

**MONDAY-5:30 P.M.**

**NOVEMBER 1, 2010**

**SPECIAL MEETING**

The City Council of the City of Elizabeth City held a Special City Council meeting on the above date and time in the City Council Chambers of the Municipal Administration Building with Mayor R. A. McLean presiding. Council Members attending were: J. M. Baker, M. E. Brooks, L. Hill-Lawrence, L. A. Hummer, R. E. King, B. S. Meggs and J. A. Stimatz. J. B. Walton was absent. City Staff attending were: City Manager R. C. Olson, City Clerk D. S. Pierce-Tamplen, Inspections Director S. E. Ward, Planning Director J. C. Brooks, Finance Director S. E. Blanchard, Human Resource Director K. W. Felton and Deputy City Clerk V. D. White.

Mayor McLean established a quorum was present and called the meeting to order. Councilwoman Lena Hill-Lawrence gave the invocation followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

**1} APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA:**

Mayor McLean called for approval of the prepared agenda.

***A motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem L. A. Hummer, seconded by Councilwoman J. M. Baker to approve the agenda as presented. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Hummer, Baker, Brooks, Hill-Lawrence, King, Meggs and Stimatz. Against: None. Motion carried.***

**2} RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE MAYOR'S CUSTOMER SERVICE TASK FORCE:**

Mayor McLean called upon Councilwoman Baker for comments.

Ms. Baker said this meeting is not being televised but it is being recorded. She wanted to say a special thank you to our Task Force Members: Councilman Rickey King, Councilwoman Lena Hill-Lawrence, JoAnne Austin, Ray Donnelly, Peggy Davenport, Glover Shannon and Darrell Harriston. They started meeting in February and met almost every single week to get this agenda item on the table and everything sorted out and planned. We had a very dedicated group of volunteers that helped to complete this task. She also wanted to thank Ginger O'Neal from COA's Small Business Center. She gave us ideas on ways to go and things that we needed to look at and were very helpful. She also wanted to thank all the City personnel who participated in the original survey, all the personnel who came to the focus groups which were very interesting and as it

turned out very helpful. Some citizens and business people also participated in the focus groups. We couldn't have identified any of these things without all of these people. We really had a good group. She would also like to thank Mr. Olson for making himself available whenever we needed clarification on an issue because we surely didn't know everything that goes on in this City. We still don't but we learned a lot ourselves in this process. We don't have all the answers but we have been successful in identifying many of the issues and challenges that as a city we face and as a customer service oriented city. She would like to finally thank Phil Wynn of Trellis Groups for making sense of it all and putting it all together in a power point format. Hopefully we will move forward from here.

Mr. Phil Wynn said he wanted to say from the outset that the information that we are presenting tonight and the recommendations that we are providing tonight really came from the citizens, commercial customers and the employees more so than Trellis. We were the facilitator to help move the process along. He would like to bring into focus as he understood it the purpose of the Task Force was to find out how satisfied the citizens are with Customer Service. When we are talking about Customer Service tonight he is going to refer to the individual customer. Do we have a customer service vision and standards? Do we have a vision in the City of what customer service should be so that every employee in the City knows that this is the standard by which the City wants to operate? Do we customer service standards that the employees are attempting to meet and they have a performance review of those standards. Do we have a feedback mechanism so that anybody in the City who has an issue has a means by which to come and say these are the issues that I see so that the City can make a decision about how to improve that? Do we have the right employees? Not every person that deals with an external customer has the personality or the skills to be dealing with external customers. Do we have the right people in place and do we have the best technology in place to enable us to provide exceptional customer service. Lastly, are, our customer service employees well trained to provide exceptional customer service? As you know we evaluated three departments. You may notice that he titled the City's Customer Service Department as City Utilities Customer Service Department. For this presentation he is using that title. The reason why is one of the recommendations that came out of the citizens and the commercial customers and employees was that we rename Customer Service Department to City Utilities Customer Service Department because there is confusion with the citizens anticipating that the utility customer service department can handle any issue, any question, any problem that comes up in the City and therefore there are phone calls being made and expectations being made of those employees that they are not possibly well trained to solve at that point. He has taken the liberty of using that title throughout the presentation. These departments were chosen because they are working with external customers. We did not discuss internal customers although at some point in time that may be an issue that the City would want to

consider. There are three different evaluation tools that were used. As Councilwoman Baker indicated we had six focus groups held in late July and early August. We recorded all of the responses in those focus groups, both on paper and in recording. We had four citizen focus groups, one commercial focus group and one employee focus group. The individuals who attended these groups were obtained by sending random sample of citizens and we attempted to get a cross section in all the wards. All the employees of the three departments were involved. In terms of technology assessment what we were looking for is does the City have the hardware and software available to either inhibit good customer service or to help provide customer service. The third point collection of city-wide and departmental documents. We were looking for any written material in the City that would indicate that there are written standards, training, etc. That was the purpose of the collection of city-wide documents. You will notice that there was a list of focus groups questions. The Customer Service Task Force, himself and Mr. Olson took a look at a number of different questions and we put them down in the categories as follows:

**Policies and Procedures:** Are the employees well versed in policies and procedures. Can they communicate these to the citizens and are the citizens having access to the policies and procedures in the three departments.

**Providing Service to Citizens and Commercial Customers:** Are the citizens and commercial customers happy with the services they are receiving? Are the employees hired, trained and expected to provide exceptional customer service?

**Training:** Are the employees trained in the departmental policies? Are they trained in customer service skills, listening skills, telephone skills and problem solving skills?

**Technology:** Do they have computer and software needed to provide exceptional customer service?

**Reward and Recognition:** Is there a reward and recognition system in place that rewards exceptional customer service behavior.

**Utilities – Payment of Bills:** Are customers happy with the options they have of paying their utility bills.

**Planning – Application Process:** Are customers happy with the issues in Planning when they make application for permits and licenses?

