

February 8, 2021

The City Council of the City of Rocky Mount met this day in a regular session scheduled for 7:00 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 Daughtridge, 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; Brad Kerr, Director of Public Works\*\*\*; Kevin Harris, Downtown Development Manager\*\*\*; and Richard J. Rose, City Attorney.

\*\*\**present as required*

Security Officer: Police Sergeant Stephen Walker.

The Mayor called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. and requested a moment of silence for individual prayer.

**APPROVAL OF/ADDITIONS TO AGENDA (ADDED TO AGENDA IN OPEN MEETING)**

Mayor Roberson inquired if there are any changes to or additions to the agenda.

Motion was made by Councilmember Daughtridge and seconded by Councilmember Miller that consideration of Item 12 related to amending/adopting administrative policies for Downtown Assistance Grants (Nos. II.31, II.33, II.42 and II.43) be tabled. The motion failed by a roll call vote (3 ayes/4 nays; Councilmembers Knight, Blackwell, Joyner and Walker opposed).

Councilmember Knight requested the addition of items concerning COVID-19 and its impact on the City and Counties and collaboration with the health departments and Unity Cemetery.

There was no opposition to the additions.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Motion was made by Councilmember Joyner, seconded by Councilmember Blackwell and unanimously carried by roll call vote (7 ayes/0 nays) that the minutes of a regular scheduled meeting of the City Council held January 25, 2021 be approved as submitted to the City Council prior to the meeting.

**COMMUNITY UPDATE BY CITY MANAGER**

City Manager Rochelle Small-Toney provided the following community update. The Manager:

- Advised that the City's website is currently down due to a disruption with the site host vendor. She advised that this disruption is not unique to the City of Rocky Mount, as it has affected other municipalities, as well. She reported that the City will utilize a

secondary provider to host the core business services offered on the City's website while devising alternate solutions. She provided assurances that no personal data has been compromised during this disruption because hosting services do not store personal information such as credit card numbers or social security numbers. She thanked all for their patience and stated the City will continue to provide updates on its social media platforms regarding this situation. She reported that a temporary site has been implemented at: <https://www.rockymountnc.gov/>

- Congratulated the Energy Resources Department for its recently received national commendation from the American Public Power Association for support in electric power restoration efforts in 2020. She stated linemen crews were honored for their mutual aid assistance to other North Carolina municipalities as well as those in Virginia, Tennessee and Louisiana after a series of hurricanes last summer, and most recently, a winter storm. The Manager thanked Energy Resources Director Chris Beschler and his crew for their willingness and ability to assist others in need.
- Announced that the City of Rocky Mount's Business and Collections Services Department will utilize the Community Development Block Grant CARES Act to assist utilities customers within the city limits who meet income requirements. The program is designed for low-to-moderate income households impacted by the loss of income due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Eligible households may receive up to \$500 toward delinquent City of Rocky Mount utilities that became due after March 31, 2020 and remain unpaid. For more information on eligibility requirements, visit [rockymountnc.gov](http://rockymountnc.gov) or contact the Business Services Center at 972-1250.
- Reported that the Imperial Centre for the Arts and Sciences remains closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. She encouraged the community to sign up for free Virtual Arts Education Programs including yoga, creative writing and calligraphy. She noted the Imperial Centre's YouTube page is also home to live, virtual performances and encouraged all to visit [imperialcentre.org](http://imperialcentre.org) for more information on these events.
- Reminded all that City Council meetings are replayed on Suddenlink Channel 19 on the Wednesday following each meeting. Replay times are 5-7 a.m., 5-7 p.m. and 9-11 p.m. She encouraged residents to subscribe to the CITY-TV 19 YouTube page and to stay connected and receive the latest news and information.
- Invited all to join staff as they continue to follow CDC guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic. She added staff will continue to assist community partners during vaccine administration and COVID-19 testing events. She noted the City's website: [rockymountnc.gov](http://rockymountnc.gov), continues to display the Citizens Resource Center, which is a wonderful guide of information for partnering agencies in the community during the pandemic.

Councilmember Daughtridge requested that the Manager provide the City Council with additional information relative to CARES Act funding.

