

REGULAR MEETING CITY COUNCIL

November 16, 2020

The City Council of the City of Albemarle met in a regular session on Monday, November 16, 2020 at 6:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall. Mayor Ronnie Michael presided, and the following members were present, to-wit: Mayor Pro Tempore Martha Sue Hall and Councilmembers Bill Aldridge, Chris Bramlett, Martha E. Hughes, Dexter Townsend, Chris Whitley, and Shirley D. Lowder.

Mayor Michael called the meeting to order.

SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

Presentation of a City of Albemarle Retirement Certificate – Harold (Hal) Dunlap, 11 Years of Service

The Mayor presented Mr. Dunlap a plaque in gratitude for his 11 years of service in the Police Department. Mr. Dunlap retired on September 1, 2020.

Council and the Mayor thanked him for his service.

Presentation of a City of Albemarle Retirement Certificate – Mark Donham, 6.33 Years of Service

The Mayor presented Mr. Donham a plaque in gratitude for his over 6 years of service serving as the Economic Development Director. Mr. Donham retired on September 1, 2020.

Mr. Donham thanked Council, the City Manager, the Management Team, and City employees for working with him during his tenure at the City.

Council and the Mayor thanked him for his service.

Presentation of a City of Albemarle Retirement Certificate – Rachel Hough, 30.16 Years of Service

The Mayor presented Ms. Hough a plaque in gratitude for her more than 30 years of service at the Public Housing Department. Ms. Hough retired on October 1, 2020.

Ms. Hough stated that she enjoyed her position and the time she has worked at the City.

Council and the Mayor thanked her for her service.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Aldridge, seconded by Councilmember Townsend, unanimously carried, the minutes from the November 2nd regular and closed meetings were approved as submitted.

ANNOUNCED DELEGATION

Ms. Tiffany Dahle – To Request Road Closures for a Locally Sponsored Downtown Christmas Parade

Ms. Dahle came in front of Council to discuss a proposal to hold a local downtown Christmas parade on December 12th and request road closures for that parade. She previously submitted her permit application for the proposed event.

Ms. Dahle stated that she, as a downtown business owner and resident, along with a few other citizens, wanted to uniquely and safely carry on the tradition of a having a Christmas parade of some sort.

Councilmember Townsend inquired about Executive Order 176's expiration date. That Order would expire by December 4th.

Councilmember Bramlett presented a motion to approve the road closures associated with this proposed downtown Christmas parade as submitted in the special event application by Ms. Dahle, allow the waiver of the permit fee, and have it contingent on Executive Order 176 expiring by the December 4th deadline. Councilmember Townsend seconded it.

The Mayor asked if there was further discussion. Mayor Pro Tem Hall noted that if the Governor decides to extend Executive Order 176 "as is" then the parade would be cancelled. Ms. Dahle understood and agreed.

Councilmember Bramlett stated that it would be a blow to downtown businesses. People identify more with the downtown when events occur there.

Councilmember Hughes then asked why Council cancelled it. The Mayor stated that the Special Events Committee came to Council with the recommendation to cancel the parade. Councilmember Hughes then replied that perhaps Council is giving a mixed message to the community if they decide tonight to approve a downtown parade.

Councilmember Lowder read a memorandum she prepared expressing her opposition to the parade, citing COVID19 health concerns raised by the county and Executive Order 176.

Councilmember Aldridge stated that although he is opposed to holding the parade overall, it is an unfortunate development because he has spoken support for holding the parade/downtown Christmas combination event as long as he has been on Council.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall stated that although not in downtown's businesses or the City's best interest, the Special Events Committee needed to consider state and county health advice related to COVID19 to limit residents and visitors from being in large groups. She looks forward to it every year, but the county statistics are showing an increase in community spread of COVID19 right now.

Councilmember Hughes agrees that the City might be sending mixed messages on holiday events. She applauded Ms. Dahle for her move to create urgency around creating activity downtown for the holidays.

