



# **Minutes of the Roanoke Rapids City Council**

A Work Session of the City Council of the City of Roanoke Rapids was held on **Tuesday, April 6, 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  
Kathy Kearney, Deputy City Clerk/Human Resources Manager  
Bobby Martin, Police Chief  
Kelly Traynham, Planning & Development Director  
John Simeon, Parks & Recreation Director  
Larry Chalker, Public Works Director  
Jason Patrick, Fire Chief  
Christina Caudle, Main Street Director

Mayor Doughtie opened the meeting and offered an invocation.

## **Fire Safety House Tour/Employee Recognition**

Fire Chief Patrick announced the new Fire Safety House was parked outside. They were awarded the FEMA AFG grant in 2019. It replaces an older house they had and borrowed for years. When he came to work with the Fire Department in 1997, they borrowed a Fire Safety House from then, Carolina Telephone. The only time of year they could borrow the house was in April because larger cities would be using it other times of the year. Over the years the Fire Department continued to borrow the house and finally Carolina Telephone donated it to them in the early 2000s. The Fire Department remodeled the house twice over the years.

He recognized Deputy Chief Wes Hux and Fire & Life Safety Educator Michael Butts. Both of them have spent a lot of time and effort on this project. Deputy Chief Hux helped put the materials together and submit the grant. The grant was for \$125,000

and the City's match was approximately \$6,000. Fire & Life Safety Educator Butts will be using the house the most. One of his primary jobs is to get the fire prevention message out. He also does some of the department's CPR and First Aid classes. He has been instrumental in the graphics for the Fire Safety House. He and Wes have worked closely on the project and getting the graphics on it. Mr. Butts has been putting the program together to carry people through the Fire Safety House. It has a lot of technology unlike the older house.

He invited City Council and the public to go outside and they would give them a tour. City Council took a brief recess from the meeting to do so.

City Council reconvened.

### **Golf Cart Legislation**

Police Chief Martin reported he was contacted back in late December in regards to allowing golf carts in the city limits. He reached out to Attorney Davis to get some insight along with City Manager Scherer. He has reservations about it but wanted to have the discussion with City Council on how they felt about allowing golf carts in the city limits.

He stated they do have them in the city limits now. There is no registration required and there is no ordinance that covers golf carts specifically. He contacted some other municipalities to see what they had in place. He enclosed a rough draft of what Elizabeth City does. In order to have this put into place, they would need to have more discussion on fees, registration, etc. He also presented City Council with a list of pros and cons of allowing this. (*Document dated April 6, 2021 is on file in the Clerk's Office*).

Chief Martin reviewed the pros:

- Registration of the carts would be revenue for the City.
- Registration would offer a way to regulate who is in charge of the golf cart and who would be a responsible person if any ordinance were violated.
- This would bring about change to safety concerns now with the golf carts already in the city limits. (When they get complaints about them now, they go and warn the individuals).

Chief Martin reviewed the cons:

- The carts are not safe to allow on streets with 35 mph zones or higher.
- If carts are involved in collisions they will not hold up and serious injury or death may occur.
- Registration would need to be regulated by the Police Department. Issue of manpower to oversee this program would come into question.

- Juveniles operating vehicles without supervision.
- Carts on the streets at night? How safe is it, and will lights aid the visibility?

He stated these were just some of the safety concerns he has about these vehicles and he brought them a rough draft for their review. They would need to discuss registration fees and fees for violations of the ordinance if City Council chooses to pass such an ordinance. They would also have a list of streets they could and could not drive on. They do receive complaints, mainly in the warm weather months. Since he did receive an inquiry from a citizen he wanted to present the matter to City Council for their opinion.

Councilman Smith asked how would they monitor the insurance on the vehicles. Chief Martin replied that would be something they would have to look into as far as the registration. Like other motor vehicles, they would have to regulate it yearly. He would need to get with the City Attorney to fine tune that aspect of it if the City Council decides to allow the ordinance for the golf carts.

Mayor Doughtie asked about signal lights. Chief Martin said there was a section in the draft ordinance that addresses lighting, but not specifically turn signals. In his research of ordinances in other municipalities, you can set forth the type of lighting for these golf carts in the ordinance.

