2. He is part of the City and making selections for the City so he would not do it any different than he would his own. He did not like paying interest either, but 2.5% was not so bad.

Councilman Smith asked Fire Chief Patrick if he needed a XL truck with all the electronic equipment on it. Fire Chief Patrick asked if he was referring to the electronic door locks and windows. Councilman Smith said they could get an SE model which is about the same but is about \$2,000 cheaper than what he was asking for. Chief Patrick said the electronic door locks and windows would help when only one person in the vehicle trying to lock/unlock the vehicle. The package they were looking at was the XL not the XLT that is considered top of the line.

Councilman Smith said he understood this was going to be a truck for Chief Patrick. Chief Patrick replied no and explained for many years the department has been asking for a truck to replace the Battalion vehicle because of cancer in the fire service. The firefighters used to get carcinogens, ashes and debris on them and it was not a big deal. Now, with cancer in the fire service, the firefighters clean their gear at the station. Now when they go on a fire call, they take off their gear and throw it in the back of SUV. So now they have gotten all that stuff inside the vehicle with them. Their goal is to get this pick-up truck and that way they can put their gear in the back of the pick-up truck to take to the station to clean. The plan is for them to have the truck for the suppression vehicle which would hopefully be for the health of the firefighters and he would take the SUV they have been using. Right now he is using his personal truck to put the gear in to bring back to the station. That is the reason they are looking at a pick-up truck – to protect them. He questioned whether this was the reason firefighters are getting cancer, they did not know, but if they can do anything to help prevent this he will do whatever it takes.

Councilman Smith said he was under the impression Chief Patrick was driving his personal truck and doesn't believe he was getting gas mileage. Chief Patrick stated that was correct. Councilman Smith said he did not understand that if he was using his personal vehicle and the City was not paying gas mileage. Chief Patrick said he has not turned any in and that was on him. They were hoping to purchase a truck last year and then COVID happened.

Councilman Smith asked why couldn't they get the extended cab rather than the four-door. Chief Patrick said he looked at one on the lot but he did not think it would be comfortable for the guys if more than two of them happen to go out of town for fire training. That is the reason they were looking at the full crew cab rather than the extended cab.

Councilman Smith asked why they needed a four-wheel drive. Chief Patrick said they needed to remember the firefighters go out 24/7 so if there is a foot of snow or a hurricane, there are areas off the road they may have to go into.

Centennial Clock Update

Parks & Recreation Director Simeon reminded City Council he spoke with them a couple of sessions ago about the Centennial clock was not keeping time accurately. He has obtained a quote from the manufacturer of that clock company to repair the clock in the amount of \$6,725. The manufacturer's professional recommendation is to update the clock with new technology rather than repair a 16 year old clock. Those repairs were estimated at \$2,000-\$3,000 with no guarantees the clock would be fixed.

He said the good news was they do have an anonymous donor that has agreed to pay the entire \$6,725 for this update. Once these funds are deposited and approved by the Finance Department, staff will seek a PO to start repairs.

Parks & Recreation Director Simeon also reported that in the last two days he had a conversation with another donor who asked the City to look into added chimes that would ring on the hour and play bell music as well as upgrade to the backup LED lighting. He received the quote for the backup LED lighting today for a little over \$2,000. He has not received quotes yet for the bells/chimes system.

He said right now they are to just repair the clock as they see fit and they do have a donor for the \$6,725 to have that done. The manufacturing company will send someone in from Pinehurst and it is very expensive for them to come in day by day. His plan is to obtain the quote for the bells/chimes and then visit the second donor again. So when they come to repair the clock, they would come at one time to do all the repairs at one time.

Councilwoman Scarbrough confirmed that the clock used to chime and that it came from the Jo Story building. Parks & Recreation Director Simeon said it did come from the Jo Story Senior Center. It was a separate unit that went out years ago and it is not connected to clock whatsoever. It is set with the Centennial Park clock and keep them the same. The speakers were on top of the Senior Center. That same set up is the quote he was looking for today. He added the donor asked that the City bring

everything they would like to see done to the clock and they feel they could find the money to do that. He recalled when they had the clock installed over 16 years ago, it was a nice center piece for the town. With the bells/chimes that went with it and if it was a holiday they could set it to whatever song they wanted made a nice touch. He believes the LED lighting will add a lot to the Avenue.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if the donor that has asked for the chimes and lighting was the same one that was going to pay the \$6,725. Parks & Recreation Director Simeon replied no, there are two separate donors. There is no monies coming from the City. It may take a week or two longer as they continue to research the chimes and get quotes. They would do everything at one time, have all the money in place, write the POs and get the clock back working and up to date with new technology.

