

REGULAR MEETING CITY COUNCIL

January 21, 2020

(Corrected via Resolution by City Council on March 16, 2020)

The City Council of the City of Albemarle met in a regular session on Tuesday, January 21, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall. Mayor Ronnie Michael presided, and the following Councilmembers were present, to-wit: Mayor Pro Tem Martha Sue Hall; Bill Aldridge; Chris Bramlett; Martha E. Hughes; Shirley E. Lowder; Dexter Townsend; and Chris Whitley. Absent: None.

Mayor Michael called the meeting to order.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Townsend, seconded by Councilmember Hall, unanimously carried, the minutes of January 6, 2020 regular and closed sessions were approved as submitted.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

Ordinance 20-03: Consider Rezoning a 6.21-Acre Parcel on S. Hill Street from GHBD to R-

10

Planning and Development Services Director Kevin Robinson was called to present the rezoning request. This hearing is to receive public input on the request to amend the City of Albemarle zoning map by adopting Ordinance 20-03 to rezone a 6.21 acre parcel on S. Hill St, (tax#33584) from GHBD to R-10. The Planning and Zoning Board recommended approval of this request, 8-0 at its January 9, 2020 meeting. The Mayor and Council members received the rezoning application, City staff's recommendations, the Future Plan Use (FLU) map, and Statement of Zoned Plan Consistency prior to the meeting.

There was no public input on the item. Upon a motion by Councilmember Townsend, seconded by Councilmember Aldridge and unanimously carried, Council closed the hearing.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Hall, seconded by Councilmember Bramlett, unanimously carried, the following Ordinance was adopted with the following Statement of Zoning Consistency with Adopted Plan:

The Albemarle City Council finds the action to amend the City's Zoning Map tax record 33584 from zone GHBD/General Highway Business District to R-10/Single-Family Residential District to be consistent with the adopted 2028 Land Use Plan. The 2028 Land Use Plan calls for general residential on the land of interest. The City's R-10 zone

will assist the lands of interest reach their intended goal of general residential and will achieve the public interest.

(Ordinance 20-03 - Rezone a 6.21-Acre Parcel on S. Hill Street from GHBD to R-10)

Ordinance 20-04: Consider Rezoning an 8.75-Acre Parcel from GHBD to

R-10

Planning and Development Services Director Kevin Robinson was called to present the rezoning request. This hearing is to receive public input on the request to amend the City of Albemarle zoning map by adopting ordinance 20-04 to rezone an 8.75 acre parcel off of US Hwy 52 (tax#4171) from GHBD to R-10. The Planning and Zoning Board recommended 9-0 for City Council to approve the request and adopt a statement of consistency with future land use map at its January 9, 2020 meeting. The Mayor and Council members received the rezoning application, City staff's recommendations, the Future Plan Use (FLU) map, and Statement of Zoned Plan Consistency prior to the meeting.

There was no public input on the item. Upon a motion by Councilmember Aldridge, seconded by Councilmember Hall and unanimously carried, Council closed the hearing.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Hall, seconded by Councilmember Whitley, unanimously carried, the following Ordinance was adopted with the following Statement of Zoning Consistency with Adopted Plan:

The Albemarle City Council finds the action to amend the City's Zoning Map tax record 4171 from zone GHBD/General Highway Business District to R-10/Single-Family Residential District to be consistent with the adopted 2028 Land Use Plan. The 2028 Land Use Plan calls for general residential on the land of interest. The City's R-10 zone will assist the lands of interest reach their intended goal of general residential and will achieve the public interest.

(Ordinance 20-04 - Rezone an 8.75-Acre Parcel from GHBD to R-10)

ANNOUNCED DELEGATION

Presentation on Opioid Overdose Prevention

Stanly County Health Director David Jenkins and Stanly County EMS Training Officer Dale Chandler provided a presentation to Council on opioid overdose prevention. The presentation covered:

- Reasons why people experiment or use opioids;
- Stanly County data on numbers of opioid overdoses and EMT responses during the period of 2017-2019;
- The type(s) of opioids most frequently available;

- Overdose prevention measures in place, including: a 12-hour, 7-day-a-week EMT coverage to respond to opioid-related calls funded by Blue Cross/Blue Shield grant which is the first program of its kind in the US; drug drop box acquisition and placement throughout the County; provision of Naloxone funded by a Cardinal Health grant; and prevention/treatment/recovery programs in place.
- Overview of the Health Resources and Services Administration Rural Communities Opioid Response Implementation grant (\$1 million in funding); and
- Overview of the NC DHHS Community Linkages to Care project (\$275,000 grant).

