

February 27, 2023

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, Jr., Lige Daughtridge, Tom Harris and Jabaris Walker.

Staff present: Peter F. Varney, Interim City Manager; Kim Batts, City Clerk; Elton Daniels, Assistant City Manager; Brad Kerr, Public Works Director; Will Deaton, Director of the Department of Development Services; Archie Jones, Director of Human Relations; Brenton Bent, Water Resources Director; Gregory Cotten, Chief Technology Officer; Latasha Hall, Director of Business and Collections Services; Tracey Drewery, Assistant Chief of Administration & Planning (Fire Department); Corey Mercer, Fire Chief; Michael Roupp, Assistant Chief of Operations; Darvin Moore, Division Chief; Ken Hunter, Assistant to the City Manager for Budget and Evaluation; Robert Hassell, Police Chief; Abdul Baloch, Chief Internal Auditor; Kevin Harris, Downtown Development Manager; Mark Adcox, Video Production Specialist; Robin Cox, Communications Specialist; Cornelia McGee, Interim Community and Business Development Director; Kena Cofield-Jones, Director of Human Resources; Kream Mosley, Deputy City Clerk; Monica Brantley, Deputy City Clerk and Richard J. Rose, City Attorney.

Security Officers: Corporal Clay Wilder, Sergeant Chris Williams, and Senior Police Officer Shawn Battle.

The Mayor called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m. and requested all in attendance to stand for a moment of silent prayer.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Councilmember/Mayor Pro Tem T.J. Walker, seconded by Councilmember Joyner, and unanimously carried that the minutes of the following City Council meetings be approved as submitted to the City Council prior to the meeting:

- Committee of the Whole meetings:
 - Regular Scheduled meeting held November 14, 2022;
 - Regular Scheduled meeting held November 21, 2022; and
 - Special Called meeting held December 1, 2022; and
- Regular Scheduled City Council meeting held November 28, 2022.

APPROVAL OF ADDITIONS/DELETIONS TO AGENDA

Mayor Roberson stated he had received the following requests to amend the agenda to:

- remove consideration of item 8(h) from the Consent Agenda; and

- add consideration of a retirement resolution honoring Fire Chief, Corey C. Mercer.

Motion was made by Councilmember Daughtridge, seconded by Councilmember Harris, and unanimously carried that the agenda be amended, as requested.

COMMUNITY UPDATE BY INTERIM CITY MANAGER

Interim City Manager Peter F. Varney provided the following community update. The Interim City Manager reported that:

- A lecture entitled “For the Love of Liberty: The Story of America’s Black Patriots” will be given by Retired Brigadier General Arnold Gordon-Bray in honor of Black History Month this evening at 7 p.m. at the Powers Recital Hall at the Dunn Center;
- Tomorrow (February 28) at 11 a.m. there will be a live streaming on the City’s website of a presentation entitled “African American History - The Untold Stories” with the featured speaker being former Rocky Mount Councilmember, Angela Bryant, Assistant Secretary for Equity and Inclusion, NC DHHS;
- Nash County Recycles Day is scheduled for Saturday, March 4, 2023, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the Nash County Courthouse parking lot. He stated that Rocky Mount’s Keep America Beautiful is sponsoring collection of electronics, up to five (5) boxes of paper documents, and unused or unwanted prescription drugs and medicines;
- On March 6 through 8, 2023, from 8:30 a.m. until 5 p.m. the City’s Tree Advisory Board will sponsor their annual tree giveaway at the Business Center. Individuals may receive two (2) American plum trees per person;
- Energy Share Rebate funds remain available. The amount budgeted for this program in 2022-2023 was \$200,000 and \$37,250 remains available. Those interested may apply for the rebate program funding for attic weatherization (\$500), HVAC replacement (\$1,000) or duct work replacement (\$250). Those eligible must be homeowners and CRM electric or gas customers. Applications may be found on the City’s website;
- The play “Sister Act” is planned for the weekend of March 3 through 4 and March 10 through 11, 2023, at 7:30 p.m. and March 5 and 12, 2023, at 2:20 p.m. at the Imperial Centre; and
- The City has now hired litter crews and they have been collecting on Leggett Road, Winstead Road, Wellington Drive, Harbor West Drive, Sutton Road, Vance Street, and Thorpe Road.