**Physical Environment:** Are there any changes that need to be made in the physical environment?

Those were the questions that were brought to the citizens, commercial customers and employees. The conclusions that we came to are as follows:

It appears there is a lack of a city wide vision for customer service.

It appears that there are no customer service standards in the City by which the employees can be evaluated.

It appears to be no feedback mechanism for customers to voice their concerns.

The employees appear to not be well trained in policies and procedures or proper customer service skills.

There is no reward or recognition system in place.

He might remind Council that this is the perception of the citizens and the commercial customers as well as the employees. As we all know perception is reality.

Some additional conclusions were:

There are some technology issues that keep the City from being able to meet customer needs. In a minute he will talk about recommendations on how to resolve these issues.

The next point is that there is a major liability issue in the Inspections Department in that all files in the Inspections Department are paper. If there is a fire in the Inspections Department, all documentation could go up in smoke. There is no trail if that were to happen. It would all be gone.

The next point is that employees are unable to communicate policies and procedures to customers.

There needs to be some updating in some bill paying methods particularly the telephone and the web site for paying utility bills.

In the application process the customers perceive that they never know all the things that they need to apply for an application when they come in and apply for an application. They bring everything they anticipate they need. They may be told that they need something else and then they have to go back and bring in something else and maybe even a third time. It is not like laying out all the things that you will need. Bring all of these back and we can fill out the application. It always requires multi visits to the City.

The recommendations are as follows:

Again he emphasizes that these are from the citizens and the employees.

He has grouped them in what he calls Phase I - 11 recommendations where there will be either low or no investment for the City to implement these recommendations

There are 8 recommendations that will require some investment from the City but they will give you a high return on your investment.

Then Phase 2 there are 14 additional recommendations that have not at this point been priced out but they will be priced out as part of Phase I if in fact you approve us doing anything.

He will go through the low or no investment recommendations.

He has already mentioned one and that is to rename the department to City Utilities Customer Service Department.

You need to evaluate the signage downstairs. The citizens feel that there is limited signage and that the sign doesn't always say where they are supposed to go and who they are supposed to see. When they get to that desk sometimes the individual that handles that particular aspect of the process is not at that desk but at another desk. The signage is confusing and it is limited. It would not take a lot of effort to address that issue.

The issue of long line assistance. Around the 1<sup>st</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> the customers feel that there are long lines when they come in and pay their utility bills. There is not enough assistance from anybody back in the department to come up and help. The way that they perceive it is they see people working in the department and they see the long line but nobody is coming up to help and they are wondering why can't these people come up and help us in this line to get the line down. That is their perception. What we are looking at is using some additional personnel resources so when the line is long somebody is assigned to come up and help deal with that.

Institute a numbering system. One of the recommendations was to institute a numbering system and one of the reasons this came out is the citizens feel that when they come in downstairs in the utility department and they sit down they are never sure if they are the next one up. The people who are waiting on them are not sure who is next either because they are busy doing their work and they are not noticing the order in which people are coming in. When the folks are sitting there confused by are they up next or are you up next. We are

suggesting that we have some type of system whether it is a numbering system or some other system that lets the person know that they are the next person in line.

Planning/Inspections follow-up phone conversations with email confirmation. There was a feeling that phone conversations should be followed up with email confirmation because a lot of times verbal commitments are made and there is no written documentation so that later on when there is a discussion about this it is basically you said, I said because there is nothing in writing. They are recommending a follow-up to phone conversations with email confirmation.

Cover Inspections office at all times. He is reminded of the individual that drove down from Virginia to specifically deal with the Inspections Department. Got there and there was nobody there to talk to them because the Inspectors were all out in the field. The office personnel were not available for whatever reason. They go over to the Planning Department but then when they get to the Planning Department they are not necessarily ready to answer questions regarding the Inspections Department. They are not getting the type of service that they feel that they should be getting. They are simply saying make sure there is someone in the office at all times so when a person walks in off the street they are able to take care of them.

Let customers know up front all requirements for permits/licenses. This will allow them to have to come in only one time. They will bring in everything that they need, fill out the application and then they get through the process without having to come back.

Document, with employee title, all verbal agreements for application approvals. There is a feeling that conversations were held and verbal agreements were made but there is no documentation to back that up. The customer then cannot go back to somebody in the office and say, "on this particular day we had this conversation and this is the documentation, this is what we agreed that I would do and this is what we agreed that you would do." They are asking for some type of documentation with at least a title on there so that they will know who to come back too.

30-days approval process. They are asking for a 30-days approval process because their perception is that they never know when the application is going to be approved. Whether that is right or wrong that is their perception.

Council minimizes changes to policies and procedures. This came up as it seems to be a number of changes made in policies and procedures particularly in the last few years dealing with the City Utility Department downstairs. A recommendation is to ask the Council to minimize some of the changes that they

make to the policies and procedures because what seems to be happening is people are not sure which policy and procedure they are operating under either the employees or the citizens that are coming in. If those changes could be minimized it would certainly help both the employees and the customers.

Resolve all issues with Logics, LLC Software. The City is waiting for their software vendor and the Finance Department to make some changes adjustments in their software. At the time that we had the focus groups we were under the impression that there were certain things that the City could not do until changes were made in the Logics system. We have since learned that those things can be done and we will talk about that in a few minutes.

