



Minutes of the Roanoke Rapids City Council

A regular meeting of the City Council of the City of Roanoke Rapids was held on **Tuesday, June 4, 2024, at 5:30 p.m.** in the Council Chambers at the Lloyd Andrews City Meeting Hall.

Present: Emery G. Doughtie, Mayor

W. Keith Bell)
Sandra W. Bryant)
Rex Stainback)
Curtis Strickland)

Council Members

Kelly Traynham, City Manager
Geoffrey Davis, City Attorney
Traci Storey, City Clerk
Carmen Johnson, Finance Director
Shane Guyant, Police Chief
Christina Caudle, Human Resources Director
Kristyn Anderson, Interim Planning Director
Kelly Daughtry, Interim Parks & Recreation Director
Ryan Newsome, Interim Parks & Recreation Director
Larry Chalker, Public Works Director
Jason Patrick, Fire Chief

Absent: Wayne Smith, Mayor Pro Tem
Tony Hall, Main Street Development Director

Mayor Doughtie called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. He provided an invocation and then the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Adoption of Business Agenda

Mayor Doughtie asked Council members if there were any known conflicts of interest with respect to the matters before them this evening.

There being no conflicts, motion was made by Councilman Bell, seconded by Councilwoman Bryant, and unanimously carried to adopt the business agenda as presented.

Public Comment (Scheduled)

Ephraim Brodsky

Mr. Brodsky stated he recently wrote a letter addressing this group that published in both local newspapers and hoped they all read it. He said the tax base is parents of school aged children. It's not seniors or people living on a fixed income, it's parents of school aged children. They are the ones paying the taxes, they are the ones shopping and paying the sales taxes and the ones buying the houses and paying the majority of the property taxes. These are the people they want to attract to the city. They pay the majority of the payroll taxes that fund a retiree's lifestyle, with no guarantee that those benefits will be available to them when they reach retirement age.

He said Mayor Emery Doughtie said he wanted to run the city like a business, and he took that personally, because in business the number one rule is that if you aren't growing, you're dying. Roanoke Rapids is dying. The City Council has not adopted a growth mindset. If they listen to Councilman Smith, the focus of this Council is not to build the City up to attract parents of school aged children, it is to serve as a champion for seniors and people living on fixed incomes. He reminded them again that their primary tax base was parents of school aged children.

Mr. Brodsky urged City Council to please not vote to reduce the tax rate two cents. These two cents represent \$20 annually for every \$100,000 of assessed value. His house was assessed at \$220,000. This cut represents \$44 a year for him. This is clearly a symbolic cut, but the symbolism is a slap in the face to anyone who cares about the survival of this city. The city manager proposed such a low, underfunded budget because she is the only City employee that this council can fire. As a single mother of school aged children, she would prefer not to uproot her family for another job opportunity. Please stop asking the city manager to cut costs, to cut services. Instead, ask the city manager to propose a budget that offers significant adjustments to capital and operational budgets. A budget that at least matches the cost-of-living adjustments that the County has been giving its employees and a budget that allows for at least one six-figure civic renewal project every year. Show the people that they care about their needs. Invest in our city; invest in our future.

He stated over the past 15 years the City Council has been shredding the budget to pieces, using the Theatre debt as an excuse. All City departments have consistently been asked to do more with less and to figure it out. He asked what has that done for the residents of Roanoke Rapids. Thanks to the internet he has read the minutes of every City budget meeting for the last 15 years. Every year or two a need for more ballfields is mentioned, but they still haven't built any and they could definitely use

some. He read repeatedly about concerns over the tennis courts falling into disrepair and they are still in disrepair.

He said he has read about staffing levels being reduced, and then restored, but that is just not true. He cannot speak to every department, but in 2008, the library had 5 full-time employees and 5 part-time employees. As recently as 2017, the library had 4 full-time employees and 5 part-time employees. Currently, they have 3 full-time employees and 2 part-time employees with no open positions. He asked where's the growth; what are they doing?