Mr. Jenkins and Mr. Chandler answered questions from the Mayor and Council members. Local County and City partners/collaborators include Monarch, Will’s Place, and Gateway of Hope. A question was raised about how those wishing to enter rehabilitation programs or find housing are transported. Stanly County used grant funding to acquire and operate a SUV and van to provide transportation to opioid addicts wishing to receive services or enter rehab programs. In response to a question about total funds received for opioid prevention in 2019, Mr. Jenkins noted that a total of about \$1.4 million in funding was granted to Stanly County.

Councilmember Hall gave an “attaboy” to EMT Dale Chandler for his work with the Blue Cross/Blue Shield opioid addiction prevention program that was highlighted in a recent new article.

Councilmember Aldridge thanked all firefighters, EMTs, and the police for working together and responding in the face of the opioid crisis.

Council thanked Mr. Jenkins and Mr. Chandler for their presentation.

UNANNOUNCED DELEGATIONS

Mr. Bradley Kimrey, a former Will’s Place resident, addressed the Council about his path from opioid addiction to sobriety (he reflected that he has been drug-free and sober 9 months today). He expressed a concern that there still are many other opioid-addicted users who are not aware of services they can access to recover. He further noted that those afflicted with drug addiction are reluctant to approach people with badges and uniforms to seek help.

When questioned about how to better spread information about harm reduction efforts and recovery resources for opioid users, Mr. Kimrey offered that posting articles in the local newspapers would help. It was noted, however, that there have been a series of articles in various local publications in the last year or so about this topic which included specific details of resources available.

Council suggested that since Mr. Kimrey has information on how to help his peers still coping with drug use and addiction, and Mr. Jenkins is a valuable resource to the City of Albemarle and Stanly County regarding opioid addiction prevention and provision of supportive and recovery programs for those who are addicted, they should meet to share information.

Councilmember Aldridge applauded Mr. Kimrey’s courage to come in front of Council about this issue, offered his appreciation for Mr. Kimrey’s work in combatting the epidemic, and wished him well.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Departmental Monthly Reports

The Mayor and Council members received monthly departmental reports for December 2019 prior to the meeting. A question was asked about closing out part-time Parks and Recreation employees in December. Parks and Recreation Director Lisa Kiser came to the podium to offer a response. The employees in question were recreation assistants who are site supervisors overseeing the athletic leagues. Parks and Recreation keeps 4 on payroll at a time, but they are only hired for 6 months and so these positions are cycled to cover the year's activities.

Councilmember Hall commented that the Albemarle Neighborhood Theater needs to be publicized more since there are so many good City events there, and attendance has not been high.

Main Street Annual Report Presentation

Ms. Joy Almond, Main Street Manager and head of the Albemarle Downtown Development Corporation (ADDC), presented her Annual Report for the Main Street Program to Council. She highlighted the following activity from July, 2018 – June, 2019:

- Five building facades were completed;
- One building rehabilitation project was completed;
- Three public improvement projects were completed;
- Over \$2.9 million in public and private investments were raised;
- A net total of three full-time jobs were created by downtown businesses (13 jobs created but 10 lost);
- A net total of five part-time jobs were created (6 gained and 1 lost);
- Eight businesses opened, 6 businesses closed, and 1 business expanded (Elite Uniforms, formerly Ethel's Uniforms and Shoes); and
- Over 350 volunteer hours (total 351 hours) were logged supporting ADDC's committee work, downtown events assistance, and beautification projects.

