

REGULAR MEETING CITY COUNCIL

April 3, 2023

The City Council of the City of Albemarle met in a regular session on Monday, April 3, 2023 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 Chris Bramlett, Chris Whitley, Dexter Townsend, Bill Aldridge, David Hunt, and Benton Dry.

Mayor Michael called the meeting to order.

The Mayor gave the invocation.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Townsend, seconded by Councilmember Dry and unanimously carried, Council approved the minutes from the March 20, 2023 special session, regular session and closed session as submitted.

AGENDA ADJUSTMENTS

Mayor Pro Tem Hall requested the addition of Council consideration of an applicant for appointment to the Tree Commission to be added as the last item under New Business.

Upon a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Hall, seconded by Councilmember Aldridge and unanimously carried, the agenda adjustment was approved.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Municipal Calendar

Council received an updated Council calendar. The Mayor asked if any Council member had questions or comments. Mayor Pro Tem Hall announced that Councilmember Dry would be joining the Special Events Committee, and requested that the Clerk add this into the calendar moving forward. The Committee meets on the 3rd Wednesday of the month at 6:00 pm.

Departmental Monthly Reports

Council received departmental monthly reports for February 2023. The Mayor asked if any Council member had questions or comments.

Councilmember Dry gave a shout out to all of the new Police and Fire recruits.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Naming of Alleyway

This item was held over from the previous Council meeting so that each Council member could provide his/her top 3 choices. These choices were given to the Public Information Officer and summarized in the agenda packet.

The Mayor told Council that he has spoken with the alleyway contractor who alerted him to the name length for the sign and potential difficulty fitting the name within the sign dimensions. He asked Council if they wanted mock ups from the contractor before formally deciding on the alleyway name. He would request a mock up of a shorter name and a longer one for Council to review.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Dry, seconded by Councilmember Townsend and unanimously carried, Council tabled this item until the next meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

Update on Construction in Progress for the Albemarle Business Center

Stephen Chambers with Chambers Engineering came in front of Council to provide an update on progress on construction at the Albemarle Business Center and take questions from Council. He distributed a color-coded map of the ABC to denote which phases of construction work the project was in to date.

- Gravity sewer – 100% installed and testing now.
- Roadway – 75% through mass grading.
- Clearing – Vegetation has been removed and are grading topsoil down to the pond area.
- Waterline – Completed about half of the waterline through the park.

Contractors have made regular progress and the weather has been good so far.

Mr. Chambers took questions from Council. When will they be ready to bid for the Golden Leaf Site Ready Grant work? Probably in the next 2-3 weeks. He requested a meeting with the Mayor and City Manager to discuss some what they have graded out. Councilmember Bramlett asked about sewer lines for the site. The Mayor replied that the plan was to have sewer lines feed to the back of buildings rather than to the road for this first phase since the City didn't know what kind of businesses might be interested. The City Manager added once a business comes in, a sewer tap will be installed to connect to the sewer line. Councilmember Whitley asked if the City was using the grant it received from the state's Department of Commerce, to which the Mayor replied that the City is using that grant for road construction.

Mr. Chambers further noted that they have been working with Public Utilities Electric Division on electrical installation, and NJR has been installing the perpendicular crossings using City-procured materials so that the City-approved electrical contractor can then feed electric lines in.

When will contractors begin work on the Highway 52 side of the park? Contractors are working their way towards that area now. Would there be any issues anticipated? There might be once they clear down towards the pond embankment.

Council thanked Mr. Chambers for the update.

Audit RFP Response Summary

City Manager Michael J. Ferris summarized the RFP process and resultant bids. The Finance Department sought Request for Proposals for auditing services from over 30 firms. Three responses were received. The City Manager explained that likely due to the complex financial climate of municipal government audits more recently there have been fewer audit firms willing to take on audit contracts for municipalities. The Finance Department's recommendations memo was included in the agenda packet. Mr. Weavil noted in the memo that Martin Starnes & Associates, CPAs, P.A. would be the firm with the best value per the City's purchasing policy. For the 2 firms summarized in the memo, the hourly rates between the two are similar.

Finance Director Jacob Weavil took questions and comments from Council. Mayor Pro Tem Hall commented that she was concerned with the differential between the 2 firms in terms of estimated time for the audit, with 1 being 1 ½ times more time than the other. She also noted the lateness of the most recent audit being brought to Council even though she acknowledged the complexity of this past audit likely the cause for the longer process.