Councilman Stimatz said with the change of the name of the Utility Customer Service Department he understands that if all you do when you go there is deal with utility issues, but unfortunately when you go down there you apply for a lot of other things. You get a business license, you may have rental property and you get an application for that, you are paying for that, so they handle more than utility transactions. If you say Utility are you also saying that is all they are going to do and you are going to shift this other stuff to the departments like Planning and Inspections or are you still going to do those functions? Now to the customer walking in they will say that is just utilities and they will go up to planning. They get up to planning and Planning says no you have to go downstairs to pay. When you change the name to utilities are you saying that is all that they are going to do and are you shifting the other burdens up and changing who is going to collect the monies? That is one question. Whichever way you go it doesn't really matter as long as the customer understands and staff understands. You talk about having to change reading the electric meters and the water meters electronically so we can let people pay on any day. The truth is we have talked about this two months ago. If a person chooses level pay they can pay any day. If you go on Level Pay we don't have to read your meter because we are estimating it based on an annual number so if you choose Level Pay his understanding is with a minor tweak to the software we can let anybody pay on any day they want too right now. That is the short term things we can do right now, but people have to opt for Level Pay. Some people don't want too but the answer is if you want any day pick Level Pay. The other one is to let customers know up front all the items that they will need to apply for permits/licenses. They don't come in looking for a permit they come in to do something. Rent out property, change zoning, rehab a building, build a building, put up a fence, put up a sign or they want to start a business. That is what people come in to do. They don't come in to get a permit. They come in to start a business. His thought would be you need to have a list that says, if you are going to start a business this is everything you need and with that xyz permits you will need the following. You need to make it two things. One is for this function you will need all these permits and then for all these permits you will

need all this stuff. He wrote this before and we have talked about it. You talk about doing it later on and it is really critical and that is documenting the process flow for these things that people come in to do. We need to do it for a lot of reasons not the least of when we do the Information Technology upgrades. If you are in Alaska and want to start a business and if we do it right you will have everything done before you get here. He is really concerned about if he is a customer walking in that doesn't know what permits that he needs but he knows he wants to start a business.

Mr Wynn asked to address those in the opposite order than which you gave them. Documenting the process flow. That was put in the second stage of implementation because from his experience and understanding that is not a simple process and that is going to take a while. He was looking for two things. Number one was what could the Council do now that doesn't cost a lot. Number two are there some things that will cost a little bit but we can go ahead and do them now such as training.

Mr. Stimatz said he is not questioning where you put it. It is clear that you are going to document the Customer Service Reps workflow. It wasn't clear that you were going to document the process workflow from a customer's perspective. That is the only differentiate that he was making there. Your timing is right and you put it in the right place and yes that other one needs to be done, he is just saying that we need to do some things for the customers.

Mr. Wynn said some of the higher investments will have a higher return. They are as follows.

Develop Customer Service Vision and Standards. It is really critical to do this city-wide but obviously taking on the entire City is a huge task. Our thinking is we will start in the Utility Customer Service Department and then move to Planning and then move to Inspections. Develop a vision for what customer service needs and some standards for customers service and put these standards in position descriptions for the employees so that an employee knows that they are supposed to have the phone answered within four rings. They are supposed to know they have to get back with a customer within 24-hours with a solution to their problem. If they don't have a solution they are at least supposed to call them back and say, "I'm sorry I don't have a solution. This is what I have done and this is where I am going." Write some standards and put them into the Customer Service positions descriptions. We went through position descriptions in the departments and there are no customer service standards written into any of the position descriptions. The employees do not even have a standard that says that they are supposed to do this so therefore it is very difficult to do a performance evaluation and hold them accountable for doing it because they don't know that they are supposed too. In addition to writing them in it provides



us with a way of doing performance reviews measuring them against those customer service standards.

Mandatory Training. Policies and Procedures, Customer Service Skills, Telephone Skills and Listening Skills. Policies and Procedures the employees have not been well trained to be able to explain policies and procedures to the customers. So, to him that is where you need to start. You need to know what the policies and procedures are to a point that you can communicate them to anybody that comes in. Then we need to combine that with the customer skills, telephone skills and listening skills. In addition, we feel that it would be very helpful if all directors and supervisors of the three departments and perhaps throughout the entire city were given the opportunity to have some management and leadership training. It appears that like in a number of organizations we got to work in an organization we grow in the organization we assume management and leadership responsibilities but we don't always get the training on how to be the best leader. We are recommending some management and leadership training and how to communicate effectively with employees, how to motivate them and what de-motivates them, how to delegate, how to form teams to improve processes, coaching and mentoring and problem solving and planning skills as part of our training program. Then as you pointed out, review the workflow processes. In reviewing these workflow processes his thinking is that we need to determine if there is a more effective way of doing the work and that includes the customer flow. These are the licenses and permits you need and these are the things you need in order to move forward.

The next thing is where do we go from here. With the support of the Customer Service Task Force we agreed that within 30-days we would recommend implementation of Phase I and II where there are low or no investment. A lot of those things are managerial changes that can be made within 90-days after that implement the rest of Phase I.

Mayor McLean asked what we are going to rename our Customer Service Department.

Mr. Wynn said his understanding that right now it is called the Customer Service Department. In the minds of the citizens that means customer service for the entire city. It doesn't matter what you need to call about they should be able to call customer service and find out whether it is turning on or off of the electricity, planning or inspection questions or finance or any other issue he should be able to call and say how do I handle this. The point is to take that name and perhaps have a separate customer service department for everything else in the City, but the city utility customer service department deals with those issues that are handled only in that department.

Mayor McLean said something that he thinks is really important and you are saying that there should be separation of duties and responsibilities and at the same time we need a separation of venue. The downstairs should be just utilities and everything else be some place else.

Mr. Wynn said that is the thinking of the Customer Service Task Force.

Councilman Brooks said the way that he understands it and he didn't vote to have this study. The reason why was because they did one in February 2002 and as we go along he will get into that. He wants to address this here specifically because that is what we are talking about. He thinks that you have a good point. Most people that come downstairs come to pay their electric bill which is under the utilities. The way he understands you are saying that because Customer Service engulfs the whole thing they should have someone that is knowledgeable about the other departments that does customer service also. They should be able to answer those questions. They don't necessary have to be in that department but someone that is knowledgeable about the procedures in planning and the other departments. It will be their job to be informed about the procedures in the other departments besides utilities if you want to change the name.