Ms. Dahle asked Council if there were alternatives to the parade and downtown Christmas events in order to bring back mental stability during these long months of isolation due to COVID19. Mayor Pro Tem Hall replied that the Special Events Committee, which has as part of its membership herself and Councilmembers Townsend and Aldridge, began looking at the City's upcoming events in September and October, and noted that there was a heartfelt discussion on the Committee as to whether events being held in fall and for Christmas should occur. In terms of Christmas events, the Committee talked about changing the parade route to make social distancing possible, and to consider alternative events, such as letters to Santa, free movies at the Albemarle Neighborhood Theater (ANT), and downtown window decorating. For the free movie event at ANT, the December 4th event is uncertain now.

The Mayor asked Ms. Dahle if she wished to become a member of the Special Events Committee. Mayor Pro Tem Hall noted that the next meeting would be held on November 18th at the Niven Center. Ms. Dahle accepted the invitation.

Councilmember Aldridge noted that per an email he sent to Council today, he reiterated the Special Events Committee's concern about the risk of COVID19 spread but did also state that Council could be sending mixed messages to the community. He thought that Council should provide a consistent message.

There being no further discussion, the Mayor requested that Councilmember Bramlett re-state his motion and asked for a vote. With a vote of 3 Council members for and 4 against, the motion to approve the road closures associated with this proposed downtown Christmas parade as submitted in the special event application by Ms. Dahle, allow the waiver of the permit fee, and have it contingent on Executive Order 176 expiring by the December 4th deadline was defeated. Voting for the motion were Councilmembers Bramlett, Townsend, and Whitley. Voting against the motion were Mayor Pro Tem Hall and Councilmembers Lowder, Hughes, and Aldridge

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Mr. Durham Lewis – To Present the FY 2019-20 Albemarle ABC System Audit

Mr. Lewis provided the audit prior to the meeting. Highlighted items of the audit included:

- Reading aloud the Opinion statement in the auditor's letter to the Albemarle Board of Alcohol Beverage Control;
- Over \$1.5 million in assets, liabilities around \$250,000, with a total net position for FY 2019-2020 of \$1,842,096.
- Revenues and expenses as follows: total gross profit on sales of \$1,047,596; expenses of a little over \$500,000.
- Distributions: approximately \$19,500 to the Albemarle Police Department; \$27,316 for alcohol education and rehab; City of Albemarle received \$340,000.

- Taxes collected on bottles, mixed beverage bottles, and miniature bottles per state law of \$11,688 paid to Stanly County, and mixed beverage taxes distributed to the NC Department of Revenue and NC Department of Health and Human Services totaling a little over \$30,000.
- A summary of working capital requirements as required by state statute, the minimum of which was \$121,763 and the maximum of \$791,462. The actual working capital amount was \$785,952.
- Historic and administrative expenses were both higher than the previous fiscal year.
- Review of the analysis of budget and actual results showing no negative variances on budget amounts.

Mr. Lewis took questions from Council. Councilmember Aldridge asked about the difference between historic expenses breakdowns from FY 2018-2019 and FY 2019-2020. Mr. Lewis replied that an HVAC system issue was responsible from the jump in expenses in FY 2019-2020.

Councilmember Townsend asked about the date of inception of the Albemarle ABC and the current number of full-time and part-time positions. ABC Board Chair Karen Cranford answered. The Albemarle ABC was established on November 2, 1998, and there are 3 full-time and about 10 part-time employees currently working.

Councilmember Hughes asked about the funds which go to the City of Albemarle. The history of funds distribution to municipalities has been a state statute for years. In 2003, the formula for allotment to municipalities was removed by the NC General Assembly and so 100% of that allotment has gone to the City of Albemarle in monthly disbursements. Councilmember Hughes thanked Mr. Lewis for the information and asked if the City can expect these funds to be disbursed. City Manager Michael J. Ferris responded that the City can plan on it and budget for it. Mr. Ferris explained that he budgets for \$20,000 per month from the Albemarle ABC, although there can be fluctuations from month to month.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall noted that the audit showed 16 disbursements to the City – when do the extra disbursements occur? City Manager Michael J. Ferris said this is the amount above and beyond the base \$20,000 per month payment.

