

August 24, 2020

The City Council of the City of Rocky Mount met this day in a regular session scheduled for 4:00 p.m. 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 Daughtride and W. B. Bullock and Christine Carroll Miller\*\*.

\*\**joining remotely*

Staff present: Rochelle Small-Toney, City Manager; Pamela O. Casey, City Clerk; Dorothy Brown Smith, Chief Communications and Marketing Consultant; Robin Cox, Communications Specialist; Mark Adcox, Video Production Specialist; Amy Staton, Finance Director; Brad Kerr, Public Works Director\*; and Richard J. Rose, City Attorney.

\*Present as required

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

The Mayor called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m. and requested a moment of silence for individual prayer.

#### **CLOSED SESSION**

The Mayor stated that a Closed Session has been requested for matters concerning economic development and attorney-client privilege.

Motion was made by Councilmember Miller, seconded by Councilmember Joyner and unanimously carried by roll call vote (6 ayes/0 nays) that the City Council enter into Closed Session at 4:06 p.m. The minutes of the Closed Session shall be filed as **ESM-559** at the end of **Minute Book 37** upon approval for release by the City Attorney.

\*\*\*Councilmember Walker arrived.

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#### **REGULAR SESSION**

The Mayor convened the City in regular session at 4:49 p.m.

#### **AMENDMENT TO AGENDA/ADD RESOLUTION RELATIVE TO DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT PROJECT**

Motion was made by Councilmember Knight, seconded by Councilmember Joyner and carried by a vote of 4 to 3 (4 ayes/3 nays; Councilmembers Daughtride, Bullock and Miller opposed) that the agenda be amended to add consideration of a Resolution Reaffirming Certain Findings Relating to the Downtown Development Project.

#### **COMMUNITY UPDATE BY CITY MANAGER**

City Manager Rochelle Small-Toney provided the following community update. She advised that:

- She is excited to announce that GlobalTrade Magazine recently recognized the City of Rocky Mount as one of the 20 top U.S. cities for manufacturers and that the City produced more than \$6 billion worth of exports in 2018, and the manufacturing industry has grown by nearly 12 percent in recent years. She said this recognition is a credit to the many manufacturing companies that call Rocky Mount home and the workforce that supports

them, and the City looks forward to our area's continued success and growth in manufacturing as well as other industries.

- The Sunset Avenue Corridor Study is ongoing and is intended to identify the needs of the area and to address concerns in the operation and function of Sunset Avenue. Virtual Zoom sessions will be held daily from 5 – 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, August 25 through Thursday, August 27. She said the public is invited to join the meetings to review ideas and information that will be presented by Mike Rutkowski, project manager with Stantec Consulting. The Council was advised that different concepts will be presented each day and links are available at [sunsetavestudy.com](http://sunsetavestudy.com) under “events” and a password or i.d. is not required.
- Due to the huge success with the Back to School Backpack Giveaway Drive, the City is sponsoring a second Backpack Giveaway tomorrow, Tuesday, August 25 from 4-6 p.m. in the parking lot of the Frederick E. Turnage Municipal Building.
- We are still in a pandemic and all are reminded that the CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings to help slow the spread of COVID-19. She encouraged all to adhere to that recommendation and follow all other guidelines issued by the CDC.
- The OIC continues to hold COVID-19 testing sites at the Rocky Mount Event Center. Those tested will need to bring their photo ID and insurance cards. Insurance is not required for testing. Testing days are Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Registration can be performed prior to arrival by logging on to [oicrmhub.com](http://oicrmhub.com). Call 252-210-9856 for more information.
- The September 30 deadline for completing and returning 2020 Census forms is drawing near. The census will determine funding for housing programs, schools, hospitals, economic development and much more in our community. Response can be made online, by phone, or by mail. For more information or to respond, visit [2020census.gov](http://2020census.gov).

Councilmember Daughtridge questioned if CARES Act funding can be identified to help support the Homeless shelter because it is a need in the community and perhaps a public safety issue.

