

March 19, 2020

The City Council of the City of Rocky Mount met this day in a Special Called session scheduled to follow a 4:00 p.m. Special Called Committee of the Whole meeting and was held in the George W. Dudley City Council Chamber of the Frederick E. Turnage Municipal Building with Mayor C. Saunders "Sandy" Roberson, Jr. presiding.

Councilmembers present: André D. Knight, Reuben C. Blackwell, IV, Richard Joyner, T. J. Walker\*, Lige Daughtridge, W. B. Bullock and Christine Carroll Miller\*.

*\*Attended remotely using Microsoft Teams*

Staff Present: Rochelle Small-Toney, City Manager; Pamela O. Casey, City Clerk; Natasha Hampton and Elton Daniels, Assistant City Managers; Dorothy Brown Smith, Chief Communications and Marketing Consultant; Ken Hunter, Budget and Evaluation Manager; Chris Beschler, Director of Energy Resources; Brad Kerr, Public Works Director; Amy Staton, Finance Director; Will Deaton, Director of Development Services; George Robinson, Police Chief; DeNaide Dickens; Interim Director of Human Resources; Joel Dunn, Interim Parks and Recreation Director; Cynthia Jones, Director of Community and Business Development; Corey Mercer, Fire Chief; Michael Roupp, Interim Division Chief of Operations; Tracey Drewery, Division Chief; Anthony Ladd, Interim Battalion Chief of Training; Mark Adcox, Video Production Specialist; Brenton Bent, Director of Water Resources; Jessie Nunery, Media Relations Specialist; Latasha Hall; Utilities Business Manager; Leslie Hudgins, Information Systems Specialist; Robin Cox, Communications Specialist; Julian Whitney, Assistant Fire Marshal; Mike Whitley, Police Captain; Clay Wilder, Police Corporal; and Richard J. Rose, City Attorney.

Security Officer: Retired Police Sergeant L. S. Parker, Jr.

The Mayor called the meeting to order and offered prayer.

#### **WELCOME/COMMENTS**

Mayor Sandy Roberson thanked Dorothy Brown Smith and the Communications and Marketing team for pulling together the technology to allow some Councilmembers to participate remotely. He also thanked City Manager Rochelle Small-Toney for her report at the Committee of the Whole meeting held just prior to today's special called Council meeting relative to the City's response to the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19).

The Mayor asked visitors to remain seated until the end of the meeting and wait to be escorted out due to social distancing as a result of the novel Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19)

#### **UTILITIES DISCONNECTION/MORATORIUM**

Mayor Roberson stated that Council has just had a robust discussion at the Committee of the Whole meeting relative to a proposed revision to the City's collection practices for utility services during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide temporary relief for customers facing a hardship from reduction in employment or unexpected healthcare costs to not

disconnect services for nonpayment for a limited time for residential and small business customers. He added that Councilmember Knight made this suggestion at the recently held press conference. The Mayor opened the floor for discussion. Councilmember Daughtride questioned the City's rate of collection and history of disconnections and recommended that the moratorium include criteria for eligibility.

It was clarified that, if approved, all utility customers will be eligible for this temporary relief, not just City residents.

Motion was made by Councilmember Joyner, seconded by Councilmember Knight and unanimously carried that the moratorium on disconnections during the COVID-19 pandemic be approved.

#### **REMOTE MEETINGS**

Discussion was held relative to the use of technology for future City Council meetings.

City Attorney Richard J. Rose reported that there is some question surrounding the use of electronic meetings and though it is recognized in the Open Meetings Law there is no specific provision for same in the North Carolina General Statutes, Chapter 160A. He expressed hope that the Legislature will clarify the use very soon and said he believes this is a part of the North Carolina League of Municipalities legislative goals. He noted there is a quorum physically present in today's meeting making it a non-issue. It was noted that a "space" must be provided to allow the public to listen in to Council meetings.

Council was informed that Facetime Live is also being implemented for today's meeting.

Councilmember Blackwell asked the City Attorney to write a letter to the Legislature to encourage and support the use of electronic meetings.


#### **COUNCIL COMMENTS**

Councilmember Knight questioned if City employees are able to travel to their homes for lunch and the City Manager responded that some employees have a lunch break of 30 minutes and some have an hour but there are no restrictions. She noted that though restaurants are closed to dine-in customers, drive-thrus remain open.

Discussion continued relative to the City's response should an employee test positive for COVID-19. The City Manager stated that the City would yield to healthcare professionals to manage health situations, but there is guidance in place with the Governor's Executive Order and CDC guidelines to assist those impacted.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Councilmember Joyner, seconded by Councilmember Knight and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 5:30 p.m.

  
Pamela O. Casey  
City Clerk