Mr. Wynn said his thinking is if you want to change it you would also need a phone that is directed to that person because one of the issues right now is if a call comes in to the department downstairs for some other issue other than utility then that has to be handled by some employee down there right now that is not trained to handle it. It is not a separate department as it is part of their duties but you would want a separate phone line that would go directly to that person so that folks looking in the telephone director or web site could see customer service for the city at this phone number.

Mr. Brooks said he agrees with you that he doesn't think we need another whole department. He thinks that you need someone that is informative that can tell you about the procedures to go to in the other departments. He doesn't think you need to have a whole other department. We are talking monies that we don't have there. He thinks if you have someone informed down there he believes it is ok to do utility customer service so they will know this deals specifically with that. We don't need to formulate a whole other department to have someone informed in that area because we are still talking about how we are going to deal with costs. We can't pull money that we don't have out of the hat. He thinks the concept is great but he thinks we don't need to make a whole new department for that. You answered the way that it can be done. They can be down there in the customer service department to answer those questions specifically.

Mr. Wynn said he has no issue with that at all. That is a very good step and he believes we need to add one step to that and that would be that the citizens need to be informed that the phone number is for that information.

Mr. Brooks said that person should also be able to answer any questions about the utility department because that includes customer services. We have lines specifically for that so that person should be informed not only by the other departments that do service but also with utilities. What he is trying to say is to have a whole other department you are talking about expenditures that we don't have. We are looking at the more economical way that will benefit the city and the citizens.

Mr. Wynn said he is not suggesting that we have to start with a whole new department right now. He wants to be clear that from our perspective what we want is how can we improve customer service with minimum costs and yet get the functions done. If that is the best way to do it then that is certainly within what we should be doing for the city.

Mr. Stimatz said to him it goes back even further. It is very annoying. We should have a city number that you can call from seven until six and somebody is going to answer the phone. Then they will direct you and whether they direct you to the utility department or the planning department or inspections or whomever, it don't matter. That is a better function he thinks. That is a more critical function. We don't have a central number for the City.

Mr. McLean said we have an almost \$68 million budget, we serve about 22,000 people and he thinks as we break it down we have to have a customer service. If you call anybody that you are doing business with whether it is Visa, an airline, etc you are going to get customer service because we don't want to wait until next week to get it but we want it right then and there. He is thinking that downstairs we just moved Personnel from downstairs and those offices are still vacant. He thinks it would be a good idea if we could just move customer service. We are not talking about adding additional people but maybe the customer service office to that area. That would make the utility personnel not having to deal with people who want planning applications and inspection applications. You would be dealing with people that know what you need to get done. He thinks if you work for the utility department you have enough issues to deal with already. We are talking about separation of venue as opposed to establishing a new department whereby we can have a person dedicated to customer service. He agrees with Councilman Stimatz we have some staff people that you can call and get answers real quick but here again he thinks it has to be something that is on going and supported by a telephone number. He thinks it is something that we really have to take a strong look at.

Mr. Olson said so you are looking at a general information number. A lot of organizations have just a general information number.

Mr. McLean said that we realize that what we are doing as a Council and he thinks all of us when we were elected or re-elected we realized that we had a customer service issue. We heard that from a lot of different people within the City but at the same time we understand a lot of these things that are here now that the staff is going to have to take control of these things and get it done. They have to get it done within the resources that we have available. He thinks it is a good start. He doesn't see where it is going to cost a whole lot. We really need the numbering system because he has been caught in the line down there and the people working in there don't know who is next. There are people that come in and sit down and then others come in and stand. He thinks we should do that right away.

Mr. Brooks said the reason why the citizens are complaining about that is because most of them come to pay their bill and is coming during their lunch time or the time that they have free. If they have five minutes to spend in the line and it takes six minutes then they have an issue. He hasn't ever seen or heard anyone say who is next. Although, the line gets lengthy some times he doesn't see it as too big an issue. When we were first talking about doing this he read the February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2002 study. He thinks that one is more in tune to specifically talking about utilities. He loved the conclusion that this came into. It hasn't been addressed. We can do all those changes but if we don't take care of the internal problems it still won't work. He didn't see any evaluations. He doesn't know who said what during this phase. The conclusion in the 2002 study said, "My conclusion after having reviewed these interviews is that the following training may alleviate some of the issues that this department currently faces." They gave three of them. One of them was internal customer service training is the last step in the process. Until the internal issues are resolved there is little progress that can be made. This customer service training needs to focus not only on policy and procedures but the empowerment of the staff to handle routine customer concerns as well as creative ways to provide customer satisfaction within the framework of policy and procedure. He agrees the problem that they have down there in customer service is most of them are doing several jobs. You can do several jobs decent but you can do one job well. They addressed this too. He had issues with this because we spent money that we all ready knew what the problems that existed as far as the utility customer service. They addressed it in that same study from 2002. It says that employees in this department are required to perform non routine non repetitive tasks while handling an enormous volume of work. These factors create a level of stress that is aggravated by a management style that does not recognize the needs of the employees. That is the root of the problem. We can play with the symptoms and add all this but the last two things in the conclusions in the 2002

study is what is dealing with the utilities downstairs. He thinks until we get to the root of this as far as the utilities are concerned we are going to have the same problems. We can add another customer service rep but if the internal issues aren't taken care of we still will have issues. We can add phones or separate departments if we want too but until we address the internal issues we are jumping across what the root of the problem is. He would love to see the assessments.

Councilman King said no one saw the assessments.

Mr. Brooks said he would love to have seen them based on what he read in the first study. They did them and they must have talked to the employees because there were internal issues that sparked some of this.

Ms. Baker said that we decided to not address the 2002 study at all simply because we were starting over and that was in the past and even though there were still some issues left we decided as a group to not to dwell on that.