#### **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:

- **Robert Cordell:**
  - Said he was a candidate for the Ward 5 Councilmember position;
  - Said he loves Rocky Mount and was born and reared in Rocky Mount;

- Said he was at Unity Cemetery this past Saturday and saw a lot of work done; all hands were on deck and he saw a lot of people having fun including children and all this was good; he thanked all who planned and participated and sponsored the event adding that approximately 150 people were in participation;
  - Said there is still a lot of work to be done at Unity Cemetery and if there is a concern it is that a sign at the cemetery was painted over and asked for there to be an investigation of who gave the authority for the sign to be painted over;
  - Commended the Council for the work they do for the City and encouraged them to continue doing the best they can
- ***Donna Johnson:***
- Said she is speaking on behalf of the entire Board of Directors of OIC and the Board unanimously supports the work of the Rocky Mount City Council and the Council has wisely prioritized housing, business, transportation, water, sewer, community safety, recreation and minority and women business development;
  - Said the City is better than it has ever been for all citizens and a huge thanks is owed to Councilmembers Knight and Blackwell for their decades of sacrifice and service for the betterment of the entire region;
  - Said the Board of OIC is an active, engaged and real entity and is not a rubber stamp group and governs vigorously for the well-being of students, patients, customers and communities and takes exception to the well-planned attack on the reputation of the organization, its work and its leaders and the Board has decided and determined as a body that it will no longer allow false information and half-truths to be the predominate voice in the community about who they are and what they do and define its self by its work and its partners and stands fully behind its board chair and CEO as well as Councilmembers Joyner and Walker as they support the Boards collective agenda;
  - Thanked the City Manager for her leadership and efforts to build and strengthen the community;
  - Said the work of OIC educates and employs overlooked people and creates pathways for young and seasoned entrepreneurs of color and has brought the health and well-being of poor people and people of color to the front of the community and around the state and has been the first line of defense against COVID for 9,000 mostly black individuals and their families in the City and beyond and in March will bring its mammography and imaging center online with the collaboration of Nash/UNC Healthcare and will continue to advocate for full service, civil social, economic and healthcare rights for black people and all people;
  - Said this is who OIC is and plans to continue to be and voiced the hope that all will continue to work with them and to continue to help people help themselves;
  - Identified the Board of Directors of OIC
- ***Nathlyn Ohree:***
- Read the preamble of the U.S. Constitution;
  - Said she reads that to remind us that whatever elected officials do includes “we the people”;
  - Said there are members of the community who are concerned about the direction of the Unity Cemetery cleanup efforts; she questioned how often volunteers will be convening to clean up the cemetery; what is the role of the Mayor and Council in the cleanup process; who owns Unity Cemetery (name on deed) and what is the mission of the owner; is the owner aware of websites, flyers and grants set up in the name of the cemetery;
  - Said there is a need to ensure domestic tranquility in the community;
  - Said she is glad for volunteers to clean up the area and feels it would be a great volunteer project for prisoners on work release;

- Said area citizens do not want the project to be a false front for political or financial exploitation and the citizens want transparency
- **Clay Turner:**
  - Said he speaks in support of OIC; said he is an attorney in the City and has served on the OIC Board for 2 years;
  - Said some things have been said in the Council Chamber that reflect poorly on OIC, but OIC is an entity governed by a Board of Directors and he is proud of the work OIC is doing;
  - Said OIC will be administering vaccines in the coming weeks;
  - Said if someone has a problem with OIC they need to come before the Board of OIC
- **Samuel Battle:**
  - Said the OIC Board member who spoke before him said something disrespectful to him about Unity Cemetery;
  - Spoke about the recent murders in the City and said many neighborhoods have not received any funding but the same people seem to be receiving grants and that is wrong;
  - Said a lady came before Council recently who had lost her son and he feels her pain;
  - Questioned when the leaders of the City will step up to help the kids and come up with a plan to run a program; said kids need something to do; said there were kids having a good time working in the cemetery;
  - Said a Police Officer was disrespectful to him, Nehemiah Smith and Bronson Williams today when 6 police officers were called when they were talking in a parking lot
- **Curmilus Dancy:**
  - Said he speaks as 1st VP of the Rocky Mount Branch of the NAACP;
  - Said on Tuesday, February 2, Juan Manuel Cruz, Jr. was gunned down by two Rocky Mount Police officers; he read a prepared statement on behalf of the NAACP and said that the NAACP demands that full transparency and commitment to the truth be greater motivation than protecting the reputation of any one person or agency
- **Johnny Cunningham:**
  - Said the Unity Cemetery sign that included a Bible verse was painted over (at the cleanup on Saturday);
  - Said sometimes we enter into a task with good intentions and it is too much; said now others are going to do the task but it needs to be done in the manner of African American culture the way that Black folks honor their ancestors and heroes;
  - Said his grandmother was a slave and he knows there is some “slave blood” in him;
  - Said Black culture has been taken, robbed, reassigned, relabeled and been dictated from people who are not African American;
  - Said you cannot disturb those who have been laid to rest even to remove a tree growing out of a grave because it is forbidden;
  - Said he hopes the City will take the task of the Unity Cemetery cleanup on itself and do it decently and orderly