Councilmember Joyner recognized and thanked staff of Keep America Beautiful and the litter crews who have partnered with Bishop Deloatch and his church, and community organizations.

RETIREMENT RESOLUTION/FIRE CHIEF COREY C. MERCER (ADDED IN OPEN MEETING)

Mayor Roberson read a resolution honoring Fire Chief Corey C. Mercer for his retirement from the City of Rocky Mount effective March 1, 2023.

Motion was made by Councilmember Joyner, seconded by Councilmember Blackwell, and unanimously carried that **Resolution R-2023-16** entitled **RESOLUTION HONORING FIRE CHIEF COREY MERCER** be adopted.

Chief Mercer received a standing ovation and Mayor Roberson and the entire City Council presented him with a framed copy of the retirement resolution and joined him for a photo.

Councilmember Blackwell voiced appreciation to Fire Chief Mercer for his dedication and leadership. Councilmember Knight echoed the words of Councilmember Blackwell and recognized Chief

Mercer as the City's first African American fire chief. Mayor Roberson thanked Chief Mercer for his service and wished him luck on his future endeavors.

PETITIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

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

Dr. Kim Koo -

- Voiced opposition to event organizers being required to furnish their own security for events and stated in her opinion City of Rocky Mount Police security seems adequate and further opposed tax dollars being used for private security; and
- Stated she hopes Councilmembers who say they support something will act accordingly

Adrienne Copland -

- Stated she thinks the City Council retreat should be held in Rocky Mount at the Event Center adding that would allow more citizens to attend and get to know the new City Manager which is important for building back trust and offering transparency;
- Said out of town retreats exclude citizens; and
- Opposed piggy-backing the retreat on another conference

Nehemiah Smith, Jr. -

- Stated the very meaning of retreat means to move away from and suggested a new name be considered for the meeting adding the Council cannot retreat at home based upon the meaning of the word;
- Urged Council to prepare a resolution in opposition to House Bill 187 adding this bill deals with critical race theory and it is his belief there is an effort to remove African American history education from American history education; and
- Said critical race theory is an advanced master's course only taught in a college setting

Richard Roberts -

- Introduced himself and his wife, Dorothy, and stated they are the new owners of the Rocky Mount *Black News Gazette* and added Councilmembers and the Mayor should have recently received a copy of the news magazine;
- Provided information about his professional background and the background of the *Black News Gazette*;
- Told the Council he was happily retired when he suggested in a barber shop that the City needed a Black newspaper due to how the Black community was portrayed in the news media and was told he should do it. He said the result was he and his wife purchasing the *Black News Gazette* which has been providing uplifting, encouraging, inspiring, and positive news content only in order to showcase and highlight the Black experience in a positive, uplifting way; and
- Stated the news magazine is free to the public and distributed in Rocky Mount and Nash, Edgecombe, and Wilson Counties

The Mayor stated he has enjoyed the publication.

Clementine Jenkins -

- Stated she wants to speak today with regard to her excessive utility bills;
- Said her bills have been excessive and gradually increasing for the past four months and there is no rhyme or reason as to why they are higher adding for two or three of the months her gas unit was out;
- Said others she has spoken to complain about high utility bills as well;
- Said she and her husband are empty nesters and on a fixed income;
- Requested an explanation for the high utility bills; asked what Council is doing to help the citizens, and asked if Councilmembers know what citizens are paying and if they are paying high utility bills themselves; and
- Added that staff has already been out to provide an energy audit

Mayor Roberson called on Interim City Manager Peter Varney who suggested that staff look at Ms. Jenkins' account to see if anything is out of line and to see if assistance is available. He reminded all that Rocky Mount utility bills are bundled to include electric, gas, water, sewer, storm water, and refuse collection into one bill, adding that there was some very cold weather during the month of December, particularly around Christmas time. He requested she provide her address to Assistant City Manager Daniels.

