

REGULAR MEETING CITY COUNCIL

November 1, 2021

The City Council of the City of Albemarle met in a regular session on Monday, November 1, 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 Bill Aldridge, Martha E. Hughes, Chris Whitley, Benton Dry, Dexter Townsend, and Shirley D. Lowder.

Mayor Michael called the meeting to order.

The Mayor gave the invocation.

The Mayor announced that Council will adjourn tonight until 4:00 pm this Thursday, November 4th for a strategic planning session at the Stanly Senior Center.

SPECIAL PRESENTATION

Presentation of a City Retirement Certificate to Dale Dennis – 28.91 Years of Service

The Mayor presented Mr. Dennis a plaque in gratitude for his almost 29 years of service in the Public Utilities Department. Mr. Dennis retired on August 1, 2021.

Mr. Dennis said a few words. He misses everyone, and thanked the City for giving him the opportunity to make a career here.

Council and the Mayor thanked him for his service.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Aldridge, seconded by Councilmember Townsend, unanimously carried, the minutes of the October 18, 2021 regular and closed meetings were approved as submitted.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Minimum Housing and Commercial Maintenance Demolition Update

Planning and Development Services Director Kevin Robinson presented a brief update on the status of the various commercial and residential structures it is working towards abating.

From the listing projected, Mr. Robinson noted that for 11 properties, Planning has scheduled hearings with the owners, although there were some no shows. The status of specific properties on the list are as follows:

- 802 Lowder Street – The owner already has demolished the property.
- 700 South 5th Street, 622 Lee Street, 1510 West Main Street, 1602 West Main Street, 661 Colston Street, 2403 Badin Road – The Fire Department considered them eligible to burn and they are ready for ordinance, abatement, and then burning

For 443 Colston Street, the owner is working on demolishing the house himself, so Planning offered him a list of contractors the City has used for this service. Two properties cannot be burned: 901 Concord and 522 East Main. Planning is pursuing different avenues for demolition with these properties.

There is one additional property located at 126 North 4th Street that was just added to this list. A hearing was already conducted, but here is a new owner of the property who has been asked to prepare a repair plan to submit to Planning in the next 30 days.

Mr. Robinson noted that due to the number of the properties on the list and the process each of these properties needs to go through by law before finally being demolished/burned, Planning's budget has been stretched and they are looking for ways to control costs.

Mr. Robinson took questions from Council. Mayor Pro Tem Hall noted that she had asked to have this item placed on the agenda because she has been receiving inquiries about 2403 Badin in recent months and asked for a clearer understanding of the timeline for abatement and demolition so that the public is aware of the process. Mr. Robinson summarized the process as follows:

- Performing title searches to determine ownership;
- Creating an RFP for bidding for contractors for abatement;
- Bidding the abatement process out;
- Scheduling and retaining contractor for asbestos assessment;
- Scheduling abatements;
- Getting estimates on demolition.

City Manager Michael J. Ferris noted that Planning's focus is on maintaining nuisance properties through working with owners to make improvements rather than allowing properties to deteriorate until demolition is needed. So while there are potential demolitions being discussed this evening, many more are abated and have not escalated to this point. Mr. Robinson added that the Code Enforcement Officer position has recently become vacant which will impact the department's short term efforts in the area of nuisance property maintenance.

Council thanked Mr. Robinson for the update.

MUNICIPAL CALENDAR

Mayor Michael and Council members received the municipal calendar prior to the meeting. The Mayor asked if Council had any questions or comments about the calendar.

There was a question about the start time for the Christmas Parade/Christmas Open House. The Council calendar has listed a 3 pm start time, but the flyer Council received tonight about the event has a 4 pm start time. Staff will clarify for Council.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall noted that typically the 2nd Council meeting in January falls on the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday and that Council has routinely adopted the next day, Tuesday, as the meeting date.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall made a motion to move the January 17, 2022 Council meeting to Tuesday, January 18, 2022. Councilmember Dry seconded the motion, and upon a unanimous vote, Council approved the new Council meeting date.