City Manager Scherer asked if the same company would be doing both projects. Parks & Recreation Director Simeon replied they are checking that and is hard to say because the chimes are a separate unit.

Parks & Recreation Director Simeon announced the NC State Library has installed public Wi-Fi at the Kirkwood Adams Community Center parking lot to assist students with virtual learning.

Utilization of Third Party to Archive Public Records from Social Media

Main Street Director Caudle said she wanted to have an informal discussion with City Council about the management of public records generated by social media. It is an emerging topic across the nation that has great importance that the City and many other governmental agencies are facing and need to thoroughly understand.

She stated social media has become a critical part of the City's communication strategy. The City collectively have a total of ten (10) dedicated Facebook pages that have the ability to reach over 23,000 followers. That is a great way to contact the community. When they are communicating through social media the citizens are definitely engaging with them.

Main Street Director Caudle gave a PowerPoint presentation about protecting the City with social media archiving as it relates to public records law by a third party, ArchiveSocial.

Councilman Smith asked Main Street Director Caudle if she had run all this by the City Attorney yet. She replied they have not had a conversation yet, they would like to demo the product. They were under the impression there would be a contract but there is not a contract with this company. Once they finish the demo on Thursday,

they will reach out to Attorney Davis and go through all the fine print to make sure this is what they want to do.

Councilman Smith asked why would she or any other staff in the administration jump into something without consulting with the City Attorney first. She replied they have not actually committed to this. They were just educating City Council on what they need to do and where they were going. Definitely Attorney Davis will be consulted and his opinion will determine what their next steps will be.

Attorney Davis said he appreciated Main Street Director Caudle bringing this before City Council in a work session like this. In his opinion this is the exact kind of stuff that work sessions are meant to take up. As she said, he understands this type of stuff is boring, but times have changed and so much of what is produced by municipal governments now is in the form of data such as this. He believes she outlined the issues that come with it. He explained that if the City produces a document like some of the reports they have in front of them, those don't change they are fixed, they are ink on paper. They go in an archive and when someone makes a public records request, they can access those. You can't do that with a social media post that was held by Facebook or some other third party that a citizen can go back in and alter. He agrees with Main Street Director Caudle, this obligation falls on us. In his limited time as the City Attorney, they have had several public records requests. The State puts an obligation on municipalities to maintain records such as this. When they get one of these requests it is important the City complies with the best of its ability and have procedures set up so they can comply.

He continued to say as Main Street Director Caudle referenced to not only make the City able to comply but also to make it easier on City employees in meeting that compliance. It seems like that is part of what this is. If they get a public records request and he informs the City Clerk of what they have to turn over, she does not spend hours or days compiling documents. To a large extent this appears relatively simple to do. As this moves forward, he would be involved in the process; it seems like they are in the initial stages now. He believes it is important that local government maintain these records.

Councilman Smith asked how long do they have to keep public records. Attorney Davis replied the statute would govern that and without having that in front of him he was afraid to say. There is a lengthy period and some have to be maintained forever.

Councilman Smith stated if they put it on social media it will last forever. Attorney Davis replied not necessarily. The concern with social media is should Facebook decide to close shop tomorrow and shutdown all their servers. If the City has not done

something to preserve what they have posted on their side, they cannot go back to Facebook and get it because they are no longer there. Presumably that is not going to happen, but they do not know that is not going to happen. The second part of it is the nature of electronic media. Someone could go in and potentially change it, especially citizen's comments.