Mr. Weavil addressed Mayor Pro Tem Hall's comment about the time differential from the 1 firm in estimating the time it would take for the audit of the current fiscal year. The firm did not use the time elapsed from this past fiscal year audit but rather the year before that as its gauge for time to conduct the proposed audit which is in the memo.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall made a motion to change the auditor the City would use for the FY 2022-23 audit to Thompson, Price, Scott, Adams and Company.

Before any further Council action Mr. Weavil noted that one of the criteria on which the auditors were being evaluated was staff assignment to the audit. Martin Starnes & Associates takes the approach that different staff are assigned for every different fiscal year audit as a form of quality control, whereas Thompson, Price, Scott, Adams and Company confirmed that the same staff would be assigned to the City of Albemarle for audits for all 3 years of the contract.

He also noted that as part of the bid process he called a customer which had used both firms in the past. With Thompson, Price, Scott, Adams and Company, one team member indicated to the customer that they felt a bit overworked and cut their timeline with the audit close to the LGC deadline, whereas the customer stated that with Martin Starnes and Associates, they did not have a timeliness issue.

In response Council noted that was important information to have in making their decision and were appreciative that this information was given to them before they went further with a vote.

As a result, Mayor Pro Tem Hall requested that her motion to change auditors, which did not receive a second, be taken off the table. The Mayor confirmed with Council that the original motion would be withdrawn.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Dry, seconded by Councilmember Townsend and unanimously carried, Council selected Martin Starnes & Associates, CPAs, P.A. for audit services for a three-year period beginning with audit of FY 22/23.

Consider Appointment for Expiring Term on the ABC Board

The Albemarle ABC Board is requesting the reappointment of current Board member John McIntyre to a 3-year term expiring March 2026.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Hall, seconded by Councilmember Whitley and unanimously carried, Council approved the reappointment of John McIntyre to a new 3-year term on the Albemarle ABC Board until March 2026.

Designation of a Voting Delegate to NC League of Municipalities (NCLM) CityVision 2023 Conference

The Mayor confirmed that Mayor Pro Tem Hall and Councilmembers Whitley and Townsend are definitely attending. Mayor Pro Tem Hall recommended Councilmember Townsend, who noted that he would be ok with that designation.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Hall, seconded by Councilmember Whitley and unanimously carried, Council approved Councilmember Townsend as the voting delegate for the NCLM CityVision 2023 conference.

Introduction of Economic Development Director Lindsey Almond

City Manager Michael J. Ferris introduced Ms. Almond. Today is her first day in the position. Her hiring was the result of an extensive search process. She has a solid background in economic development, business retention, and workforce development. He is excited to have her on board. He invited her to come up in front of Council to say a few words.

Ms. Almond began by stating how grateful she was to be able to serve the City and give back to the community who raised her. She commended Council and City staff for the positive momentum she and her husband have seen in the City on their return from being away for 14 years. She is grateful for the opportunity to come back home and work for the City.

Council welcomed her and wished her good luck in her position.

Discussion of Summer Meeting Schedule

Councilmember Aldridge noted to Council that the first July meeting was scheduled for July 3rd, the day before the July 4th holiday, and thought that Council should reconsider that date but be mindful of that month being one heavy with vacation time.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall explained that due to events Council was working around over the summer and having had the experience of only having 1 meeting a month between June and August which ended up making those meetings very long, she suggested to Council the following dates:

- June – Remain 2 meetings on the 5th and 19th
- July – Two meetings on the 10th and the 24th
- August – Remain 2 meetings on 7th and 21st
- September – Added the change of the first meeting of the month from September 4th (Labor Day) to Tuesday the 5th.

Councilmember Aldridge asked Council if just 1 meeting date in July would work, possibly keeping the meeting proposed for the 10th. After brief discussion Council consensus was with having only 1 meeting in July on the 10th.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Hall, seconded by Councilmember Bramlett and unanimously carried, Council approved adopting the following schedule of meetings for June through the first meeting in September:

- June – 5th and 19th
- July – 10th
- August – 7th and 21st
- September – First meeting on the 5th

Consider Appointment to the Tree Commission

Mayor Pro Tem Hall noted that for the Tree Commission there are 5 seats open for the community and currently only 4 are filled. Former Councilmember Martha Hughes has submitted an application with her first choice the Tree Commission.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Hall, seconded by Councilmember Aldridge and unanimously carried, Council appointed Martha Hughes as the 5th community member on the Tree Commission for a 3-year term.