- ***Cleophus Arrington:***
  - Said he lives in the City and is here to express his concern relative to the City claiming Unity Cemetery; said it is a great idea but should not be used for political gain;
  - Said he understands 5 or 6 years ago the City was willing to clean up Unity Cemetery, but the effort was blocked by people on the same committee cleaning it up now;
  - Said as a young boy in Rocky Mount he helped to clean the cemetery for Mr. Stokes along with some of his mother's friends and it was kept clean back then because people took care of it;
  - Said he doesn't know why people are always knocking the City Council and City Manager for their efforts;
  - Said someone at the cemetery last Saturday told him the people doing the job have already applied for grants and he thinks that is a shame;
  - Said he does a lot of volunteer work in the City distributing food and has a youth baseball team (said he is looking for youth 14 years of age and sponsors and has a trip planned for Savannah, Georgia, March 13-15);
  - Said he moved back to Rocky Mount from New York about 9 years ago and thinks the City gets more divided each year because people can't get along;
  - Said he thinks the City Council is going an excellent job
  
- ***Glenn Draughn:***
  - Said he is a resident of the City;
  - Expressed concern about Unity Cemetery; said Steve Hart, Lewis Turner and he started cleaning up the cemetery from 2005 - 2015 and asked the Council to adopt the cemetery;
  - Said the City considered adopting Unity cemetery it but people from Channel 17 TV fought against it including the Councilmember in that Ward and certain residents;
  - Said Councilmember Knight should have been involved in the Unity Cemetery cleanup and it didn't happen;
  - Said he wants the City to adopt the cemetery and do what is needed;
  - Said Unity Cemetery has a lot of history;
  - Said people are buried there who had swine flu and tuberculosis and children should not have been involved in the cleanup but were there on Saturday and a lady was videoing kids picking up sticks;
  - Said Council is doing a great job along with the Manager and the community supports them, but all this other stuff has to stop
  
- ***Bronson Williams:***
  - Said today he had the unfortunate experience of having the Police Department called because it appears at some point an ordinance has been passed (to prevent) 3 black men from engaging in conversation outside of the IHOP in Rocky Mount after eating breakfast;
  - Said while the call is an issue and he is dealing with the owner of the franchise, his concern is with how 5 responding Police Officers handled the situation;
  - Said the body language and word choice of the Officers along with the idea of de-escalating vs. escalating the matter (concerned him) and that he feared for his life;
  - Said after seeing so many black men both young and old who were doing nothing lose their life during an arrest at the hands of a sworn law enforcement officer (concerns him); said it was not until a black senior officer was on the scene that he could then see an attempt to understand vs. being understood;
  - Said when fellow school members operated outside the expected norm they were suspended, and the offer of additional training was made;

- Said sensitivity and bias training should be a top priority for local law enforcement and said he hopes the City's drug testing policy is equitable throughout the entire department and provided to mid-level supervisors who have questionable job performances to allow them to be bullish to subordinates;
- Said he trusts the organization has an anti-bullying policy;
- Said he hopes the Council will support the idea of taking possession of Unity Cemetery and fixing up the cemetery and providing perpetual care; said those buried at Unity Cemetery are no different - no worse or no better - than those buried at Northeastern and Pineview and it looks like in 1901 Unity Cemetery was established because of Jim Crow laws and said people did not want black folks to be buried in the same cemetery;
- Said today we have an opportunity to right some wrongs

There being no other speakers, the Mayor closed the public petitions portion of the meeting.

#### **PLANNING BOARD MINUTES**

Motion was made by Councilmember Daughtridge, seconded by Councilmember Walker and unanimously carried by roll call vote (7 ayes/0 nays) that receipt of the minutes from a Planning Board meeting held January 12, 2021 be acknowledged. The minutes are on file in the office of the City Clerk.

#### **ANNEXATION NO. 318 - 1523 WEST MOUNT DRIVE/CONTIGUOUS**

The Mayor opened a public hearing relative to Annexation No. 318 and recognized staff to explain the feasibility study prepared in connection with the annexation by the Department of Development Services. Will Deaton, Director of Development Services, explained the report, noting, if approved, the property will become a part of Ward 4 and concluded by recommending approval of the annexation. A copy of the report is on file in Annexation No. 318 in the office of the City Clerk.

No one appeared and the Mayor declared the public hearing closed and noted written comments will be accepted up to 24 hours after the public hearing in accordance with NCGS 166A-19.24 and such comments can be submitted to the City Clerk.

*NOTE: No public comments were received.*

Motion was made by Councilmember Walker, seconded by Councilmember Joyner and unanimously carried by roll call vote (7 ayes/0 nays) that **Ordinance No. O-2021-7** entitled **ORDINANCE EXTENDING THE CORPORATE LIMITS OF THE CITY OF ROCKY MOUNT/ANNEXATION NO. 318 - 1523 WEST MOUNT DRIVE** be adopted.