Main Street Director Caudle gave an example about a citizen could post something on the Police Department's Facebook page last year. Now that citizen has deleted their Facebook account. Not only did they go away with all their content of their comment, but all the relative content of the replies that other users put under the citizen's comment goes away with it. The City cannot go today to that post from a year ago and confidently pull from that comment stream because the City does not know what users have deleted their accounts or deleted a comment. A lot of that have inflamed over the last year due to COVID and a lot of civil and human rights campaigns that have gone on. Some of other agencies are getting a lot of interaction on basic posts. The City does not have any control over what the users do with their comments but the City is legally liable if there were a public records request. That is where some of the difficulty comes in because once it is posted, it is not there forever. With social media, they do not control the users or the company that is hosting it. They do not have full control yet they are legally liable for the records. That is really the challenge. There has been a lot of legal stuff over the past year and will probably continue. Things may change, but for now they are seeing it used more and more every day, but the law in relation to what the City is liable for has not.

Councilman Smith asked why is a public official of the City of Roanoke Rapids posting on Facebook. Main Street Director Caudle replied she did not know that they have. For example, the Police Department makes a post about a promotion and one of the City Council members posts "congratulations" and then someone starts a conversation with them and they engage them, it is part of the City's public record. She suggested in another meeting, they could discuss best practices and things they could do. For instance they could have a Councilman Wayne Smith Facebook page and a Wayne Smith page so the Councilman Smith page covers him. That is a whole other conversation. As an elected official, with what they are seeing on a case by case basis collectively, courts are determining as an elected official they could be subject to public records requests if they are speaking of governmental business whether it's their personal page or not.

Attorney Davis added part of it is when the public records laws were initially drafted and put into place by legislatures, the internet nor social media was not what it was. Now that social media has become what it is, they fall into the same categories and qualify for the same obligations on municipalities as any other documents. It may be

in the future that legislators and the General Assembly look at this and say they have these public records laws but the current way things are going determine which social media records to maintain. That has not been done so it is still a moving target and an evolving thing. As of right now, he agrees with Main Street Director Caudle and his interpretation of the law is that the City would be bound to keep these records.

Councilman Smith asked if email correspondence and texts between the City Manager and City Council would be subject to public records. Main Street Director Caudle replied yes.

Attorney Davis stated this a good reminder for everyone that any official business that a City Council member or City employee undertakes will be subject to public records law and someone can get access to that through a public records request. There are exceptions for things such as communications with the City Attorney and other limited exceptions.

Councilman Smith said he understood that to get emails under his possession they would have to have a judge sign off for them to get that information. Attorney Davis replied not if it is true public records request and it was regarding City business with City employees and things like that.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked about the pricing. Main Street Director Caudle said there were three tiers. The City would have to use the second or third tier because they have too many interactions to fit into the cheapest price plan. It looks like the City would fit into the middle tier, but they will not know until they start. The middle tier for 12 months would be \$4,788. If they prorate that by the month and the City wants to use it for the remainder of this fiscal year that ends up being just shy of \$1,600 to cover from March to end of June. She would suggest budgeting \$5,000 annually from there. There are no overages so if for some reason the City starts hitting 40,000 archival records then they would need to look at the next highest tier level the next fiscal year. That is the information she has now, they will have a deeper conversation with the company on Thursday. She stated the school system is in the middle tier and has been utilizing it for about a year now.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked how much was the highest level tier. Main Street Director Caudle replied it was \$599 per month and captures 50,000 records with no overages. From looking at what the City has generated the past year as an estimate they are thinking the middle tier would work for the City. They will just evaluate and see what they are archiving every month and keep this open discussion. The laws are ever changing as it relates to this. There are no federal government regulations on

these big social tech companies so that may come too and that would change everything.

Councilman Smith asked where this company was located. Main Street Director Caudle replied ArchiveSocial is based out of Durham, NC so they are essentially local but are a national company. They do work in all 50 states. They hold the market on North Carolina agencies.

NCLM Final Advocacy Goals List

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee presented the North Carolina League of Municipalities 2021-2022 Municipal Advocacy Goals. He reported out of ten goals the City of Roanoke Rapids City Council submitted, eight of them were included in the adoption by the NCLM. He believed that was a good outcome. These goals are what the focus will be. He said if they had any questions City Council would like him to find out or answer he will.