City Manager Rochelle D. Small-Toney stated that she has had meetings relative to this matter and Ken Hunter continues to work to help to assist. She added that several locations have been looked at as space for the homeless clientele but, as of yet, no suitable location has been identified. She said the State is assisting in looking at the feasibility of placing temporary trailers onsite at the Bassett Center. The City Manager recommended that both Nash and Edgecombe Counties be contacted and requested to assist with funding. She stated she does think the City can help, but it will take a little more time to identify a suitable location.

Councilmember Joyner reported that he serves on the Board of United Community Ministries. He thanked the City Manager, staff and OIC for the assistance they are providing and stated the number of those testing positive for COVID-19 is decreasing.

Councilmember Knight voiced a desire that CARES Act funding be considered to provide assistance to My Sister's House due to the rise of domestic violence during the pandemic. He supported asking the Counties

to assist with funding for both the Homeless Shelter and My Sister's House.

#### **PETITIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

The Mayor opened the meeting for petitions from the public and outlined guidelines for public petitions. He recognized the following individuals for public comment and a summary of comments is outlined below:

##### o ***Samuel Battle***

- Stated it is disrespectful to notice a meeting for a certain time and then go into closed session causing people to have to wait to be able to speak. He added that closed sessions should be held after the Petitions from the Public portion of the meeting;
- Stated that utility bills are hard-hitting especially for those living in Wards 1, 2, 3 and 4 and voiced opposition to write-offs for some;
- Said he remembers when the Douglas Block nightlife was vibrant and now it looks like a ghost town; he questioned how the Downtown can be "cranked up" when there is minimal traffic Downtown and said support is needed from all communities

Mayor Roberson stated that the closed session was listed on today's agenda.

##### o ***Nathlyn Ohree***

- Said she appears today to express her love and concern for all people in the City;
- Said she is praying for development of the Edgecombe portion of Rocky Mount and said when anyone blocks development for one side of the City citizens must ask why;
- Said there should not be hatred regardless of personal differences; she said her grandparents had a black mother and a white father, yet no one raised her to hate anyone; she said she was encouraged to strive to do her best and she thanks God for turning her hopes into realities;
- Requested that Black Lives Matter be painted and that the parking deck with the hotel be pursued expediently in order to advance the City;
- Shared some of her approaches to life; and
- Said she believes the Council is doing the best they can because she hears good from those in the City; everyone does not have what they want, but have what they need so far and pray for having more and encouraged Council to continue to do their best

##### o ***Kiyah Darden***

- Said it has been a long time since she has appeared to speak but has watched from home as others speak and said it seems funny that everyone who comes to express themselves are speaking against the Black Action Committee, the City Council, the City Manager, Black Lives Matter or another black leadership in the City;
- Said she is tired of sitting quiet and not defending her people when nasty, racist people openly disrespect her and her people because they don't like change;
- Said all lives do matter but not all lives are treated the same and said it is not about color, but about respect;
- Said she used to think there was total freedom of speech but as she has gotten older she has seen this is not true and on tv journalists and actors/actresses has been shut down for voicing their opinion in a way that offends a certain person or group;
- She questioned why it is okay for "old heads" to come to speak and be disrespectful and said they should be sent out without multiple warnings;
- Said black people are not mad at being singled out as black people because all know there is nothing like a black man's hand or a black woman's love and care;
- Said Black Lives Matter has been painted on some businesses in Raleigh;

- Said a lady said at a recent meeting that a Black Lives Matter painting would anger the Caucasian people; she said if that saying will make Caucasians mad then they need to get ready to be mad because the truth hurts;
- Said Black lives do matter and it is time that Black people are treated like they matter and with equal respect

The Mayor closed the petitions from the public portion of the meeting.

**AD VALOREM TAX RELEASES**

The City Council received the following schedule of ad valorem taxes recommended for release and/or refund:

**SCHEDULE A - acknowledge receipt of report of the following taxes under \$100 approved for release and/or refund by the City Manager:**

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>BILL NO.</u>	<u>NAME/ADDRESS</u>	<u>TAX</u>	<u>COMMENT</u>
<u>NASH COUNTY</u>				
2017	1516	RINIKER, JOHN & ALAN R ROBELL 113 VINEYARD CT ROCKY MOUNT, NC 27803	88.23	CITY FORECLOSURE
		<b>TOTAL RELEASE:</b>	<b>88.23</b>	

Motion was made by Councilmember Joyner, seconded by Councilmember Miller and unanimously carried that the tax releases and/or refunds be approved as recommended.

