



# Minutes of the Roanoke Rapids City Council

A Work Session of the City Council of the City of Roanoke Rapids was held on **Tuesday, May 3, 2022 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  
Sandra W. Bryant)  
Suetta S. Scarbrough)  
Wayne Smith)  
Rex Stainback)

## **Council Members**

Kelly Traynham, City Manager  
Geoffrey Davis, City Attorney  
Traci Storey, City Clerk  
Carmen Johnson, Finance Director  
Bobby Martin, Police Chief  
John Simeon, Parks & Recreation Director  
Davis Wise, Planning & Development Director  
Christina Caudle, Human Resources Director  
Jason Patrick, Fire Chief

**Absent:** Larry Chalker, Public Works Director

Mayor Doughtie called the meeting to order and opened with an invocation.

## **VIPER Radio System**

Police Chief Martin said per a conversation held at the last meeting about the VIPER radio system the Police Department is requesting to transition from their existing radio system. City Council asked for more information and insight into the radio system. He contacted Buddy Wrenn with the Halifax County Emergency Management. In his opinion Mr. Wrenn has some of the better knowledge of the VIPER radio system due to the fact he uses it on a regular basis. Mr. Wrenn will give City Council more information and how the system works. The VIPER radio system was made for emergency management and first responders when it was created.

He reported they have spent approximately \$117,545.90 over the past few years on their current radio system which averages out to \$16,792 per year. They are looking to transition to a more updated radio system. The benefit would be that repair costs would go down tremendously. His concern at this time was the inconsistency with communication officers,

firemen or any other first responder. He reported a recent incident where they lost contact with an officer for four minutes chasing an armed subject. He feels the coverage and clarity is much better with the VIPER radio system and there are other features that can be introduced with these radios. One is GPS and the other is the man-down button. It will save them money in the long run although there are upfront costs to put portables in the officer's hand and mobiles in the vehicles. It is something that is needed.

Councilman Smith asked what the upfront costs would be. Chief Martin replied the upfront cost for the portables was \$150,000 for 50 radios. This would outfit the entire police department and have 6 spare radios. It would be \$175,000 for the mobile radio system that go into the patrol cars with 6 extra.

City Manager Traynham added the Fire Department has been included in an application for a Firefighters Association Grant for the VIPER radios to be used by the Fire Department. It would be a partial allotment, but if funded it would help support the Fire Department's preliminary need for the radios. She noted that funding decision is pending.

Chief Martin called on Buddy Wrenn to speak to City Council.

Mr. Wrenn said Chief Martin had distributed a packet which was the NC Strategic Communications and Interoperability Plan which is the State's plan for 911 Communications land/mobile technology and the ability to support that at the state level. He referred to page 7 which gives an overview of the VIPER system overall. It states there are over 234 tower sites and 143,000 users state-wide. It is very large system and has been in operation for over 20 years. It's not new technology; it's been built in phases. As the state received funding they were able to build towers or lease tower space, they proceeded to build it. At this time it is over 97% built state-wide. The infrastructure was already in place. Each one of those sites has a generator backup meaning if they were to lose power there is a generator backup to each one of the sites.

He referred to page 9 in the packet. He stated the question he gets a lot was if there would be user fees. Currently the VIPER system is funded by State Legislature which is on an annual budgetary basis. They have a capital plan for replacement of repeaters. They replaced the repeaters in Halifax last year. There are multiple tower sites that are accessible within the City of Roanoke Rapids. The closest is the Enviva tower just across the river in Northampton County that is approximately four miles from the city's center. The second site is at the Halifax County Sheriff's tower which would be closer on the south end of town towards Hwy. 125 and Exit 171. It is seamless as far as the transition to whichever tower is closest when they key up on the radio.

He said it has been reiterated to him multiple times over the years that State Legislature will be funding the infrastructure. Basically what the County would be responsible for as they transition to VIPER which they have already been through the process, they have submitted the total radios that would be in the County and they estimated radio traffic and said existing infrastructure is sufficient to support full time radio usage on the VIPER network for their county. There is no infrastructure that has to be added at this point by the County. All they are responsible for is the portable and mobile radio purchase and maintenance. Other good components of the VIPER radio system is it's a closed loop system. Each radio has its own unique ID number. Those ID numbers are appointed by one point of contact in the County. Nobody can go out and buy a radio on Ebay and start talking on that radio system. If a radio was stolen, they can turn that radio on or off remotely permanently or temporarily. Another good component of this system specific to law enforcement is they have the capability to be encrypted. Encryption allows the users to not be picked up by digital or analog scanners; it's basically like a cell phone call. Also, if they have outside sources/agencies coming in to help, as long as they have a VIPER radio system they can get an event channel.

