



# Minutes of the Roanoke Rapids City Council

A special meeting (Budget Work Session) of the City Council of the City of Roanoke Rapids was held on **Tuesday, May 7, 2019 at 3:00 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)  
Suetta S. Scarbrough)  
Wayne Smith)

## **Council Members**

Joseph Scherer, MPA, MS, City Manager  
Traci Storey, City Clerk  
Leigh Etheridge, Finance Director  
Bobby Martin, Interim Police Chief  
Kelly Lasky, Planning & Development Director  
Jason Patrick, Fire Chief

## **Council Budget Briefing**

City Manager Scherer gave an overview of the draft FY2019-2020 budget priorities:

- Maintain current level of services and staffing
- No layoffs or employee benefit reductions
- City appearance improvement
- Improve street maintenance

## **Revenue Estimates**

- Ad Valorem: \$6,945,131
- Motor Vehicle Licenses: \$735,187
- Interest Earnings: \$50,555
- Utility Franchise Taxes: \$1,447,529
- Beer & Wine Taxes: \$72,000
- Powell Bill Allotment: \$448,162
- Sales Tax: \$3,400,333
- Planning: \$126,871
- Residential Solid Waste User: \$1,488,220
- **Total From All Sources: \$16,670,261**

**Department Budget Totals**

	<b><u>Budget Requested</u></b>	<b><u>Current Year Budget</u></b>
Police	\$3,409,615	\$3,350,293
Fire	\$2,128,645	\$2,188,654
Planning	\$633,260	\$526,391
Public Works	\$4,891,546	\$4,510,704
Parks & Rec	\$1,958,465	\$1,789,561
General Gov't	\$4,376,045	\$5,153,634
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$17,500,576</b>	
Revenue Forecast	\$16,670,261	
<b>Deficit</b>	<b><u>\$830,315</u></b>	

City Manager Scherer called attention to the current installment notes payable amounts. The Neighborhood Resource Center's last payment is the next fiscal budget year 2020-2021. The rest will be out two or more years.

<b>General</b>
----------------

**General Issues**

- No increase in property tax rates
- No changes in employee benefits: health insurance, longevity, holiday bonus, 3% 401k match
- Some revenue sources trending down
- Pension contribution cost up (state mandated) 1-1/2% increase
- Health insurance costs up (2.5%)
- Landfill costs up (\$3-\$5 per ton)
- Equipment maintenance costs up
- Municipal election cost (\$4k - \$18K)

City Manager Scherer reported the City must pay for any municipal election that is held which costs approximately \$4,000. However, if the City wants an early voting (one-stop voting) location in the city, the Board of Elections has indicated the City must pay the entire cost for that. The cost is estimated at \$10,000-\$14,000. He has asked for a detailed list of how they came up with that estimate. The early voting location would have to be open for thirteen days, a certain number of hours each day. This would impact the budget as well if the City requests an early voting site.

Councilman Smith asked why the City would have to pay for a site when the Board of Elections has several other sites in the county. City Manager Scherer replied they are only holding one other early voting location in Halifax which all the municipalities will share in that cost. We would only be charged if the City of Roanoke Rapids wants to hold their own in the city. Kristin Scott said she checked with the State Board of Elections and that was true. This would be the first time the City would be charged for that. Councilman Smith questioned whether this was because of the controversy over the past two years and now they decided to get out of it by charging us.

Councilwoman Scarbrough asked if this was true for all the counties or just Halifax County. City Manager Scherer replied Ms. Scott said the State Board of Elections said this was the case so he would presume that was true in every county.

## **Police Department**

### **Need New Body Cameras, Radios (\$6k)**

City Manager Scherer reported Interim Chief Martin has indicated the department needs new body cameras. Chief Martin said the existing cameras were about five (5) years old. They have just started wearing out outside the warranty and to have them fixed costs approximately \$400-\$500 per camera. He said they use them every day for every call so they are going to have some wear and tear on them.

