

February 26, 2024

The City Council of the City of Rocky Mount met this day in a regular session scheduled for 4:00 p.m. in the George W. Dudley City Council Chamber of the Frederick E. Turnage Municipal Building with Mayor C. Saunders "Sandy" Roberson, Jr. presiding.

Councilmembers present: André D. Knight, Reuben C. Blackwell, IV, Richard Joyner, T.J. Walker, Jr., Lige Daughtridge, Tom Harris and Jabaris Walker.

Staff present: Keith Rogers Jr., City Manager; Kim Batts, City Clerk; Nyki Hill, Assistant City Manager; Archie Jones, Director of Human Relations; Abdul Baloch, Chief Internal Auditor; Mark Adcox, Video Production Specialist; Kream Mosley, Deputy City Clerk; Monica Brantley, Deputy City Clerk and Richard J. Rose, City Attorney.

Security Officers: Corporal Clay Wilder, Sergeant Chris Williams, and Senior Police Officer Shawn Battle.

The Mayor called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and requested all in attendance to stand for a moment of silent prayer.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Councilmember Joyner, seconded by Councilmember Harris, and unanimously carried that the minutes of the Regular Scheduled City Council meeting held October 23, 2023 be approved as submitted to the City Council prior to the meeting.

APPROVAL OF ADDITIONS/DELETIONS TO AGENDA

The following requests were made to amend the agenda to include:

- Request to approve demolition of certain dwellings
- Update on Energy Efficiency Program
- Building Reuse Program Funding for the Expansion of Project SMART
- Council comments (3 minutes each)
- Closed session - Personnel

Councilmember T.J. Walker asked for clarification on if the request was for the houses to be referred to staff for recommendation for demolition or if they were being referred for demolition.

Councilmember Knight stated that his request is for demolition. He stated he had circulated a list at the previous meeting and asked that staff bring back the list with a status at this meeting, but he had only received an email from the City Manager explaining his theory and how he processed the demolition procedures. He further stated that the City Code Ordinance for the Housing Code says the power lies within the City Council to demolish houses.

Motion was made by Councilmember Joyner, seconded by Councilmember Knight, and unanimously carried that the agenda be amended, as requested.

COMMUNITY UPDATE BY CITY MANAGER

City Manager Keith Rogers Jr. provided the following community update. The City Manager reported that:

- Stated 9 to 5 the Musical is currently being performed at the Imperial Centre on several dates during the month of March, tickets can be purchased at imperialcentre.org/theatre
- Stated on Saturday March 16 from noon until 4 p.m. the International Festival of Cultures is returning to Rocky Mount at the Nash Community College Brown Auditorium; guests will have an opportunity to sample exotic foods, visit vendors and enjoy multi-cultural entertainment
- Stated the City of Rocky Mount recently earned the Government Finance Officers Association's Distinguished Budget Presentation Award; award represents a significant achievement for the City and also reflects the commitment to meet the highest government budgeting standards
- Stated to receive this award, local governments have to satisfy nationally recognized standards and guidelines for effective budget presentation, so he would like to commend the budget and finance team

PETITIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

The Mayor opened the meeting for petitions from the public and outlined guidelines for public petitions. He called on the following individuals for public comment and a brief summary of comments is outlined below:

Dr. Kim Koo

- Stated she cannot agree with the Mayor that an applause after a petitioner's statement is a form of rowdiness or disrespect
- Stated the petitioners portion keeps the first amendment alive "that people have the right to petition the government for a redress of grievances"
- Stated if the City is ready to spend \$1 million to develop a comprehensive land use plan, she would like to know what has been achieved in the past plan that would contribute to modifying the new plan
- Asked what some of the ramifications of prioritizing one aspect versus another are and how will the new plan take into consideration the changing geopolitical economic conditions in this nation
- Asked what the status is of the \$4.5 million leftover ARPA money
- Asked what the status is of the money that Shelley Willingham requested for Edgecombe County from the North Carolina Legislature
- Asked what the status is of the Atlantic Arlington Corridor plan that has been spoken about so much
- Stated if the project has been put on hold and if the money has been put in the general fund let citizens know instead of not providing an answer

Mumtaz Shaik

- Stated through petitions, the public provides the Council with their concerns, complaints, and congratulations prompting actions and some positive changes to the community
- Stated that we can all agree that Councilmembers have been heartily applauded on many occasions and she is sure the Council appreciates it and recognizes the support and approval
- Requested the Democracy of group applause be allowed to continue as long as it does not deteriorate into rowdiness