NEW BUSINESS

Proposed Sidewalk Fee-in-Lieu Projects

The Mayor began by summarizing the recent history of Council action on this topic, then Mr. Robinson from Planning and Public Works Department Director Ross Holshouser came in front of Council to discuss and answer questions about the proposed sidewalk projects to be funded through fee-in-lieu funds.

Councilmember Hughes asked if an owner chooses to not pay into the fee in lieu sidewalk fund, what is the process for putting in a sidewalk if the owner wants to pursue that independently? The owner would need to hire a general contractor.

There are specific projects where Council approval is being sought to proceed. One project is a connectivity project on Leonard Avenue. This was a section of sidewalk that was not installed during the City's previous project on Leonard Avenue due to the impending NC 24/27 widening project. City staff currently have all that is needed to construct this section.

The other recommendation is to install a section of sidewalk on the north side of Pee Dee Avenue to connect to Ridge Street. This will complete sidewalk on the north side of the entire City maintained section of Pee Dee Avenue. Depending on the out of pocket expenses, the fund may need to grow slightly more, but if approved, we can proceed with the planning work in order to begin when funding is sufficient. Councilmember Hughes asked how the City would handle this particular project if there's not enough to fund this work. City Manager Michael J. Ferris replied that City staff would like Council to approve this project up front with the understanding that it wouldn't move forward until there are enough funds to complete it.

Mr. Ferris also clarified for Council that staff are only seeking approval for the Pee Dee and Leonard Avenue projects at this time.

Councilmember Hughes made a motion to approve the Leonard and Pee Dee Avenue sidewalk projects as described by staff, which was seconded by Councilmember Dry.

The Mayor asked if there were any more questions from Council before the vote. Councilmember Townsend asked if there would be a sidewalk extension planned to the new Morgan Hills subdivision. Mr. Ferris replied not at this time.

The Mayor note that Councilmember Hughes's motion was still on the table and called for a vote. All Councilmembers voted unanimously to approve both the Leonard Avenue and Pee Dee Avenue sidewalk projects.

City Staff Recommendations on Requirements of the Sidewalk Ordinance

Planning and Development Services Director Kevin Robinson presented this item to Council. At its October meeting City Council requested that staff look at the sidewalk sections of the City Zoning Ordinance and make recommendations for any changes that may be needed.

Mr. Robinson, Mr. Ross Holshouser, and the City Manager met to review and discuss Council's request. They are not recommending any changes. Sidewalks located anywhere in the City are a benefit and available to all residents. Paying into this fund or constructing sidewalks is one way to support the extension of sidewalks. The City has had a focus on sidewalks, sidewalk connectivity, greenways, and recently the sidewalk walking routes as a way to enhance our offerings. It is not uncommon for municipalities to have a development fee of some sort and in the case of Albemarle, ours is designed to support sidewalks.

The Mayor did not call a vote, but announced that Council would not take action on this item leaving the sidewalk ordinance as currently written.

Request to Modify Residency Requirement

Human Resources Director Dana Chaney presented this request to Council. Staff requests that Council consider modification of the City's existing residency requirement. As competition for talent tightens, many municipalities no longer have this requirement. Staff wish to recruit and retain a diverse talent base to assist the organization in meeting current and future growth opportunities. Council's support in adopting a 50-mile residence radius for most employees is appreciated. We now request that this same radius be adopted for all employees with the exception of the City Manager.

The existing residency requirement for leadership roles has a particularly negative impact on the organization's recruiting capabilities at this time due to:

- The current shortage of appropriate rental or other housing within Albemarle and Stanly County
- Challenges of relocating school children
- The existing labor market and the competition for top talent

- The increased numbers of more flexible job opportunities for those with higher-level skill sets (increased telecommuting options in both the public and private sectors)
- The trend we are seeing for higher level candidates to express interest in COA roles but then withdraw from the process once the residency requirement is outlined.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Whitley, seconded by Councilmember Townsend, and carried with a vote of 6 Council members for the motion and 1 Council member against, Council approved expanding the residency requirement for all City of Albemarle employees except the City Manager to live within a 50 mile radius. Mayor Pro Tem Hall voted against the motion.