Councilman Smith asked if there was some grant money out there for this. Chief Martin replied yes there was and that was something they would be looking in to. The department has five cameras that are down right now so to have them fixed and back out on the street is why he allotted that amount in the budget.

Councilwoman Scarbrough asked how many cameras does the department have now. He replied they have one for every officer on the street. They have 28 cameras plus cameras they give the narcotics team when they do search warrants so they have 32-35 cameras that are used all the time.

Councilman Smith asked what is the cost per camera. He replied a new body and car camera set up was around \$5,000. He added the \$6,000 requested was to repair and replace, which is cheaper.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked with the five that are down if there were officers without them. Chief Martin replied they were using the ones they had left and were

trying to get those five repaired as quickly as possible. They have body cameras for officers and they can share as well if they need to.

City Manager Scherer reminded Council these items are what has been requested but some things may need to be cut to balance the budget. These are issues he wanted to highlight; he was not saying everything had to be funded.

### **Ammunition Costs Increased (\$5k)**

Chief Martin explained they were having a hard time getting the ammunition that they were using; they would put an order in but were not getting it. They have decided to go back to the original ammo so this would be for one year to get them back to where they needed to be. Once they change out the ammo, the cost would go back to what they normally request. They were using Winchester but it is difficult to get it in a timely manner.

### **SRT - Equipment Outfit (\$5k)**

Chief Martin said the SRT is basically the City's SWAT team. It has been out for a few years and with their fight against narcotics and other things - they are used to serve high risk warrants. They were used in the standoff on Old Farm Road. They had to get Halifax County's Hazardous Injury Team to come in. The department has members with the training but they are working to re-establish the City's SRT. The funds requested is for training and to outfit them with some equipment. They do have vests from the previous team that can be utilized.

Councilman Smith asked if they were having trouble with the County coming into town. Chief Martin replied no, they want to work together. The department was going to re-establish the SRT so that they can work and train together. If they get it re-established, they can link back up with the County. The County actually has guys that get specialized training that can come back and help train our guys.

Councilman Smith stated he was all for the officers' training but why would we need to get vehicles and equipment and duplicate what the County has. Chief Martin replied we would not need any vehicles - we already have that in place. They were not trying to double up it's what they already had in place but it got pushed to the wayside.

### **Vehicle & Equipment Maintenance Costs Up (\$10k)**

Chief Martin said this request was for the department's outdated patrol vehicles. They are trying to update any 2007 and beyond vehicles. They almost have more officers than vehicles that are running. They just got 5 new vehicles in which has

helped tremendously. They still have vehicles out there that are on their last leg. The equipment is the lights, radios etc. on the vehicles. His hope was this would cut down the maintenance costs as they progress and update vehicles. He added the department needs new flashlights, duty belts and holsters. Currently they have six different flashlights and to outfit each officer they have to go to six different distributors to get parts and pieces. He was trying to outfit officers with one type of light (Stinger flashlight). These lights are metal as opposed to the plastic ones they are using now which are starting to break and fall apart. They are just running out of duty belts and holsters.

Councilman Smith asked how many vehicles would \$10,000 buy. City Manager Scherer replied they were not buying any new vehicles, just increasing the maintenance on them.

## Fire Department

### **Server upgrade (\$7k)**

Chief Patrick said their server is in dire need of an upgrade; they have been asking for it several years now. It is similar to the server that was upgraded at City Hall last year. In addition to the server, they will need to upgrade some of their computers with that same funding.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee stated it seems to him that it would be better to purchase for all so departments get a better rate on servers and computers. City Manager Scherer replied if the City was in a better financial situation, he would agree with that, but it was hard to set aside a large amount of money to upgrade all the servers at one time as opposed to fixing them as we go the best we can.

Chief Patrick explained what the server is and how it works for the department.

### **Radios replacement ((\$7k)**

Chief Patrick stated right now 70% of the department has radios that are approximately 18 years old. They have been trying to replace them. The ones they have now they cannot get parts for them. He has been waiting a year now for cases for the radios. They have applied for a grant the past two years to replace everything they have, but so far have been unsuccessful. They are in a grant process right now to replace them but they cannot continue to wait for a grant that may never come. They need to start replacing them on a regular basis. This amount will not replace every radio they have, but if they can get in a process of replacing a few every year, it doesn't hit them all at one time; similar to what they did with the air packs.