Mr. Brodsky stated he may not have all the answers, but he definitely has some ideas. There is room for cuts of non-essential expenditures as well as room for significant improvements in the latest budget. For cuts, a few come to mind right away. First, is the cemetery. He asked why does the city own the cemetery. Sell it or just donate it to one of the 50 area churches. He did not think any taxpayer enjoys having to pay for the cemetery, and dead people don't pay taxes. Second was the community center. Kirkwood Adams is falling apart, and he questioned why the City owned it. The City should sell it, one less thing to worry about maintaining or falling into disrepair. They don't even have any full-time employees, so this would just be removing another headache from the woefully understaffed Parks and Recreation Department. Finally, the Canal Museum. He asked why the City owned and maintained the Canal Museum. His children have been in school here for 3 years now and have never taken a field trip to the Canal Museum. The website has hours posted, but he has been there several times on a Saturday during open hours to find the doors locked. He said Historic Halifax is run by the state, not by the municipality of Halifax, they should give the Canal Museum to either the state or to a non-profit. This should not be the responsibility of City taxpayers. There you have it, in just a few sentences, he just saved the City half a million dollars off of the budget. Compounded over 10 years, that's over \$5 million.

He suggested some improvements. He said they should match the County's pay structure and set the City's minimum wage at \$15 for all employees, not just full-timers. Next, work on some proactive renovations and updates rather than working reactively. Why wait for the HVAC system to break or the roof to collapse before appropriating funds? Every City building needs to be renovated so start the renovations. They need some parks restored and some new ballfields built. These are the economic drivers that bring people to the city and promote movement among the youth. If the City sells the cemetery, the groundskeepers can be repurposed to work on these projects.

Mr. Brodsky said he was out of time, but he had more to say and was willing to come

back another time to say it. This cut does not represent a future focus mindset. If they want to focus on the future and want the city to grow, raise the taxes and at least match the County.

Public Comment (Unscheduled)

John Miles

Mr. Miles stated the crime rate was getting horrible. He said downtown all these teenagers are running around with “orby” guns. They are shooting cars, people and houses. They will run into people’s yards with them. It is like an automatic machine gun so when they pull the trigger it does not stop until it’s empty. The kids are freezing them like paint balls which makes them hurt a lot worse. His wife has a short video where they ran up to a car and fired no telling how many rounds at the car while it was being driven. This has happened several times. They shot a small boy up the street the week before last. They shot him so many times that they had to call the rescue squad. He had 50-60 welts on him and was bleeding. The Police Department has been down there numerous times. Nobody has ever been arrested. It is like nothing is being done about it. Probably what is going to happen is one of these kids is going to run up to somebody’s car with one of these guns and start firing at the car and somebody is going to pull out a real gun. Then it is going to be bad news for somebody; somebody is going to be dead in the street. They are proposing the City ban the orby guns. They buy them from Walmart and Tractor Supply. They are dangerous. He continued to say the girl across the street got shot in face with one and it was close to her eye. This is going on all night until 2:00-3:00 in the morning. A gentleman that lived across from him had some relatives that had a pontoon boat in the yard, and they shot it 400 times. It is everywhere and these kids are constantly shooting these guns. They are also shooting animals. It is no telling how many cars, animals and people they have shot.

Mayor Doughtie asked Mr. Miles if he had personally made contact with the Police Department. He replied yes and they told him there was nothing they could do because orby guns are not illegal. That is why they were asking for them to be illegal.

Mayor Doughtie encouraged Mr. Miles to follow up and continue to have communication with the Police Department to find a resolution to the problem.

Approval of City Council Minutes

Motion was made by Councilman Bell, seconded by Councilwoman Bryant, and unanimously carried to approve the May 13, 2024 Special Meeting and May 21, 2024 Regular City Council Meeting minutes as drafted.

Committee Appointments

Library Advisory Committee

City Clerk Storey said the terms for Sandra Duncan, Krystal Cook-Elliott, Brian Jones and James Ketoff on the Library Advisory Committee expired in May. All four members have served the maximum number of two consecutive terms allowed by City Policy, but City Council has the authority to waive this section of the policy and has done so in the past. She contacted the four committee members, and all were interested in continuing to serve. She reported City Council took a ballot vote earlier and all received a unanimous vote to be reappointed.

Motion was made by Councilwoman Bryant, seconded by Councilman Stainback and unanimously carried to waive the City Policy for Sandra Duncan, Krystal Cook-Elliott, Brian Jones and James Ketoff and reappoint them to the Library Advisory Committee.

Senior Center Advisory Committee

City Clerk Storey stated the Senior Center Advisory Committee currently has three vacancies. Ms. Jodeana Huss King has submitted a volunteer application which was enclosed in their packets for their review and consideration. She reported City Council took a ballot vote earlier and Ms. King received a unanimous vote to be appointed.

