

**City-County Special Joint Session
November 29, 2021**

The City Council of the City of Elizabeth City and the Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners met in special joint session on Monday, November 29, 2021 in the EC-PC Senior Center, located at 215 South Water Street, Elizabeth City, NC.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Bettie Parker
CITY Mayor Pro Tem Johnnie Walton
Councilman Billy Caudle
Councilman Michael Brooks
Councilman Chris Ruffieux
Councilwoman Jeannie Young
Councilman Kem Spence

MEMBERS ABSENT: Councilman Darius Horton
CITY

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Lloyd Griffin, III
COUNTY Vice-Chairman Charles Jordan
Commissioner Jonathan Meads
Commissioner William Sterritt
Commissioner Barry Overman
Commissioner Sean Lavin

MEMBERS ABSENT: Commissioner Cecil Perry
COUNTY

OTHERS PRESENT: Interim City Manager Ralph Clark
County Manager Sparty Hammett
County Finance Director Sherri Small
Parks and Recreation Director Sean Clark
Community Development Director Kellen Long
ECDI Director Debbie Malenfant
County Clerk Lynn Scott
City Clerk April Onley

The special joint City-County Council regular session was called to order by County Chairman Lloyd Griffin and Mayor Bettie Parker at 6:00 p.m. They welcomed everyone to the meeting and requested that Councilman Kem Spence provide the invocation, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

County Manager Hammett requested that discussion on the National Guard Armory be moved from ninth to seventh as the Boys and Girls Club director was present and could only stay for a short period of time.

Motion was made by Councilwoman Jeannie Young, seconded by Councilman Kem Spence to amend the agenda to move the National Guard Armory discussion to number seven on the printed agenda. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Spence, Ruffieux, Brooks, Walton, Young and Caudle. Against: None. Motion carried. *The County subsequently voted and received the same unanimous results.*

1. Statement from Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners Chairman Lloyd Griffin III:

Chairman Griffin welcomed everyone to the Senior Center, where the two bodies had not met together since the ribbon cutting. He noted that this evening's agenda was exciting and he was looking forward to the discussion.

2. Statement from City of Elizabeth City Mayor Bettie J. Parker:

Mayor Parker greeted everyone and said it had been the practice of the city and county to meet at least twice a year, and this would be our second meeting. She said she was pleased that we were all here together for the meeting.

3. Update / Discussion – Middle School Gymnasium Leaseback:

ECDI Director Debbie Malenfant explained that she was presenting on behalf of a team including both the county and city managers, Interim Chief of Police Larry James, Community Development Director Kellen Long, and Parks and Recreation Director Sean Clark. She said this project could be of great impact; it has been in discussion for a little over a year. The Board of Commissioners approved the sale of the former middle school campus to J.D. Lewis Construction Management on November 16, 2020. The sale and conversion of the buildings to market rate apartments is a transformative project that will have tremendous benefit to the city, county, downtown Elizabeth City and the community as a whole. The existing main building and annex will be converted into 84 market rate apartments. The stand-alone gym that's currently being used for PAL will be leased back. A portion of the purchased land will be dedicated to the City of Elizabeth City for Parks and Recreation.

From December 2020 to present, there have been ongoing meetings with city staff, the Boys and Girls Club, PAL, SOULS and J.D. Lewis. On March 21, 2021 the City Council approved local historic landmark status. On June 7, 2021, the Board of County Commissioners unanimously voted to dedicate 12 county-owned parcels of land behind the gym to the City of Elizabeth City for Parks and Rec usage (3.5 acres); contribute back to Boys and Girls Club the full \$150,000 they've paid in rent; assist Boys and Girls Club with temporary relocation; recommend a 20-year lease with ECPC Parks and Rec for the gym with option to purchase at a predetermined price after five years; and contribute \$10,000 to the SOULS program pending 501c3 status.

On June 14, 2021, the City Council approved conditional zoning. On September 13, 2021, the Board approved extension of the closing date to January 7, 2022. In August of 2021, the Boys and Girls Club temporarily relocated to the former Day Break space at Edgewood per request of executive director due to ECMS facility issues. On October 27, 2021, an onsite meeting was held at the gym to review a preliminary wish list proposed by PAL and Parks and Rec, which included the preliminary wish list items, architectural drawings and estimated cost to complete revisions made by Parks and Rec and PAL staff.