He said in their line of work, that radio is communication and that is their life line. In fire department line of duty deaths, the number one thing is communication.

### **Station #1 HVAC (\$20k)**

Chief Patrick said Station 1 was built in 1998 and most of the air conditioners were 1997 so they are about 22 years old. He has been told they are no longer making the refrigerant used in those units. They are trying to use up the stock pile they have. Once this is used up they do make a supplement to go in the place of it but he understands it is not as efficient. Again the parts for some of these HVAC units are difficult to get. The year before last they had to replace one of the units and it cost about \$7,000. They would like to start replacing them because last time it went out in August and they had to do without a lot of things for the rest of year.

### **Pickup Truck (\$30k)**

Chief Patrick said he believed former Chief Coggins asked for two vehicles four years ago and one was kicked out. They are still in need of that pickup truck. The truck will be a four-door vehicle that they plan to put a camper shell on. He said some of them may be familiar with the cancer issues within the fire service. One of the things they are starting to do with their department when they have a fire is right then all the equipment is deconned (rinsed off with water from the truck on scene) and put in the back of a truck to the station. It is then thoroughly washed inside and out. This way they do not put any contaminated gear with carcinogens back inside the truck. They are trying to do any little thing to prevent anyone from getting cancer. This is what the new pickup truck will be used for in addition to having another vehicle for the department to use when they go out of town to schools. Plus they are finding out that pickup trucks work best for the department as opposed to SUVs; they are cheaper too. He also noted that there are five staff people out and about doing fire inspections, fire prevention and doing their job and they only have four vehicles.

Councilman Smith asked Chief Patrick how many vehicles did the department have. He replied they have six vehicles counting the brush truck (3 SUVs, Mazda, Battalion 1 and brush truck).

## **Planning & Development Department**

### **Part-time Administration Help (\$20k)**

Planning & Development Director Lasky said currently in the department's part-time budget is one employee, Donald Tart, who works 1,000 hours a year which is his limitation. She is proposing to have additional administrative help to

supplement and add to the department's existing services to improve efficiency. This person would mostly help with answering telephone, filing and other office administrative work. The department had two administrative assistants several years ago when a lot more development was taking place. When budgets were cut over the years that level of staffing was cut. She would like to propose part-time for now as opposed to full-time mainly to see how it would go. She said as general statutes keep changing to put additional requirements on cities to approve permits within shorter time frames, it has increased their workloads significantly.

Councilman Smith stated he has managed offices in Henderson, Durham, Ahoskie and Roanoke Rapids and found part-time help was not worth a nickel. He says that is because the time you get busy, it is time for them to get off of work and the person that is busy has to go up there and take their place. He asked why she was asking for a part-time employee rather than a full-time employee. He believes that would be more efficient for the City and for her. Planning & Development Director replied it would be and she considered that, but she was being mindful of the other needs the department has. Having full-time assistants would greatly change things for the department.

Councilman Smith asked her what was the difference between the part-time and full-time help. She replied primarily the expenses of benefits. City Manager Scherer added they would be looking at an average of \$40,000-\$50,000 for salary and benefits.

Planning & Development Director Lasky stated with the budget she had in mind it would be for approximately 30 hours per week. But if she could get full-time that would be great.

Councilman Smith said he would rather put a full-time person in the budget instead of a part-time person because when they leave then she would have to take the other person away from their job to cover that or either she would have to do it. And if she has to do it, it costs the City a lot more money to do that work. She replied at the current staffing levels, that's what was occurring. Councilman Smith said he believes City Council needs to look at putting a full-time person in that position.