Mayor Doughtie confirmed that drivers of the golf carts had to be at least 16 years old and have a driver's license. Chief Martin replied yes and that is the part he addressed earlier concerning juveniles.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if they could be ticketed. Chief Martin said yes and that would be something they would need to discuss further like the registration fees and fines. Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked how many other cities and towns allow this type of ordinance. Chief Martin replied not many. Some of the larger cities allow it in certain areas such as a gated community. Roanoke Rapids is set up differently because of the main streets. His concern would be if they cross a main street. They have multiple collisions/accidents a day in just motor vehicles and if a golf cart was involved in a collision they do not have any protection in this type of vehicle.

Councilman Smith asked how many golf carts did they have in town. Chief Martin replied he did not know. They get multiple complaints mostly in the area of Shell Drive, around the duck pond and sometimes they get complaints of them on the Canal Trail.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked Chief Martin from a police standpoint did he believe

this type of ordinance would open up the idea for four-wheelers. He replied they always have to look at that and it is a good point. He would hate to open that door. They already have enough issues with four-wheelers in the city limits on the Canal Trail and have even received complaints of them driving down Hwy. 158 doing wheelies. He believes this could be a gateway for the ATVs.

Councilwoman Bryant asked if the person that requested the ordinance gave a reason for usage. Chief Martin said the gentleman is from a larger area and emailed him along with the House Bill that regulates golf carts. They use them in and around the neighborhoods where he came from. She asked if they would be restricted to that. He stated they would have to go through every street within the city limits to determine what streets/areas (35 mph, 25 mph or 15 mph zones) they would be allowed to drive on to regulate the amount of golf carts. His fear is if a juvenile or child got in a golf cart not knowing the regulations and something were to happen. There is always the potential for disaster when you introduce a motorized vehicle that does not have the protection like a motor vehicle.

Councilwoman Scarbrough asked if they had registered golf carts now. Chief Martin replied no.

Chief Martin stated again that he provided City Council a draft ordinance for their review and wanted to make sure they had a discussion about the matter since a citizen had brought it to his attention.

Councilman Smith stated if City Council was even to consider such an ordinance, he would like to see that they have public hearings on the matter to get the public's input before making a decision.

### **CDBG Update**

Planning & Development Director Traynham gave an update on the CDBG Neighborhood Revitalization Program and shared some of the steps they were currently undertaking since City Council approved the grant administrator.

She reported on March 18, 2021, the City received the formal grant agreement package from the State Rural Economic Development Division (REDD) and returned the initial documents as required to begin completing administrative tasks and conditions of funding approval. The City is required to comply with Federal, State, and local guidelines regarding the use of CDBG funds. As a condition of funding approval, the City shall have in place specific policies, procedures, and guidelines that will allow the city to proceed with the CDBG-NR project.

Planning & Development Director Traynham said she plans to ask City Council to formally adopt the following resolutions, guidelines, plans and policies, for utilization during the administration of the CDBG-NR Program at the April 20<sup>th</sup> meeting. She reviewed and summarized each one.

1. Project Budget Ordinance (*Establishes revenue/resources for program*)
2. Financial Management Resolution (*Establishes designated financial officer which is the Finance Director and identifies the bank for deposit*)
3. Housing Assistance Policy (*Processing procedures for homeowner applicants, establishes dwelling unit inspections, rehabilitative standards, maximum grant limitations for each home - \$72,000 or \$70/sq. ft. heated occupied space, eligibility criteria, grant awards, regulations for accessory buildings and temporary relocation benefits*)
4. Housing Construction Contract Award Policy (*City required to follow award guidelines for those who bid on rehabilitation, reconstruction or demolition of dwelling units, ensure efficient work schedules and performance standards for contractors selected to do work*)
5. Citizen Participation Plan (*Outlines program information, establishes procedures and requirements for conducting public hearings, procedures for comments, objections and complaints relative to the CDBG program*)
6. Residential Anti-displacement and Relocation Assistance Plan (*Minimize displacement of homeowner occupants during rehabilitation process and provide relocation assistance*)
7. Local Jobs Initiative (Section 3) Plan (*Encourages job creation for low, local income persons; establishes affirmative actions for resident and business participation and outlines requirements and compliance for records, reports and monitoring of the project*)
8. Temporary Relocation Policy (*Goes further than described in #6 – assistance to households if participants are temporarily displaced from their homes due to rehab work, lead based paint abatement or on-site replacement; establishes moving and housing expenses approved through grant program providing safe and sanitary housing conditions and fair housing laws*)
9. Code of Conduct (*For officers, employees or agents of City; prohibits gratuities or gifts to help persuade decision making; defines what conflict of interest is and sets forth consequences should an employee engage in prohibited behaviors*)
10. Fair Housing Policy (*Describes the City's desire to affirmatively further fair housing opportunities throughout the city and deplore discrimination in provision of housing on*