Councilmember Blackwell thanked Ms. Jenkins' for her sincere, heartfelt testimony adding it is everybody's testimony. He said he can't explain every detail of how utility bills are calculated but agreed citizens are owed clarity for how bills are calculated. He stated Rocky Mount is not sitting on an island of high utility bills. He said we all sit in a country and in a world where energy costs are skyrocketing, and much of this is still related to international conflict. Mr. Blackwell stated that the City buys gas and the price point is not set by Council. He said that one of the Councilmembers is a Council representative at Electricities and suggested he could perhaps offer some explanation. He reiterated that the issue is not isolated and is shared by many. Mr. Blackwell agreed that customers need to understand why the cost increases for electricity and gas are so dramatic and added that the City's rate for stormwater and trash pick-up has not changed that much and the change and shift in rates is with gas and electricity.

Mayor Pro Tem T.J. Walker stated that he feels the sincerity of Ms. Jenkins' thoughts and comments relative to high utility bills. He said he pays his utility bills and also hears concerns from constituents about high utility bills and directs those constituents to Latasha Hall at the City's Business Office. He said he is yet to hear back from anyone referred to her adding that City staff will find a way to help customers and recommended she reach out to staff directly and to her Councilmember, if necessary.

Councilmember Daughtridg stated that he appreciates the question from Ms. Jenkins and thinks utility bills are some of the most significant bills citizens have. He agreed with Councilmembers

Blackwell and Walker that gas prices have been going up and there have been increases in electricity charges. He said he believes the City has absorbed some of those increased costs. He reported that he has personally done an analysis on utility bills and Rocky Mount is 1% higher than Wilson and 5% higher than Fayetteville and Greenville but 14% lower than Duke and Kinston; 11% lower than New Bern and 22% lower than Halifax. He added that for electricity Rocky Mount is 9% higher than Dominion but 21% lower than Edgecombe-Martin. He said Council has tried to do what they can to make the rates as low as they can. He stated that Latasha Hall in Business Services works to educate customers on how bills are calculated and can explain how customers can calculate their own bills. He encouraged customers who need assistance to reach out to the Business Services Department. He said he pays his utility bills on time for both his business and home and is happy to share that information if a request is made.

Councilmember Knight thanked Ms. Jenkins for sharing this information. He stated that the City Council has been fighting high utility bills for a very long time noting he was a member of the North Carolina Eastern Municipal Power Agency (NCEMPA) prior to Councilmember Daughtride becoming a member. He provided background of the City's efforts which resulted in an agreement with Electricities. He added that he hopes all Councilmembers are paying their utility bills and said he has proof that he also pays his bills every month despite the lies pointed towards him by the findings of the State Auditor. He complimented Ms. Latasha Hall and her staff on the work they do and reported that he also directs citizens who contact him about their utility bills to Ms. Hall at the Business Services office. He recognized that utility bills have been higher this year adding there has been a lot of cold weather. Councilmember Knight said Rocky Mount is known for fighting for justice relative to high utility bills and the stand Rocky Mount took to get utility bills at least 14% lower is documented. He encouraged Ms. Jenkins to contact the Business Services office for assistance and answers to other questions she may have.

Mack Battle -

- Congratulated Fire Chief Corey Mercer on his retirement and thanked him for his service;
- Said he is excited about the incentive grant awarded to East End Missionary Baptist Church and thanked Councilmembers for their service;
- Provided history relative to East End Missionary Baptist Church and its work in the community relative to improving the community, specifically as it relates to dilapidated housing;
- Said there is still a lot of work to be done and thanked Council for the incentive grant which allows the church to move forward in this effort; and
- Said he was a part of the Berkshire Community celebration and thanked Council for the incentive grants which provide motivation to the community

Councilmember Joyner thanked Reverend Battle for his comments and the Council for approving the incentive grants. He recognized the work of Ms. Cornelia McGee and staff of the Department of Community Development and said he looks forward to working with all communities to make redevelopment a reality.