He announced there will be a meeting on March 3rd and encouraged other City Council members to join in the meeting since it will be virtual. There are many topics the NCLM put out there and one in particular was the Council-Mayor form of government. He feels they are some good topics they need to start looking and listening to. Some of the Council members have been in local government for a long time or some other kind of leadership for a long time, but there are changes out there they may need to look at.

Grants Update (Police and Fire)

Police

Police Chief Martin reported the department has applied for a local law enforcement grant through the Governor's Crime Commission. This grant will provide the department with \$23,000 for the purchase of protective masks and helmets. No matching money will be required by the City.

He said they have also spoken with Motorola and are exploring some improvements to their digital radios. One of the engineers is coming to meet with them to give a recommendation. They will pursue any communications related grants from various sources: Grants.gov, Governor's Crime Commission on Crime, DOJ Bureau of Justice Assistance Technology grants, etc.

Chief Martin stated he wanted to let City Council know they were reaching out for grants to help with some of their needed equipment at the Police Department. The grants they are looking at hopefully are grants that do not require any matching monies from the City.

Fire

Fire Chief Patrick said he also wanted to update City Council on some of the grants the department is looking forward to applying for this year. As they may know, the department has been fortunate to have received several grants in the past 12 months. Last year they received a \$425,000 grant which did require a 5% match from the City for the new Fire Safety House. In the next month or so they hope to bring it to one of the City Council's Work Sessions to let them go through it.

He said moving on to what they are applying for this year, as most of them may know the department is in need of a new fire truck. They have been asking for one, but with budget constraints they have not been able to move forward with it. Chief Cook looked at some different grant options and dealing with some grant writers, found that they would be eligible to apply for a grant through the AFG Program with FEMA. That would allow the department an opportunity to possibly get a fire truck with only a 5% match from the City. A new fire engine costs approximately \$500,000 so the City's part would be 5% which is about \$25,000. It would be a great opportunity if awarded that grant. He stated it was a long shot but they remained hopeful. In talking with the grant writing, the average award was two per state each year. They should know whether or not they are successful in receiving that grant by the end of September. In the past they thought they would be competing against volunteer fire departments who basically run their operations through fundraisers and donations. Through Chief Cook's research, he found they would be competing with other municipalities. Hopefully this will come through for them because the fire engine they have is 30 years old and had brake and electrical trouble with it.

Chief Patrick reported they would also be apply for a grant through Fire Prevention which is also through AFG. It requires a 5% match. They would like to get a robotic fire truck to aid in their fire prevention efforts. Hopefully, with COVID subsiding in the future the department can get back out to do their normal fire prevention programs in the community. It is similar to the Andy the Ambulance that EMS carries out to different functions.

Councilman Smith asked how much did they have to pay the grant writer to write the grant. Chief Patrick replied he was grant writer out of Pennsylvania and it cost \$4,500 to write the grant and manage it for them.

Councilman Smith said he heard Chief Patrick say they were having trouble with one of the fire trucks and asked if they had thought about stopping some of the EMS calls. Chief Patrick recalled in April they made some departmental policy changes and unless they are needed for lift assistance, clearing from another call or headed back

to the station, the fire trucks do not go to EMS calls. It is mostly the battalion vehicle or Ford service truck.

Councilman Smith asked if they thought about doing away with the EMS service calls all together. He knows the men do not like that but they could volunteer with the Roanoke Valley Rescue and that would take a lot of strain off the fire trucks. Chief Patrick replied they have tried to keep the fire trucks off the road. The advantage of how they are set up is the response time. He reported this year their call volume is down 800 calls. They went from in 2019 running 2,092 calls to this year they have run 1,290 calls so have reduced their call volume quite a bit. A lot of was through COVID and work with the communications center to basically going to calls that are a true emergency.

Chief Patrick stated as far as working with the rescue squad, they are trying to build up their relationship with them. Just responding from that location or another location that is EMS, their trucks and stations are strategically placed within the community to get a 5-minute or less response time throughout the city. This helps with EMS calls. Since EMS moved out of the City Limits on Hwy. 125, their response time has lengthened to the center of the city. Station 6 within the City's jurisdiction stays extremely busy and is the busiest station EMS has. They saw this with a save at Lowe's where the Police and Fire Department crews were able to revive a person. It took EMS 20 minutes to get on scene.