Information – Employee Christmas Luncheon

Parks and Recreation Director Lisa Kiser came in front of Council to present this and the next item on the agenda. The annual City of Albemarle Employee Christmas Luncheon will be held in person on Wednesday, December 15, 2021 from 11:30 am - 1:30 pm at the EE Waddell Community Center.

Information – City Arbor Day Celebration on Thursday, November 18

The annual Arbor Day celebration for the City of Albemarle will be held on Thursday, November 18, 2021 at 12:00 noon at the corner of First St. and W. Main St. Public Works has been planting new trees in this area ahead of the event.

Ms. Kiser took the opportunity to answer Council's earlier question about the start time of the Christmas Parade/Open House event and to report out from last weekend's Autumn Extravaganza events.

The Christmas Parade/Open House event will begin at 4:00 pm. The Open House will begin at 5:30 pm. Ice sculptures, face painting and other activities will also be occurring.

For the events of which comprised the Autumn Extravaganza, the turnout was as follows:

- Thursday kids' trick or treating – In spite of the rain there was a good turnout of about 1,000 people.
- Friday ghost tours / Snuggs House tour/ City Lake Park movie – The ghost tours were well attended but the movie attendance was low. Next year the movie likely will move to the ANT.
- Saturday Farmer's Market and Craft Fair – Attendance was estimated to be 2,000-2,500 for the day.

Finally, Ms. Kiser announced that the agenda for the upcoming strategic planning session this Thursday was placed at each Council member's desk tonight. CRC would be facilitating the sessions again this fall.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall:

- Re: 2nd Street and Highway 52 – that intersection still is overgrown and trying to see around vegetation there at the right of way is dangerous. The City Manager said staff would report this to the NCDOT.
- Re: mask policy – Is the City's mask policy in effect? City Manager Michel J. Ferris assured her it was in all City facilities, when employees cannot put at least 6 feet distance apart from customers and fellow employees, and in City vehicles when there's more than 1 occupant. Mayor Pro-tem Hall indicated a reminder to all employees regarding the policy might be needed.
- WM recycling update re: back logs – Public Works Director Ross Holshouser came in front of Council to summarize the current situation and its impact on recycling. WM has been having personnel issues which have impacted routes, but new drivers have been hired and are getting accustomed to new routes now.
- Update Handy Sanitary District and water request – The City Manager reported that it appears Handy has made some progress with the NCDOT regarding connecting a water line to the NC Highway 49 bridge. A meeting is being scheduled to discuss further.

Councilmember Whitley:

- Re: Arbor Day celebration event – He wanted to point out that on the same day there is the scheduled stormwater management presentation to the Albemarle Rotary Club. He will be in attendance at the Rotary Club and could be late to the Arbor Day ceremony.
- He announced that Keep Stanly Beautiful and the City are sponsoring a trash pick up event on the morning of Veteran's day, which is November 11th.

Councilmember Dry:

- He thanked the City Manager and staff involved for helping out the Windsor Heights nuisance property issue. He also acknowledged the Planning team for their assistance in the process.

CLOSED SESSION

Upon a motion by Councilmember Whitley, seconded by Councilmember Hughes, unanimously carried, Council approved moving into closed session pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(1)

to prevent the disclosure of confidential or privileged information and 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 Dry, seconded by Councilmember Whitley, 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)(1) to prevent the disclosure of confidential or privileged information and N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(5) Real Estate and N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(6) Personnel.

The Mayor called for a motion to grant Carolina Treetop Challenge a third deferral agreement to cover the period from October 1, 2021 through October 1, 2024, and to extend the lease agreement from 15 years to 20 years.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Whitley, seconded by Councilmember Aldridge, the motion was unanimously carried.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Lowder, seconded by Councilmember Hughes, unanimously carried, the meeting was adjourned to Thursday, November 4th at 4:00 pm at the Stanly County Senior Center at 283 North Third Street for a strategic planning workshop.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall reminded everyone there would be a downtown retail strategies session on November 10th.