#### **ANNEXATION NO. 319 - 1533 WEST MOUNT DRIVE/NON-CONTIGUOUS**

The Mayor opened a public hearing relative to Annexation No. 319 - 1533 West Mount Drive and recognized staff to explain the feasibility study prepared in connection with the annexation by the Department of Development Services. Will Deaton, Director of Development Services, explained the report, noting, if approved, the property will become a part of Ward 4 and concluded by recommending

approval of the annexation. A copy of the report is on file in Annexation No. 319 in the office of the City Clerk.

No one appeared and the Mayor declared the public hearing closed and noted written comments will be accepted up to 24 hours after the public hearing in accordance with NCGS 166A-19.24 and such comments can be submitted to the City Clerk.

*NOTE: No public comments were received.*

Motion was made by Councilmember Walker, seconded by Councilmember Joyner and unanimously carried by roll call vote (7 ayes/0 nays) that **Ordinance No. O-2021-8** entitled **ORDINANCE EXTENDING THE CORPORATE LIMITS OF THE CITY OF ROCKY MOUNT/ANNEXATION NO. 319 - 1533 WEST MOUNT DRIVE** be adopted.

**TRAFFIC ORDINANCE AMENDMENT/BELMONT LAKE PRESERVE**

The City Council was advised that the streets within the Belmont Lake Preserve development were originally private but have recently been accepted for maintenance by the City.

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

**ADOPT:**

- 25 MPH speed limit for:
  - o All existing public streets within the Belmont Lake Preserve Planned Density Residential District; and
  - o All future public streets constructed within the limits of the Belmont Lake Preserve Planned Density Residential District

Motion was made by Councilmember Daughtridge, seconded by Councilmember Joyner and carried by roll call vote (7 ayes/0 nays) that **Ordinance No. O-2021-9** entitled **ORDINANCE AMENDING THE TRAFFIC CONTROL ORDINANCE MAP OF THE CITY OF ROCKY MOUNT** be adopted.

**RESIDENTIAL TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT/POLICY AMENDMENT**

The City Council was provided with a Resolution amending the current Residential Traffic Management Policy to include a points-based scoring system to determine eligibility for installation of speed cushions or other physical traffic calming devices. In response to a question from Councilmember Daughtridge, Public Works Director Brad Kerr advised Council that blind spots and curves are also taken into consideration during the determination of eligibility for traffic calming devices.

Motion was made by Councilmember Walker, seconded by Councilmember Joyner and unanimously carried by roll call vote (7 ayes/0 nays) that **Resolution No. R-2021-11** entitled **RESOLUTION AMENDING ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY NO. VII.17 ENTITLED "POLICY: RESIDENTIAL TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT POLICY"** be adopted.

**DOWNTOWN FINANCIAL INCENTIVE GRANTS/ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY ADOPTION AND AMENDMENTS**

The City Council was presented with a Resolution approving a Policy for an Accelerated Façade Improvement Grant and amending

current Policies relative to the Downtown Rocky Mount Development Incentive Grant; the Downtown Building Assistance Program; and the Roof Replacement and Repair Grant.

A lengthy discussion was held to include concerns relative to the Central City Revitalization Panel's (CCRP) role and the effect of the policies on the City's Main Street designation. Downtown Development Manager Kevin Harris advised the Council that the CCRP is aware of the programs but perhaps not aware of the requested amendments as they came about due to the recent State audit. It was noted that the CCRP has no role in the appeal process.

Extensive conversation was held relative to the policies and the role of the CCRP.

Councilmember Daughtridge requested that in addition to information relative to budget transfers and police reports that Council be provided on a quarterly basis information about grants (grantees and those not approved) and also information relative to utility accounts (previously requested). He questioned if the Internal Auditor reviews grants for compliance.

City Manager Rochelle Small-Toney noted at the last Council meeting the City Attorney advised that the language relative to these type grants would need to be amended to reflect the appropriate language to state the projects are economic development projects. She added that the Internal Auditor reviews these grants pursuant to a restructure in response to the State Auditor's findings to add additional layers of oversight and grants now pass through the Utility Billing Director working along with the Community and Business Development Director as well as the Internal Auditor.