Councilmember Blackwell thanked East End Missionary Baptist Church for being courageous and stepping outside the bounds of tradition, cleaning up our communities and neighborhoods, and not just replacing the people by fixing the structures but by building something new to bring people back in to live in their neighborhoods. He added it makes a difference to the families who have lived there for generations and the Council appreciates what is being done.

Marion Stoga -

- Stated she has been a resident of Rocky Mount for about 15 years;
- Said as she looked up the definition of retreat and it says withdraw from enemy forces as a result of their superior power or after defeat;
- Said she sure hopes that doesn't mean that Council is leaving the City because something's gone wrong and they have to go to another city regarding housing;
- Said she was only going to say a couple of words about the retreat because she saw something mentioned by one of the Councilmen that the retreat should be in Rocky Mount and added that citizens with an interest in housing should be invited; and
- Requested there be more pickleball lines on pickleball courts. She said she saw the Committee of the Whole meeting wherein there was discussion of Sunset Park, but nothing was said about pickleball until her Councilmember mentioned paddleball; she asked why Wesleyan tennis courts cannot be used for tennis tournaments, if needed; and
- Provided information to Council about actions being taken by Wilson relative to pickleball courts and tournaments adding if tournaments are held people will come and will spend money

Leon Wright (retired Colonel) -

- Told the Council he is from the Red Tail squad of the Tidewater Chapter of Tuskegee Airmen out of Hampton, Virginia;
- Said he has two issues and stated that the Tuskegee Airmen National Day is the fourth Thursday in March which will their 75th anniversary;
- Said his job is to teach aerospace and provided a brief detail of his acronym AISTEMCAT and said schools are not teaching artificial intelligence, science, technology, engineering and math, or CAT communication, arts and theater and the job of the Tuskegee Airmen is to educate youth;
- Said he is the Eastern Region Director/Representative and covers everything on the east coast all the way down and international because they have a soon to be new chapter coming online from Italy making the group international;
- Said next month they will be in Tuskegee, Alabama, and that they have been invited for an air show on May 6; and
- Said our schools need teachers and his job is to educate students about learning to fly

Mayor Roberson assured Mr. Wright he would share information provided to him with regard to National Bullying Day with the entire Council.

Mayor Pro Tem T.J. Walker added that all Councilmembers will be provided with Mr. Wright's email.

Gerald Jenkins -

- Stated his concern is with regard to the crimes being committed in the City and it seems as though nothing is being done to alleviate these crimes;
- Said he has spoken with the Police Chief and understands the City does not have enough officers to be out on patrol or to take care of some of these crimes but feels like something really needs to be done;
- Said there are a lot of Black men just walking the streets because they don't have any place to go and can't find jobs because they have stripes on their backs;
- Said the City and County are full of dilapidated buildings and houses and said he does not see why some type of program cannot be implemented to help the same men who walk the streets because these Black men need jobs;
- Said he thinks a program should be created so these men can clean up neighborhoods and create jobs where some of these Black men can come in and work and feel good about themselves again;
- Said all men need to work and these Black men need to work so they can start over again;
- Said kids are carrying guns to school in bookbags and the newspaper is full of crime; and
- Asked that someone who thinks this is a possibility call or meet with him because he would like to be a part of such a program to be sure it is done in the right manner

Councilmember Joyner thanked Mr. Jenkins for his comments and requested that Councilmember Blackwell share information about the Construction Trade Program at OIC that is also looking at working to rebuilding housing. He added the Police Academy helps to inform citizens of partnerships with the City to resolve some issues in a therapeutic way.