Councilman Smith stated he knew how hard they worked. Citizens of Roanoke Rapids pays a tax for EMS to run calls. The citizens also approved a one-cent property tax to be paid to Roanoke Valley Rescue. The Police and Fire Department running EMS calls is costing the tax payers money. The City of Roanoke is paying three times the amount of money for EMS than any other citizen. It is the County's responsibility for EMS to run calls, not the City. He knows that Chief Patrick said they have cut down on a lot of calls on the fire truck but they were running a \$500,000 truck up and down the road for these EMS calls. Here they were financially in a bind and the citizens of Roanoke Rapids are paying their fair share of it.

Chief Patrick said he understood that and he will get City Council those numbers. With the new software they have, they can track every vehicle on where they go, how many calls they go on and the type of calls.

Councilman Smith said he knows they want to help the citizens of Roanoke Rapids. But if the people at the Fire Department want to be paramedics or EMS people instead of firemen, they need to volunteer their time when they are off work at Roanoke Valley Rescue or somewhere else and not costing the City the additional money.

City Manager Scherer said he agreed with Councilman Smith that they need to look at all the different things. If they are not the City's core services, then they need to look at reducing or eliminating those. This is probably one of things they need to take a hard look at just eliminating. He has directed all the department heads to take a look at their operations and how they can reduce expenses or non-essentials to reduce the City's expenditures. They can have the Fire Department determine that this is probably something that is not their core mission and can bring that back to City Council.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said he would like to see that report no matter which way they go. He would also like to see him equate the 800 less calls to any kind of savings. City Manager Scherer added it would also reduce the City's E-911 charges as well.

Mayor Doughtie asked if they could buy a fire truck for just \$500,000 now. Chief Patrick replied the fire truck is the truck, not the equipment. Mayor Doughtie recalled the last truck they bought cost over \$600,000. Chief Patrick said that was a ladder truck so it had a lot of moving parts. The new truck they were looking to replace including the equipment would be \$600,000 - \$625,000. They were short a truck period and needless to say they have a truck that is aging that needs replacing. When ISO came and with the department going to structure fires, they are supposed to have two engines and a ladder. That is everything they have so if they are on scene they would not have a reserve truck during that time frame. Hopefully they can get this truck replaced and down the road look at getting a used truck as a reserve truck. If they get this grant, the downfall is this truck has to be taken out of service and not used anymore. It will be deemed unsafe. City Manager Scherer added they could sell that truck to help outfit the new truck.

Budget Review

City Manager Scherer stated with regard to our current budget, my staff and I are looking at what steps or actions are necessary to reduce expenditures for the rest of this fiscal year to accommodate potential reduced revenue receipts. The recovery of our local economy is still fragile and uncertain as the pandemic continues to restrict businesses from fully being open or even just open, like bars, restaurants and large entertainment venues.

We are looking at several options for spending reductions as well as evaluating what our potential revenue could be for the remaining 3rd and 4th quarters. Some year-to-date revenues are up while a few are below last year's amounts at this time. Total revenue receipts thru December are up 6.6% while expenditures are down 2% below this same time a year ago. However, there is no guarantee this trend will continue. Also, some feel that since our total population continues to decrease, our services

expenses should be concurrently reduced as well.

Our largest expenditure is in Personnel costs. While we do value and appreciate the yeoman's work all our employees do, the biggest opportunity for savings is in reducing personnel expenses in salary and benefits. Personnel savings can also be realized by closing facilities and/or reducing hours of operation. Personnel costs reductions can be achieved by layoffs, reduced hours, furloughs, no backfill of vacant positions, retirements, or filling of positions at lower salaries or with only part-time personnel. Vacancies can create other options like consolidating functions, merging crews and/or reducing management or supervision. Also, can opportunities like telecommuting be utilized for any savings? I do want to emphasize that I consider layoffs to be a last resort for us to do. Layoffs significantly damage organizations, where productivity plummets, customer service and creativity declines and top talent flees.