Ms. Almond took questions from Council related to Main Street Program's 4-point approach plan, Board capacity, and the number of volunteers represented in the volunteer hours statistic. ADDC/Main Street's 4-point approach ties into its sub-committee work and the Main Street Program structure: economic vitality (business recruitment and retention); design (beautification efforts, building design, and public art); promotion (advertisement of ADDC programs); and organization (volunteer recruitment). ADDC's Board of Directors currently stands at 10 members; Board capacity is 13. There is opportunity to recruit and seat a few more Board members. For the breakdown of the number of volunteers comprising the 351 volunteer hours logged, Ms. Almond would have to check into providing an exact number, but estimated the number to be 30, which includes members of the 4 sub-committees, folks performing beautification tasks such as flower planting, and event volunteers staffing events such as the wine festival or Outdoorsman Bonanza.

Update: Parking Improvements at E.E. Waddell Community Center

Councilmember Townsend asked for an update on the parking improvements at the E.E. Waddell Center. The Mayor and Council members received designs for the parking lot near the banquet room and the parking lot off of Wall Street prior to the meeting.

Parks and Recreation Director Lisa Kiser provided an update to Council. Stanly Community College (SCC) will be assisting with the grading of the areas for the parking lot improvements/additions. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been signed with SCC. The goal is to start work in the first week of February, 2020. SCC Heavy Equipment students are expected to assist with this project as part of their spring 2020 semester coursework.

Ms. Kiser also provided an update on the HVAC upgrade project for the E.E. Waddell Community Center Gymnasium. Miles-McClellan has been contracted to complete the design build for the project and is currently designing the schematics. Ms. Kiser needs to change the 1-phase electric process to a 3-phase process due to the need for wiring replacement. The gym will have to be closed during the month of May, but the project should be finished by June 1st.

CONSENT AGENDA

Albemarle ABC Board Appointment

Due to an expiring term, City Council needs to make an appointment to the ABC Board. John McIntyre's term expires on March 16, 2020. The Board is pleased with John's service and would like to see him reappointed.

Consider Road Closures for Mini Medley Relay

The Council considered approval of road closures for the 41st Mini Medley Relay on Saturday, March 21st. The special event permit and request letter were provided to the Mayor and Council prior to the meeting.

Roads to be closed for the Mini Medley relay are:

- * 3rd St from North St. to E. Cannon
- * 4th St from North St. to E. Cannon
- * North St. from 3rd St. to 4th St.
- * E. Cannon from 3rd St. to 4th St.
- * Montgomery Ave from 3rd St. to 4th St.

Consider Approval to Hire Arnett Muldrow for Wayfinding Plan Development

At the August 6, 2019 City Council Workshop, Council received a wayfinding plan presentation from Arnett Muldrow. Staff vetted three wayfinding design firms and recommended Arnett Muldrow to City Council. At that time, the Mayor informed Council and staff that a decision could not be made on hiring a wayfinding design firm until we received notice on awarding of the BUILD grant. Wayfinding was included in the city's application for the BUILD grant and the grant would not fund plans that were approved before the grant was awarded.

In November 2019 the City of Albemarle received notification that it did not receive the BUILD grant. Therefore, staff is requesting that City Council consider the recommendation made on August 6, 2019 to hire Arnett Muldrow to design the city's wayfinding plan. Their proposal represents a balanced approach to wayfinding design and a phased implementation that is desirable from a resource perspective. Arnett Muldrow has worked with our community in the past and our Planning Director, Kevin Robinson, has worked with the firm in his previous job and highly recommends them.

Funds are available in the current budget for the development of this plan. The Mayor and Council received the original wayfinding proposal from Arnett Muldrow prior to this meeting. If approved, staff will get an updated timeline from Arnett Muldrow.

Consider Approval to Absorb Excess Utilities for Public Housing Residents

The Mayor and Council received a memo from staff with details and a request for Public Housing to absorb excess utility charges for residents for the months of October and November 2019 prior to the meeting.

Consider Bids Received for Surplus Scrap Metals Bid 2020-2023

The City of Albemarle received bids for surplus scrap metal on January 13, 2020. Two (2) companies submitted bids for consideration. Staff is recommending the following bids be awarded to: Butch's Recycling for 10,000 lbs. scrap iron (in roll-off container) \$0.035/lb and to Foil's Inc. for 2,000 lbs. scrap copper tubing \$2.15/lb and for 15,000 lbs. scrap aluminum wire (in roll-off container) \$0.2050/lb.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Aldridge, seconded by Councilmember Townsend, unanimously carried, the Council approved the following items as detailed above:

- The reappointment of John McIntyre to another term on the ABC Board;
- Road closures for the 41st Mini Medley Relay on Saturday, March 21st;
- Hiring Arnett Muldrow to design the city's wayfinding plan;
- Absorption of excess utility charges for public housing residents for the months of October and November, 2019; and
- Awarding of bids to Butch's Recycling and Foil's Inc. for recycling of scrap iron, copper tubing, and scrap aluminum wire.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Update on Code Violations at 503 Old Charlotte Road

City Attorney David Beaver has been requested to provide an update on this issue. Mr. Beaver noted that the complaint brief has been prepared and filed in court. Mr. Beaver requested a certified copy of the Council minutes authorizing him to file the complaint in court to be submitted along with the complaint.

Other Contract Attorney Work in Progress Discussion

Since this is the last Council meeting which Mr. Beaver will be representing the City of Albemarle, Mr. Beaver asked to clarify with the Council whether he should continue working any unresolved cases. Council affirmed that he should complete all work assigned to him. Council then requested that Mr. Beaver provide an update on any open cases. Mr. Beaver provided a document detailing all cases he is still working on for their review.

Mr. Beaver received the lease for Carolina Treetop Council on January 21st. He will provide the lease addendum and send it to the City Manager. However, the Mayor confirmed that the lease already is approved.

A case involving the City's acquisition of a deed of trust in place for the Crystal Village Subdivision was raised. Mr. Beaver noted that he was contacted recently by Stan West about a deed of trust the City of Albemarle has held to secure a bond for a tract of land to be developed into a subdivision Crystal Village. The City of Albemarle is being asked to release the land or cancel the deed of trust. Council asked whether the deed of trust was still in effect. Mr. Beaver replied that if no action was taken to cancel the trust or release the land involved in the trust, then likely it is still considered in effect. Since the infrastructure of the subdivision has been built (i.e., water/sewer lines, roads, etc.), thus expending the bond secured for that purpose, the Council concluded that the deed of trust was no longer required.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Hall, seconded by Councilmember Lowder, unanimously carried, the Council authorized Mr. Beaver to cancel the City's deed of trust.

It was noted by Council that most of the cases itemized on Mr. Beaver's list are handled by City staff, and that Council typically is not aware of legal work on behalf of the City of Albemarle unless it is pertinent to legislative process or action.

Item #4 in Mr. Beaver's document involving a property owner on Elm Street involving the unopened right of way of Hill Street is being handled by the City Manager. Mr. Beaver noted that the section of Hill Street in dispute is not City-controlled, but rather is private property.

The Mayor inquired about the call from the Attorney General's office. Mr. Beaver replied that the Attorney General's office contacted him about the Highway 24/27 rerouting project and Barnard Drive. The Mayor suggested that Mr. Beaver follow up with the Attorney General's office, as it may have something to do with filing paperwork about the state working on a city street. Mr. Beaver will follow up on this.

Per the Old Wiscassett Mills abandoned railroad deed item, the Mayor shared that when the deed was recorded it did not have the correct description (only 1 map was provided when two maps should have been included). Mr. Beaver was asked to update the deed. Mr. Beaver noted that the deed update was completed and submitted in December 2019.

Mr. Beaver is working with the publisher of the City Ordinance books to develop updated language for the book's introduction regarding non-partisan elections.

The Mayor raised an item that is not on Mr. Beaver's list but is a situation of which Council is aware. He is working with Dent Hall Turner to redraw the deed for the old police station property. The deed was sent back to staff and himself yesterday. The City is considering selling the property due to the environmental restrictions placed on it. Mr. Beaver was asked to file the deed once it is submitted to him.

The Mayor and Council thanked Mr. Beaver for his service to the City of Albemarle.

Discussion of Albemarle Business Center Infrastructure

The Mayor requested a delay in the further discussion of this item until the next Council meeting due to the plan to visit the Monroe Business Center site on January 22nd.

NEW BUSINESS

Introduction of Fire Chief Pierre Brewton

City Manager Michael Ferris introduced Fire Chief Pierre Brewton. Chief Brewton began his duties for the City on January 21 and fills the vacancy created when Fire Chief Shawn Oke retired.