Council noted that the Albemarle ABC is well run, and thanked Karen Cranford and the ABC Board for their service to the City of Albemarle. Ms. Cranford replied that this year is proving to be exceptional; revenues are up \$300,000 in the last 4 months.

Council thanked Mr. Lewis and the ABC Board for their time and report tonight.

2020-2021 City of Albemarle Employee United Way Campaign

Mr. Tanner Denton in the Albemarle Finance Department continues to serve as the City of Albemarle's United Way campaign coordinator. He presented his request for incentives to be provided for the employee campaign again this year, along with Senior Planner Ellie Sheild, who starting this year will serve with Mr. Denton as co-chair of the City of Albemarle's campaign. Mr. Denton began his presentation by stating that for last year's United Way campaign, \$27,522.20 was raised by City of Albemarle employees, which broke the previous year's total. This speaks volumes about City of Albemarle employees.

This year, the co-chairs are working to create an intentional impact via funds and volunteer support. As an incentive, the co-chairs are requesting again that employees who donate their “fair share” receive a paid day off in the next year. An employee’s fair share donation equals one hour of pay per pay period. The day off would be for their normal shift.

Both Mr. Denton and Ms. Sheild are working to re-brand the campaign as intentional, community-driven, and a way to build bridges with the community.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Hall, seconded by Councilmember Aldridge, unanimously carried, Council approved the United Way campaign incentive of “fair share” days for City of Albemarle employees.

Departmental Monthly Reports

The Mayor and Council received October 2020 monthly departmental reports prior to the meeting. The Mayor asked if any Council members had and questions or comments about the reports.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall asked about Police and Fire Department openings per the monthly HR report. Police Chief Dulin reported that currently there are 6 openings which do not include the officers in training. Fire Chief Brewton replied via phone that there currently is 1 opening.

Councilmember Aldridge commented on the HR monthly report, specifically the applicants for Police Department positions. He was happy to see that there were 79 applicants for open Police positions. He inquired about HR’s communication policy when applicants submit an application for a City of Albemarle position and if an applicant is not selected. HR Director Dana Chaney answered. She said that there is an automated email which is sent to every applicant who applies to a City of Albemarle position, and when there is a finalist selected and onboarding requirements met, HR also sends out a notification to applicants that the position has been filled.

Councilmember Bramlett commented on the HR monthly report. He said that although it might not sound like a good number of applicants for job openings, the dynamic the City of Albemarle is seeing is similar to what other businesses are currently facing: a jobseekers’ market. It is a competitive environment for employees right now.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall had some questions for Public Housing Director Lee Staton per the Public Housing monthly report. Has Ms. Hough’s position been filled yet? Mr. Staton replied that they are in the process of finding a replacement for Ms. Hough. For the door project, are all the doors in now? Currently 70 units have had their interior doors replaced, which is about 1,000 doors.

NEW BUSINESS

Stogner Architect Indefinite Contract Extension

This requested contract extension is for the final year of the indefinite contract for architectural engineering services with Stogner Architecture, PA executed in November 2016. City Manager Michael J. Ferris confirmed that this is the last year of extension on the contract for Stogner.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Townsend, seconded by Councilmember Whitley unanimously carried, Council approved the contract extension for Stogner Architecture, PA.

After the vote Mayor Pro Tem Hall commented that the Public Housing Board will still continue to make sure things are going well with the Stogner contract even though Stogner has been the contractor for some time. The Mayor added that when the current contract was initially considered by Council, Council looked at multiple contractors, but that all others had no experience with HUD projects, whereas Stogner did. Was there an RFP that was put out for bid? Yes.

City Manager Michael J. Ferris reminded Council that recently a revised purchasing policy was reviewed and approved by Council. In it the policy allows for contracts to be bid out for 5-year contracts with one contract extension of 2 years before a new bid is offered for that contract.

Consider Meeting Date for Review of Albemarle Business Center

Per discussion in the adjourned strategic sessions this month, it was noted that an adjourned meeting of Council would be called next month to discuss undecided aspects of the Albemarle Business Center. City Manager Michael J. Ferris put out an online poll to Council to consider a short number of December dates prior to this meeting. After discussion of potential dates, a new date was provided: December 10th at 6:00 pm.