Mr. Brooks said if these things haven't been corrected it is not in the past but it is in the present. It is good to jump over it and jump into the future when you got problems in the past so what happened is we have got issues in the past that haven't been resolved and we are jumping into other things. We are adding on to a pile. If the foundation is not good you can build a 34 story building and still you aren't going to get anything. What he is saying if we will deal with the internal issues then we can start working on the first, second and third floors. We are acting like the foundation is solid and it isn't.

Mayor McLean said under the low cost-no cost under the Planning Department you are talking about phone conversations. He has noticed that if you call a company on the phone and you talk about an issue and if you agree on the issue you are going to get an email immediately. That is the way that business is done now. So, if you are talking with Inspections Department and saw we agree on that and we agree on that you should get an email real soon. He is talking about following up on phone conversations. This is something that he thinks should be done pretty quickly with the proper training. As he looks at what is here he knows that we have things that we need to improve and he thinks that one deterrent that we have that you don't have at most places is we don't have enough space. Did you see that as a problem?

Mr. Wynn replied that yes he did. We addressed it as a higher priority as some of the other issues. For example, Mr. Brooks was talking about it just a few minutes ago. We addressed it here in two or three ways. Number one we talked about training. Number two we talked about management and leadership training for the directors and supervisors which he believes is the kind of issue

he was bringing up. Number three we talked about doing a process improvement of looking at the way you do the work and the work flow and improving that work flow. To him we are recommending what you are saying but maybe not in exactly the same order that you said it. The reason that we recommended things in the order that we did is because we felt that we could get more bang for the buck getting some small wins and moving into the larger wins. For example, the reason for the developing and implementing the process and improvements downstairs of the entire work process is going to take a while. He thinks we addressed the issues but not necessarily in the same order.

Mr. Brooks said he does know that when you build a house you don't start on the first floor but you start with the foundation. What happens is until you take care of the internal issues you can't move forward. Every body is not a customer service person. Some people don't know how to address people when they are frustrated and they have had a long day. One of the issues that we have here is that until we get the internal issues taken care of we won't be making many accomplishments. One of the problems that we have in this city is the utilities. He is here all the time and he sees for himself and he understands that there are internal issues that need to be taken care of. How many people within the last year have left Customer Service? It has been quite a few. That tells him that we have internal issues down there if people are leaving in these economic times. We can build the first floor all you want to but the problem lies with internal issues because as hard as times are now we still have people leaving. He is talking about people working here. We have to deal with this issue. He would be more than happy to serve on something to see how we can deal with it. He understands the internal issue.

Ms. Baker said further down there are some training issues that need to be addressed. That is your foundation. Part of your foundation there are some other recommendations that may or may not be stated in here but it hasn't been ignored she just did not focus on that prior evaluation. It has not been ignored as we know where the problems were and we certainly addressed them.

Mr. Brooks said he hopes you understand his concerns. Within six months we had a lot of people leave that one area and that shows we have internal issues down there. They tried to improve it by switching management but that didn't rectify the problem as we still have internal issues. He doesn't think taking a car and building a car but you don't have the wheels and axles on the car it is not going anywhere. That is what he is trying to get you to do and that is to get to the root of the problem and build a solid foundation and go from there.

Mr. King said that he thinks Mr. Brooks had a point there when you said that everybody is not designed for customer service. Some people just can't deal with other people. He thinks in the process of getting someone that can work

with the public we need to look at them and this is where the training will come in. We will see if they are even qualified to be a part of customer service. It is hard. When you are dealing with utilities and people come down there during the course of a month and someone is hammering you about their bill, and if you are not a people person it is hard. You need a people person to work down there.

Councilwoman Meggs said when you were talking about getting back to the customers; we need to say to get back with the customer within 24-hours. Don't hold it over for five or six days but when they call and you say I'll get back with you. That is kind of vague. Say something specific.

Mr. Wynn said he is not here to tell you what those standards should be but he believes and that is why it is stated this way that one of the first things that you need to do is to develop those standards so that the employees know what they are. Getting back to you within 24-hours means he will get back in some way shape or form but you can count on the fact that within 24-hours you will hear from me. I may not have an answer to your question but you will hear from him and he will let you know where he is in the process. Developing customer service standards is one of the first things that we have to do.

Mayor McLean asked if some of the things in Phase II be moved to Phase I. Such as when we talk about policies and procedures for city utility customer service department. Can we move all policies and procedures to Phase I?

Mr. Wynn said yes we can. These recommendations in the different phases were his attempt to oil down a 32-page document into something that he could present to you and you could take hold of it and make something happen. At this point we can move things around and adjust them to what you feel is the right way to handle them.

Mr. McLean said to him the policies and procedures job descriptions expectations are the foundation of good customer service. You need to look at technology and how we are going to use it to enhance. You don't need technology to have a good customer service system because at one time we didn't have it and we had a good customer service. Now we have it because we have to do things quickly.

Mayor Pro Tem Hummer said she would like to go back to Planning/Inspections and she would like to say it is a good thing to follow up phone conversations with emails especially in the Inspections Department. For many years they have had to share an administrative assistant with Planning so we, the Council, has to take the responsibility to provide the personnel in some of these scenarios because we really haven't done that in that respect. That is one thing that we

have to do when we get in the budget. It is impossible for people to be out in the field and then come in and make phone calls and emails if they don't have a full time staff person.

Mayor McLean said that we need to understand the responsibility of the staff. The review has been done and he thinks if we really look at the information that we have received it can serve as a foundation for getting us to the next level. He thinks the Customer Service Task Force has done a very good job. We appreciate what you have done in terms of working with them.

Ms. Hill-Lawrence said she would like to say that new technology is excellent and we should utilize new technology but nothing works as good as good old common sense, one on one and learning how to deal with people. Customer Service is a difficult job but she thinks even with the right training and the right people it can be done. Some people are not trainable. If we research and try and hire in our hiring practices get those persons who we see as having the skills to do that and further develop their skills to make them more effective in dealing with every day problems. She thinks that would be one of the areas that would certainly enhance our operation.