Motion was made by Councilman Strickland, seconded by Councilman Stainback and unanimously carried to appoint Ms. King to the Senior Center Advisory Committee.

Public Hearing

Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Budget

City Manager Traynham stated tonight is a public hearing for the proposed fiscal year 2024-2025 budget to receive comments from citizens concerning the budget expenditures. They were not asking for approval tonight. During the next meeting, June 18th, the budget ordinance will be presented for adoption.

She said they have presented the proposed budget several times throughout the month of May. They have made a few adjustments but did not increase the budget. In the last couple of weeks since some of the final quotes were received, they have been able to provide a partial level of street resurfacing funds. They have budgeted for \$260,000 - \$270,000 as they have reallocated some Powell Bill expenditures. They have also increased some of the part-time salaries in order to have some of the facilities open more often. She noted they have also been able to budget \$15,000 towards the proposed skate park at Emry Park. They would also request \$15,000 from

the tourism contribution. These contributions in addition to the fundraising efforts by the community will accomplish the proposed project.

City Manager Traynham said on February 7, 2024, City Council held a retreat and discussed individual perceptions and goals and came to some consensus about what they would like to see for the City going into the future. A lot of it was about improving the quality of life and community appearance. She feels the proposed budget outlines these goals that were collaborated on by City Council. It will make some improvements that were long overdue and needed such as HVAC, window replacement, equipment and so forth. She believes the proposed budget will allow them in FY25 to initiate many improvements to help the City provide more reliable services and enhance the daily living for the citizens. They can do this through staff excellence, infrastructure, facilities, public safety, community outreach and involvement, and through planning and development activities.

She reported the public hearing has been properly advertised as required in the media and no changes have been made to those numbers in the proposed budget announcement. The proposed budget sets a new tax rate of \$0.641 per \$100 valuation which is 2-cents less than the current fiscal year's rate. This is above the revenue neutral rate that has been provided by Halifax County. She stated everything has been published in accordance with the NC General Statutes as required for considering the annual budget.

Mayor Doughtie opened the public hearing for public comments.

Marya Murray-Diaz

Ms. Murray-Diaz said she had been a resident of the city for about 7-8 years. She wanted to emphasize some of the goals that parents in the community have and echo some of what Mr. Brodsky said, but also a twist from her perspective. She has worked on facilities throughout her career and with operations; she has worked in schools. She is currently working with Rural Health Group working on school-based health centers. She stated she was not representing Rural Health Group right now; she was representing herself as a citizen.

She said she thinks the budget sounds fantastic. The skatepark, the increase in part-time salaries and employees; she thinks that is moving in the right direction. She emphasized that this is the moment in time where decreasing tax rates might not be the smartest thing to do. They have deteriorating capital structure here in Roanoke Rapids. They have buildings that need to be demolished, walls that are falling down into streets, parks and playgrounds that are unsafe, and mulch that needs to be improved to the 9-inch rate that is safe for kids. There's just so much they physically

need to do in the city of Roanoke Rapids that she did not think it was an investment in kids, an investment in families to do a tax decrease at this moment in time.

Ms. Murray-Diaz stated she did know that politically it is really hard to have citizens experience the increase in tax assessments without giving them a little bit of a break, but like Mr. Brodsky said, \$20 a year for her is like \$1.50 per month. She thinks they should use that money for really important things, to invest in the kids and families. She said the library needs hours on the weekend; this was the only town she has ever lived in where there are no Saturday hours. There are a lot of families who want to use the pool often. If they have the means they go to the country club because of the limited hours here. The list could go on and on, the playgrounds, some of the structures/buildings, the pool house where folks get changed is pretty rough; she did not want to touch a single thing.

She said this is a moment where they can really invest more and demonstrate investing in the kids and the community. A one-cent decrease in the tax rate might be feasible politically and then take the other one-cent to invest in the kids and their families.

Justin Kerr

Mr. Kerr stated he has been working on the Emry Park skate park project and trying to get the money raised. He was honored that former Parks & Recreation Director Simeon proposed to City Council that they help finish it out and they have found the money to help make this work. He said this has gone way better than he thought, especially with the first fundraising day they had at T.J. Davis in March. They raised \$2,000 on just a little dollar raffle ticket for kids. He hasn't seen so many kids showing up at the skate park and skating in the street since then. He informed City Council that the group was still working on raising money no matter what they did here today or not. They will be having another fundraiser on September 7th. They hope to keep doing this even once the park gets finished, maybe twice a year, to keep the kids involved and getting out. He thanked City Council.