Mr. Wrenn said he personally had been using the radio for more than ten years in his previous and current job. It is the chosen radio system of all state agencies at this point. The current usage is 288,000 key ups per day on the system state-wide. They are able track every key up over the entire system. If a tower starts to have problems they have technicians that respond to those towers. All this is implemented by the NC State Highway Patrol.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if there were monthly or yearly fees. Mr. Wrenn replied there were none. The State Legislature funds operations and maintenance for all the towers with their state budget. It is kind of a joint operation between the state, counties and municipalities. That would be subject to change only if the State Legislature changes funding.

Councilman Stainback asked Mr. Wrenn if had ever experienced issues with signal strength in any particular area or always 100%. He replied their commitment is 95% or better at the road. The County has tested it throughout the county and have not experienced any issues. Chief Martin added they utilized the system during the Roanoke Rapids High School Centennial Celebration and it worked flawlessly. The Police Department has tested VIPER radios going to locations in areas they have experienced issues and they did not have any issues with them.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if the \$175,000 for the mobile in car radios included everything. Chief Martin replied no, that was just the radios. They would have to be installed and he did not have a quote for the installation. Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked

whether that could be done in-house. Chief Martin said they could, Public Works could do it but it all depends how much time they have. Public Works used to do the installation of the radios for the Police Department. The only maintenance they would have if they needed a microphone or something like that. The goal is to have a good, clear radio system.

Councilman Smith asked how many agencies actively have these radios now. Mr. Wrenn replied all EMS currently has them installed in their trucks and they have enough portables for all the supervisors. There is a total of about 200 in the County.

Councilman Smith asked when he expected the Sheriff Office and everybody to start using these radios. Mr. Wrenn replied the Sheriff Office funding is budgeted for this upcoming budget year starting July 1<sup>st</sup>. The radio systems at the 911 Center are sitting in the warehouse waiting to be installed. Once they are installed they will have the capability to convert over.

Councilman Smith asked when they anticipated that being done. Mr. Wrenn said he hoped it would start before May 1<sup>st</sup>, but they had a delay with the installation of some infrastructure. That has now been installed and after the final testing they will begin the installation of the radios. The vendor said it would take about one month total for both sites including the backup center here on Jackson Street. He was hoping within the next 2-3 months. He added they planned to do it in phases. As soon as radios are installed, EMS will be on VIPER.

Councilman Smith asked if they were thinking it would be six months to a year before they were able to get everything activated like it should be. Mr. Wrenn said that would be a worst case scenario. As mentioned the County Firemen's Association hired a grant writer to apply for an AFG grant through FEMA for the Fire Department. Depending on what they find out about that the Fire Department may be delayed on the County level.

Councilman Smith asked if they were going to operate the analog until all this is done. Mr. Wrenn replied yes. The radios they were installing can receive analog or digital. Some municipalities may choose to stay on the analog system. It should not be an issue.

### **Commercial and Residential Housing Survey**

Planning & Development Director Wise stated in the last meeting Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee requested a housing survey. He started with the Roanoke Rapids Historic District as the starting point since there are funds that can assist with preservation projects. He acknowledged two of his staff who were instrumental in assisting with the project that was completed in 14 days on top of their regularly assigned work, Kristyn Anderson, Administrative Assistant and Roger Bell, Code Enforcement Officer.

He gave a PowerPoint Presentation. In his presentation he noted the Historic District has 1,945 resources of which 1,163 are contributing to the historic significance and 782 that are non-contributing to the historic district. A map was created identifying the properties with each parcel color coded to indicate its overall condition. (The presentation and supplementing documents are on file in the Clerk's Office).

He reported one of the most distressed historic resources is located in the 200 block of Roanoke Avenue. The entire block is at risk. Though funding such a large project would be challenging, it is not impossible to obtain.

Planning & Development Director Wise also presented a map distinguishing the parcel uses. Residential, schools, commercial, industrial and vacant lots. Within the historic district there were 1,590 residential parcels, 204 commercial parcels, 7 school parcels, 140 vacant parcels and 4 industrial parcels.