Mr. Wynn said you will find in the report another comment or another word and that is orientation of the employees to the work situations. Even if an individual comes in here with a great resume in customer service they have never worked for the city before and they do not understand the City. They do not understand the policies and procedures so we feel and the employees have indicated that the orientation they get is not very good. Basically it is here is your job and there is your desk and go to work. We feel that a strong orientation will go a long way. When an individual is hired let them meet all of the other people that they are going to be inner acting with in or outside their department. Take them around and introduce them to people. Then provide the training within that department. We totally agree with you and would like to work with you when you are ready to hire some people to put in those positions.

Ms. Baker said she has a couple of things. One of the things that she thinks we can do that would impact a lot of areas the most is in Phase II Implementation. It is installing the new phone system. Our system is antiquated at best. It doesn't allow for a lot of the technology that is out there. Our people could use the phone system instead of going through a person to say request an extension or to do a lot of things or just too directly dial into somebody's office. If they didn't have to go through the operator to get to Planning or didn't have to go through the operator to get to some other department then we wouldn't tie up a lot of customer service time. She thinks even though it is an expensive item, she thinks it is going to be one of the most time saving and efficiency products that we can put out there. The other thing that she wanted to say is and she doesn't



know how many of you on Council noticed in Winston-Salem last week their excellence in Customer Service. They exhibited it very well at that conference. They have two employees from every department meet every week and they have turned that City from a non customer friendly city to a very efficient customer service empire. The employees love going to work. They love speaking well of the City. It was evident everywhere we were. They were ambassadors at the League of Municipalities Conference that we were there attending. They were all in their purple shirts and they welcomed you everywhere you went. They always had a smile on their face and they were speaking well of the City. They were proud of their City. We need more of that. They did it all day long. They wanted to come and talk to us about it. It was amazing. They didn't have a good reputation for many years and they decided to turn it around and the employees took it upon themselves to do it. They loved to share that with their departments.

Mr. Wynn said one of the skills of his company is to build teams. In our opinion one of the best ways to implement some of the implementations and recommendations here particular in the first part where there is low or no cost is to let them employees become part of the team. Then present to them this is the issues and how would you go about resolving the issues. Then when they come up with the idea about how to resolve the issue they have ownership of that idea. They will implement that idea and they will walk with it more so if somebody who is the manager says, "Thou shall do this" because who has the better insight as to what is going on down there. It is the people that are on the front line. He is excited to hear when a city takes it employees and builds a team. Those are some of the ways you can implement here. We can help facilitate that if you want us too.

Mayor Pro Tem Hummer said she really likes what you just said because we do have a very capable workforce and she thinks that maybe part of the problem is they aren't included. We all learned something from these things. Any problems that we have we always learn something from them. She would strongly urge staff, meaning the City Manager, to accept and implement what is within our reach at the moment that doesn't cost us any money. We have department heads trained in orientation and training and if we have to bring in some advice in from the Institute of Government to help give some new ideas then so be it. She thinks the stepping stones are to do things like that before we say install a new phone system which will be very complicated as well as very expensive and we don't have the money right now. We can't put too much into affect at one time. She thinks we have to start with the things that you recommended in the first Phase. She thinks the employees will get excited about it.

Mayor McLean asked if the staff had seen these recommendations.

Mr. Olson replied that just the department heads of the affected departments. We went over them last Friday. We discussed the findings and ways on how to implement the findings. We also had some minor disagreements with some of the recommendations that are in here because of some what we believe are issues with State Statutes. Staff is willing to work with whomever to put these policies and procedures together. He can tell you right now from the Department Directors perspective we are not happy either. We know that there are some deficiencies that we need to address and we are willing to address those. We are willing to work with whomever to put those new policies and procedures into effect.

Mr. Brooks said during the interview process there should be certain questions that you can ask or that you will know if that person is customer orientated. He thinks that is part that he is stuck on. When the people are happy some of the problems will go away and when you take care of the internal issues that will happen.

Mr. Wynn said there are some instruments that are available that we can recommend in the hiring process that will help you determine whether or not the person is customer service orientated. If they aren't, then yes we can hire them but that is exactly the issues and problems that we are going to run into. If we have the wrong people we are still going to have some customer service issues. There are some things that we can do.

Mayor Pro Tem Hummer said she thinks the key thing is for one person to answer most of the customer service questions. When everybody has to deal with all the problems that they really don't have the knowledge or the paper work to answer the questions it is very frustrating and it affects their job. It is not their fought. She thinks they are getting some undue criticism in that area. She thinks that can be eliminated even if another position has to be created down the road.

Ms. Wynn said he is glad that you brought that up as there was something that he wanted to bring up and he skipped over it. There were a lot of compliments for the people that work in the City. It wasn't all problems. There were a lot of people that made comments like, we know the struggles they are under going, we know the issues they are struggling with and we can see the problems. He doesn't want us to say that everybody downstairs is not doing their jobs. They have issues and they have problems but there were a lot of people that complimented your staff. A lot said they were doing the best that they can with the equipment, situations, space, etc.

Mayor Pro Tem Hummer said she would like to ask once you start all this could you bring an accumulation of all your thoughts back to Council.

Mr. Olson said every since the city employees focus groups met he met with the Department Directors and we discussed a number of issues that we thought we could do a better job on. He will take the blame for the City and the City staff on this issue. If he had done a better job and been a better manager some of these items we should have been able to address a number of years ago. It is unfortunate that he has not been able to do it. He thinks that we do have direction that we can go now. He thinks we are all willing to go forward with this. We are excited and we know there is going to be challenges. We believe a lot of the issues that need to be addressed can be done through technology. Let him give you an example of one business license. Probably the most confusing thing the City has here is the business license. Depending on what type of license you need you may need two or you may need ten department approvals. Until an individual sits down and talks with the business owner they do not know if it will have to go to the fire department, chief of police, planning, building inspections and so on. All those may be involved just to open a business. That can be done through some technology changes where people submit the forms electronically. It goes to all the departments and the department looks at it and then we know exactly when that department got it. They have 24-hours or 72-hours to act on it, it is done. If someone doesn't act on it we know exactly where the bottle neck is. That is part of our problem and has always been. We are working with a company and they are looking at a number of our processes.

