



# 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 **Thursday, April 15 at 3:00 p.m.** the Council Chambers at the Lloyd Andrews City Meeting Hall.

**Present:** Emery G. Doughtie, Mayor  
Carl Ferebee, Mayor Pro Tem  
Ernest C. Bobbitt)  
Sandra Bryant  
Suetta S. Scarbrough)  
Wayne Smith)

## **Council Members**

Joseph Scherer, MPA, MS, City Manager  
Traci Storey, City Clerk  
Christina Caudle, Main Street Director  
Kelly Traynham, Planning & Development Director  
Bobby Martin, Police Chief  
Jason Patrick, Fire Chief

**Absent:** Leigh Etheridge, Finance Director

Mayor Doughtie called the meeting to order and offered an invocation.

Councilwoman Bryant stated she has noticed log trucks on Roanoke Avenue going too fast. She asked if they could request some speed bumps and if anyone else had made complaints about it.

City Manager Scherer said they generally do not recommend speed bumps. He said Roanoke Avenue is also a NCDOT road and they would probably not agree to it. They do not recommend speed bumps on City streets because they end up slowing down emergency vehicles and causing damage to personal vehicles. They try to use other methods to control speeding; speed bumps are used as a last resort.

Police Chief Martin reported he had been in contact with DMV in regards to their units patrolling the Roanoke Avenue area. Trooper Warren has been doing a good job to help them out because of all the complaints about log trucks and excessive speed. The Police Department is aware of it and is working on it. They also have utilized the radar trailer which gives data on the times the speeding occurs. This allows them to utilize the officer's time more efficiently to work the area during peak times.

## Planning & Development Department

Planning & Development Director Traynham presented the department's FY 2021-2022 budget.

She stated their primary goals were to maintain current staffing levels and to provide the training opportunities that were required for certifications. She reported the Demolition line item is \$25,000 which has been typical of years past. That will accomplish two single family residences.

Councilman Smith asked how many houses they had to demolish now. She replied three or four and two other ones that have been through the process. They could potentially have more as they continue on and City Council approves the demolition order. They moved slower on that this past year because of COVID.

Councilman Smith stated the department actually needed \$50,000 to tear down four houses that they haven't torn down in the last two years. Planning & Development Director Traynham said that would be correct.

Mayor Doughtie asked if she thought they had more than three, four or ten houses that need to be taken down. He feels the city has a large number of homes that are in a deteriorated state or moving that way. They will continue to move in that way because the homeowners have shed any responsibility on them. He asked when the City goes through the process of demolishing a home, do they put a lien on the property. She replied yes they do put a lien on the property.

Planning & Development Director Traynham stated approximately 70% of the homes in Roanoke Rapids are more than 50 years old so she agrees there are a lot of homes that look in various conditions from new down to about to fall over. The housing code has a dilapidated condition and one for unsafe human habitation. The ones that are considered unsafe for human habitation are the ones the department is able to move forward with a demolition order. Others that get boarded up typically stay that way unless someone with interest shows up and wants to make a change. A lot of the time it is heir property and the condition continues to deteriorate. There are a great deal of homes that need attention, but they can only do a few at a time. The department only has one minimum housing inspector and he also does the vehicles. She added one thing the department wants to accomplish in the upcoming year is to conduct a housing survey city-wide. They would then prioritize and rank houses. The last time this was done was back in 2006.