I have directed department heads to review their operations and be prepared this week to recommend what non-essential services and measures they feel can help us reduce their expenditures between now and the end of June. One example of this is my plan to realign Parks and Recreation building maintenance responsibilities to Public Works, thereby consolidating all City building maintenance tasks under them and realizing an anticipated cost reduction by doing so. We need to rethink how we operate and look at adjusting what services and programs we are actually providing. We are looking at selling some properties to help raise revenue and potentially put the property back onto the property tax rolls. We have looked at and cut all non-employee discretionary spending. We have looked at refinancing any current loans with the lower market interest rates but none are eligible for this option.

We will provide you our recommendations for your consideration and approval. To quote Charles Darwin in his book *The Origin of Species*: "It is neither the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change."

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked City Manager Scherer to put a dollar value to the recommendations. He said that is what they were working on right now. What services and reductions they can do and what potential savings that will offer them.

Mayor Doughtie asked if he had a timeframe. City Manager Scherer replied he hopes to bring that to them by the next Council meeting.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said in going back to the Mayor-Council form of government again. He hopes the things he was going to be presenting is what he feels the City

really needs. City Manager Scherer said it would be their best recommendations. Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said he would take that for now. The way he reads it and the way it is analyzed from the NCLM and other cities and towns is that the City Manager is the one who presents his best overall observations/recommendations and the City Council either yay or nays it. The City Council does not usually present that to the City Manager and then the City Manager says this is the way they need to go. He was saying that for a reason. If he was presenting something, let it be what is the best for the City and what he feels is best overall for the City and the departments and not what City Council feels. City Council, at that point, will make a vote. He gets left and right sometimes from all the different things he knows that is going on and he does not like that.

Mayor Doughtie asked if that was something City Council would vote on. City Manager Scherer replied no. Mayor Doughtie stated he understands Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee's concept but did not think they had to vote on that type of thing.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said the City Manager should put together what he feels is best for the City rather than what City Council demands is best for the City. Mayor Doughtie said he totally agrees.

Councilman Smith asked Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee if what he was saying was that he thinks the City Manager should go ahead and enact whatever he decides to do and not present it to Council. Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee replied he was not saying that. He believes he has misinterpreted what he said. He will say it in a different way so there is no confusion. He knows that City Council, for whatever reason, from time to time tells the City Manager what they want, how they want it and he brings it back as a recommendation to the City Council to amen. It needs to be a process where they all participate in it. Sometimes they don't get that chance. When they get it, it is a done deal. That is not a good form of Mayor-Council form of government.

Councilwoman Bryant said she agreed. Since she has been on the City Council and the training that she has gone to, it is not supposed to be apparently dictated to the City Manager by part of the Council and then brought before Council for their backing when it has already apparently been done. They do not need to be indulging in that and she will not support it.

Miscellaneous

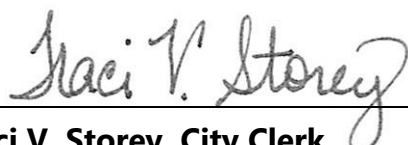
City Manager Scherer announced the NCLM is conducting a Virtual Town Hall connecting Legislators with them on Wednesday, March 3rd at 5 p.m. He gave them the information in a handout tonight. They can register on the NCLM website.

He reported they were moving forward with putting the old Fire Station 2 up for sale. It will be done through the sealed bid process. One of the reason they are doing this is to help reduce maintenance expenses for some of their older aging facilities and the opportunity to put property back on the property tax roll. He will need a resolution from City Council if they agree to allow him to authorize the sale. There will be a 30 day period to accept sealed bids. Once the bids are completed he will bring them to City Council for them to approve for the high bid or disapprove all the bids.

City Manager Scherer said he had the update for the Division 4 projects from the NCDOT. He said they may have seen the NCDOT having some financial issues, but they have told them recently their coffers are back up over \$1B now.

He reported the Hwy. 125 and Premier Blvd. project is a little over 60% completed. They are looking to have that entire project done this coming December. The bridge joint replacements on I-95 bridge over the Roanoke River is 70% completed and hope to have it completed by this coming April. They have a little over 80 miles of upcoming resurfacing projects in the County this year. The new bridge on Hwy. 48 by the paper mill had been put on hold pending funding but that project back on the design phase now.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:12 p.m.



Traci V. Storey, City Clerk

Approved by Council Action on: February 16, 2021