He said some of the funding opportunities could be utilized in other areas such as the Canal Museum and the City Public Library. However, some grant opportunities would be closed to the City because Roanoke Rapids is not currently a Certified Local Government. He said the Cannon Foundation located in Concord, NC has divided the state into three regions and has given Eastern NC a total of \$1.9M. One of the foundations giving considerations is Historic Preservation. Historic Preservation is an economic development tool that is underutilized in some communities. Roanoke Rapids has a substantial number of historic resources.

Planning & Development Director Wise explained the program requirements to become a certified local government and the City has already completed many of the requirements. The two things they would need to do is reestablish the Historic Preservation Commission and provide the necessary documentation of previous work and current activities.

He said everyone talks about marketing but nobody talks about product development. The path to success requires relentless incremental improvement.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked about how the City could become a Certified Local Government. Planning & Development Director Wise said he would reach out to CLG coordinator and start that process with the steps he mentioned. The only "hitch" is that a city has to be a CLG for one year before they are eligible to apply for any grants. He would recommend applying towards the end of this year in November or December. In January they could apply for grant funding that could be awarded in the spring.

Mayor Doughtie asked for him to elaborate on his comment about product development. Planning & Development Director Wise replied he did a Main Street internship with the

Department of Local Affairs in the State of Colorado. Marketing historic resources is one of the points of the Main Street approach. It is an economic development tool that most communities don't think of. Most of the time people think of preservation, they think someone is going to tell them what to do with their property. If a town writes its ordinance that way, it may be the case. People look for authenticity when they are traveling - Heritage Tourism. He has a preservation background and has spent from age 21 to 40 rehabbing historic homes from 8,000 sq. ft. to 12,000 sq. ft. and smaller houses. He has also done properties like what the City has uptown and downtown. He has been on both sides of the table. He gave his history of rehabbing a historic property. He stated his project would have not happened if not for City incentives.

He said the City has a lot of upper stories that are vacant so that is revenue property owners could get to help with their properties. There is a Rural Transformation grant that just closed today or yesterday, but a second round is available in August. When working on the survey, he kept track of how many boarded windows, storefront windows were broken and storefronts that were not historic. He would like permission to write a grant this summer that will cover multiple properties uptown and downtown to replace boarded windows, broken windows and storefronts. On both sides of town where people come in are very distressed. That is a deterrent for anyone wanting to invest in a property. This will be a long, slow process.

Mayor Doughtie said he felt there were many properties with potential on the Avenue. When people live on the Avenue you don't have trouble bringing them to the Avenue because they are already there.

Planning & Development Director Wise reported he had a meeting scheduled with Reid Thomas who is a preservationist with the State Division of Archives this week but unfortunately he had to cancel. Instead he will be meeting with Maggie Gregg with Preservation NC. He will take her on a tour of the City to see how they can start putting some things together. Mr. Thomas plans to set another time to meet and bring his supervisor.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked what they could do about the "red" properties that were noted to have major issues and public safety issues. Planning & Development Director Wise said he could begin looking at those properties with Roger Bell and Brian Duhadaway. He referred to the Historic District Housing/Building Condition Survey document in their packets which list all the properties and their condition. Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if they could look more closely at the properties in red. Planning & Development Director Wise said they would and report back at the next meeting.

Mayor Doughtie thanked him for getting the information in such timely and detailed manner.

Planning & Development Director Wise asked that they keep an open mind to preservation. He was not advocating for preservation to just preserve it, it has to have a use to be of value. You can't just rehab a building to restore it and it sit there.

Mayor Doughtie said they have discussed with the City Manager and City Attorney about the issue of homes where families have moved away, the property has been abandoned and they have numerous heirs and nobody took any interest in taking care of it. It then goes down in value and it becomes an issue on what to do about them. The City has quite of few of those type of situations.

Planning & Development Director Wise stated there was a rental home inspection program here in the past. His experience with this type of program is that it needs to be city-wide, not just picking one section of the city. A lot of the red and yellow properties may have been averted had there been an inspection of the property. He explained how a rental property inspection program would work. It is a way to lessen the complaints.

Councilman Smith suggested Planning & Development Director Wise meet Cathy Scott who is the Halifax County Economic Development person. She is very smart on grants and getting different things in the community.

### **Compromised Storm Drain System (1<sup>st</sup> & Jackson Streets)**

In Public Works Director Chalker's absence, City Manager Traynham reported a few months ago while the trash truck was running its routes drove across a void in the road and some of the road base began to collapse under the weight of the truck. It has been reviewed and they have received an estimate for the repair. It appears to be a \$75,000 repair for the correction of the compromised storm drain system issue. The work would have to be contracted out.

She said Public Works is monitoring it and keeping crushed rock on top of it to keep it stabilized until the repairs can be made.

