

REGULAR MEETING CITY COUNCIL

May 3, 2021

The City Council of the City of Albemarle met in a regular session on Monday, May 3, 2021 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 Martha E. Hughes, Chris Whitley, Benton Dry, Dexter Townsend, and Shirley D. Lowder. Absent: Councilmember Bill Aldridge.

Mayor Michael called the meeting to order.

The Mayor gave the invocation.

Dr. John Enamait, President of Stanly Community College, came in front of Council to announce the recipient of this year's Outstanding Alumnus Award. Dr. Enamait called Councilmember Dexter Townsend forward to accept the award and noted his accomplishments as a SCC graduate through to the present.

Councilmember Townsend graduated from SCC with an Associate of Applied Science Degree in Business Administration. While a student there became involved as an officer in the Phi Beta Lambda chapter. His wife and daughter also are graduates of SCC. He has been employed at Preformed Line Products for 27 years and currently is a Production Supervisor.

Councilmember Townsend has been active in many community-minded pursuits over the years. Appointed to fill the vacant council seat of the late T.E. White, he has represented the constituents of District 1 on City Council since 2008. Among the many memberships and commitments Councilmember Townsend has made to the Albemarle community over the years, a few notable examples include: chairing the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Prayer Breakfast; membership in the Stanly County chapter of the NAACP; member of the Friends of EE Waddell Center; completing Leadership Stanly in 1993; serving on the Albemarle Downtown Development Corporation (ADDC) Board of Directors; and membership on the Stanly County Arts Council and Men Making A Difference in Stanly County. He was named Stanly County Citizen of the Year in 2016.

Councilmember gave a few remarks. He was overwhelmed and surprised by this award. He thanked God, his wife and daughter, Dr. Enamait, Mr. Dan Hazlett and faculty from SCC, City Council and the Mayor, and was humbled and proud to accept the award. He credited his membership in Phi Beta Lambda, where his wife was a member also, in reuniting them together and developing a bond that eventually led to their marriage.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Hughes, seconded by Councilmember Hall, unanimously carried, the minutes of the April 19, 2021 regular and closed meetings as submitted were approved.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Minimum Commercial Code Update

The Planning and Development Services Department has the property on Badin Road, the property next to City Lake Park, and the house on West North Street all as the active commercial case focus at the present time. The department is pursuing demolition for the first two.

For the West North Street property, the department is hopeful the owner will obtain permits and start work again. The work that was begun previously was not permitted, but should have shored up the roof and hopefully added to the preservation of the property. This is a property that is salvageable if the owner begins improvements.

Overall, now that the department has the commercial maintenance code, the process is largely the same as that for residential. Asbestos assessments and title searches are underway and will include those two commercial properties mentioned above. Council will be presented with an ordinance soon after the department receives those documents.

In the future there are commercial properties downtown to potentially address as well, but the Economic Development Director Keith Tunnell also is planning to conduct a downtown conditions survey for commercial properties. This will give us an objective way to begin prioritizing these properties. There are many other minimum code cases that do not rise to the level of even considering demolition, but nonetheless need to be addressed. Code Enforcement Officer Tony Evans has proven to be very effective in working with owners to make headway in other cases. If the department needs to take further action on others, having the objective data for the downtown structures will help justify why action is being taken on some and not others.

The Mayor asked if Council had any questions to pose to Planning and Development Services Director Kevin Robinson. Mayor Pro Tem Hall commented that she had requested this item be placed on the agenda as a result of a resident inquiry about a property on Speight Road and 740, and thought Council might need an update even though Planning had presented a minimum code update back in March.

There was no further discussion on the topic.

CONSENT AGENDA

The Mayor asked if Council wanted to move any items on the consent agenda. He noted that for the street name change item requesting Rebel Road become Salvation Way, due to a response today from another property owner who would not be able to be at the May 17th meeting, Council should consider amending the public hearing date to June 7th.

Resolution for Legal Work for Economic Development Project

This resolution, should Council approve it, will authorize the retention of Mr. Ernie Pearson from Nexsen Pruet, LLC as the attorney to conduct economic and business development evaluation related to Project Foam on behalf of the City of Albemarle.

[Resolution 21-08 - To Authorize Nexsen Pruet, LLC to Assist the City Attorney in Handling Legal Affairs for the City]

Set a Public Hearing for May 17 to Consider Renaming Rebel Road to Salvation Way

Cross Community Church is constructing their new facility here and would like to rename the road to Salvation Way. There is no other developed property on the road and therefore no structure addressed off Rebel Road.

Consider Approving a Resolution Opposing HB 401 and SB 349

NC House Bill 401 and Senate Bill 349 are entitled "Increase Housing Opportunities." The bills aim to allow up to 4 housing units on any lot that is served by water and sewer. The City Resolution would oppose this without further clarification from the Legislature on how it affects the City's ability to effectively plan for its own growth and infrastructure.

