



# 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, **April 11, 2023 at 10:00 a.m.** at the Public Works Training Facility.

**Present:** Emery G. Doughtie, Mayor  
Carl Ferebee)  
Sandra Bryant)  
Wayne Smith)  
Rex Stainback)

## **Council Members**

Kelly Traynham, City Manager  
Traci Storey, City Clerk  
Carmen Johnson, Finance Director  
Larry Chalker, Public Works Director  
Doug Love, Assistant Public Works Director  
David Wise, Planning & Development Director

**Absent:** Tommy Daughtry, Council Member

The budget work session was called to order.

## **Public Works Department**

Public Works Director Chalker stated based on last year's approved budget, they raised some line items mostly due to inflation. Line items such as streetlights, they increased the budget anticipating an increase from Dominion. Streetlights are over \$400,000 per year which is their most significant expense other than capital. Another significant projected increase is the landfill tipping fees. Luckily, they have not had an increase from the vendor where they take their trash to which is GFL in Weldon.

Public Work Director Chalker said the itemized budget does not reflect any salary information. He stated they were looking at a 2.98% increase across the board for operating expenses which equates to \$141,450 on a \$4.7M budget. He reiterated the increases were due to inflationary expenses.

Public Works Director Chalker pointed out budget line item 10-5600-1310 for

Streetlights. Budget last year was \$425,000; increased \$5,000 (\$430,000) for FY2023-2024.

He moved to the Landfill Tipping Fees 10-5810-5710 budget line. This is where the trash trucks get the rollout containers. Last year's budget was \$340,000; increase of \$20,000 (\$360,000). This does not mean they were going to spend it; it is just preparing them in case GFL hits them with an increase. He called attention to 10-5820-5710 for Refuse Tipping Fees which is what the grapple truck picks up in the alleys such as appliances or if you clean out your shed. Budget last year was \$85,000; increased it \$10,000. They haven't had an increase in a while. Their other option is to go to Halifax County's landfill which is about \$10 higher per ton than GFL. They could negotiate with Halifax County, but they would want the City to sign a contract to say we would only take the trash there. Another option with solid waste is to take it to Brunswick County in Lawrenceville, VA. Sometimes it can be \$20 cheaper per ton, but they would have to drive it all the way up there. Driving up there could be good for the trucks to run highway speed.

Mayor Doughtie said years ago they talked about a transfer station. Public Works Director Chalker stated he thinks a transfer station was a good idea. Years ago, they were going to do a transfer station with Halifax County. They had a joint meeting about it, but the County built the transfer station but the City didn't. He thinks the problem with the transfer station here was the Lincoln Heights community did not want it in their backyard; nobody would. If they could have a viable site, it would allow them not to have to drive away from the city. Also, the City would not have to pay GFL.

Mayor Doughtie asked about the land the City had on Deep Creek. Public Works Director Chalker said some of the land around that area has been sold. Because of the fact the land is an old landfill that has been covered up and it's been percolating, he was not sure what it would take. Because of the date of this landfill, if they went back in there he was not sure of the environmental regulations they would have to address. City Manager Traynham stated considering proximity to fresh drinking water sources and the environmental part would dictate the location of it. They discussed the leaf yard site which is leased from Albert Etheridge.

Finance Director Johnson said a transfer station would not be a bad idea because of the amount of money the City pays on a monthly basis to GFL. They pay \$32,000-\$34,000 per month based on volume to GFL.

Public Works Director Chalker stated the department has been doing an excellent job maintaining the Theatre, but they never know what is going to spring up at any

given time. They may not have a lot of funds budgeted for it, but they have done everything they can to keep it top notch. They will be happy if the City finds a buyer. When somebody is out at the Theatre working, they are not doing their regular work around here. Their most significant maintenance expense has been two things. They had to put a HVAC compressor in a unit and make a roof repair in a roof drain on the top of the roof.

Public Works Director Chalker reviewed the department's fees on the proposed FY2023-2024 Fee Schedule. To purchase a new rollout container, it costs about \$60 so they need to update that amount on the schedule. The residential solid waste fee will increase from \$265 to \$285 per year. That brings into the City a total of \$1.6M. Trash pickup is the only thing the City sells. This fee is on the property tax bill. This fee covers collection of trash, yard debris and appliance items plus cost of the equipment.

Finance Director Johnson said the City's cost is way cheaper to collect its own trash in comparison to contracting it out. Public Works Director Chalker stated he has been asked in the past to get quotes for contracting trash collection. He said it costs the City \$4.25 per stop. The best price he can get from a vendor is over \$16 based on the last time he got prices. GFL was the best price. The City collecting trash allows them to have control of what they are doing. Finance Director Johnson stated this is a revenue generating service; they would not want to contract that out.

Public Works Director Chalker continued to review the proposed increases on the fee schedule.

- Driveway permits will increase from \$50 to \$75.
- Debris Removal & Special Collections
  - Small Pickup increased from \$40 to \$60 per load.
  - Large Trailer increased from \$100 to \$150 per load
- Disposal Fees – Landfill increased from \$75 to \$85
- No change to cemetery lot fees.
- Cemetery Foundation Fees – Increase from \$175 to \$200

Councilman Smith asked why they did not increase the utility street cut fee. Public Works Director Chalker replied as they went through the fees, they did not think about, but he was open to a recommendation. Councilman Smith said he felt this was a fee that needed to be increased because of all the street cuts throughout town. If the City has to go back and repair what they are doing, then they need to charge them more.