Councilmember Blackwell said he wanted to call attention to what the Police Chief has told Council over and over that 60-70% of every gun violence encounter in Rocky Mount has been about a domestic relationship and has to do with two people or people within that circle not getting along. He stated he does not think the problem can be policed away because it is about mental and spiritual health and [lack of] commitment to resolving disputes in a nonviolent manner. He added it is also an issue of disregard for human life and he does not think that police on every corner is ever going to solve that issue and it is something that we all have to roll up our sleeves and do something about. He noted there are programs to aggressively help people. Mr. Blackwell said OIC has two (2) programs of which he is very proud to help people understand that pathways to success begin with enlightenment and education and for people who are not able to stick with traditional school systems offering places where people can go to get back on track. Mr. Blackwell said data shows that every time someone receives a degree or certification it increases their likelihood of being able to earn more money and when we look at where violent crimes are being committed it has everything to do with poverty. He said the poverty

issue has to be fixed before the manifestation of poverty can be fixed and the root of the problem is not having access to resources. He stated that OIC works with one of the strongest programs that the U.S. Department of Labor funds called the SOAR program and one of the OIC team members here works together with law enforcement agencies and supportive entities to help people who are coming back from prison. He reported that Rocky Mount has a large number of folks that come back from prison and OIC helps them find another way to live, creates new peer circles, creates opportunities to get certifications and finish degrees and then there are people who will hire them. He said OIC targets young Black men between the ages of 18 to 24 and stated that Councilmember Jabarish Walker is one of the best at helping young black men in particular find ways to get back to a productive manner. He added that the problem is a systemic issue that has been created by about 400 years of systemic oppression. Councilmember Blackwell told Mr. Jenkins he appreciates his enthusiasm about wanting to look for solutions and OIC is just one solution for the reclamation of people and there are many in this community. He noted there are a plethora of nonprofits and Boys and Girls Club, in particular, does a phenomenal job and has intervened for hundreds of young black kids. He recognized more is needed but stated the violence in Rocky Mount primarily stems from people who are in relationship with each other, who haven't found a way to work out problems and they reduce their answers to violent attacks. He added this has to stop and said he looks forward to hearing answers from others to help collaborate with people.

Councilmember Harris thanked the Police Chief, the Mayor, and Interim City Manager Varney and indicated a meeting was held last month with the Eastern District US attorney and other officials from various federal agencies as well as state agencies and some of the key messages he received from the meeting is that the Police Department can't do it all and it takes a concerted effort and, according to Mike Easley, the solution has to come from intervention and prevention. He stated this requires collaborative efforts of, not only the police, but churches and various agencies like the United Way and the Boys and Girls Club. He said the community must come together and it starts with prevention and intervention and that begins in the home. He stated Council is going to look at various ways of what the City can do to help the Police Chief adding technology can provide some assistance. Mr. Harris added he hopes the community can come together to develop some concrete plans for what can be done to make this City a better place to live.

Councilmember Knight thanked Mr. Jenkins for coming to the meeting to speak. He said if Councilmembers had a solution that could cure all and help all they would do it, not just here in Rocky

Mount, but all across this country. He said he thinks the five (5) black Councilmembers understand, adding he is not saying that the others do not understand, but the black members live it every day and see it. He stated they speak to youth groups and churches wherever they are invited and with young people just walking the street and in community centers. He added it will take the community and not just Councilmembers along with state and federal assistance to help the problem. He added it is his understanding a law is going to be passed that you don't need a gun permit to carry a gun and as a result more guns will be put in the hands of the community. He again thanked Mr. Jenkins for any help he can offer and said the Council knows and understands the problem.

Mayor Roberson stated this is a matter of utmost concern to this Council and continues to be a priority. He said he is proud of our Council, community, and Police Department for making it such a priority and it is not something that can be solved overnight but is a process that Council is committed to trying to make happen.

CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor Roberson reminded those in attendance that Item 8(h) on the Consent Agenda was removed by the Council for further discussion.