Conversation continued and Councilmember Blackwell stated while he is appreciative of the dialogue relative to the role of the CCRP, its authority and its impact on Downtown Policies the CCRP was developed by the City and since its authority is not delegated by the NCGS it has no authority to make decisions or appropriations without Council authorization. He added that all Councilmembers receive information at the same time, that he remembered the City Attorney advising that the changes would need to be made and that he does not understand why anyone would have a problem with the revisions by the Attorney to bring the grants into compliance. He said he is mystified by the level of innuendo that seems to cast a shadow on the level of development in the Downtown when for the first time since the 80's there is small business activity and added he hopes objections do not have any coloring because of those receiving the grants and he sees this as economic development. He said if Council wants to create insight regarding who is receiving grants there needs to be a conversation about who has had an



interest in the Downtown and who has suppressed Downtown development. He said these type questions are not even asked in closed session about economic development projects requiring millions of dollars from the City. He questioned the concern when the Downtown is finally growing and people of all races and ethnicities are coming Downtown, opening shops and having a wonderful time and being unified. He says great things are happening but he does not see black entrepreneurs being able to open up and establish shops across the City but does see that Downtown and he is very concerned about the tenor of questioning and the level of seemingly distrust/mistrust of professional staff.

Councilmember Miller said the difference is public money is not used for projects all over the City. Councilmember Blackwell responded that public money is spent on every project.

Councilmember Walker said he is in support of Downtown Rocky Mount and was excited to see in the policies that some of the Downtown boundaries have stretched further into Ward 4 and encouraged all entrepreneurs and individuals considering investing to look closely at the Ward 4 boundaries.

Councilmember Joyner called on the City Attorney for comment and Mr. Rose state that the policies are economic development policies and that needed to be clearly stated. He added that a vibrant Downtown benefits the entire City.

Councilmember Knight said he would like to see transparency relative to the millions of dollars being awarded to those receiving City contracts and that is why the Council pushed for the MWBE Program for the population that has not benefited in the past adding if small grants are being questioned then grants for millions of dollars should also be questioned.

Councilmember Daughtridge said that as a business owner in the Downtown who operates two businesses in Ward 4, he is very much in favor of the Downtown. He stated his concern is that Council did not receive the red-lined version of the policies until Sunday and that the CCRP is being removed and questioned if anyone on the CCRP is concerned with that adding that the CCRP has been in an advisory role and questioned why they are being removed.

Downtown Development Manager Kevin Harris said the incentive grants were rolled out and reactivated in early 2019 and each grant came before the CCRP and while the changes were not provided to the CCRP the grants themselves came before CCRP. He brought attention to a CCRP policy change in November 2014 approved by Council wherein the role of the CCRP was addressed and said the role was changed from overseeing the grant programs to a more general advisory role of fostering Downtown revitalization with a focus on attracting private investment dollars. He added that the role the Panel had

played in assessing applications that sought funds through the incentive programs and making decisions as to grant amounts and terms of grant agreements for building improvements effectively became staff roles in order to expedite the grant process and ensure the applicants' private information remained confidential.

Motion was made by Councilmember Daughtride and seconded by Councilmember Miller that consideration of Item 12 related to amending/adopting administrative policies for Downtown Assistance Grants (Nos. II.31, II.33, II.42 and II.43) be tabled. The motion failed by a roll call vote (3 ayes/4 nays; Councilmembers Knight, Blackwell, Joyner and Walker opposed).

Motion was made by Councilmember Knight and seconded by Councilmember Blackwell that **Resolution No. R-2021-12** entitled **RESOLUTION APPROVING ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES** be adopted. The motion carried by a roll call vote (4 ayes/3 nays; Councilmembers Daughtride, Bullock and Miller opposed).

The Resolution:

- Adopts:
  - o Policy No. II.42 Entitled "Policy: Accelerated Façade Improvement Grant"; and
- Amends:
  - o Policy No. II.31 Entitled "Policy: Downtown Rocky Mount Development Incentive Grant";
  - o Policy No. II.33 Entitled "Policy: Downtown Building Assistance Program"; and
  - o Policy No. II.43 Entitled "Policy: Roof Replacement and Repair Grant"

**FY 2020-2021 HOUSING INCENTIVE GRANTS**

The City Council was advised that the following funding allocations have previously been approved:

a)	Berkshire Community	\$	30,000
b)	Around the Wye Community	\$	30,000
c)	623 Branch Street	\$	43,830
d)	Grandma's House LLC	\$	75,000
e)	Berkshire Community Housing Renovation Project	\$	40,000
f)	Sumner Apartments	\$	75,000
g)	AFRESHnewStart, LLC	\$	300,000

It was requested that the City Manager, Finance Director, Community and Business Development Director and City Clerk be authorized to execute the Housing Incentive Grant Agreements. City Manager Rochelle Small-Toney noted the requested action is only a housekeeping item. She noted items (a) and (b) were approved in FY-2019-2020 and items (c) through (g) were approved during the current fiscal year.