Chief Brewton comes to the City of Albemarle from the City of Spartanburg (SC) Fire Department with over 30 years of experience. He rose through the ranks from entry level firefighter to reach second in command, becoming the highest-ranking minority within the Spartanburg Fire Department. During his tenure, Brewton has assisted the City of Spartanburg in establishing a progressive, proactive, effective, and efficient All-Hazards/All-Risk Customer Service-based Department. Chief Brewton has also assisted the department with obtaining national fire accreditation and achieving a national insurance ranking of class 1. Chief Brewton has significant command experience, serving as the incident commander for the Type III Upstate Incident Management Team responding to State and Federal disasters.

Chief Brewton addressed Council. He is honored and humbled to be chosen to be City of Albemarle's next Fire Chief. He thanked the City Manager, the Mayor and Council for giving him the opportunity to lead the City of Albemarle Fire Department. His goal is to serve all of the people of Albemarle.

Council welcomed Chief Brewton to his new position.

Consider Approval of FY19-20 Pavement Preservation Street Plan

This presentation is being provided to City Council for approval. City Council approved funding for pavement preservation and street maintenance in the FY19-20 budget. The Mayor and Council received the street listing for this year's pavement preservation plan prior to the meeting. The City of Albemarle contracts with The Kercher Group, Inc. each year to run pavement analysis and recommendations based on annual budgeted dollars.

As with last year's Council request, this year's list was generated on a 50/50 plan of preservation (micro-surfacing) and rehab (mill & fill). Overall, a total of 10.45 miles of street will be improved under this plan.

Council requested that Public Works Director Ross Holshouser come forward to take questions. Councilmember Hall asked what the mileage of roads covered under the plan totaled. The City of Albemarle manages approximately 122 miles of paved road. It was suggested that Council consider a penny tax rate increase in order to complete more street preservation work annually. In FY2018-19 \$250,000 was spent on street maintenance and pavement improvement based on the 50/50 plan. A question was asked about when an assessment would be completed again. For the next fiscal year, a reassessment of street repaving progress and status is planned, considering the last assessment occurred in 2015.

Councilmember Lowder gave a "shout out" for the East Main/Pee Dee Avenue Road repair. It is the best work she has seen.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Bramlett, seconded by Councilmember Lowder, unanimously carried, Council approved the FY19-20 Pavement Preservation Street Plan as submitted.

Consider Dates for a City Council Workshop on the Parking Plan

Staff would like to present a recommendation for the next phase of the parking plan. Similar to the workshop held on August 6, 2019, when staff originally presented the parking plan, staff would like to set another workshop for March, 2020. Assistant City Manager, Nyki Hardy, vetted potential dates with the Mayor and City Council to determine the most desirable date for the majority of Council. The date options provided were March 3, 4, and 9, 2020. The workshop would be held at 6 pm. The majority of Council is available on Tuesday, March 3, 2020. Staff requests that City Council set the workshop for March 3, 2020 at 6:00 pm.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Hall, seconded by Councilmember Lowder, unanimously carried, Council approved setting the next parking plan workshop for Tuesday, March 3, 2020 at 6:00 pm.

Quarterly Business Update

City Manager Michael J. Ferris asked Council for a delay in the presentation of this report until the next Council meeting. Staff is requesting more time to research job creation data. Council agreed to delay the update until the February 3rd Council meeting.

Reminder: Monroe Corporate Center Visit

The trip to visit the Monroe Corporate Center is scheduled for January 22, 2020. Staff and interested Council members will leave the City Hall parking lot at 12:30 pm and ride in the Parks & Recreation bus. The plan is to be back in Albemarle around 5:00 pm.

COMMENTS

City Manager Michael J. Ferris commended Parks and Recreation Director Lisa Kiser for her conception and organization of the first MLK Day of Employee Service, which was held on Friday, January 17th. There were 50 volunteers who participated. Volunteer efforts took place at Esther House, Habitat for Humanity, the Community Inn, and Park Trail, among others. It was an outstanding event.

Council should take a look at the most recent edition of the employee newsletter *City Connection*. It contained a lot of good articles and features about some of the positive things that City of Albemarle employees do as part of their daily work and in the community. He is proud to be part of an organization where there is care, concern, and compassion among City of Albemarle staff.