Curmilus Dancy

- Stated he is speaking for all of those that are allowing him to speak for them especially those who are afraid due to retaliation
- Asked is it legal to approve the agenda and then an item is moved to the end of the agenda

- Asked who creates the salary for the City staff that are hired by the City Manager
- Asked if the police department is fully staffed why is there a post to hire detectives; can they not be promoted from within

Mike Klinetobe

- Stated he just moved to Rocky Mount 3 months ago and he really likes it
- Asked if the City of Rocky Mount has a plan, more specifically a 20-year plan
- Stated he thinks there is a great future here in Rocky Mount and he looks forward to being here for 20 years or more

Bridget Phifer

- Stated she is with Living Better Life here in Rocky Mount and they are committed to driving positive change and fostering economic empowerment within the community
- Stated they believe that working together they can implement initiatives that effectively bridge the wealth and economic wealth gap here in Rocky Mount
- Stated they have outlined several strategies that they believe will contribute to this goal such as entrepreneurship development programs tailored to the need of the minority and underserved communities

Theresa Alston Stokes

- Stated she is here to advocate for this Council to step its work up in order to provide decent, safe and affordable housing to many of the citizens who desperately need housing
- Stated she represents a community of the citizens who have heard from City leaders and staff about studies and promises to clean up certain neighborhoods and replace deteriorating buildings with decent housing but unfortunately, they have seen little progress
- Stated they are not even certain that the state money that has been given to the City, specifically by Shelly Willingham, for affordable housing on the Edgecombe County side of the City has been allocated for its intended purposes
- Stated two weeks ago she appeared before the Council requesting that they host a town hall meeting with the community so they can understand the plans for utilizing this grant and the American Rescue Plan funds to advance affordable housing in our communities
- Stated families are demanding action and if housing is indeed the number one priority, the city should be ready willing and able to discuss it with the community
- Asked if Council will discuss plans for increasing the construction of affordable housing at the upcoming retreat and can the plans be shared with the community upon their return

Crystal Wimes-Anderson

- Stated there is a group called Rural Opportunity Institute and they build up rural communities to support people healing from generational traumas to achieve health safety connection and self-determination
- Stated there is a survey being done by Parks and Rec and she would like for the Councilmembers who live in or represent Edgecombe County to stay abreast and to ensure that there is a community center that is drafted for the neighborhoods on the Edgecombe County side of town
- Stated there is a neighbor who has been calling regarding issues with code and parking on private property, asked the Councilmembers who are involved to refer that case over to human relations so they can get that addressed

CONSENT AGENDA

Motion was made by Councilmember Joyner, seconded by Councilmember T.J. Walker, and unanimously carried that the Consent Agenda [Items 8(A) through 8(E)], be approved as follows and more specifically:

A. AD VALOREM TAX RELEASES:

That the following tax releases be acknowledged and approved for release and/or refund:

SCHEDULE B - acknowledge receipt of report of the following taxes over \$100 approved for release and/or refund by the City Council:

YEAR	BILL	NAME/ADDRESS	TAX		COMMENT
EDGECOMBE COUNTY					
2014	6506	FERGUSON, MICHAEL LT 14 A J LONG EST ROCKY MOUNT, NC 27801	188.67 11.32	CITY INT	FORECLOSURE
		TOTAL RELEASE:	199.99		
NASH COUNTY					
2023	1000035	CULPEPPER W H LIMITED PARTNERSHIP BETHLEHEM RD ROCKY MOUNT, NC 27803	194.25	CITY	VALUATION CORRECTION
		TOTAL RELEASE:	194.25		
2023	1002279	JONES, LA TOYA MARIA 128 GRANGE ST ROCKY MOUNT, NC 27804	99.67 2.74	CITY INT	OWNER CORRECTION
		TOTAL RELEASE:	102.41		
2023	1001797	RODWELL, JEROME TAYLOR 1801 BETHLEHEM RD ROCKY MOUNT, NC 27803	188.81 5.19	CITY INT	PERSONAL PROPERTY LOCATED OUTSIDE CITY LIMITS
		TOTAL RELEASE:	194.00		
2023	1001377	ROLLER, JAMES ALBERT ROLLER, JASON WESLEY 1409 CLUBVIEW DR ROCKY MOUNT, NC 27804	529.29 14.56	CITY INT	DUPLICATE BILL
		TOTAL RELEASE:	543.85		
2023	1002048	STUART, MARIANNE JEAN 1200 TAVERN LNDG ROCKY MOUNT, NC 27804	137.14 3.77	CITY INT	PERSONAL PROPERTY LOCATED OUTSIDE CITY LIMITS
		TOTAL RELEASE:	140.91		

B. MODIFICATION OF WATER TOWER LICENSE AGREEMENT/USCOC OF GREATER NORTH CAROLINA, LLC (US CELLULAR)

The City Council was advised that the City of Rocky Mount entered into a Water Tower License Agreement dated September 14, 2015 with USCOC of Greater North Carolina, LLC (US Cellular) to install antennas on the Marigold Street water tower. This agreement requires written approval from the City for any modification or extension of equipment.