Motion was made by Councilmember Knight, seconded by Councilmember Joyner, and unanimously carried that the following items on the Consent Agenda [Items 8(a) through 8(i)], be approved as follows with the exception of Item 8(h) and more specifically that:

- 1) the Certifications and Assurances, Special Section Warranty, and Certifications and Restrictions on Lobbying be approved and that the City Manager, Mayor, and City Attorney be authorized to execute any required documentation on behalf of the City;
- 2) That the Water Assessment Contract be approved/authorized and the Mayor and City Clerk authorized to execute the same on behalf of the City;
- 3) That the Parks and Recreation Sunset Park Master Plan be approved/adopted;
- 4) That receipt of the Petition requesting the closing of S. Washington Street at the CSX Railroad be acknowledged and a Resolution adopted declaring the intent to close which schedules a public hearing for May 8, 2023;
- 5) That a resolution amending Administrative Policy No. IX.1 Entitled: Water-Sewer Extensions and Services Connection and FY 2022-2023 Budget Ordinance appropriating funding in the

General Fund to cover Change Orders for the Denton Street Pool Project totaling \$147,420 be adopted; and

- 6) That the bid for overhaul services for Generator #3 located at Substation #9 be awarded to Gregory Poole Equipment Company in the amount of \$393,517.78 pursuant to Sourcewell Contract #092222-CAT.

The following is a detailed accounting of the items included in the Consent Agenda, with the exception of Item 8(h), which was removed from the Consent Agenda:

A. PROPERTY DISPOSITION/CONVEYANCE OF CITY-OWNED PROPERTY TO CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD (information only; previously approved):

The City Council was provided with an agreement, including a property map and aerial map, with the Church of the Good Shepherd dated October 27, 2003, in which the City agreed to convey a 30-foot-wide parcel of land formerly owned by Fenner's Warehouse, Inc. to the Church. It was noted that the Church agreed to construct a parking lot on the parcel to be available to the City for overflow parking for the Imperial Centre at such times as there were no worship services, funerals, weddings, or other church events. The Council was advised that the agreement provided that the City convey the 30-foot-wide strip of land connecting Church Street to Falls Road which was previously conveyed by the Church to the City on March 19, 1993, and had been used by police, fire, and other emergency vehicles back to the Church following construction of the parking lot. Council was advised that the City had wanted Goldleaf Street extended from Falls Road to Church Street before the 30-foot-wide strip was conveyed back to the Church and that the Church completed construction of the parking lot in 2005 with the Goldleaf Street extension being completed shortly thereafter.

The City Council received a deed prepared by Poyner Spruill, LLP conveying the aforementioned property to the Church. It was noted that no action was necessary for the Mayor and City Clerk to be authorized to execute the deed, as that authority had previously been authorized in the agreement dated October 27, 2003.

B. FY 2023 FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION'S CERTIFICATIONS AND ASSURANCES/FY 2024 SPECIAL SECTION 5333(B) WARRANTY FOR TRANSIT FUNDING/CERTIFICATION AND RESTRICTIONS ON LOBBYING

The City Council was provided with FY 2023 Certifications and Assurances for Transit grant funding; Special Section 5333(b) Warranty for Transit Grant funding and Certification and Restrictions on Lobbying and advised that the certifications and assurances ensure the City will comply with all laws and regulations governing federally assisted program public transportation funds.

By consent, the Certifications and Assurances, Special Section Warranty and Certification and Restrictions on Lobbying were

approved and the City Manager, Mayor and City Attorney authorized to execute any required documentations on behalf of the City.

C. WATER ASSESSMENT CONTRACT

The City Council received a water assessment contract with Robert P. and Lisa B. Matthews for water service to 1681 Bessie Lane [PIN 383109270241]. Council was advised that the connection fees for this property are \$4,265, that the customer has prepaid \$265, and the contract requires the remaining fees of \$4,000 to be assessed against the property.

By consent, the assessment contract with Robert P. and Lisa B. Matthews for water service to 1681 Bessie Lane [PIN 383109270241] **(C-2023-4)** was approved and the Mayor and City Clerk authorized to execute the same on behalf of the City.

D. SUNSET PARK MASTER PLAN

The City Council received a Sunset Park Master Plan which was completed in January 2023 and presented to Council at the February 13, 2023, Committee of the Whole meeting. The City Council was advised that the proposed Master Plan is the most thorough park plan created to date and is grant-ready. It was noted that approval/adoption of the plan does not include obligation for funding the project but does improve scoring with future grant applications.