*basis of race, religion, color, creed, sex, national origin, young children in a family or handicapped conditions)*

11. Excessive Force Policy *(Prohibits excessive force by law enforcement agencies within jurisdiction for any individuals engaged in non-violent civil rights demonstrations)*

12. Procurement Standards *(City will procure a number of contractors for lead based paint inspections, asbestos surveys and construction work. Procurement standards will be applied to all contractors involved in process so City will adhere to requirements set forth by State and Federal government for use of CDBG funds. Ensures City will contract with small or minority business firms, women's businesses etc. to greatest extent applicable. Procurement Standards will be followed utilizing competitive negotiations. Any contracts to be awarded will be presented to City Council and ranked like they did the administrative consultant and they would make final decision)*

13. Equal Opportunity Plan *(Equal housing and employment. City will follow Civil Rights Act of 1964, The Fair Housing Act and Executive Order 12892 Equal Opportunity in Housing which eliminates housing discrimination and promotes diverse inclusive communities. Provide information to public for these equal opportunity programs. Equal Employment Opportunity is similar by providing non-discrimination clauses as well as prohibits retaliatory actions)*

14. Language Assistance Plan - Providing Meaningful Communication with Persons with Limited English Proficiency *(Encourages City to provide meaningful access to people that have any language barrier; encourages staff to identify any persons involved in the program with language barriers and to immediately address those concerns; if City does not have interpreter on staff there are options and services available through Fluent Language Solutions, Inc.)*

She stated these documents are form templates that the State provides for the City to use. She wanted to provide them to City Council in advance of the April 20, 2021 meeting where she will ask them to adopt a resolution to approve all of them in accordance with the CDBG grant for this specific project.

Councilman Smith asked if the City would receive the \$750,000 up front or would they spend City money and then be reimbursed. Planning & Development Director Traynham replied it is on a reimbursement basis. Right now the only funds they can spend is for administrative funds until they officially get the release of funds for the construction process. She added for all the grant programs they have done they have used the requisition and reimbursement method. Typically the State is very quick in the turnaround of the financial reimbursement back to the City. There is a schedule included in the financial documents that shows the deadline for submittal. She does not expect the City to be overwhelmed or overburdened with those upfront costs.

Councilman Smith asked what was the typical turnaround time. Planning & Development Director Traynham replied she would have that answer for him by the April 20<sup>th</sup> meeting, if not before.

Mayor Doughtie asked where would the money come from if they had to pay an interpreter, for example as noted in #14. Planning & Development Director Traynham said it would come from the grant. It depends on what category of the activity. There is no City funds committed to this program and everything would be paid for through the grant.

Councilwoman Bryant asked how long did this process take to spend the grant funds. Planning & Development Director Traynham replied once City Council adopts these policies, there are a few other activities that need to be done. The one that will take the longest is the environmental review because the State has a 30 day review period on that. That is before the City can ask for a release of funds to start the project. They have three (3) months from March 10, 2021 (date Secretary of Commerce signed the grant agreement) to satisfy all the funding approval conditions. From March 10, 2021, they have twenty-seven (27) months to obligate all the funds or to say exactly where and how they will be spent. All funds have to be spent within thirty (30) months or September 10, 2023. The program itself has to be closed out by December 10, 2023. She added the release of funds request is due by August 10, 2021. They expect to be ahead of that deadline. These dates could potentially change should they have severe weather or substantial occurrence within the grant program.

Councilman Smith asked if anyone had applied for the grant program. Planning & Development Director Traynham said in the application submitted to the State in August 2020 included 12-13 homeowner applications. City Council will serve as Housing Selection Committee and the department will provide them a ranking of each of the applications based on need, income status etc. She noted #3 in the policies and procedures list outlines how the homeowners would be ranked. The grant administrator has a housing rehab specialist that will come in and go through each home to create a scope of work and estimates. That scope of work will go through a bid process for each home. They believe there is enough money to do at least eight (8) homes scattered throughout the city.

Councilman Smith asked if the City would inspect each home after the work is completed. She replied yes.