County Manager Hammett advised that the City and County had previously discussed demolishing the annex and rebuilding the gym façade and making the gym a Parks and Rec asset; however, it was decided that the cost was prohibitive being at \$1 to \$1.5 million, which would not include any gym renovations or improvements. Per discussions with city staff, the former city manager and the interim city manager, the consensus was that the best use would be for the gym to become a Parks and Rec asset for community-wide use. Lease terms would be developed, based on the final estimate for the cost of renovations provided by the developer.

Proposed lease terms include the cost of gym renovations/improvements plus interest would be amortized through a 20-year lease agreement between the City (Parks and Recreation) and J.D. Lewis. The lease agreement would include an option to purchase from J.D. Lewis at a predetermined price after five years. Annual property taxes specific to the gym paid by J.D. Lewis would be factored into the lease agreement. The preliminary cost estimate based on the Parks and Rec and PAL wish lists totaled \$2 million. Major components of the renovation included demolition of the existing locker rooms, boiler room, and incidental rooms; construction of new locker room and bathroom facilities, kitchen and office; demolition of existing roof and installation of thermoplastic polyolefin roof; installing concentric units for heat and air conditioning; and painting of all interior painted surfaces. He noted that we are still awaiting the revised cost estimate.

The draft lease is being reviewed by both County and City attorneys at this time. Preliminary estimates are placing annual costs between \$155,000 and \$165,000, of which the County would pay 55% and the City would pay 45%. Although this is a large amount of money, the cost to construct a new gym would be significantly more and the Parks and Recreation Department is in need of another gymnasium to better serve the community.

Commissioner Sterritt asked if anyone was here tonight representing SOULS. Manager Hammett said no. Commissioner Sterritt explained the importance of the SOULS program. Mr. Hammett said he'd had ongoing conversations with the director of SOULS and agreed to the \$10,000 in support as soon as they obtained their 501c3. Councilman Spence concurred that they were an important community group and noted that his church helped feed on the first Saturday of the month.

Commissioner Griffin added that both bodies would follow up with their respective boards on this particular item during their next meetings.

4. Update / Discussion – National Guard Armory:

Manager Hammett advised that the National Guard Armory site is 6.6 acres and the main building is approximately 17,000 square feet. The Boys and Girls Club, the City and the County have all expressed interest in acquiring the armory. Former police chief Eddie Buffalo was also interested in securing the armory for the City's Police Department. Former emergency management director Christy Saunders had also requested it for the County through state emergency management for County storage needs and as a backup emergency operations center. In December of 2020, the County received notice that the National Guard Armory was going to be available and ownership could be transferred to the County. Manager Hammett noted that when he was made aware of that fact, he contacted Interim City Manager Buffalo to propose a City-County share use, as well as to provide temporary location for up to two years for the Boys and Girls Club while they built a new facility. The Boys and Girls Club expressed interest in the armory as a permanent location. A determination was made that the County's space needs could be met at alternative County facilities, including the Pritchard Street garage site and the new EMS headquarters.

Following that determination, Manager Hammett discussed the possibility of the Boys and Girls Club making the armory their permanent location, sharing the facility with the City (the Police Department and PAL) and splitting the renovation costs. It was agreed that it could be mutually beneficial. The first step would be a feasibility study in determining the best use for the facility and potential costs. Manager Hammett had spoken with JKF Architecture about conducting a study.

Boys and Girls Club Director Elizabeth Mitchell said the armory was a sought-after building. She said she'd contact Manager Hammett after structural problems in the middle school building back in 2017 to inquire about the possibility of using the armory for the Boys and Girls Club. She felt the location would make for an ideal facility. The interior would be beneficial for an indoor gym as well as "power hour" tutoring.

Interim Police Chief James said he believed this facility would be a benefit for both the City and the County. PAL has long served in the same space as the Boys and Girls Club, so we are accustomed to working alongside them. He noted that it was difficult to find space for the Police Department's storage and he felt that this would be ideal for all parties involved.

Councilwoman Young agreed that the armory would be a great location for the Boys and Girls Club and the Police Department. She said we'd started to look like a "used car lot" when we were storing vehicles at the middle school. She concurred that the location of the armory would be more accessible to children after school.

Mayor Pro Tem Walton asked if the building was in the County's control currently. Manager Hammett said that it was. Mayor Pro Tem Walton asked if they should form a committee for the feasibility study. Manager Hammett agreed that it would be a good idea.

Mayor Parker noted that the armory had been standing vacant for many years. She asked if we'd have to do anything major to see if the structure was sound. Manager Hammett stated that the structure was sound, but it would require some major renovations, such as a new roof and heating and air system.