Highlights of the plan were noted to include:

- Carousel renovation;
- Miniature train replacement;
- Spray Park renovation;
- Renovation of 6,000 linear feet of greenway;
- Sunset Park concession building and outdoor restrooms renovation;
- Renovation of tennis courts;
- New playground;
- Three (3) new mini-shelters;
- Multi-purpose field;
- Fishing piers and kayak launch renovation;
- New multi-use, natural surface trail (7,290 lf);
- Wildlife observation, river access, and riparian restoration;
- Pollinator Gardens at Community Gardens; and
- Park security cameras.

By consent, the Sunset Park Master Park was approved and adopted.

E. STREET CLOSING/S. WASHINGTON STREET AT CSX RAILROAD

The City Council acknowledged receipt of a Petition from the City requesting the closing of S. Washington Street between the southern end of S. Washington Street and western end of Monk Street at the CSX Railroad crossing. Council was advised that the request is to close the right of way for the CSX railroad crossing located at the southern terminus of S. Washington Street which provides entry to the CSX property to the south.

By consent, **Resolution No. R-2023-17** entitled **RESOLUTION OF INTENT TO CLOSE S. WASHINGTON STREET AT CSX RAILROAD CROSSING** was adopted. Said resolution schedules a public hearing on the street closing for May 8, 2023, at 7:00 p.m.

F. WATER-SEWER EXTENSIONS AND SERVICE CONNECTIONS/ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY

The City Council was advised that Administrative Policy IX.1 entitled "Policy: Water-Sewer Extension and Service Connections" sets forth the terms for extending service to annexed areas, areas inside the City through the petition process, new residential or commercial developments inside the City, connections to existing utility lines outside the City, and related services.

It was noted that the amended policy provides a process for considering extensions of water and sewer service to property within satellite annexation areas.

By consent, **Resolution No. R-2023-18** entitled **RESOLUTION AMENDING ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY IX.1 ENTITLED "POLICY: WATER-SEWER EXTENSIONS AND SERVICE CONNECTIONS"** was adopted.

G. BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENT/DENTON STREET POOL PROJECT CHANGE ORDERS

The City Council received a budget ordinance amendment requesting approval of \$147,420 of change orders to the contract for the Denton Street Pool Project and were advised the budget amendment is required to increase the financing total for the project and appropriate funds necessary for the expenditure.

By consent, **Ordinance No. O-2023-59** entitled **ORDINANCE AMENDING THE BUDGET ORDINANCE FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023 FOR DENTON STREET POOL PROJECT CHANGE ORDERS** was adopted.

H. FIRST AMENDMENT TO NEIGHBORHOOD RESTORATION AND PRESERVATION INCENTIVE GRANT/EAST END MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

Consideration of Item 8(h) was removed from the Consent Agenda.

I. BID/OVERHAUL SERVICES FOR GENERATOR #3 LOCATED AT SUBSTATION #9

The City Council approved a recommendation for the award of overhaul services for Generator #3 located at Substation #9 to Gregory Poole Equipment Company in the amount of \$393,517.78. The award will be administered through Sourcewell, a competitive group purchasing program which allows purchases to be made through competitive bidding and offers competitively obtained purchasing services at discount prices to two or more public agencies, pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-129(e) (3). The award is pursuant to Sourcewell Contract #092222-CAT and bid documentation is on file in the office of the City Clerk as **BD-2023-8**.

FIRST AMENDMENT TO NEIGHBORHOOD RESTORATION AND PRESERVATION INCENTIVE GRANT/EAST END MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH (REMOVED FROM CONSENT AGENDA)

The City Council was provided with a first amendment to a Neighborhood Restoration and Preservation Incentive Agreement with

East End Missionary Baptist Church. It was noted that the Council approved the grant on November 28, 2022, in the amount of \$100,000 for the restoration of a house at 1012 East Highland Avenue. Council was advised that the Church has acquired the property but has decided to demolish the existing structure and build a new home at the site and additional costs associated with change in the scope of the project for demolition and new construction are estimated at \$9,192.63. It was explained that the Church will provide the additional funding required to complete the project.