[Resolution 21-09 – Opposition to NC House Bill 401 and Senate Bill 349]

Letters for Two New Appointees to State Governmental Positions

Letters of congratulations have been drafted to Mr. Jeff Michael as the new Deputy Secretary of Natural Resources and Mr. Gene McLaurin as the new chairman of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Hall, seconded by Councilmember Lowder, unanimously carried, Council approved the following:

- Resolution 21-08 authorizing the retention of Mr. Ernie Pearson from Nexsen Pruet, LLC as the attorney to conduct economic and business development evaluations on behalf of the City of Albemarle;
- Amending the public hearing date for consideration of renaming Rebel Road to Salvation Way to Monday June 7th;
- Resolution 21-09 voicing opposition to NC House Bill 401 and Senate Bill 349; and
- Letters of congratulations to Jeff Michael and Gene McLaurin for their new roles.

NEW BUSINESS

Presentation of the Proposed FY 2021-2022 City of Albemarle Budget

Copies of the proposed budget and budget letter were distributed at the meeting.

City Manager Michael J. Ferris presented the proposed FY 2021-2022 budget to Council. The proposed budget totals \$75,667,906 reflecting an overall 4.33% increase from the current fiscal year adjusted budget authority. He announced that the City would close this current fiscal year in a good position with solid balances in City funds.

Mr. Ferris highlighted the accomplishments of the current fiscal year including:

- Receipt of a clean audit report and third consecutive Certified Annual Financing Report designation from the Government Finance Officer Association;
- Acquisition of 6 new Police vehicles allowing the City to have assigned vehicles for all police officers;
- Interior improvements at Fire Station #2, roof repairs at Fire Station #3, and acquisition of extrication and Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) equipment for firefighters;
- New roof on the EE Waddell Community Center, new playground equipment at Morehead Park, and new programming through Parks and Recreation including a remote learning program at the EE Waddell Community Center;
- Overhaul of the City's residential land use regulations by the Planning and Development Services Department;
- Completion of the Auria relocation deal, completion and opening of the downtown Pfeiffer Health Sciences campus, continued retention of Retail Strategies to prevent local business leakage to neighboring communities, and in bidding phase for infrastructure development of the Albemarle Business Center by the Economic Development team;
- Refurbishment of a vacuum truck and establishment of a project budget for the City's stormwater management plan;
- In the Electric Fund, continuation of the pole inspection and replacement program and extension of electric services to the Albemarle Business Center, with Public Utilities' Electric Division winning the Public Power Award of Excellence in Grid Modernization, Value of Public Power, Wholesale Power Cost and Workforce Development, along with the prestigious RP3 Diamond designation from the American Public Power Association;
- In the Water and Sewer Fund, the City received state funding approval for Phase 3 inflow and infiltration project, and re-evaluated plans for the improvements to the wastewater treatment plant to address electrical reliability, flow management, and compliance. We also replaced the fluoride tank and purchased leak detection equipment for the Jack F. Neel Water Treatment Plant.; and
- No reduction of services or staff layoffs as a result of COVID19.

For the upcoming fiscal year, Mr. Ferris is recommending a reduced tax rate of 61-cents per \$100 of assessed value which generates revenue for the City's General Fund. To put the General Fund in perspective as it relates to City expenditures, Mr. Ferris explained that operation of the Police and Fire Departments alone account for 56.30% of the General Fund expenditures.

Additionally, there will be a proposed slight increase in the solid waste collection fee, but not the solid waste disposal fee, and no change to the planning and zoning or motor vehicle registration fees.

More specific considerations in the proposed budget were summarized as follows:

- A \$75,000 increase in the General Fund share of the street preservation program;
- A \$25,000 increase in the Powell Bill Fund from the current fiscal year, although receiving continually lesser amounts from the state in recent years;
- An increase in meter and tap fees for the first time in over a decade;
- A 1% rate decrease in Electric rates, with an accumulated 10.5% rate decrease in the last 6 years for the average residential customer;
- Recommendation for the implementation of the compensation study to bring all City staff positions to market rate with a provision that all employees increase at least 1.5%;
- A 3.1% increase in rates per person in the self-funded health insurance program. This is the fifth straight year of the City's self-funded health insurance program which has realized a cost savings to the City since it has operated.

Mr. Ferris thanked retired Finance Director Colleen Conroy, interim Finance Director Sarah Richards, Assistant Finance Director Jacob Weavil, and Assistant City Manager Nyki Hardy for their roles in supporting the budget development process, as well as the City's Leadership Team and the Mayor and City Council for their contributions to development of the proposed budget during the strategic planning sessions and in other forums.

The Mayor added that budget workshop sessions will be held on May 18th and 19th starting at 4:00 pm in City Hall.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Townsend, seconded by Councilmember Whitley, unanimously carried, Council approved setting the public hearing for the FY 21/22 budget for Monday, June 7, 2021 at 6:30 pm in Council Chambers.

The Mayor asked if Council had any questions thus far. Mayor Pro Tem Hall inquired whether there was funding for a Public information Officer (PIO) in the proposed budget. Mr. Ferris replied that there will be some funding for those activities. Further discussions will occur in the announced budget sessions.