### **FY 2021-2022 Budget Discussion**

City Manager Scherer made the following presentation for the FY2021-2022 Budget Review and Development:

### SITUATION

- a) Past fiscal year has been tough, with reduced staffing and no external assistance from the prison system, some facilities temporarily shut, programs cancelled, reduced revenue and dealing with the virus response and trying to keep our employees safe.
- b) Recently, the economy has picked up, with January sales tax revenue the highest we've seen in a long time. Retail recruitment firm sees the economy expanding with pent up savings and stimulus money for people to spend.
- c) Travel is picking up again – Exit 173 is busy, license plates at Starbucks, Chick-fil-A and other businesses are mostly from out-of-state.
- d) Other revenue sources continue a slight upward trend.
- e) Some major expenses are also trending up, such as fuel, health insurance, tipping fees and street light costs.
- f) For the FY21-22 budget, we plan to address major needs of our personnel and equipment needs, some of which have been lacking in past years and are becoming critical.

### ASSUMPTIONS

- a) Service levels to remain the same. No facilities to be closed.
- b) Frozen personnel positions to remain in place unless department resources can be shown as reallocated for position funding or a case can be made for additional funding.
- c) No new taxes or use of fund balance is planned for.

### OTHER PREPARATION ISSUES

- a) Capital projects or equipment “we could do with” for next year and 2-3 years thereafter.
- b) Information technology hardware and software upgrades.
- c) Raising fees charged for services to increase revenue stream for that service.
- d) Any planned grant requests.

### BUDGET PRIORITIES

- a) Salary and Personnel Benefits
- b) Public Safety Forces
- c) Infrastructure Repair
- d) Keep Facilities Open

### OVERALL BUDGET ESTIMATES

- a) Estimated Revenue: \$15.6-16M (have not received NCLM Revenue forecast yet)
- b) Initial Budget Submissions: \$16.9M

IMPACT ISSUES:

- a) Health Insurance Costs up 7.7%/\$118K (*Received news today that may go down a little bit*)
- b) Potential 911 Center Funding Savings: \$71K (Proposal)
- c) Legislative Assistance with COVID Relief or Economic Development
- d) American Rescue Plan (ARP) Funding \$4.19M (2 payments of \$2.09M) *First payment should be received in June and second payment would be a year later. No formal guidance yet, but the four (4) key categories of eligible expenditures: Coronavirus response/relief; higher wages for public employees; revenue replacement; investments in broadband infrastructure. Would like to help with personnel costs to cover budget gap.*
  - i. Assist with Personnel Cost, Fund Balance Restoration, other.
- e) Possible Increased Powell Bill funding (General Assembly bill proposed).

MAJOR BUDGET INCLUSIONS:

- a) Repaving: \$400K
- b) Restore Positions in Police and Public Works
- c) Possible Use of ARP funds for COLA
- d) Public Works Capital: refuse truck, knuckle boom, leaf machine
- e) City Hall elevator replacement
- f) Police/Fire Vehicles

TOURISM REQUESTS

- a) Trail Maintenance: \$15K
- b) 1026 Green Space Fixtures: \$12K
- c) Chockoyotte Park batting cages and parking lot improvements (needed to host regional and state girl's youth softball tournaments): \$4K
- d) Christmas in the Park features and electrical support upgrade: \$8K

PROPOSED BUDGET CALENDAR

- a) City Council meet with Departments at Lloyd Andrews Building
  - i. April 13 at 3 p.m. (Public Works, Police and Fire Departments)
  - ii. April 15 at 3 p.m. (Parks & Rec, Planning and Administration)
- b) If needed, second meeting with City Council and Departments
  - i. April 20 at 2 p.m.
  - ii. April 22 at 2 p.m.
- c) May 4: Proposed Budget Presented to City Council
- d) May 18: Public Hearing Held
- e) June 1: City Council Pass Final Budget
- f) June 15: City Council Pass Final Budget – if adjustments are needed.

City Manager Scherer announced the departmental draft budgets will be sent to City Council on Friday for their review and consideration.

Councilman Smith said he recalled last year's budget was \$15.7M and now they are talking about \$16.9M this year and asked if they were considering increasing the budget over \$1M. City Manager Scherer replied they would be utilizing some of the ARP funding for COLA and capital purchases so that is where most of the increase would be. Finance Director Etheridge reminded City Council that these are also the initial departmental budget requests or first pass. City Manager Scherer stated this is what the departments have submitted and they will review with them what they will need to reduce or adjust.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee stated there were items and things they held and cut back last year. He would like to look at the list of those directly and the restoration of those from the funds prior to any new dollars being used elsewhere. He believes the ARP funds are for the restoration from COVID. City Manager Scherer said City Council should see a lot of the budgets have been proposed to go back to pre-COVID levels. Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said they may already have a list of those items, if not they need a list of what they did to cut back from COVID. This way they could make a better decision as what to do with those ARP dollars. City Manager Scherer stated he anticipates being able to put some of these ARP funds back into the fund balance as well. One of the things it says it's supposed to do is help offset revenue loss.