Councilmember Blackwell stated that for a number of years each Councilmember has had an opportunity to bring projects to the Council for consideration to look for opportunities to bring affordable housing to the City and the only Councilmembers who have

done so for a number of years are the Councilmembers for Wards 1, 2, 3 and 4. He said work has been done in those Wards and properties have been acquired to stabilize areas. He specially identified the Holly Street Community as being reflective of the work and investment by the City leveraged by other community-based partners. He said he is continually concerned about the resurging question of why certain people receive grants and added no one was concerned when the bid for street paving was awarded. Mr. Blackwell said the Council looks to see what people can bring to the table when considering grants and their ability to convert a dilapidated property to beautiful housing. He said renovation is more beautiful when renovation of property allows people to remain in communities and these initiatives allow such renovation and what is why he is so supportive of them.

Councilmember Daughtridge said he has had and continues to have questions about these grants and has not received answers to his questions. He stated it his understanding that bids are awarded to the lowest bidder and often there is no other competition. He says being a good steward of public funds is the reason he asks questions but often when he asks a question there is inuendo that the reason the question is being asked is because the color of someone's skin is in question. He said that is incorrect and unfair.

City Manager Rochelle Small-Toney said when staff brings recommendations to Council the projects have been vetted and if Council chooses to support the recommendation and staff and fund the projects they proceed. She said additional layers of oversight have been added and no one is monitoring the large projects. She gave the Barnhill paving project as an example relative to MWBE participation. She said the City does not monitor the MWBE participation because there is not staff to allow such monitoring and the City rests on the belief that participation will be as agreed upon.

She added tangible results of effort can be seen from the grants awarded. She stated a description of each project along with the economic impact and personal investment of the grantee has been provided to Council. She said the City joins and exceeds some other communities in providing grants to support and make a difference in communities and in the Downtown.

Councilmember Walker said he believes being able to see the investment made will provide clarity and it is a misunderstanding if anyone believes the City is just giving money away. He added the grants incentivize those willing to make an investment particularly in areas that are in need, especially in historically underserved communities.

Councilmember Joyner said communities in need want to restore pride to their communities and the grants provide opportunities to incent the work being done. He says he has served communities for a long time that have been denied opportunities and that are now receiving those opportunities and thanked the Council and staff for seeking to do more for communities in need.

The City Manager stated the Berkshire Community Housing Project should be a project the Council and City is proud of because it is a community-driven project. She said people in this neighborhood have pooled resources to identify properties that are dilapidated in the community in an effort to bring them back onto the tax roles. She said there is no other project in the City like this and it a model in the City and perhaps even in the state or nation. She said the community is not asking the City to spend funds to demolish these properties and the effort should be celebrated and represents investment and sustainability.

Councilmember Walker asked what the reason is for opposition to the grants, if there is opposition.

Councilmember Daughtridge voiced the concern that Council was not provided with the grant agreements; questioned if how the grants are being spent is most effective for the work being done; and questioned who the sub-committee is comprised of and if there are minutes of the meetings. He said grants were provided in 2019 and 2020 and although he heard from a Councilmember tonight that each Councilmember is allowed to bring their own projects this is the first time, he has heard this. Councilmember Blackwell stated the City Manager has provided this information and suggested that if there is a project that a Councilmember wants done in their community, they should seek to build consensus among the Council.

Motion was made by Councilmember Knight and seconded by Councilmember Joyner that the City Manager, Finance Director, Community and Business Development Director and City Clerk be authorized to execute the following Housing Incentive Grant Agreements:

Berkshire Community	C-2021-4
Around the Wye Community	C-2021-5
623 Branch Street	C-2021-6
Grandma's House LLC	C-2021-7
Berkshire Community Housing Renovation Project	C-2021-8
Sumner Apartments	C-2021-9
AFRESHnewStart, LLC	C-2021-10

The motion carried by a roll call vote (5 ayes/2 nays; Councilmembers Daughtridge and Bullock opposed).

**TRAFFIC ORDINANCE AMENDMENT**

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

**ADOPT:**

- All-Way Stop at the intersection of Westry Road and Morning Glory Way

Motion was made by Councilmember Joyner, seconded by Councilmember Daughtridge and unanimously carried by roll call vote (7 ayes/0 nays) that **Ordinance No.0-2021-10 entitled ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ROCKY MOUNT APPROVING INSTALLATION OF ALL-WAY STOP AT WESTRY ROAD AND MORNING GLORY WAY** be adopted.

Councilmember Knight noted there is an all-way stop sign at Springfield Road and the Neighborhood Association continues to request a traffic signal.

**GRANT APPLICATION/ASSISTANCE TO FIREFIGHTERS**

The City Council was advised that staff is requesting authorization to apply for an Assistance to Firefighters Grant in the amount of \$627,538 and was informed that the AFG Program helps firefighter and first responder agencies to obtain critically needed resources necessary for protecting the public and emergency personnel from fire and related hazards. It was explained that the planned use of the funds is for replacement of self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) packs. The Council was further advised that the grant requires a local match of \$57,048.91.