Consideration of State Distressed Utility Revolving Loan Fund Training

The Mayor added this item for Council discussion. He noted that a contingency of 3 City Council members and senior City staff are required to complete training per NC Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) for revolving loan funds. Per Council's agreement last year to be designated as a distressed utility, the City has to complete this training in order to be considered for future funding for state grants for City wastewater plant improvement projects.

There is a first training which is available online on demand, with a 2nd training which can either be completed online or in person. The 2nd online training dates are May 15th or 22nd, with the in person date May 10th at Piedmont Triad Council on Government location.

He will be 1 of the Council members to register for the training, and anticipates that the Public Utilities Director, the Finance Director, and the City Manager as the staff to take the training. He polled Council for 2 other members to agree to take the training. Mayor Pro Tem Hall and Councilmember Whitley agreed to take the training. The Clerk will register members for the training.

COMMENTS

The Mayor asked for Council to pass out Food Truck Friday magnets the PIO made.

Councilmember Bramlett:

- He noted that he and his wife pick up trash along Highway 24/27 regularly and commented that he thinks Albemarle is looking better these days. He gave a shout out to Lee Snuggs and Keep Stanly Beautiful for going out on Saturday mornings. There will be a community sweep event on April 22nd at 9:00 am in Rock Creek Park.
- Part of Pfeiffer being becoming an integral part of Albemarle is due to Mayor Pro Tem Hall's efforts. She initiated a group called Pfeiffer Friends where community residents "adopt" students.

Councilmember Aldridge:

- He congratulated Lindsey Almond on her new position as Economic Development Director.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall:

- She asked if Treetop Challenge was operating. No one was sure about the business's status currently.
- Related to construction work going on by Highway 24/27 although it's a NCDOT maintained road she wondered if the City should be reaching out to NCDOT to get construction updates and post them in order to get the word out better in order to avoid traffic congestion and snarls while the work is ongoing. Councilmember Aldridge added that he noticed that Barney Poplin Drive near the county EMS center and the steakhouse was backed up last week. He reiterated city and county timely cross communication would help ease these issues.
- Related to traffic complaints that have come in front of Council, what are next steps on that?
- She moved forward a message from a Stanly County Schools board member requesting to meet with the City. The Mayor replied that he was asked to hold off on scheduling a meeting until Planning related information has been obtained related to school boundaries. That meeting will be postponed until that data is collected.
- There was a Blue Cross/Blue Shield event that she and the Mayor attended recently. Attendees commented on how much revitalization was going on in the City. She commented that Albemarle is doing rural development well.

- She asked per the email from HUD today what next steps were. The Mayor replied that Council will be polled with possible dates to send to HUD.

Councilmember Whitley:

- He welcomed Lindsey Almond.
- The second round of CATALYST grants is now open through the end of April. The bank has again contributed so this round also has a \$90,000 fund from which to award grants.

He pointed out to Council that for the voting delegate for the CityVision conference there should be an alternate voting delegate.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Dry, seconded by Councilmember Townsend and unanimously carried, Council approved Councilmember Whitley as the alternate voting delegate for the CityVision conference this year.

Councilmember Dry:

- He welcomed Lindsey Almond.

Councilmember Aldridge asked if there was any status update on the tent city on Highway 24/27. The City Manager replied that the owner was notified and given until the end of this week to dismantle the tent city. If that isn't done? Then the City will dismantle it.

CLOSED SESSION

Upon a motion by Councilmember Hall, seconded by Councilmember Hunt, unanimously carried, Council approved moving into closed session pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(3) consult with the City Attorney, to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(5) Real Estate, N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(6) Personnel and N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(9) Security Plans.

RETURN TO OPEN SESSION

Upon a motion by Councilmember Bramlett, seconded by Councilmember Aldridge 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)(3) consult with the City Attorney, N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(5) Real Estate, N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(6) Personnel and N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(9) Security Plans.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Dry, seconded by Councilmember Hall and unanimously carried, Council approved increasing the City Attorney's annual salary to \$110,000.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Dry, seconded by Councilmember Hunt and unanimously carried, the meeting was adjourned until Monday, April 17, 2023 at 6:30 pm in City Hall.