US Cellular submitted a consent letter dated February 8, 2024 requesting the City's consent to the following:

- Remove six (6) 1-5/8 inch coaxes
- Add three (3) C-BAND/Dod Dual Band RRUs with integrated antennas

It was noted that USCOC pays the City a monthly rate of \$2,533.32 with a 3% increase on October 1st of each year. The proposed equipment configuration will not exceed allowable limits to

the tank and the contract states that the licensee shall be responsible for any repairs or damage to the tower during installation. The modification of the Water Tower License Agreement was approved and the Mayor was authorized to execute the consent letter on behalf of the City.

C. RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING APPLICATION FOR GRANT FUNDING/LEAD SERVICE LINE FIND AND REPLACE PROJECT

The Council was notified that as part of the Lead and Copper Rule Revisions (LCRR) the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires that all community water systems (CWS) develop an inventory of all service line connections, both system-owned and customer-owned. This list must identify the potential presence of lead within each service line connection and must be completed and submitted by October 16, 2024.

It was noted that the City has been undergoing the inventory aspect of the project to determine existing pipe material since December 2021 and the City will be responsible for replacement if a lead service line is discovered. At this time, specific grant funding amounts are undetermined, but it is anticipated that the application will be for approximately \$1.5 million. **Resolution No. R-2024-9** entitled **RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING APPLICATION FOR GRANT FUNDING FOR THE LEAD SERVICE LINE FIND AND REPLACE PROJECT** was approved and the Mayor and City Clerk were authorized to execute required documentation and certifications, including subsequent grant final application and agreements.

D. HOME RECONCILIATION AGREEMENT THIRD AMENDMENT

The City Council was provided with a Third Amendment to the HOME Reinvestment Partnership Fund Reconciliation Agreement between the City of Rocky Mount, Nash County, Edgecombe County, and the Town of Tarboro approved by Council on October 11, 2021, with amendments approved on November 8, 2021 and January 10, 2022.

The City Council was advised that the third amendment states the following:

1. **Allocation of Funds** - That the City of Rocky Mount will return HOME funds as follows:

<u>Jurisdiction</u>	<u>Allocation</u>
Nash County	\$1,047,858
Edgecombe County	\$ 475,773
Tarboro	\$ 125,991
Sharpsburg	\$ 153,571

2. **HOME Allocations FY 21-22** - The first sentence of Term 1 of the agreement is revised as follows:

In addition to the reconcilment amount of HOME funds shown in Section 1 of the First Amendment for Nash County, Nash agrees to

administer the FY 21-22 HOME allocations for the participating government as shown in the table below:

<u>Jurisdiction</u>	<u>Allocation</u>
Middlesex	\$ 5,243
Spring Hope	\$ 7,363
Whitakers	\$ 2,489
	<hr/>
	\$15,095

3. **HOME Allocations FY 22-23** - The first sentence of Term 1 of the agreement is revised as follows:

In addition to the reconciliation amount of HOME funds shown in Section 1 of the Second Amendment for Nash County, Nash agrees to administer the FY 22-23 HOME allocations for the participating governments as shown in the table below:

<u>Jurisdiction</u>	<u>Allocation</u>
Middlesex	\$ 5,861
Spring Hope	\$ 8,231
Whitakers	\$ 5,566
	<hr/>
	\$19,658

The Third Amendment to HOME Reconciliation Agreement was approved and the Mayor and City Clerk were authorized to execute the Amendment on behalf of the City.

E. CITY COUNCIL MEETING/CANCELLATION

The City Council approved cancellation of the regular City Council meeting scheduled for March 11, 2024 and rescheduled the March 11, 2024 Committee of the Whole meeting to March 25, 2024 at 2 p.m.