City Manager Scherer said he would agree with that, but they were trying to be as frugal as they could while still providing assistance in the department.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said she was talking about that person working 30 hours per week which is a little more than what was considered part-time and asked what

was the part-time requirement. She replied it was 1,200 hours without having to provide benefits and the amount would depend on how skilled of a person. She noted that down the budget request list, they have a vehicle need as well so if a part-time person could help in any capacity then she would foresee if it works well to create a full-time position in a future request. She said all their duties are customer service related; they do not produce any physical, tangible objects. It requires a lot of sitting down and report writing. Any type of help at this point would be beneficial to get their work done.

Councilman Smith stated the department does produce revenue for the City. He said you can't tell him that two part-time people were better than one full-time person. They have a part-time with Donald Tart and are talking about hiring another part-time person. If you add those two salaries, it was about the same amount of money.

City Manager Scherer said they would consider a full-time person, but their goal was to provide additional assistance while being frugal with money. Councilman Smith said he appreciated them trying to be frugal and appreciates what they do, but he did not think having two part-time people instead of one full-time person was being too frugal. City Manager Scherer said they would still need Mr. Tart as a part-time inspector, the other person would help run the office. Planning & Development Director Lasky said most of the people are out of the office most of the day so Administrative Assistant Kristyn Anderson is the only person that has no need to go out of the office on a routine basis. They adjust their schedule to make sure someone is there all the time.

Councilman Smith asked if Ms. Anderson would not be more efficient for you if she was back there helping rather than in the front answering the phone. Planning & Development Director Lasky replied absolutely. She is the go to person and has exceeded beyond a basic administrative assistant. Her performance acts more like a project manager. It would be ideal to have the new person answering phones, filing and making copies while Ms. Anderson would be that point person that knows the status of projects, schedules inspections and doing more of the project manager role.

City Manager Scherer said they would see what they could do about putting another full-time person in the department.

#### **Demolition increase (\$75k)**

Planning & Development Director Lasky said they asked for additional money for this line item because there are a lot of needs throughout the community. They



have been receiving approximately \$20,000-\$25,000 a year the last couple of years. That does not accurately represent the number of structures they could potentially seek code enforcement action on through demolition efforts. She said they could look at two ways: why is the City having to budget monies to demolish private property? It removes blight, improves public safety and leads to future opportunities for land use.

### **Pickup Truck (\$30k)**

Planning & Development Director Lasky stated the department currently has six vehicles and one of them is not working very well. It is an 18 year old Crown Victoria passed down from the Police Department. It is a 2001 with 150,000 miles on it. They also have a new inspector that started a couple of weeks ago and they do not have a vehicle for him to drive unless they share. On the state contract they can get a pickup truck for \$20,000-\$25,000 and then additional funds are for tags and up fit.

City Manager Scherer stated they do have needs within the departments and reminded Council they would not be able to fund them all this year, but he wanted them to be aware of the needs they have and have had. He asked if they had any questions.

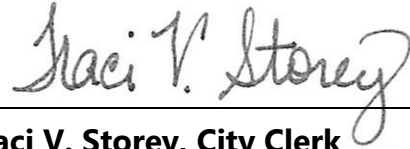
Councilman Smith asked City Manager Scherer as the budget was now, where was he looking to get the \$800,000. He replied there were some other recommendations in budget they will hear on Thursday that are needed but they just cannot be done this year such as Kirkwood Adams. He was planning to go back to the departments and ask them cut their budgets percentage to help make up the deficit. He will leave it up to them to decide what lines they feel they can afford to cut and still operate.

Councilman Smith asked if after that is done, would Council get to look at the cuts in the departments. City Manager Scherer replied yes, they will give them a recommended budget that balances and have them take a look at it.

Councilman Smith asked what was the City's fund balance. Finance Director Etheridge replied 22%.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked what would the \$800,000 be as a percentage. City Manager Scherer asked Finance Director Etheridge if they balanced the budget with undesignated funds, what would that bring the fund balance down to. She replied 20-21% would be an estimate.

There being no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 3:40 p.m.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Traci V. Storey". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

**Traci V. Storey, City Clerk**

**Approved by Council Action on: May 21, 2019**