Councilman Smith said some of land the City has liens against now cannot be built upon because there is not enough clearance on the lots. Planning & Development Director Traynham said many of the lots are non-conforming to current zoning code. He asked if there was any way they could change that so houses could be built back on the lots. She said they could look at that. Some of the main issues are if the density is increased, it becomes a fire risk. Sometimes owners will try to split it with adjoining properties to increase the green space in between. There are some exceptions to rebuilding on the lots, but most of the historically platted lots are 25 feet wide and a lot of time they find encroachments that make it difficult. They try to be as flexible as they can.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said he would like see them follow along with the survey and would like to include lots with two lots together. The two lots would make one good single lot. As far as heir property is concerned, he would like to get with her and talk with the City of Greensboro. They have a process where they can get that property and do something with it. He said the City has a lot of that. He would like to see that as a project this year, to do the surveys and look at the two lots and focus on those.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked what the department's main focus was for the upcoming year. Planning & Development Director Traynham replied their main focus would be the CDBG grant. That is major function of multiple areas of the department. Since the applications they received from homeowners are throughout the city, their hope is it will become a "competing with your neighbors" kind of trickledown effect with improvement. There are potentially eight or nine families that will benefit along with the City. Another priority is for them to continuously try to improve customer service delivery so people will have a more positive experience when they come into the department. She knows they can still do better in the communication aspect.

Mayor Doughtie suggested having a meeting where City Council could talk with Planning & Development Traynham to ask questions and get clarification on planning issues. City Manager Scherer agreed and said that would be a good topic for a Work Session, to have the department come meet with City Council.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Police Department</b></p>
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Police Chief Martin presented a budget summary for the Police Department's FY 2021-2022 budget.

**2021-2022 Goals**

- To restore budget to pre-COVID conditions
- To employ a full staff with up to date technology
- Provide law enforcement officers with fully upfitted patrol vehicles

**Budget Overview**

2020-2021 Budget (approved) \$3,203,629 (down by \$110,000 from FY2019-20)

2021-2022 Budget (requested) \$3,360,620 (increase of \$156,995)

The \$156,995 increase would enable the Police Department to carry out and continue to provide public service to the citizens of Roanoke Rapids by the best possible means and allow our agency to travel towards the pathway of reaching the three-year goals that are set forth by the minimum yearly budget increase towards vehicles, equipment, technology, and rate of pay for employees.

2020 and into 2021, presented an understaffing of 7 openings and carried 3 frozen positions. In the midst of COVID-19, the Police Department saved approximately \$34,000 to include online training vs. in-person, participated in an equipment surplus program and eliminated the officer on-call program just to name a few. During this 2020-2021 budget year, we continue to use those same cost saving techniques to help conserve money within the current budget.

To continue with the vehicle rotation that began in 2019 to be completed by 2026 to enable the old vehicle to be only seven years old and to replace all the fleet with a year of 2019 or newer as well as be upfitted with in-car cameras.

Reinstatement of one investigator position and one PACE position, which will leave one Investigator's position frozen.

**Increases beyond agency-control**

- 20% fuel increase
- Ammunition costs increase
- PPE (gloves 25% increase)
- Body Armor increase

**Capital Items (requested) 2021-2022**

<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Total Price</u>
5	Vehicles (upfitted)	\$40,131	\$200,655
14	Laptops	\$800	\$11,200
5	In-Car Camera	\$5,500	\$27,500

**Capital Items (requested) 2022-2023**

<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Total Price</u>
7	Vehicles (upfitted)	\$40,131	\$280,917
14	Laptops	\$800	\$11,200
7	In-Car Camera	\$5,500	\$38,500

**Capital Items (requested) 2023-2024**

<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Total Price</u>
7	Vehicles (upfitted)	\$40,131	\$280,917
7	In-Car Camera	\$5,500	\$38,500

Chief Martin presented year-to-date revenue totals for the Police Department.

Finger-prints	\$430
Animal	\$1,500
Wreck Reports	\$6,647
MO Violations	\$20,640
Alarms	\$150
Other	\$575
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$29,942</b>