Mayor Doughtie thanked Mr. Kerr and the group for what they were doing to try to emulate what they did with the first skateboard park. There were citizens that worked and raised some money. He believed City Council would agree that most everywhere they go where federal and state people are, they are told money is there; they just need to know how to send in requests for it. There is no guarantee they will get it, but it seems more dollars are available especially if they can be successful as they have been. That is how the initial skateboard park got started. He added the cameras on the poles in town, it came to fruition from individuals helping the Police Department get those cameras. Also, the chimes over at Centennial Park came from individuals.

He said people in this community will support things like that when they can see where their money is going.

With no one else wishing to speak, Mayor Doughtie closed the public hearing.

Mayor Doughtie asked if anyone had questions of the City Manager. He stated City Council will come back June 18, 2024, where they would more than likely approve the budget for the next year.

City Manager's Report

City Manager Traynham said there were a lot of activities going on in the city for people of all ages. She received the Senior Center's newsletter today and saw the calendar of events which is just for one particular program and service the City offers. There are a lot of things employees are doing to help serve this community and keep things going. She appreciates the work they are doing to help keep things going and for City Council hearing their needs and responding to them.

She announced youth baseball and softball are wrapping up in the next couple of weeks. They will then move on to industrial league sports for the summer and before they know it will be fall sports. Other regular activities include story time at the library on Wednesdays. A lot of families enjoy participating in this activity. Swim lessons will be offered at the aquatic center and outdoor pool. The outdoor pool will open this Saturday for the season; hours 1 – 5 p.m. daily.

City Manager Traynham reported the Jo Story Senior Center was preparing for the box fans that are available for distribution for those in need. There are some limitations involved. Qualifying individuals are those on disability or over the age of 60 and have a health situation. If someone needs a box fan for relief from the heat this summer, contact the Senior Center.

She announced the Senior Center has started a cancer support group. She said they did not have to be a senior to participate. It is not just for individuals who have cancer, but also for those who are indirectly affected by it. They will meet the last Tuesday of each month at 12:30 p.m. at the Senior Center. She said unfortunately there are many people in this community who have cancer or are affected by it. She commended the leadership through Thomas Goble's experience in creating this support group for all.

City Manager Traynham said the library is kicking off their Summer Reading Program today and it will run through the middle of July. They are still taking registrations.

She reported that the Public Works Department has identified and removed some dangerous trees from the city's street rights-of-way. This is an ideal time to do this since hurricane season officially started June 1st.

She said the Planning Board will hold a special meeting on Thursday in the Lloyd Andrews Building at 5:30 p.m. to consider an amendment to the zoning ordinance. It is concerning the Entertainment Overlay District for a change in the permitting process from a special use to a permissible use and to provide a definition for a multi-use recreational facility. It will then come before City Council during the next meeting on June 18th at 5:30 p.m.

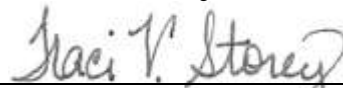
Mayor Doughtie asked going back to the proposed budget, did they not have \$20,000 in demolition. City Manager Traynham replied yes, and what they propose to do is bid out a number of jobs in order to get an idea of estimated costs. They know they will need to make a request to City Council for the building downtown. The demolition activities will be funded once they have more information about the actual costs. Mayor Doughtie said one of the citizen comments came up about demolition and City Council has discussed it in detail, but they have not seen fit so far to put in very much money; it is extremely expensive.

Mayor Doughtie requested an update at the next meeting on the nuisance properties in town that Public Works and the Police Department were working through.

Mayor Doughtie referred to another comment received earlier tonight about the Kirkwood Adams Community Center. He reported Lowe's came in and gave them \$2,000 worth of plants. They put in a lot of manpower as did the City employees. They have been able to put some dollars into Kirkwood such a new roof and HVAC system. He noted the building was built around 1975 and there really had not been anything done to it in 50 years, so it was definitely in need of repairs. The comment was about selling it, but Kirkwood was one of the few properties that they have that carries its own as well as the cemetery. The cemetery brings in enough revenue that it's not really a real cost to the City.

Adjournment

There being no further business, motion was made by Councilman Bell, seconded by Councilman Stainback and unanimously carried to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 6:05 p.m.



Traci V. Storey, City Clerk

Approved by Council Action on: June 18, 2024