**TRAFFIC ORDINANCE AMENDMENT**

The City Council received the following recommendation from the Traffic Engineer:

**ADOPT:**

- All-Way Stop at Recreation and Ravenwood Drive

Motion was made by Councilmember Knight, seconded by Councilmember Joyner and carried by roll call vote (6 ayes/1 nay; Councilmember Walker opposed) that the **ORDINANCE AMENDING THE TRAFFIC CONTROL ORDINANCE MAP OF THE CITY OF ROCKY MOUNT** be adopted.

Councilmember Walker stated this intersection is a three-way stop. Brad Kerr, Director of Public Works, responded to questions from Councilmembers and noted traffic in the area did not meet the threshold for speed cushions and other measures were recommended. He added that sometimes a lower cost solution can be identified that is just as effective. Councilmembers Walker and Knight voiced concern for safety for children in the area of Recreation and Ravenwood Drive. Conversation continued among Councilmembers and, upon request, the Public Works Director stated he could provide Councilmember with the standards for speed cushions. Councilmember Knight stated it is his opinion that speed has not been the only factor considered for speed cushions and there are different measures for different communities. Councilmember Daughtridge stated he lives in Candlewood and the request by Candlewood for speed cushions was denied some years ago. Councilmember Blackwell clarified that Council is asking for an expanded definition and

qualifying factors for speed cushions and stated there is increased demand for traffic calming measures in most communities.

In response to questions from Councilmember Walker the Director of Public Works stated the recommendation was primarily due to traffic volume and not generally due to speed.

Councilmember Miller stated she has been told speed humps are no longer in use due to the potential damage to emergency vehicles and two speed cushions are in use in Ward 7. She added speed is also a concern in Ward 7.

Councilmember Blackwell stated the community near Ravenwood and Recreation Drive is a newly renovated community and requested that Council be included early on in conversations relating to traffic calming measures as new communities and community renovations are being made.

A Motion to reconsideration was made by Councilmember Knight, seconded by Councilmember Joyner and unanimously carried by roll call vote (7 ayes/0 nays).

A Motion was made by Councilmember Walker, seconded by Councilmember Joyner and carried by roll call vote (7 ayes/0 nays) that the recommended **ORDINANCE AMENDING THE TRAFFIC CONTROL ORDINANCE MAP OF THE CITY OF ROCKY MOUNT** be denied.

City Manager Rochelle D. Small-Toney requested that staff be allowed to review the matter and bring a recommendation back to Council for consideration and there was no objection.

#### **FISCAL YEAR 2019-2020 TAX SETTLEMENT**

The City Council received a resolution from the Tax Collector of taxes collected for the Fiscal Year 2019-2020 and requesting permission to collect taxes for the fiscal year commencing July 1, 2020.

Councilmember Daughtridg stated that in May he requested and received a spreadsheet that included 10 years of delinquent property taxes. He added that uncollected property taxes totaled \$4.5M on May 1 with 58% being in Edgecombe County and 42% being in Nash County. He stated the majority of property owners pay taxes, but others do not and recommended that other options for collection, including foreclosure be considered. He stated the City has a duty to collect taxes and it causes harm when property owners do not pay taxes. He stated that it would be interesting to see the results of a study on whether people paying county taxes are not paying City taxes since the City does not implement foreclosure for collection.

Motion was made by Councilmember Knight, seconded by Councilmember Blackwell and unanimously carried by roll call vote (7 ayes/0 nays) that **Resolution No. R-2020-26** entitled **RESOLUTION APPROVING SETTLEMENT OF FY 2019-20 TAXES DUE AND COLLECTED** be adopted.