Motion was made by Councilmember Blackwell, seconded by Councilmember Knight, and carried by a vote of 5-2 (Councilmembers Daughtridge and Harris opposed) that the first amendment to the Neighborhood Restoration and Preservation Incentive Grant with East End Missionary Baptist Church be approved and that the Mayor, City Clerk, and Finance Director be authorized to execute the same on behalf of the City. The amendment will be placed on file in the City Clerk's Office with the original agreement **(C-2022-61)**.

Prior to a vote on the motion, the following discussion was held.

Councilmember Daughtridge stated that there has been prior discussion relative to changes in the housing incentive grant but those changes that should be very easy have not yet been provided to Council for consideration. He stated when the subcommittee of three(3) councilmembers get together that meeting needs to be public and there needs to be minutes of the meeting. He added that the public needs to know how to apply for the housing incentive grants. He stated there is not yet an approved process and his vote today has nothing to do with any of the entities but has everything to do with a lack of process which has been talked about for over a year.

Councilmember Knight stated that comments such as the ones just made are the kind of hiccups there are on Council and when the request is from an organization such as East End Missionary Baptist Church, which is an organization that has proved itself in the community. He said Councilmembers who live on the east side of town have had to fight through this for the last twenty (20) years to get progress and there should be a record of that in the minutes or on tapes of Council meetings.

Councilmember Harris said, as a private citizen speaking at the podium before he was a member of the Council, he has said on numerous occasions that he supports affordable housing but does not support how the incentive program has been administered because there are no written policies and procedures. He said he has previously asked and it has been confirmed that there are no written policies and procedures. He added he believes Interim City Manager Peter Varney has given one of the members of the committee a draft

of proposed policies and procedures and is waiting for comments. He stated he would like the requested action to be amended and Mayor Roberson stated there is currently a motion on the floor to be voted up or down. Councilmember Harris stated he wants to make his fellow Councilmembers and the citizens of Rocky Mount aware that he is glad to see the work East End Baptist Church is doing but in reviewing the settlement statement the initial amount of money going to the Church after the document has been signed was \$41,485.13. He said this is money that essentially has already been paid for the acquisition of the property and unpaid taxes and assessments totaling \$8,033.35. He added these taxes and assessments are due not only to the City but also to Edgecombe County and the citizens of Rocky Mount are being asked to pay for the previous owner's failure to pay taxes and assessments and that is wrong.

Mayor Pro Tem T.J. Walker asked if there is someone on staff who can communicate the changes relative to this request.

Interim City Manager Peter Varney told the Council the request is for a change in scope. He stated the original plan was to acquire the property on Highland Avenue which had a house on it and to renovate that house. Mr. Varney reported that the change is to demolish the house rather than renovate it and build a new house there in its place. He added that there is also a budgetary change of an additional cost of \$9,192.63. He noted the applicant has found a source for the change in cost and the grant amount of \$100,000 remains the same.

Councilmember Knight stated that every time he has asked the City Manager and management in Community Development, he has been told they have a process for how grants are allocated. He said while a Councilmember may have a problem with how it is being done, there is nothing illegal in how the applications are being processed and how grants have been awarded. He stated the subcommittee has not met and there are no minutes to share. Councilmember Knight stated these are the issues dealt with every day when credible citizens in the community want to help revitalize this community and give people a decent place to live. He asked Mr. Varney to speak about some of the changes to the policies and procedures and to advise when those changes will be on the City's website and when it will be announced that the process is open so this matter can be put to rest.

Mr. Varney reported that he has drafted a policy for housing incentive grants and the next step is to convene the subcommittee so that the members can review the policy and approve the policy or make recommendations.

Mayor Roberson stated he believed sufficient debate had occurred and requested the Council vote on the action being requested.

APPOINTMENTS

No action was taken to fill the vacancies on the City's Boards, Commissions and Committees.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, by consensus, the meeting was adjourned at 5:15 p.m.



Kim Batts
City Clerk