Councilmember Townsend had the following remarks or questions:

- He thanked Council and staff for attending this past Saturday's MLK Jr. Prayer Breakfast held at EE Waddell Community Center. He also expressed appreciation for the MLK Day of Employee Service in which he participated. He hopes that this event continues into the future.
- He posed a question about whether the deeds to the land for the hotel project have been settled yet. The Mayor replied a lawyer needs to present it to him and the City Manager for signature in order for the process to move forward.
- City of Albemarle webpage updates as noted by him in the last Council meeting still do not appear to have occurred yet. It is important for the public to have up-to-date information.

Councilmember Hughes requested that the article written by Dr. Mike Walden in the Stanly News and Press on mini-cities, some of which are targeted to retirement communities such as the one in Pittsboro (Chatham Park) be disseminated to Council. The article could

provide further ideas on mixed use development to inform Council's thoughts for the ABC project.

Councilmember Aldridge made the following comments:

- He is glad to hear that this past Saturday's MLK Jr. Prayer breakfast was well-attended and expressed his regret that he was not able to attend.
- He gave a "shout out" to the Police Department fundraising challenge spearheaded by Officer David Hunt on January 11th. Over \$16,000 was raised to support former COA police officer Sergeant Mike Martin's battle with brain cancer. The funds were used to purchase a wheelchair for former officer Martin. Finally he gave a "shout out" and prayers for the Martin family.

Councilmember Lowder commented on the time Council allots for people to speak at a Council meeting. Who decides how much speaking time is allowed? The Mayor responded saying he confirmed with the UNC School of Government that Council has the authority to limit speaker time, although not the topics that can be raised. Councilmember Lowder requested that this item be placed on the agenda for the next Council meeting.

Councilmember Lowder commended Assistant City Manager Nyki Hardy on the well thought out memo presented to Council on the excess utility cost problem facing public housing residents.

Councilmember Bramlett followed Councilmember Hughes's comment about mini-cities and retirement community development. He noted that there is no better rural community than Albemarle ready to become a mini-city and develop a retiree community. Albemarle is ideally positioned and it would be a good opportunity to develop it this way.

Councilmember Whitley provided the following comments:

- The MLK Jr. Prayer breakfast was well-attended and provided good food and a great speaker.
- He requested an update on City recycling. What is the participation rate in the recycling program? Is there a problem locating recycling drop-off sites? Public Works Director Ross Holshouser responded that Waste Management has its own materials recovery facility (MRF) in Winston-Salem, NC and should be transporting City of Albemarle recycling to that location. The Mayor asked if there is any marketing or advertising of the recycling program. The City Manager stated that a bill stuffer providing do's and don'ts tips and the recycling schedule is sent to residents once a year. On the participation rate

question, the City Manager will request that Waste Management provide some statistics. Is this information on the website? The information will be placed on the website as well as the link to Waste Management's page about recycling.

- He attended a Regional Planning Organization (RPO) meeting last week. Right now the group is considering road projects to recommend to NC DOT. RPO will be voting on the project list in March. Typically there are 15 projects which are submitted to NC DOT, with a maximum of 18 projects recommended. Currently some projects might not be taken up so there is room for other projects to be considered. Council can come see him to view the current project list.

Councilmember Hall provided the following comments/questions:

- She gave a "shout out" on the article on mixed use development. Per the Albemarle Business Center development process, she met Mike Manis at a COG meeting a few weeks back. He should be contacting the Economic Development Director Mark Donham by the end of this week (week of January 20th) with more mixed use options.
- At COG meeting, the federal lobbyist announced that a new slate of grant programs and deadlines are coming up. That information will be provided to staff for dissemination.
- Clarification was asked about the Grace Place building – is the front of the building occupied? There is a church occupying the front of the building.
- She gave an "FYI" with distribution of promotional materials for the Stanly County Habitat for Humanity BBQ fundraiser on February 27th
- She noted that she saw on Facebook that HGTV ONE AMERICAN TOWN complete makeover is currently accepting applications from small towns and cities to re-do a small downtown. This is really something that the City of Albemarle should pursue.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Lowder, seconded by Councilmember Townsend, unanimously carried, the meeting was adjourned.

The next regular City Council meeting will be held at 7:00 PM Monday, February 3, 2020 in City Council Chambers.