City Manager Traynham stated this leads into storm water inventories and management. Back in 2017-18 the City of Roanoke Rapids in partnership with the Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments (COG) applied for a Clean Water Management funds for a grant project to help inventory the City's storm water system. The City has not had a complete inventory of the storm water pipes. With the age of the City, much of this infrastructure is old and fragile. They are not certain where some of the pipes go and flows into it or not.

She said when this need came up years ago, the COG got involved to help with it. She reported they were in the second phase of the funding.

City Manager Traynham said Anthony Price Jr. is working in the field on behalf of the COG to help facilitate this grant program. He has been working with a few of the Public Works staff looking at the storm water inventory and identifying what flows into it and where the water goes. This inventory will be helpful in doing repairs and replacement as well as in the case of an emergency spill.

She introduced Mr. Price who is a graduate of the University of North Carolina and is from Littleton. He has been hired by the COG to complete this study on behalf of the City. He will share with City Council what he has been doing and how it will help the City.

Mr. Price reported his work on this project involves data collection and map creation. He has been collecting GPS locations and information regarding these assets and how it gets out to the Roanoke River. He made a PowerPoint presentation as he explained his process of locating and documenting the assets. He stated they find a lot of these manholes and catch basins are extremely filled with leaves and trash.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked how the Roanoke Rapids Sanitary District fit into this. Mr. Price replied he believed they already had their sanitary water/sewer system mapped out. The City's system is separate.

City Manager Traynham said the results of this study and mapping will help with project management and identifying ways in which to improve the system. Mr. Price has come across a few instances where something did not appear right or identified where there could be a potential problem. It will help the City with budgeting purposes in the future for making improvements.

Councilman Smith asked Mr. Price if he had found many of the storm drains stopped up. Mr. Price replied yes, a majority of the time they are stopped up especially during the Fall. City Manager Traynham added as part of the grant they will be conducting a review of the Storm Water Ordinance for development and also to provide some best practices. This type of effort will be beneficial in the long run and is something that has been needed by the City. Now they will have it digitally and electronically available.

### **Police Department Salary Analysis**

Councilman Smith stated he recalled in the last meeting, City Council discussed and put in place the minimum salary for certain officers and understands it has already been implemented. He did not want to discuss the matter further until they work on the budget. They need to know exactly their income and they need to know what they have in salaries

as far as the budget is concerned before they get into setting basic salaries. He asked the matter be tabled until they have another budget meeting.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked what was involved with tonight's presentation. City Manager Traynham replied in the last meeting, the motion was modified for Option 2 but limited it to the lower positions. The Police Officer position was assigned to Grade 19, a BLET Cadet position was created for Grade 14 and the Master Officer position was moved from Grade 18 to Grade 20. The issue did not come to full circle was when the Master Officer was moved to a Grade 20, there were two positions that are supposed to be a higher rank. The options presented had included bumping up the ranks so they would not have superiors in the grade and pay range as lower ranked positions. When they change the grade they need to bump up the next ones to the next progressive level.

She said now the Police Investigator and Police Sergeant positions are at Grade 20, the same as the Master Officer. Human Resources Director Caudle, Chief Martin and herself have looked at this and recommend reassigning those positions to Grade 21. Reassigning the grades to naturally reflect the progression of rank would not immediately trigger an increase in salary. Everyone currently in a position involved in this would still fall within the salary range so it would not change their pay. Although they would need to look more closely at potential compression issues. Their request tonight is to make the salary schedule correct to match the progression of rank and class, but does not equate to increased salaries.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said the question was whether or not they agreed with their logic and it makes sense to him. At the next meeting if they could have the cost if there was a cost to do that.

City Manager Traynham replied that was a question they did not have the answer to at the last meeting. Since they have looked at each person salary and grade and potential new grade. Changing the current grades would not automatically equate to a change in salary. Should some salaries be adjusted, probably so, but they are finding that throughout the City for a lot of employees. They were not asking for action tonight, but wanted to bring it up to them. This is something that fell short in the last meeting. They would like to bring that to City Council at the next meeting to try and correct the issue. They can make it part of the upcoming budget.

Councilman Smith asked if they were looking at a COLA in next year's budget. City Manager Traynham replied yes, salary will change as a result of that. They were talking about addressing the grade to make the salary schedule follow the natural progression in position and rank.