BUILDING REUSE GRANT/PROJECT SMART (added in open meeting)

The City Council was provided with a resolution authorizing submission of the grant application for Project Smart to the North Carolina Department of Commerce Building Reuse Program Funding (\$500,000) for renovation/expansion for "Project SMART" - a distribution facility on Instrument Drive. The Council was advised that a local manufacturing company has made plans to expand its manufacturing and distribution operation as a result of the recent acquisition of two smaller production companies. They were further advised that the company:

- Was founded in Maryland and has been serving the Washington D.C., Maryland and Virginia since 2007;
- Has been serving Cary, NC since 2014;
- Has purchased a 15-acre site with warehouse buildings containing around 64,000 square feet in Rocky Mount;
- Plans to renovate and upfit the facilities for a distribution site to distribute frozen, dairy, African, Caribbean, Latino ethnic foods; and

- Plans creation of 25 full-time and part-time jobs in phase 1 (to be completed in 2 years) and 25 full-time and part-time jobs in phase 2 (to be completed in 5 years).

It was noted that the City and the Carolinas Gateway Partnership will arrange for a local cash match of 5% of the grant amount (\$25,000) to be used for planning and grant administration.

Motion was made by Councilmember Joyner, seconded by Councilmember Daughtridge and unanimously carried that **Resolution No. R-2024-10** entitled **AUTHORIZING RESOLUTION BY THE CITY OF ROCKY MOUNT FOR THE NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE BUILDING REUSE PROGRAM - "PROJECT SMART BUILDING REUSE"** be adopted. This resolution provides that the City has substantially complied or will substantially comply with all State and local laws, rules, regulations and ordinances applicable to the project and to the grants pertaining thereto and that Keith Rogers Jr., City Manager, is authorized to execute any additional documents pertaining to the grant application as requested by the North Carolina Department of Commerce.

DEMOLITION OF CERTAIN DWELLINGS (added in open meeting)

Councilmember Knight stated at the last Council meeting he circulated a list of houses to include Zenia Court, Pender Street, East Highland Street, and 130 Discovery Street. He explained that 620 Woodland has been demolished by the property owner and he is asking Council to approve and act upon these four houses today. He stated that he thinks another Councilmember has one to add as well. He explained that all of these meet the guidelines if you look at the housing code Chapter 11, Section 11-2 "Exercise the police powers authority" as it reads that the City Council hereby finds and declares that there exist in the City dwellings and certain abandoned structures which are unfit for human habitation due to dilapidation, defects increasing the hazards of fire, accident or other calamities, lack of ventilation, light, or sanitary facilities, or due to other conditions rendering the dwellings unsafe or unsanitary, or dangerous, or detrimental to the health, safety, morals, or otherwise harm to the welfare of the residents of the City, and that a public necessity exists to exercise the police powers of the City pursuant to Article 19 of Chapter 160A of the General Statutes of North Carolina. He explained that he is just asking the Council to approve the action to demolish these homes.

Councilmember Daughtridge stated that obviously these houses are in bad shape. He asked City Manager Rogers how many homes are on the list, if there is a list, and how do you get on the list. He explained that before he was on Council he requested action on some houses that needed to be taken care of. He stated again that he would like to know from the City Manager where we are on the list

and what the process is because if every meeting each Councilmember adds something at some point they will not be within budget. He reiterated that he completely agrees that these houses are in bad shape and something should be done.

City Manager Rogers responded that at the last Council meeting he understands there were properties that they want to see demolished. He explained that he has no doubt that these structures need some action to make sure that the community looks as good as it possibly can, but they are discussing demolition of privately owned property. He stated that state statutes require that they give notice and provide opportunity of compliance from these private property owners. He continued stating that the staff does have a list and he does not know the number on the list, but he knows it is substantial and they are working to ascertain whether demolition is absolutely necessary. He explained that what he means by absolutely necessary is notifying the property owner of the violations or conditions, making sure that sufficient waiting period has passed for each of these violations, and determining the cost if the City was to either rehabilitate or proceed with demolition. He stated all of these things are required by state statute as well as local ordinance so they are happy to move forward with addressing these property concerns, as he suggested in the email that was sent to Council, but this could be a subject that they discuss at the Committee of the Whole. He explained that this is not a personal or staff philosophy about the way they deal with these properties, it is state statute. He stated they do have the properties in question on the list, and the City having the money to proceed with demolition is not a concern. He reiterated that there is a process that is required. He continued stating that they are endeavoring to ensure that they can comply with state statute as they go about dealing with private property concerns.

City Attorney Rose stated that the manager is correct, the statutes are pretty clear on that, the City has procedures in place and staff that is familiar with it. He explained you have to give the notice as it is private property and if you get sued you may have to pay damages as well as attorney's fees if you take someone's house down without giving the proper notice.