**REAFFIRMATION FOR FINANCING OF DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (ADDED TO AGENDA IN OPEN MEETING)**

The City Council was advised that a resolution authorizing approval of an installment financing contract was adopted by the Council on July 8, 2019 and the Local Government Commission (LGC) has requested reaffirmation of the findings in the resolution, acknowledgement of the assumptions used to make the projections and the possibility of the need to raise taxes to recover the debt in the event revenues are less than anticipated.

Council was further advised that current assumptions and projections indicate sufficient sources exist or will be generated by the project to cover the debt service payments and the worst case scenario of having significantly less revenue generated by the project may require up to a 2 cent property tax increase in order to cover the debt service payments on the parking garage.

Councilmember Daughtridge stated as a fiduciary of the City he plans to vote no on the Resolution and stated he had requested the public be made aware of the additional findings and that some soft costs were not included in the Davenport report (\$2.3M) that were included in the NewBanks report. He added that the pandemic is continuing and is affecting the world, and no one knows what impact the pandemic will have on the City's tax base and it is not yet known when groups can once again come into the Event Center. He said he does not think it is prudent to consider approval of this project at this time and plans to vote in a way he feels is best for the City as a whole.

Councilmember Blackwell stated he plans to vote for the Resolution and the only regret he has is that the public was not able to hear the overwhelming, outstanding and verifiable information from industry experts. He stated his hope that at the next meeting of the Council the public will be able to hear the same verified data from people who know what they are doing in the industry and that they be able to provide information on which Council can base its decisions. He added that for some reason there seems to be the thought, which is being publicly stated, that the considerations for the parking deck are based solely on the success or lack of success of the Event Center. He said that has not been a part of any discussion that has ever been held by Council, before or after the audit findings, and the audit results are immaterial to this project. He stated a lot of hotel activity is taking place five minutes from Downtown and the Mill has a mini version of a hotel that is working. He said he is trying to understand why some feel a hotel is not a good idea for Downtown Rocky Mount. Councilmember Blackwell pointed out that Rocky Mount is the only City that calls itself a City that does not have a hotel Downtown. He said data for the parking deck was provided by the City's Finance Director and information was verified by the Davenport Accounting firm, Novogradac and an additional entity that the costs are not unreasonable and or excessive and Council has

also been advised that the City's cash flow is more than enough to cover the project with just moderate success. He said the great success the Downtown is enjoying has not even been taken into account and that Rocky Mount hasn't looked this good since he moved here in the 80's. Mr. Blackwell noted that the Carolinas Gateway Partnership has advised that Rocky Mount is being considered for more projects than Wake County. He said he is excited, energetic and enthusiastic to vote yes for this project.

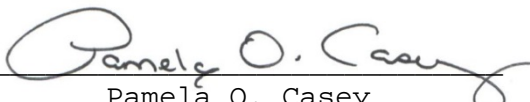
Councilmember Bullock called for the vote.

Motion was made by Councilmember Joyner, seconded by Councilmember Blackwell and carried by roll call vote (5 ayes/1 nay) that **Resolution No. R-2020-27** entitled **RESOLUTION REAFFIRMING CERTAIN FINDINGS RELATING TO THE DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT PROJECT** be adopted. No vote was recorded for Councilmember Miller pursuant to NCGS 160A-75 as she indicated she had experienced technical difficulties.

Councilmember Knight stated as a 17-year sitting Councilmember he wishes to say that he is in support of the hotel project and some have been trying to stop the project for over 2 years. He said he has spent over 30 years fighting for growth on the east side of the City which is all of his ward and this project will bring jobs, housing and business to this part of the City. He added he knows the City underwent an audit which was part of the derailment of the project but that has concluded, and he wants the citizens to know that all should see a thriving City all over Rocky Mount. Councilmember Knight said if hotels are being built on Winstead Avenue then surely there can be a hotel Downtown and then another hotel Downtown.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

Motion was made by Councilmember Blackwell, seconded by Councilmember Knight and unanimously carried by roll call vote (7 ayes/0 nays) that the meeting adjourn at 5:42 p.m.

  
Pamela O. Casey  
City Clerk