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked Chief Martin what was his primary focus for the upcoming year. He replied trying to get fully-staffed. They will continue to be proactive. They have issues with some pretty severe violence that has taken place within the City Limits of Roanoke Rapids. They are focused on getting the PACE Team back on the street and making contact with the citizens. He stated when the PACE Team and Narcotics Division was fully staffed, they saw a decline in the types of crimes being committed. He is hoping over the next 1-2 years they can close that gap. They focus a lot of their man hours on community policing.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if they planned to continue on with the committee that was started early on. City Manager Scherer replied he had provided City Council with some recommendations on how to formalize that process, but has not received any feedback. They had put it on hold depending on how they wanted to move forward. Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked City Manager Scherer to resend that. He replied they could.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked about the uptick in violence. Chief Martin said the general crimes stay pretty steady: B&E's in storage buildings and vehicles, theft of catalytic converters, etc. His concern was the major crimes of people being

assaulted/shot and some of these crimes are involving individuals as young as 16. The law that changed the age affects how to charge 18-19 year olds causes some issues.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said they had his report about the body cameras but in the actual budget request it looks opposite. Chief Martin replied they had already purchased the body cameras except for the in-car cameras. What he included in budget is what he would request as a final budget item to put with the upfit of the new vehicles. The plan is as they get new vehicles to go ahead and upfit them with the in-car cameras. It cost \$5,500 for the camera and the software. The body cameras would work in conjunction. He was trying to get this to add to his budget. This is where they have these discussions. They need the vehicles, the laptops and in-car cameras.

Councilman Smith asked what Separation Allowance was. Chief Martin replied that is for the individuals that retire and they draw a separation allowance until they are 62 years old. Councilman Smith asked if that was government policy or City policy. City Manager Scherer said it was a government policy and separate law enforcement policy. Councilman Smith asked for clarification of the 401k police line item. Chief Martin explained police officers 401k is different than non-police. It is a different rate structure.

## **Fire Department**

Fire Chief Patrick presented and summarized the Fire Department's FY 2021-2022 Budget request in the amount of \$2,132,291. The FY 2019-2020 budget (pre-COVID) was \$2,045,000. As his fellow department heads stated, they are trying to get back to where they were because this past year they had to cut a lot of things. He said they could not keep the cuts up again this year. They did away with turn gear and replacement and they try to get a few a year so it doesn't hit all at one time. Although it is an increase to the FY 2019-2020 budget, the increases in social security, insurance and retirement totals \$50,000 which they have no control over.

He highlighted the following:

- HVAC system at Fire Station #1 is 24 years old. They have a total of eight units there now. Two of them have been replaced within the last three years and one is down right now that they are working with Public Works to find a cheaper way to replace it rather than using a standard unit.
- Radio System Upgrade & Maintenance.

- Learn Not to Burn Program (Fire Prevention materials they hand out to school kids)
- Fire Fighter Grant - submitted AFG grant requesting a new fire truck. City match would be \$25,000 if they received the grant. They will find out in September.

### **Capital Items**

- Fire Truck – Grant not guaranteed. Down a truck right now. ISO graded department as two engine, one ladder response. If they receive the AFG grant they will have to get rid of Truck 142 because it is deemed unsafe so they cannot keep that truck. They would still be short a truck either way. He said if they get the grant, they will get a \$500,000 fire truck for \$25,000. He asked them to consider to purchase another engine at that time. There would be a little savings on the engineering because you build/design them from the ground up. This way they could basically get two fire trucks for the price of one.
- Storage shed for Fire Station #2 to store the Fire Safety House for \$12,000. Include concrete slab, building and installation (turn-key). They would also store items taken out of old Fire Station #2.
- HVAC Replacement at Fire Station #1

### **Capital Items (2 Years Out)**

- Replace generator at Station #1 (Current one is 20kw and not big enough to run station)
- Rotation of staff vehicles
- Parking lot at Station #1 (\$16,000) – Public Works will be working on replacing apron in the rear.

Councilman Smith asked about line item for Career Development. Fire Chief Patrick replied that is a program that rewards personnel for getting certain certifications. He believes that is a good way to retain employees for going above and beyond to get their certifications.