Councilmember Knight stated they have a procedure that has worked and they have never torn down a house without giving notice or a hearing for the property owners. He stated he believes that this is a deflection, delay, and defiance of the City Manager. He explained that he kindly asked publicly for staff to bring the information back to this governing body today. He stated if any of these houses have not had the proper procedure followed then he does not expect to move forward with the demolition. He continued

stating the City Council knows the process of notifying property owners and the procedure has worked for the last 50 years, so he would like to know why it is not working now. He explained that he is not asking this Council to circumvent or do anything against the general statute or code that gives the authority of this Council to approve demolition. He explained the Council cannot make a decision because staff will not give them the proper information. He stated no one wants to live beside a house like this, no one wants their children playing near a house like this and it is not right. He explained that the power lies not with the City Manager but with the Council and he was elected by his constituents to advocate for them as well as all of Rocky Mount.

Mayor Roberson asked City Manager Rogers where we are in the process for these particular houses.

City Manager Rogers responded that he is happy to provide the Council a full list of the properties that they are looking at for code enforcement. He stated that many of the properties that are on this paper tonight have been in this condition for multiple years so this is not a change in philosophy, staff, or process. He explained that when he arrived, he was asked to have staff put together a comprehensive list rather than deal with individual properties because there are so many properties around the City that need attention. He continued stating that he is in no way trying to downplay the attention that is needed on these properties, however, it is simply a process that needs to be followed. He stated in terms of a status update, he is happy to provide a list of all the properties with the various stages of enforcement or he can bring staff to a future Committee of the Whole so Council can provide direction at that time moving forward. He explained that they are not holding off on demolition but simply trying to make sure that they are compliant with the statutes.

Councilmember Harris stated he has several concerns regarding if they are getting the full picture. He stated that he does not think these 4 houses are the only burned houses in the City and they need a detailed report on all of the housing code issues whether they are burned or have major structural damage so we know the magnitude of the issue. He stated that it would be nice to have more information on these properties such as past due property taxes. He stated there are commercial buildings that are in horrible shape as well and asked what is being done about those. He stated they should get more information so as a Council they can strategize and put priorities in place. He agreed that these four houses are atrocious, but he has seen other houses that are just as bad. He stated that he does not want people calling him questioning why some houses are being torn down but nothing is being done with others.

Councilmember T.J. Walker stated that he believes the City Manager sent out an email on February 23 speaking about Five Points development and also about the demolition and rehabilitation process. He explained that the email let Council know that staff does have a list inclusive of the ones shared by Councilmember Knight in the last City Council meeting. He stated that if these houses are already on the list, then he will support moving forward with demolition after seeing the list. He explained that has been the process since he has been on this Council, they normally receive a demolition list and vote to either amend the list or not.

Councilmember Knight stated there have been hearings for these properties and the process has been followed, but if the process is followed and it is not provided to City Council then they do not see a list. He explained that they have addressed commercial properties as well. He explained that these houses are not something that he has randomly picked up, they have been through the process. He continued explaining that the issue is not with the process, the issue is the City Manager not bringing Council the information.

Councilmember Jabaris Walker stated he agrees with Councilmember Knight and once they get the demolition list then they can make some decisions. He stated that this morning he saw 2 other properties that he would like to add to the list as well which are 1605 Fountain Street and 1552 Springbrook Drive. He explained that once he sees this list he is okay with doing what they have to do to get the properties demolished.

Councilmember Blackwell stated he thinks what the direction was last Council meeting was to come back with a specific update on these properties and what was received was a generic reply. He explained that this could have been simply answered and then they could have moved forward. He stated that a general update about what the process is might be important to refresh the Council's memory, but he also thinks it is important to give them what they asked for. He explained that if they do not have a list of all the properties they have requested an update for, then they will have to continue to come to Council meetings and add things to the agenda if the things they have been used to seeing for years no longer appear. He explained that his concern is the fact that Council has not received one request for demolition in 12 months and that is unusual. He inquired about what changed in the perspective of the administrative and management leadership that says this is no longer a priority. He stated that it is clear that if they can move rapidly to purchase land that needed to be purchased, he voted for it and is not in disagreement, but as Councilmember Knight stated they deserve equal respect when it concerns other places in Rocky Mount. He continued stating that they have a process, work the process so

Council can vote on it to take these houses down instead of telling them what the process is as they all know because they have been here. He asked for Council to be provided with a list that they can respond to, allocate funds, move forward and start cleaning the neighborhoods up.

Councilmember Joyner stated he knows they prioritize burned properties over other properties. He explained that some of the landlords may be liable with code violations and looking into that may help to stop some of these moving forward.

Councilmember Harris stated he would like to go on record to say that they need to demolish these 4 houses, but there could be 6 or 10 others that need to be demolished. He explained that it would be better if they knew of the total number of houses because it would be cheaper to put all the houses up for demolition if the money was available at one time rather than have each house individually demolished by a prospective company. He stated that hopefully next month they will have a list that they can scrutinize and examine and approve the demolitions at the next Council meeting.