Councilwoman Bryant said as a member of the Halifax County Visitor & Convention Bureau board, she wanted to remind City Council that tourism is to be used as a destination or marketing organization. When looking at a request they have to keep that in mind whether or not it is destination or marketing related and not just something they would like to have.

Mayor Doughtie said it seems the City has cut back not just last year but every year since he's been Mayor. He noted the \$400,000 for repaving, but is not sure how far that will go. He talked about the complaints from citizens on the condition of the streets and back alleys. He stated police is high on his priority list for budget. When people look at moving to a community they look at schools, crime rate, infrastructure and those types of things. If a community doesn't have good roads and schools and a safe community they have a tendency to continue to look and go somewhere else. He said it is wonderful the City is going to receive the ARP money. He said the City's fund balance when he became Mayor was 8% and they have grown it up to more than 20% but now it is down some. Lean times will continue to come – they come and go. The people that survive best are the ones who are prepared for those times when they come.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee added to Mayor Doughtie's comments about people coming. He said there are things people expect the City to do: Police, Fire, Public Works and those sort of things. They also look for amenities. He recalled while working for the hospital when a doctor came to relocate, if their wives didn't like what was going on, they wouldn't come. They would not relocate and they actually lost a couple of doctors because of it. They said there was nothing to do in Roanoke Rapids. He stated they needed to look at these amenity type things such as the Aquatic Center and Park & Recreation activities for their kids.

Councilwoman Bryant said she agreed with Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee about the quality of life amenities. Everybody can enjoy a park. People that are coming to the area are looking for that type of green space and having organized activities for their children to participate in safely. She thinks these quality of life issues are very important and definitely need to look at those. She also agreed with Mayor Doughtie's comments on paving and that some of the alleys are in great need. There is two blocks on Hunting Ridge Road that is so bad she even drives on the opposite side of the road.

### **Miscellaneous**

City Manager Scherer gave the following report:

May Work Session: As part of the session, transport Council to Public Works for a tour of their operations.

### **Bills Submitted/Issues of Interest to Cities**

- a) NCLM asks General Assembly to not force municipalities to delay elections because of census information delay. *He talked with Kristin Scott with Halifax BOE and she indicated they are moving forward with holding elections in the fall unless they hear otherwise.*
  - i. Have blocked off proposed Early Voting period with Kirkwood Adam Civic Center calendar.
- b) Proposal to decriminalize all municipal ordinances, leave only \$50 fine for enforcement – NCLM opposes the bill.
- c) Municipal Employee Whistleblower Protection – NCLM opposed bill.

Centennial Clock Repair: Still anticipating receiving final donation soon to move forward with clock repair and installing system upgrades.

Recently a man was reported living in a tent on the Canal Trail. The Police Department and Parks & Recreation Director Simeon contacted him and he voluntarily left the area.

NCDOT has indicated they have a resurfacing package with Rose Brothers Paving. This is for West 10<sup>th</sup> Street from Zoo Road to the Avenue. They are hoping to have it done this summer.

The State has come out with new judicial guidance that in general, 18 years olds are to be considered juveniles and not adults for criminal acts. The Police Department has received training and guidance on how to handle these situations.

**Closed Session**

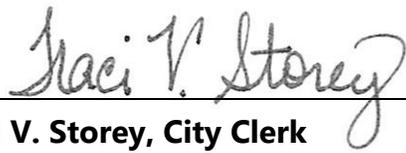
Motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee, seconded by Councilwoman Scarbrough and unanimously carried to go into Closed Session to discuss a matter with the City Attorney as allowed by NCGS 143-318.11 (a)(3).

**[Remainder of page intentionally left blank]**

*Minute Book Pages 20277 - 20285 contain Minutes and General Account of a Closed Session which have been sealed until such time as public inspection of those minutes would not frustrate the purpose of the Closed Session.*

City Council returned to Open Session. No action was taken.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

  
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**Traci V. Storey, City Clerk**

**Approved by Council Action on: April 20, 2021**