Council agreed that the meeting should be set for Thursday, December 10th at 6:00 pm.

COMMENTS

Councilmember Aldridge:

- Are Council meetings broadcast live on Facebook? Yes they are. Is there any way for those questions which are asked on the Facebook live feed to be answered? It is not certain whether this is a requirement of open meeting laws. It was suggested that the City Attorney look into the legality of answering online forum questions of a public body's open meetings broadcast and report to Council.

Councilmember Townsend:

- He requested an update on the flooding issue reported in the middle of last week at the EE Waddell Center. Parks and Recreation Director Lisa Kiser provided the update via phone. On November 11th flooding occurred on the left side of the EE Waddell Center due to roof replacement work being conducted by the contractor. There was water damage. From November 11th through the past weekend the contractor worked to dry out the entire Center. Initial electric inspections were completed, with a final inspection to be done tonight. There is an expectation that a letter can be provided to the County tomorrow (November 17th) to restore power throughout the building. Late today, Benton Dry with his restoration company inspected the building for possible mold and mildew. He saw only a few areas of concern near the kitchen

and banquet room, and planned to remove “soft” drywall in those areas tomorrow (November 17th).

The Mayor inquired as to whether the ceiling tile was inspected. Ms. Kiser replied that Mr. Dry did inspect tiles today and didn’t see any issues with them. The Mayor suggested that staff should look into whether there is a warranty period on building or contents related to flooding or water damage. Ms. Kiser said they would look into that.

Councilmember Townsend had further questions. Is the roof complete? No it is not – the right side needs to be done. Has there been an analysis of what can be replaced vs. what can be salvaged? Ms. Kiser replied that the carpet in the banquet hall was not damaged enough to be replaced but could be deep cleaned. That will be done in December 2020.

Councilmember Lowder asked if an engineer should go into the building to inspect it for structural integrity. Per Assistant City Manager Nyki Hardy, a third party remediation services firm will be retained to conduct a remediation environmental analysis of the building.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall:

- She congratulated Parks and Recreation Director Lisa Kiser and staff and the other departments involved in getting the walking trails done.
- She reminded Council and the public that the groundbreaking for the Charters of Freedom will occur on Monday, November 30th.
- The virtual tree lighting ceremony will occur on November 28th at 5:30 pm with the Mayor. Other virtual Christmas activities will be going on in December.
- She noted that she saw on Facebook that a few cities around the country are starting a Christmas Eve bell ringing tradition. One city is planning to do bell ringing at 6:00 pm EST that night. She hoped that there might be someone in the community who could lead this activity.

Councilmember Bramlett:

- He has enjoyed the 5 years he has been on City Council. Council is a fantastic group to work with. The City of Albemarle has more opportunity to grow now in his estimation than when the railroads were introduced. With his participation on the Stanly County broadband committee, he can see growth via more of the County be connected to the Internet with the development of more connectivity. The Mayor asked him to elaborate more on the committee’s work. The committee’s mission is to bring more consistent availability of Internet connectivity with higher broadband speed to the whole county. He would like to see the county match the gigabyte speed that the City of Albemarle has. He sees this opportunity as critical to school-aged children, particularly now that school instruction has become largely remote due to COVID19.

CLOSED SESSION

Upon a motion by Councilmember Hall, seconded by Councilmember Hughes, unanimously carried, Council approved moving into closed session pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(5) Real Estate, and N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(6) Personnel.

RETURN TO OPEN SESSION

Upon a motion by Councilmember Bramlett, seconded by Councilmember Hughes and unanimously carried, Council returned to open session. The Mayor stated that a Closed Session was held pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(5) Real Estate, and N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(6) Personnel.

No Council decisions or actions were taken as a result of the closed session.

The Mayor noted that on Morgan Road there is a lot of tree clearing going on. Also, at the Royal Mobile Home Park, the remaining 4 mobile homes on that lot have been removed.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Lowder, seconded by Councilmember Hughes, unanimously carried, the meeting was adjourned to Monday, December 7th at 6:30 p.m. in Council Chambers in City Hall.