Councilmember Knight stated that Councilmember Joyner is correct, the burnout houses have always been a priority, especially the ones that are circulating through the gallery. He advised Councilmember Harris that there is a list and all he has to do is ask for it and hopefully the City Manager will give it to him. He explained they have always had a list and have always approved demolitions, not one at a time, maybe 5 or 6 and he just wants to make that clear.

Councilmember T.J. Walker stated he would like to amend the motion because there is a house on the street he lives on that was damaged by fire as well and if they begin to bring in a list every meeting, constituents are going to start questioning how certain properties were torn down so fast but the City could not get theirs down. He explained that anything he has ever brought to Council, the first thing he had been addressed and approached with is process.

Councilmember Daughtridge stated that he thinks they are getting ahead, going back to what City Attorney Rose said that they cannot sit here and say they are going to demolish something as they have to go through a process. He stated that they can request that this process starts. He explained he feels they should get a list, go through the list at the next meeting, find out where these structures are in the process that need to be demolished and either prioritize or vote on them to begin the demolition process. He advised he not be supporting this motion if it goes through today, but he will support coming back when they have the list and they know what process they are going through.

Councilmember Knight stated again, as he asked at the last Council meeting, if the houses have already been through the process, then he would request they be demolished. He stated further that if the houses have not been through the process then he defers. He continued stating if the houses go through the process and the information held by the City Manager then he is circumventing the process and Council has nothing to consider.

Councilmember Harris asked if there are other burned that have gone through the process that they need to approve as well, so why can't that information be provided to them at the Committee of the Whole next month then add it as an agenda item so the whole list can be approved rather than just these four houses.

Councilmember Knight amended his original motion to include that if these properties have been through the process that they be demolished and if they have not been through the process then he defers. Motion was seconded by Councilmember Joyner and carried by a vote of 5-2 (Councilmembers Daughtridge and Harris opposed)

ENERGY EFFICIENCY PROGRAM UPDATE (added in open meeting)

Councilmember Knight stated he gets a ton of inquiries from citizens, especially seniors and not only in his ward about their heating unit being antiquated and sometimes it goes out in the middle of the winter and even at the peak of the summer. He explained that most of our seniors do not have the money to have someone put a unit in and Council had asked previous Interim City Manager, Peter Varney, to work along with Latasha Hall to develop a program that citizens could be approved for. He continued stating that Ms. Hall had worked on this program and it was supposed to come to Council to vote on it.

Councilmember Blackwell stated in a Committee of the Whole meeting they had a conversation with Mr. Varney and recommended that the City look into a program and a process regarding how they could help their economically challenged citizens with new HVAC equipment if they did not have the funds themselves because faulty equipment creates high utility bills. He explained that is what he thinks Councilmember Knight is referencing that research had been done but it seemed to have gotten lost somewhere along the way, so he is asking for a refresh in order for it to be discussed.

Mayor Roberson stated for clarification it included solar panels and some other components such as window replacements, it was really about reducing energy utilization.

Councilmember Harris inquired about another program that was increased by \$15,000 to help people with some improvements to their houses, and suggested maybe at the same time Council should get an update on other programs that the City administers.

Councilmember Blackwell stated he is fine with that as he would appreciate any information that tells them what is happening, how much money is spent, how much is not spent, and who is on a list, because they are not receiving it now.

Motion was made by Councilmember Knight, seconded by Councilmember Joyner and unanimously carried requesting the City Manager/staff bring the information relative to an Energy Efficiency program before the City Council for it to be reviewed and voted on.

Council Comments

Mayor Roberson stated he had posed questions to the City Council relative to the following:

- 1) *"how Council might like to see the CORM elevate and/or operationalize MWBE initiatives"*
- 2) *"Topics/initiatives/processes that you would like for us to discuss/cover as we conduct budget sessions"*
- 3) *"Goals that you have for the CORM that should be incorporated into our future discussions"*

City Council comments were as follows:

Knight-

- Stated that the Mayor's proclamation outlined the significance of the importance of Black History Month he is thankful that the Mayor is able to recognize the inequalities and challenges that have perpetuated this huge economic divide between white and black and other communities of color that still exist today
- Stated as members of this entire City Council, they hope the goal is to dismantle policies, practices and the culture that supports, perpetuates and expands those disparities
- Stated he was hoping the proclamation could be turned into a working document with the following 6 initiatives:
 1. Create partnerships with banks and other financial institutions to build accessible capital tools to help black and brown individuals, entrepreneurs, and non-profit organizations build wealth and transfer wealth to their families and communities
 2. Fully staff the City MWBE department to achieve clearly stated and measurable outcomes
 3. Strengthen and expand the City efforts to support the renovation and building of housing that benefit low and middle-income families with a specific focus on population of color in the City
 4. Facilitate a comprehensive review and implementation of strategies from the CityStart Initiative report to help close the racial wealth divide
 5. Recruit a grant writer to strengthen revenue for existing and new downtown, inner city and entrepreneurial housing initiatives
 6. Form a community wealth creation committee to help support foster innovation and hold elected and appointed officials accountable to the spirit and tangible outcome of this bold initiative
- Stated for discussion at the retreat, he would like to look back to July 11, 2022 at the City Council minutes where the City Council approved appropriating \$1.5 of the \$3 million ARPA funds to be spent over 3 consecutive fiscal years and he would like to discuss where that money is

- Stated it is his understanding that some of that money has not been allocated where it needs to be, therefore the initiative is not moving forward

Blackwell-

- Thanked the Mayor for his very forward thinking and bold proclamation that was presented because it created a footprint, clarity and vision about where Council needs to go
- Stated Rocky Mount is a City that is between 60 to 70 percent African American and also a City that continues to be at the top of the unemployment list or battling health and education inequities and disparities, as well as disparities in economic opportunities for the large percentage of the population that are living in poverty
- Stated from his perspective, the City Council should retool their priorities around how to focus the City coffers on rebuilding broken places or places that have never been strengthened
- Stated he supports every tenant that Councilmember Knight outlined from MWBE to working with our local, regional, and national banks
- Stated he believes housing should always be kept first and the fact cannot be diminished that a huge percentage of the City has older and insufficient housing that many of our people live in
- Stated new people moving to our communities are not going to choose to live in communities that are dilapidated
- Stated people are living in poverty everyday and the City should be funding initiatives that bring people out of poverty
- Stated attention is needed into equity in hiring, how people are paid, as well as equity in how decisions are made about how programs are moved forward
- Stated they should create a state of priority for Edgecombe, downtown Rocky Mount
- Stated there are thousands people coming here from all across the country to the Event Center, but a hotel, parking deck and enhancements to the Event Center are also needed
- Stated he does not feel full advantage is being taken of this great momentum and he believes the City can do better
- Stated he hopes at every Committee of the Whole meeting there is something that deals with racial equity and that the impact to racial equity is reviewed in every budget that is passed

Joyner-

- Stated in 1999 South Rocky Mount had the highest incidents for emergency room use for primary healthcare and one of the major reasons for this was dilapidated housing and homelessness in that area
- Stated he feels one of the first initiatives should be to take an in-depth look at these 14 communities that have been in poor condition for a long time
- Stated he feels there needs to be a strategic plan together on how to change this with support of the community organization
- Stated community wealth building and other initiatives have empowered communities to feel good about being a part of their development and he thinks they should be given staff support
- Stated he feels the Council should provide the support needed to ensure the homeless shelter is stable, so they give adequate and good service to those that find themselves in a situation of need

- Stated Council voted to work to become a model food system and Parks and Recreation has stepped up to make sure we can do it; funding should be put in place to show the Council is serious about commitment
- Stated Council needs to see where the gaps are in recreation services throughout the City
- Stated as the City grows there needs to be a conscious effort to keep gentrification from occurring

T.J. Walker-

- Clarified that Council is responding to questions the Mayor sent out to them. The first question was *"how Council might like to see the CORM elevate and/or operationalize MWBE initiatives"*
- Stated MWBE was a fairly new program and has gone through some challenges due to several changes in directors, but he thinks once things are fine-tuned and a director is in place, he believes the initiatives are already set and they can make whatever is needed happen
- Stated the next question was *"Topics/initiatives/processes that you would like for us to discuss/cover as we conduct budget sessions"*
- Stated he feels some of those topics would include some of the salaries since there have been a lot of questions from the public, some of the financial processes such as what had been mentioned with the discussion around demolitions and other various initiatives they want to make happen
- Stated the next question was *"Goals that you have for the CORM that should be incorporated into our future discussions"*
- Stated he feels community development is definitely a goal but also they need to update their plan, stick to it but be flexible where needed
- Stated there was a conversation around demolition but the same Council has previously proceeded with demolition, then stopped because there were vacant lots and now want to start back again
- Stated he feels a plan will provide a roadmap, because if Council comes to every meeting with a different mindset, staff will not have a clear direction to follow
- He feels once there is a concrete comprehensive plan that it will forward the goals to lead the City in the right direction