Finance Director Johnson asked who was making the repairs. Councilman Smith replied it was the Roanoke Rapids Sanitary District. She reported the City does not charge them a street utility cut fee. Public Works Director Chalker stated he came to City Council with the fee with the RRSD in mind so it would help us. Once they had it put in place and they took the RRSD their first permit to fill out, there was a lot of negotiation with the previous city manager. It was negotiated that they didn't have to pay the fee. They still have to do the permit, so they have permits on file and track them. They have requirements for them to properly patch the hole and to be responsible for it. In his professional opinion, the warranty for a cut needs to be longer than a year.

Finance Director Johnson agrees that the RRSD should be charged for utility cuts. That would just take a vote on City Council's behalf and City Manager Traynham could change that. Public Works Director Chalker suggested discussing this with the RRSD. City Manager Traynham agreed and said they needed a meeting with them. She said if they could pull the permit records to assess how much they could have been collecting that would be good to know.

Public Works Director Chalker said there were other utility companies with negotiated fees as well not just the RRSD. They need to go back and look at the agreements. City Manager Traynham added they cannot have perpetual agreements. Public Works Director Chalker stated Dominion rarely cuts the street. They have been very responsible and if they've needed to pay a permit fee, they've done it.

Councilman Stainback asked if they knew what other cities charged. Public Works Director Chalker said it was all different charges. He could reach out to some to see what they were charging. Councilman Stainback thought that would be a good idea.

Finance Director Johnson stated it would be appropriate and a good time because of inflation costs and the cost of materials to fix the roads. She said the bids they are getting for paving the roads has doubled.

Public Works Director Chalker added they were accepting bids for street resurfacing. They did not get enough the first time, so they are requesting them again. They have set aside \$500,000 of the ARPA funds to do some street resurfacing and made a list of the worst streets. Based on what they were hearing by talking to the vendors, that \$500,000 will probably only do half of them.

Public Works Director Chalker presented and reviewed the Public Works Capital Requests FY2023-2024.

Wheel Loader	\$ 90,000 <i>(used)</i>
Backhoe	\$ 90,000 <i>(used)</i>
Leaf Vacuum	\$ 65,000
Knuckleboom	\$240,000

He said a new knuckleboom the City bought will be delivered tomorrow. Their next request for a knuckleboom will be to lease it rather than buy it. They will need another one because the ones they have are all in bad shape. They run every day.

Public Works Director Chalker said the newest backhoe they have was bought used from Garner 12 years ago. It's their frontline backhoe.

Public Works Director Chalker expressed appreciation for the leased vehicles; it has made a big difference. They were able to reduce maintenance costs in the budget because of it. Finance Director Johnson added they would pay for themselves. She saw it with the company she worked with before.

Councilman Smith asked why the City had railroad maintenance. Public Works Director Chalker replied there is an agreement that the City has to pay for every railroad crossing in town for some type of maintenance.

Councilman Smith said he noticed there was an increase in maintenance costs in line item 10-5600-1700 Maintenance & Repairs. Public Works Director Chalker stated there are still so many old vehicles in the Street Department, they could not cut that budget. This is anything with a license plate. Old wheel loaders, dump trucks etc.

Councilman Smith stated if the trend was for each department to increase their budgets, he didn't know where they were going to get the money from.

City Manager Traynham said a lot of it is the costs the City is charged to do business has gone up so they are having to adjust to cover operational costs. Public Works Director Chalker said the budget is based on current service levels. If they want them to do the same things next year that they are doing this year, the costs have got to go up because of inflation. What they are buying from Lowe's, rock and pipe vendors and across the board, everything has gone up.

Councilman Smith said he understood that. The average citizen is experiencing the

same problem. If they increase the budget, they would be looking at a large tax increase or taking money out of reserve.

City Manager Traynham reminded City Council these budget work sessions are not presenting a balanced budget right now. They are just expressing the needs of each department. Once they get direction from City Council and apply anticipated revenues, they will then create a balanced budget. It is important that the needs are expressed and documented.

Mayor Pro Tem Ferebee asked if they could get a side-by-side document with the budget amount, YTD, projected amount and then percentage. Finance Director Johnson replied she could do that.

City Council discussed revenue projections they receive from the NC League of Municipalities, the State and other sources.

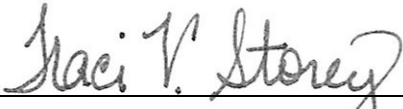
City Manager Traynham and Finance Director Johnson explained how they monitor the revenues and expenditures monthly to make sure they are not exceeding in any area. Public Works Director Chalker added they have always looked at the bottom line and they are lean. Sooner or later that gap is coming and the City will need to do something.

Councilman Smith said City Council understands that, but they have a responsibility to the citizens that are paying the fees to keep the City going. They want to make sure they are not overburdening them.

City Manager Traynham said she believes any increases made should be made incrementally. Sometimes these things are going to have to increase to bring in more revenue to pay for operations. It is the same with raising taxes; you do not want to wait so long to make an adjustment. City Council discussed the amount of revenue raising taxes a penny would equate.

Public Works Director Chalker invited everyone to tour the public works department after the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 11:20 a.m.

  
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Traci V. Storey, City Clerk

**Approved by Council Action on: May 2, 2023**