Motion was made by Councilmember Daughtridge, seconded by Councilmember Miller and unanimously carried by roll call vote (7 ayes/0 nays) that the grant application and local match be approved; that staff be authorized to submit the grant application on behalf of the City; and that the Mayor and City Clerk be authorized to execute any required documentation and/or certifications, including the subsequent grant agreement.

**APPOINTMENTS**

Mayor Roberson opened the floor for appointments/removals to the City's Boards, Commissions and Committees and appointed Lea Diane Henry to the unexpired term on the Housing Authority.

No action was taken to fill the remaining vacancies.

**CLOSED SESSION/PERSONNEL**

The closed session for personnel was removed from the agenda.

**COUNCILMEMBER COMMENTS/COVID-19 - EQUITY IN POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION OF VACCINE (ADDED TO AGENDA IN OPEN MEETING)**

Councilmember Knight told the Council that the NAACP has issued a request that the Edgecombe and Nash County Boards of Commissioners actively ensure their respective Departments of Health do more to guarantee the prioritization of Black and Brown communities and constituents in administration of COVID vaccines. He requested that the City Manager contact both Nash and Edgecombe County Commissioners to hold a discussion that includes the Directors of the Health Departments for Nash and Edgecombe Counties and the

City's Human Relations Director relative to Black and Brown communities who are lagging behind in receiving the vaccine.

He said the media is reporting that mostly Black and Brown communities are being impacted by the virus and added few are receiving the vaccine. Mr. Knight said Nash County is reporting COVID-19 numbers, but Edgecombe County is not, and he feels, as elected officials, Council would like to know how communities are being impacted.

Councilmember Knight stated he would like to see a collaboration with the Human Relations Director, the City Manager, OIC, other nonprofits and ministers for a round table discussion in reference to this matter. He told the Council he had a very hard time with Edgecombe County Health Department and felt disrespected and encountered road blocks in having the vaccine administered to his adult care home and it is reported that a lot of inner city communities in the City are experiencing the same type of treatment. He said this needs to be addressed and resolved.

Councilmember Walker said Nash County and Bill Hill has worked alongside Ebenezer Baptist Church. He reported that COVID-19 vaccinations will be given at the church on Wednesday (February 10) beginning at 10 a.m. by appointment only. He said appointments can be made by calling the church at 252-446-2378. He stated that the church saw the need for vaccinations within the community and encouraged others with space to offer their locations for vaccinations. Councilmember Walker added that he would like to see some of the community centers opened for administration of the vaccine.

Councilmember Blackwell thanked Councilmember Knight for bringing this matter to the attention of the Council. He said the state of health in cities directly impacts every aspect of life and work done affects outcomes. He said the statement issued by the NAACP has done its job in provoking Boards of Commissioners in both counties to ask their Health Departments to get more aggressive and creative in partnering with the community.

Mr. Blackwell said both health departments are overwhelmed and under resourced but the legs of public health entities (OIC is a federally qualified health center) have been cut out for years, and they have been defunded and underfunded and still expected to keep everyone safe.

Mr. Blackwell said there are dedicated local legislators, faith leaders in the community, the hospital and its staff and other community-based organizations creating new opportunities and methods to engage the public. He added some of the issues are federal issues because the federal government has required every state to only book appointments by internet access. He said in Rocky Mount Black, Brown, poor and marginalized communities do not have the same level of access or money for devices or if they do, they cannot navigate them, especially those 65 and over. He stated it is hard to get access to the sites and he has seen in the vaccination efforts white

people in the front and black people in the back and it is not right. He added while that might not be the intention the result is the same.

Councilmember Blackwell stated that he is excited that Human Relations has a great opportunity to step up in the square and be assertive and ask for clarity and transparency of what the real numbers are to figure out strategies and work together to protect everyone in the community. He said collaborations are going on with many entities to figure out how to address our population, community, family members, friends and all of us.

Councilmember Daughtridg agreed with the comments and said he hopes Tar River Transit can be utilized because he feels transportation is part of the issue and since CARES funds are going into transportation it would be a wonderful way to use that transportation. He suggested that vaccination sites be identified on the City and Council's social media pages and on the City's website.

The City Manager responded by saying she will reach out to both County Managers.