Daughtridge-

- Stated he agrees with what Councilmember T.J. Walker said
- Stated there will be a retreat; he believes it will be in Greenville, SC and the plan right now is to focus on downtown and housing
- Stated infrastructure also has to be a focus; need to ensure funding is in place for water, sewer, electric and roads
- Stated he feels code enforcement has been lacking for the last 10 to 15 years which has created the current situation with dilapidated houses and commercial buildings and this issue is not only in one part of the City
- Stated there is a huge panhandling problem in Rocky Mount that needs to be taken care of; some of the biggest complaints he has received in the last 6 months has been dealing with panhandling
- Stated there is a huge litter problem throughout the entire City of Rocky Mount and litter laws need to be enforced

- Stated he believes at one time it was passed that everyone pays \$2 or \$3 a month to fund people to clean up litter and if it is not being done now, it needs to be
- Stated he feels the property that was just purchased west of 95 should be annexed into the City of Rocky Mount
- Stated there is no fire station west of 95 in the City and that is life and safety; he knows that is in the CIP, but that needs to be made a priority
- Stated sidewalks are needed throughout the entire City; specifically Jeffreys Road and Sunset Avenue
- Stated there needs to be parks and recreation west of 95 as well
- Stated the City helps fund the homeless shelter and he believes in that but he also feels Nash and Edgecombe County should be encouraged to help fund the shelter as well because it is a social issue and counties are responsible for social issues

Harris

- Stated he appreciates all the feedback from the Council
- Stated he thinks the citizens are looking at 2 things from Council which are "what is being done to keep citizens safe" and "how their money is being spent"
- State last Committee of the Whole meeting they were given a 6-month interim report on the financial position of Rocky Mount
- Stated they need better financial information coming from the City such as actual versus budget and if any specific line items that Council has approved in the budget have been shifted to other areas
- Stated they need to have a clear picture of their exact financial position because they have a lot of challenges
- Stated Councilmember Blackwell mentioned old houses and he is correct, but beneath those old houses are probably old water pipes, sewer lines
- Stated that Councilmember Daughtride mentioned infrastructure and asked if Council really has a thorough understanding of the quality of the electrical lines that have been underground for 30 to 50 years, the sewer pipes, and water pipes
- Stated he feels there are a lot of financial challenges ahead and in order for Council to have a road map of spending programs, Council has to know where finances stand
- Stated he asked questions of the CPA firm 2 weeks ago and he is waiting for answers from them, as well as, answers from the City Manager and Finance Director
- Stated he does not see how Council can proceed going forward if they do not know the information

Jabaris Walker

- Stated the MWBE will always be special to him because he went through it and if they can find a way to get more mentors to help people just starting off that would be very helpful
- Stated he would like to see discussion about housing in the budget session
- Stated there is an issue with homeless people in the area and he would like to see a plan to help the shelter stay relevant, but also help people in the shelter
- Stated when downtown takes off and thrives then he feels the City will thrive
- Stated he would like to know what ways Rocky Mount could become a leader in NC with assisting the reentry population

Mayor Roberson-

- Stated the City is 65 to 70 percent African American so there is no discussion that can be held without consideration of race and how to elevate people in the community
- Stated the City is overwhelmingly a poor community relative to many other places in the state so ways should be sought to elevate income levels, equity and opportunity
- Stated he feels public/private partnerships would be a way to enable the types of activities to create those roadmaps and opportunities
- Stated he feels working together and understanding how we fit with our education systems in both Nash and Edgecombe counties is important because at the end of the day these are our children and we need to make sure that they are educated and have the biggest and best opportunities going forward
- Stated he also feels it is important to create a community, environment, and a culture that the children want to come back to and participate in
- Stated he hears how great friend's kids are doing somewhere else and he would like to hear about them doing well here in Rocky Mount
- Stated he believes we have exported way too much talent through the years and we should all that we can to try to have that talent here in Rocky Mount
- Stated he echo everyone else in terms of infrastructure, creating programs, and trying to chart that course but it does not happen unless they work together
- He stated this discussion is an attempt to try to get everyone moving together in a direction that they can agree on so there can be measurable actions and programs

CLOSED SESSION

A Closed Session was requested relative to a personnel matter.

Motion was made by Councilmember Joyner, seconded by Councilmember Daughtridge and unanimously carried that the City Council enter into Closed Session at 5:41 p.m. The minutes of the Closed Session shall be filed as **ESM-640** at the end of **Minute Book 38** upon approval for release by the City Attorney.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, by consensus, the meeting was adjourned at 6:25 p.m.



Kim Batts
City Clerk