Mayor Pro Tem Hummer said she would like to ask our employees to please stay with us and work with us. She asks those that are consider leaving to reconsider as we are going to try to make things better. It will take some time but she thinks it will work out.

Mayor McLean asked if it was the consensus of Council to accept and strongly urge staff to accept and implement these recommendations which we feel will make it better for our customer service area. We hope the staff will look at this as a way of us working with them to insure we are working together.

Mr. King said that several months ago the seasonal election rates failed. What he has been hearing in the community from a lot of people is they have a problem with extensions and he thinks that we can help Customer Service right now if we go ahead and make an extension for every month. He thinks they spend more time on the telephone with extensions than anything else. Until we get the proper technology where everybody can pick their date he is asking Council to join with him to say instead of having five extensions that we have twelve. The winter months are coming and he thinks it will help the elderly and other people. He thinks it would help staff also because he knows after you get to five extensions it goes crazy. He is hoping that will help.

Mayor McLean asked Mr. Wynn as he looks at procedures and the way of doing things this is one thing that we know will help, should we leave this to make it a part of the overall changes that we wish to make or should we do it independently of every thing else that has been presented.

Mr. Wynn said his response is you look at things in context with the old picture and the whole process. If you make some decisions without doing that you might affect something that you don't realize that you are affecting. To him, it is something that we need to look at within the whole concept.

Mr. Olson said he thinks you need to look at it more globally than what you are doing right now. These are policy related items. Also, we have learned over the years if you give twelve extensions for five days each they are going to want twelve extensions for ten days. You are going to have to give staff some guidance and one thing he would encourage is go ahead and empower our employees to make these decisions so he doesn't get the phone calls, the Mayor or you all don't get the phone calls. Once you establish a policy you stick with that policy. We have had eight different polices in the seven years he has been here on extensions. A lot of you have voted on them numerous times.

Mr. Brooks said that the City Manager has a good point. If we allow twelve extensions we need to make sure that we only extend them for five days and it goes back to the study. It would be great if we had someone to give that information to them. If the information is given to the customer that you only get twelve extensions with five days extensions, they can come fussing and fighting but that is a policy. He thinks if we have someone that relays that information to them or we can put it on the TV and let them know that this is what it is.

Ms. Blanchard said that the current policy is that they get five extensions that they don't have to pay anything down. Extension six through twelve you can also get an extension but 50% down is required. That is the current policy.

Mayor McLean said this is what he sees. The whole situation looks bad because even when you get an extension that is approved you still get a late fee charge. He knows he can't pay his bill and his bill is due on the first. He knows he can't pay it before the eighth. A five day extension is not going to do him any good plus it has to be late before he can get the extension. He can't ask for the extension until he doesn't pay it so therefore he is going to be charged a service charge. That whole situation is not right.

Mr. Brooks said that we can't put all the responsibility on the City. Somewhere down the line they have got to be responsible for keeping their own lights on. If we give them the courtesy of giving the extension for five days and if they know

they don't get paid until the eighth, they need to borrow money from someone so they can get it in on time. There is just so much that we as the City can do. What we are trying to do is take the responsibility that they are supposed to have and put it on our shoulders. We know it is bad economic times. We are helping by giving them five extensions with no money down.

Mayor McLean said what he is trying to say is we need to empower the staff to make decisions because if he gets paid on the eighth and his bill is due on the first the five day extension is not going to do him any good. There are a lot of people that get paid but not on the date their bill is due.

Mr. Brooks said he agrees but the electric bills goes out on the same date every month.

Mr. Olson said what we see is we have a lot of people especially those that are slow pay or individuals that get some type of social service type of check. Their bills are usually due on the 25<sup>th</sup> and their check doesn't come in until the second, third or fourth of the month. There is where you get the eight days you are referring to. The policy is five days. That gives you until the 30<sup>th</sup> but they know they don't get their check until first, second and heaven forbid it the first is on a Saturday. There are some issues but he thinks this needs to be looked at more comprehensively by the Council. Those members that have been here a number of years know we have this debate usually in February after the high electric bills associated with the winter.

Ms. Blanchard stated that our current policy allows us to move those customers to a route that would allow them to have the due date when they need it. If they get paid on the first of the month they can be moved to that particular cycle.

Mayor McLean said that everybody wants to pay their light bill. He knows he does. Our late rate is about 25% per month. That means that 25% of our customers pay late each month. That is huge because we pick up an additional \$300,000 per year because our citizens can't pay their bills on time. That is in addition to what they can't afford to pay. He thinks this whole situation has to be looked at. He wishes we could get to that point in time whereby we didn't budget that type of revenue to offset expenditures.

Mr. Olson said we would have to raise everyone's bill by 1% to cover that revenue. We have looked at it time and time again.

Mayor McLean said it is tough. Every time he sees someone crying he sends them to Dianne or Vivian. He wants us to work together to address our electric rates at some point in time because that is a real issue within this city.

He would like to come up with an ad hoc committee that will work with staff and bring back a report to this Council at least once a month.

Ms. Baker said if we do a committee she feels it should be made up of employees. Part of the problem is Council keeps changing the rules. We need to keep out of it. In seven years we have changed the extension policy eight times.

Mr. Brooks said he doesn't think Council has gone through and done a complete change. Most of the time the Council has been involved with the extensions because there is where we see the most pain. If you are making \$7 or \$8 an hour and you get a \$500-\$600 electric bill that is pain. It is hard to see tears roll down people's eyes. The twelve extensions are already in place.