Consider Setting Public Hearing for Voluntary Annexation of 1.15 Acres on Anderson

Road

A voluntary annexation petition has been submitted by Olde South Land Partners LLC to request the City to annex 1.15 acres of unincorporated property into the City Limits for the purpose of developing a subdivision with this parcel and an adjoining one within the City limits.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Hall, seconded by Councilmember Whitley, unanimously carried, Council approved Resolution 21-10 authorizing the setting of a public hearing for Monday, June 7, 2021 at 6:30 pm in Council Chambers for the petitioned annexation of 1.15 acres on Anderson Road.

[Resolution 21-10 – To Set a Public Hearing for an Annexation of Property Situated on Anderson Road]

Discussion of May 25th Council of Governments Meeting

It is the City's turn to host the quarterly meeting among neighboring municipalities and the County. Council will need to determine if they would like to proceed. The Clerk/Assistant to the City Manager provided initial results of polling of surrounding municipalities and the County about the proposed event prior to the meeting.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall noted that as she mentioned in an email to Council, she would like to recommend that the meeting be hosted in person outside at Market Station with a boxed meal provided.

Council discussed logistics and a potential conflict with the operation of the Farmer's Market the next day. Councilmember Dry offered to donate disinfectant products for the group in order to safely hold an in person meeting. A Councilmember asked what the proposed topic would be. Per the email poll taken among the group, the American Rescue Plan funds were a much-noted item.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Hall, seconded by Councilmember Hughes, with a vote of 5 Councilmembers for the motion and 1 against the motion, Council approved hosting the May 25th quarterly Stanly County Council of Governments meeting outside on the Market Station property with boxed meals to be provided. Council members in favor of the motion were Councilmembers Hall, Hughes, Townsend, Lowder, and Whitley. Councilmember Dry voted against the motion.

Information – Budget Workshops Set for May 18th and 19th at 4:00 pm

The Mayor announced again that budget workshops will be held on Tuesday and Wednesday, May 18th and 19th. The workshops will begin at 4:00 pm and will be held in Council Chambers.

COMMENTS

The Mayor began by sharing that he had participated recently in a US Conference of Mayors conference call, and among the items discussed was the American Rescue Plan. More is

expected to be known about how the funds can be used next week with the anticipated release of IRS guidelines.

Councilmember Townsend:

- He wanted to acknowledge the Fire Department’s nighttime training exercises which are being posted on Facebook. He wanted to make the public aware.
- He thanked North Albemarle Baptist Church for honoring the Police Department with a meal last Friday.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall:

- Re: North Albemarle Baptist Church – there is a new minister so there are plans to do different things to reach out to the community, such as participating in the vendor market for this coming Saturday’s Cruise-In event. The Cruise-In will have an-ADDC sponsored vendor set up with over 20 vendors there.
- This Saturday, May 8 is the Beach Blast 5k, which starts at Second Street.
- Thursdays at Station concert series begins this Thursday May 6th at 7:30 pm with live entertainers performing.
- This Friday May 7th is Food Truck Friday at City Lake Park with musical guest The Entertainers. There also will be a dozen vendors there. Windstream is a premier sponsor for this month’s Food Truck Friday.
- She inquired about whether the City could use the reverse 911 system to advertise for events based on a suggestion initially raised by Councilmember Hughes. Councilmember Hughes noted that she raised this issue because a resident had posed the question to her. The Mayor noted that there is a local 911 Committee which includes APD Chief Dulin, and that the question should be raised with that committee.
- Re: recent audit letter provided to Council – she reminded her colleagues on Council that the auditor works for the public body and that if anyone on Council had questions to feel comfortable posing them to the audit firm.
- Re: Charters of Freedom update – she noted that the brickwork is going in right now. There is a new foundation contact for Charters of Freedom Charlie Unruh. He will be in town on May 27th and so there will be a Charters of Freedom Committee meeting that day to set the Dedication Day date.
- She congratulated Councilmember Townsend on his Alumnus of the Year award from SCC.
- She noted that she may have a conflict on May 12th for the Employee Appreciation event.

CLOSED SESSION

Upon a motion by Councilmember Dry, seconded by Councilmember Lowder, unanimously carried, Council approved moving into closed session pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(4) Economic Development and N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(6) Personnel.

RETURN TO OPEN SESSION

Upon motion by Councilmember Dry, seconded by Councilmember Lowder, unanimously carried, City Council reconvened to open session.

The Mayor stated that a closed session was held pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(4) Economic Development and N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(6) Personnel.

The Mayor called for a motion to set a public hearing for Monday, June 7, 2021 at 6:30 pm for an economic development incentive package for Project Foam. Upon a motion by Councilmember Whitley, seconded by Councilmember Lowder, unanimously carried, the motion passed.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Dry, seconded by Councilmember Whitley, unanimously carried, the meeting was adjourned to the next regular City Council meeting on Monday, May 17, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. in City Council Chambers.