Councilman Smith stated it was going to be difficult for him to work with Chief Patrick on a second fire truck as long as they keep running a \$500,000-600,000 truck up and down the road for rescue calls. Chief Patrick said they have done everything they could to keep them off the road. He reported the numbers for the past 12 months as follows: Engine 144 went on 26 medical assist calls and Engine 141 went on 7 medical assist calls. Most of these calls were for lift assist with an obese patient.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked for a list of the number of calls prior to request. Chief Patrick replied he did not have it with him; he only went back 12 months. Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee said he would like to see that because he would like to see the difference before the request to stop running the truck to rescue calls. Chief Patrick said it would be a huge difference. He will get numbers from April 2019 – April 2020. He added they have reduced their call volume by 700 calls as well. They are only going to true emergencies.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked about a Capital Items List. City Manager Scherer said they will put together a list of all these items and come back to City Council once they get a better idea of what additional funding they have. They will then need to discuss a prioritized list of personnel and capital items for them to decide on and request administration to act on.

Chief Patrick explained that if they received the grant for the fire truck they would sell truck #142. The equipment on that truck could be transferred over to another engine. With two new engines, they would be running them and allow them to put the ladder truck on an “as needed” basis to structure fires only. It would give them more longevity with the ladder truck. A new ladder truck would cost \$850,000-\$1M. Engine #142 already needs an engine rebuild, is 30 years old and has 109,000 miles on it.

### **Goals for FY 2021-2022**

- Adjust gaps between salaries
- Re-instate Part-time Fire Marshal position
- AED Defibrillator Trainer
- In next four years lower ISO rating again (need to get training hours)

Mayor Doughtie asked Chief Martin if the City’s population of 13,972 that he listed on his summary was correct. Chief Martin replied he obtained that from the most recent census. City Manager Scherer asked him to send him the link he got the information from.

Councilwoman Bryant stated those figures very well may be correct. They need to be looking at that and looking forward to things they can do to make this area more attractive. Most young people that go off to college, they are not coming back. If that continues the city could very easily get below 10,000. The average age probably be shocking to many. The neighborhood she grew up in used to be full of children and now there are no kids. The City is aging, the population is aging and young people are not staying here so they need to be looking at that. They need to be



coming up with things to make them want to come back here and attract others here.

Councilman Smith said it depends on economic development. It is jobs that make people want to leave town.

City Council discussed that jobs and quality of life were important for growing the City's population.

### Final Budget Comments

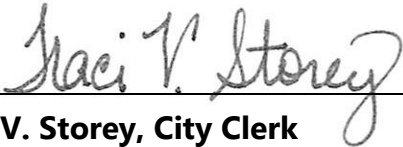
City Manager Scherer gave City Council a summary of the Next Steps for the FY 2021-2022 Budget.

- Provide Council updates on the American Rescue Plan funding as it becomes available.
- Provide Council new Department budgets based on \$15.8M revenue estimate.
- Provide Council a list by Department of unfunded needs/wants for next fiscal year. For consideration, prioritization and funding if additional revenue becomes available.
- Provide Council the list of Debt Load Summary (what loans are outstanding and their completion date).
- Provide Council a draft 3-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).
- Plan for next round of meetings:
  - May 4<sup>th</sup> Work Session
    - *Provide new department budgets for review and discussion before developing Final Draft. (Include any ARP information or recommendations)*
  - May 18<sup>th</sup> City Council Meeting
    - *Provide Final Budget to City Council*
    - *Make any final changes as necessary after meeting*
  - June 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting
    - *Provide Budget for Public Hearing*
  - June 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting
    - *City Council adopt Final Budget*

Mayor Doughtie asked City Manager Scherer could provide City Council a report on when the fund balance was at a maximum and where they were now. He replied he could give them the figures from the past 5-6 years. His understanding from the

general guidance he has received, they could use some of the ARP monies to put in fund balance. It's supposed to be used for revenue that they have lost.

There being no further business, motion was made by Councilwoman Bryant, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee and unanimously carried to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 4:35 p.m.

  
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Traci V. Storey, City Clerk

**Approved by Council Action on: May 18, 2021**