Mr. King said but that in place means after the first five extensions you have to pay 50%. It is still not helping the person. In his opinion it doesn't help the people.

Ms. Baker said how about if we make that the first item for the committee of employees. Ask them what would work the best. You deal with the customers everyday and you are the ones that have to face them. You are only talking about two or three people a month that come to you but these employees are dealing with 22,000 people.

Mr. Brooks said it goes back to the initial thing he was saying. If you have internal issues you have got to get that foundation straight. You can say we have internal issues in that area and we don't know what kind of conclusion to come up with and then they will be sent up to Rich. If we deal with the internal issues it will make the foundation strong. He believes that.

Mr. King said they should not have to come to Rich because we have empowered Ms. Blanchard and a couple of people in the electric department to do whatever so they don't have to come to Rich. He thinks it was the supervisor and the assistant supervisor. We have empowered people to do things.

Mayor McLean said that this is a big deal what we have heard tonight. Are you telling me that the Council's work is done? Are we finished? We know that staff is going to take additional recommendations from Mr. Wynn to come up with this group of employees that is going to help us to come up with recommendations that they can work with based on their knowledge. That is going to be done. Let us know who they are. We are going to ask that you bring us back monthly reports on the implementation of these recommendations.

Ms. Baker said she thinks what we need first is a motion to expand his services to this City. Phase I has been classified as those changes which could be made

with little or no investment on the part of the City. This phase involves the customer service, planning and inspections department. The second phase of Phase I has also been included and this requires some investment on the part of the City at a cost estimated at \$25,000. That includes some training and some beginnings to fix the foundation. The first thing we have already started some of the things that don't cost any thing. The second phase of the first part is going to involve some changes. Not the \$50,000 phone system but it is going to involve some training and purchasing of some things that will make things better like some incentive programs. You have got to bring some people in that are experts in training for what we need to fix our problems.

***A motion was made by Councilwoman J. M. Baker, seconded by Councilman R. E. King that we implement Phase I and the second part of Phase I as well so that we can continue and further to bring the monthly reports back to this body to a cost of \$25,000.***

Mayor Pro Tem Hummer said that she believes he has told us that he can take some things from second part of Phase I and even Phase II at no costs to us. She just cannot ask for any more money right now. She thinks that we need to get this on track before we ask for more money. What we are asking him to do tonight is that going to cost more money. Bringing us monthly reports and things like that.

Mayor McLean said this whole thing is the staff's responsibility. Every thing like the training the staff has to decide how it is going to get done.

Mr. Olson replied that every department has a training budget. He believes some of the items are included in the \$25,000 in all likelihood can come out of the existing budget expenditures. He has to look at everyone's budget to just see where we are. It is just reshuffling some things. He needs to look at that a little bit closer to see what we can do. There are some expenses that we are working on right now. We will be able to work that out.

Mayor Pro Tem Hummer asked if Ms. Baker would reword your motion to use existing funds already in the budgets.

Mr. Olson said to reprioritize existing expenditures in the budget. He thinks that we can do that.

***The motion has been amended to indicate any funds to be used will come from the existing budgets. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Baker, King, Brooks, Hill-Lawrence, Hummer and Meggs. Motion carried.***

Ms. Hill-Lawrence said she knows we just told them to bring a report back but she doesn't think that is enough involvement on our part. She thinks that we should be involved in that process because this is like saying you go and do what you want to do. She thinks it needs to be more fine-tuned than just bringing us a report back.

Ms. Meggs said we need a date in there like they are going to have this done by this date, etc.

Mr. King said the things that are not going to cost any money they can go ahead and start putting those in place now. The no cost things should take a month to do those things.

Mayor McLean said what we just did. In Phase II we are talking about training, job descriptions, standard operating procedures and the staff is going to need help. He thinks Phil will be helping with that. Staff can make the decision to hire him or employ him to help get these things done. That is how it is normally done in industries. What we need are updates relative to what we are going to spend, what it is going to cost and where we are relative to the process.

Mr. Wynn said his company is more than willing to work with the City in implementing these issues. In fact in the first contract part of our agreement was that every two weeks we were providing an update to Mr. Olson so he knew exactly what we were doing. We provided him with an implementation deadline and then we said every two weeks we will let him know where we were on meeting that deadline. There is no reason why we can't put together an appropriate deadline for this and then give Mr. Olson or whomever an update every two weeks.

Mayor McLean said he is hoping that we are looking at a quality enhancement plans or the way to evaluate what we have done. We need to go back to those of the focus groups in six months and ask them the same questions. That is going to determine how effective we are.

Ms. Hill-Lawrence said in Phase I in the Customer Service Department it seems to her that those four things can be done in a month. Did we rename the Customer Service Department? That is a recommendation and has not been acted upon as yet.

Mr. Olson said he thinks what we are doing now is you are giving us 30-days to bring all these recommendations back so you can act on them. These are all policy related decisions. Some fall within the preview of the city manager but a lot are policy related decisions and they need to be brought back to Council and you need to take official action on those. The numbering system we will find one



and we will make it work. We can do a lot of these things here with very little expense.

Mr. King said so what he is hearing is those first four items in the Customer Service Department should be taken care of by December 13, 2010.

Mr. Olson replied that is correct.

**3} ADJOURNMENT:**

There being no further business to come before the Council at this time, Mayor McLean entertained a motion for adjournment.

***A motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem L. A. Hummer, seconded by Councilman R. E. King to adjourn the meeting. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Hummer, King, Baker, Brooks, Hill-Lawrence and Meggs. Against: None. Motion carried.***

Mayor McLean adjourned the meeting at 7:28 p.m.

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Dianne S. Pierce-Tamplen, MMC  
City Clerk

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Roger A. McLean  
Mayor