**COUNCILMEMBER COMMENTS/UNITY CEMETERY - CLEAN-UP AND MAINTENANCE**  
**(ADDED TO AGENDA IN OPEN MEETING)**

Councilmember Knight stated that he was excited to see the participation this past weekend in the Unity Cemetery clean up. He added:

- Council has been discussing the cleanup of United Cemetery for years and the recommendation has been made by Council that the City take over the responsibility for Unity Cemetery, adding it is in the minutes;
- Most of those who have kept the cemetery clean are no longer here. He added in 2006 the Council allocated funds for United Cemetery and requested an assessment from a professional company who does cemetery clean up and restoration to provide an estimate and that information was provided March 20, 2015 but was sabotaged by some in Rocky Mount associated with the Rocky Mount Concerned Citizens FB page and some associated with WHIG TV and the effort was stalled;
- Stated after that Council redirected its focus on housing and Downtown Development. He asked the City Council to place discussion relative to Unity Cemetery on a future agenda, perhaps at a COW meeting, to look at the assessment prepared in 2015. He stated this was a thorough plan and well thought out;
- Said there was a meeting with the Unity Cemetery Committee that outlined the acreage of the cemetery, divided the cemetery into quadrants and gave an estimate of the cost for renovation;
- Said the problem is there is no perpetual care. He said the City bought Pineview Cemetery in the early 1900's when Jim Crow laws prevented Blacks from being buried in Pineview and, but tax dollars were used for the its maintenance;
- Said he hopes the City will do what is right and reconsider the plan for restoring Unity Cemetery prepared in 2015. He said it can be very dangerous for individuals to clean the cemetery because there are collapsed graves and it is a massive undertaking;
- Said the City is the only entity that can clean up and maintain the cemetery. He said if the City does not do so future generations will be left with the same problem. He said many are excited about the Unity Cemetery cleanup now, but this is not a new discussion.

Councilmember Miller said she supports Councilmember Knight's comments adding that both she and her husband were both physically

involved in the prior cleanup effort at Unity Cemetery over a number of weekends and agreed that regular maintenance is needed. She said she understands there is some question of ownership of the property and if the City cannot buy the cemetery, she supports a plan being put in place to divide the cemetery into sections and individuals being able to adopt sections to provide regular maintenance.

The Mayor requested the minutes referred to by Councilmember Knight be provided to the entire Council.

Mayor Pro Tem Joyner stated the matter could be placed on an upcoming COW for discussion and voiced support for the cleanup.

City Manager Rochelle Small-Toney stated that when the issue came up, she was directed to bring an update back to the Council in March and staff has been working on it. She said the presentation to which Councilmember Knight referred will need to be updated because it has a financial impact. She said former Assistant City Manager Thom Moton did an excellent job in laying out what will be required adding she would like to take it a step further and provide a more realistic account. She asked that the City Attorney provide assistance relative to the transitional process adding that it is her understanding if the cemetery has been abandoned the City will be in a much better position to take control of the property. She said the City does not own the property and it is under private partnership and there may be an opportunity to sit down with an owner of a section of the cemetery. She said there are a number of steps that will need to be taken up to and including a survey to determine ownership.

Councilmember Blackwell said:

- he is excited and thankful for the inspiration from the community;
- two people have come into the public square to get people involved and though he thanks them for their work and money he does not trust their intention. He said some of those involved needed to be involved in the cleanup because the policies were created by their forebearers;
- this is an excellent opportunity to right a historic wrong, but he will never support an effort for Unity Cemetery to be cleaned up by volunteers and it is the City's responsibility;
- these families were denied support of the City to which they paid taxes, fees and utilities and never saw the benefit coming back to honor their dead and ancestors;
- there is rich history defining the City in Unity Cemetery and people with good intentions might accidentally destroy some of the history;
- restoration experts are needed to provide information as to what needs to be preserved, to ensure grave markers are in the correct place and legible;
- Councilmember Knight proposed years ago that Unity Cemetery be tied in with the Greenway program so that people could walk, bike and jog through that area and have places to stop, view and reflect. He added that Sue Perry Cole and Joyce Dickens proposed to the City years ago the concept of heritage tours;
- this conversation is nothing new and he is thankful there is an opportunity for Council to do work they are commissioned to

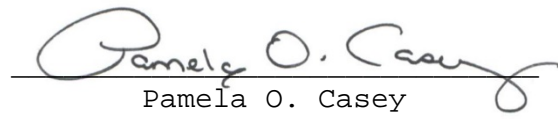


do morally and ethically and to right the wrongs of racism, change that narrative, honor our dead and create opportunities for future generations to learn from the past.

Councilmember Daughtridge stated he does not know if the project is shovel-ready but voiced support for discussion in a Committee of the Whole meeting. He said the City has received a recent Parks and Recreation grant that might help with connecting the cemetery to the Greenway project previously mentioned and feels the project is worth pursuing. He said he was not involved in the earlier cleanup effort but was in attendance on Saturday and asked that some of those involved in Saturday's planned cleanup be included in future discussion because there are people with passion involved. He said people from all walks of life and all colors were working together on Saturday and there needs to be more of that adding "it was awesome." He voiced support of the project.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, by consensus, the meeting was adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

  
Pamela O. Casey  
City Clerk