Councilman Smith asked if she had an estimate of the income expected for next year. City Manager Traynham replied she and the Finance Department staff will meet in the morning to discuss and review those numbers. She said they appear steady at this point from prior years. At the next meeting she will be more prepared to share a complete picture and a balanced budget.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said he would like to see them add a mid-point salary. He was not saying by the next meeting or this budget, but he would like to see them move to adding a mid-point on the scale.

City Manager Traynham reported she and Human Resources Director Caudle were soliciting information on conducting a salary study and what the cost would be. She hopes to bring that to their attention in the near future.

Councilman Smith stated he did not have a problem with changing the grade. He said right now he had some concerns about the budget. He does not anticipate an increase in taxes and did not anticipate voting on a tax increase. City Manager Traynham stated she did not anticipate providing City Council a budget that includes a tax increase.

Mayor Doughtie questioned if the issue with moving people at the lower salary range up across all the City departments would cause this same situation. City Manager Traynham said they were looking at everything with that. Overall they are finding some employees who have been employed for a number of years, and in fact found nine of them who they felt their pay should be increased. As they know, everyone wants to make more money, but the cost of living is going up. She is hoping in the budget scenarios to provide a few alternative actions that would be satisfactory to the employees and City Council in a fiscally responsible manner.

Councilman Smith asked how many department heads conduct performance reviews on their employees. City Manager Traynham replied most of them do. He asked if they were presented to her to review. She has not taken the opportunity to review those at this time. She actually need to take time to review the department heads, but she intends to. She would also like to bring back a merit program as part of the budget instead of relying on a COLA.

Councilman Smith said he has checked with other cities and conduct performance reviews on all their employees. They get bonuses based on how they perform. He would like the City to get into the same thing. Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said they had to do an evaluation at the hospital every year even if they did not get an increase.

Mayor Doughtie asked how do they implement a merit based program, does City Council

grant that authority or does the City Manager have that authority.

City Manager Traynham said it comes with the funding. If City Council allocates money in the budget to cover those merit increases, it can be within the administration's authority to do so. She recalled when the monies for merit raises was removed from the budget years ago as cost savings, it have never come back. She would like to see it come back because she believes some employees question where they stand. Many time merit increases are based on performance achievements such as certifications. They were looking at this for the upcoming budget and with the salary study.

Attorney Davis added there may be parts of a merit based evaluation system that needs to interface with the City's Personnel Policy. He believes City Council would have significant part in that whether it is with the budget or amending the Personnel Policy.

Councilman Smith said they need to try to get this implemented within the next year.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said when a study is done, it would be nice to implement all of it but they may not be able to do all of it, but could possible phase it in.

### **Miscellaneous**

City Manager Traynham announced on May 6, 2022 at 8:30 a.m., the Fire Department will host a Veteran's Breakfast at Fire Station 1.

She also announced Open Enrollment for insurance and benefits for the next year will be held this Wednesday and Thursday at the Kirkwood Adams Community Center.

She reported the Fire Department has been conducting training at the former Texas Steakhouse Restaurant which is slated for demolition for redevelopment. The department is also finishing up the hydrant testing this week.

City Manager Traynham stated the next City Council meeting will need to be moved to Wednesday, May 18, 2022 due to Election Day on Tuesday, May 17<sup>th</sup>. She plans to present a first pass of budget options for a balance budget at this meeting.

Councilman Smith asked Fire Chief Patrick to bring an estimated cost for the fire truck. It is a year down the road project. It will take a year to get it once they order it. He feels it is a priority that they will have to do. He would like City Council to discuss it at the next meeting. He understands there is possibility that if they order and pay for the fire truck they can save about \$38,000 or more.

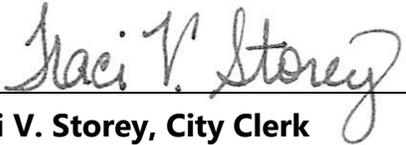
Chief Patrick said that was correct. He met with the representative yesterday and was told

the City could save money by buying upfront. He was waiting for the finalized price and was told it would be about 30 days to hear back on that. The longer they wait the longer it will take to receive it. The estimated time for delivery has gone from a 13 month delivery to an 18 month delivery. As soon as he gets the price back he will bring it to them. He added they would not be able to sit on that price for very long either as prices change every day. Councilman Smith asked if Chief Patrick could have the price by the next meeting. Fire Chief Patrick said he was not sure but would contact the representative to see.

City Manager Traynham suggested City Council could authorize a fee not to exceed if they feel this is a priority action.

**Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

  
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**Traci V. Storey, City Clerk**

**Approved by Council Action on: May 18, 2022**