5. Presentation / Discussion – Human Relations Commission:

Mr. Gene Troy, Program Manager for the NC Human Relations Commission explained that he was interested in establishing a Human Relations Commission in place of our current Community Relations Commission. Most commissions are established by ordinance, bylaws, executive order, resolution or motion. He recommended that there be a staff liaison if we created a commission that was joint between the City and County. Commission members can advise the local government on things that affect the community. They help ensure that services are implemented fairly to everyone and make an annual report to the governing bodies. He explained training services and the development and implementation of local work plans.

Mayor Pro Tem Walton said this was a very interesting conversation for him. He said we are all interconnected because we are all humans. We need to connect ourselves so we can try to help all humans. He asked Mr. Troy why he selected Elizabeth City to provide this presentation. Mr. Troy said he'd chosen this area because of the events that transpired a few months ago.

He explained that there was a state Human Relations Commission and the board members discussed what was going on and they asked him to reach out to the City and County managers about establishing a commission here. Mayor Pro Tem Walton opined that he felt the bodies would be “drooling at the mouth, but we’re all sitting here like we’re hypnotized.” He asked out of the 25 commissions, what’s the closest one to Elizabeth City? Mr. Troy said he believed Pitt County was the closest. Mayor Pro Tem Walton asked if they were all volunteer-based? Mr. Troy confirmed that they were. MPT Walton said that he felt we needed something. He said we do have a commission here and they selected two or three people every year, but he felt that there were a lot of changes that needed to be made if we wanted to make it work. He said that everything started from the top. He stated that he personally would love to see it come to fruition. He pointed out that he was born and raised here and he knew how it was, how it is and how it could be.

Mayor Parker asked about the nine commissions that are staffed. Did Mr. Troy know where they were located? Mr. Troy noted that Winston Salem, Chapel Hill, Wilson, and Rocky Mount were some of them. Mayor Parker said they sounded like locations that were larger and had more money than we did. She said she did see the need in our area and she did like the concern that Mr. Troy had for us and she hoped that our concern was equitable. She noted that we were still in the healing process. She confirmed that we did have a Community Relations Commission, but when it’s not staffed, it seems like it fizzles out. Volunteers seem to be hard to find. She asked who paid for the staffed operations? Mr. Troy said that the City and County either joined together or one or the other would pay for the staffing. He also mentioned that five of the nine were staffed due to fair housing. Mayor Parker said we needed some cohesiveness and she believed it would work well for us in thinking about what we’ve gone through. We’re trying to get back to normal and doing a good job, but there is the underlying silence of it all. There are people who are grieving and not satisfied with what has gone on.

Mayor Pro Tem Walton noted that we put ordinances in place all the time. If it’s a concern for us, we can just put people on it since we have staff. We can grab from other groups and create that relationship. He said it’s money over morals. The moral thing would be to create it. Money over morals would not make it happen. If we morally do what we’re supposed to do, we could create it. If we keep sitting here like a chair, nothing will change.

Commissioner Barry Overman asked Mr. Troy what the effect of a volunteer group had over a paid staff. How limited were the volunteers in their abilities? Mr. Troy said some of the volunteer organizations were extremely effective. He mentioned Granville County and said they pulled off things that staffed commissions were often unable to do. He said they had a budget, but a lot came from co-sponsoring with other agencies as well. Commissioner Overman said it was a good opportunity, but he wasn’t all for creating another committee just to meet for the sake of meeting. He felt we needed people who wanted to be there and be part of it.

Commissioner Sterritt said he had been appointed to serve on the local Community Relations Commission. They were supposed to meet once a month and only about seven people are coming at this time. Only about ¼ of all the counties in the state are doing what they should be doing as far as human or community relations. We need to be thinking about this. We’ve got three people on the CRC right now who are in their late eighties / early nineties and we need to change that.

Chairman Griffin asked Mr. Hammett to schedule a meeting with Interim Manager Clark and Mayor Parker so that they might have an opportunity to discuss this topic further.

6. Presentation – Coast Guard Marathon;

Visit Elizabeth City Executive Director Corrina Ruffieux directed the attendees’ attention to a slide show presentation. She explained that Visit Elizabeth City were the producers of the Coast Guard Marathon, which would be held in Elizabeth City March 3-5, 2022. The running events include a full marathon, half marathon and a 5K. She noted this event had been in the works for more than two years and had been canceled twice due to COVID. It was converted to a virtual race in 2021, and had still managed to secure over 11,000 participants. Registration for this year opened in September. So far, we have over 1,200 registered runners. Our in-person signups cover 43 states and even other countries. Only 25% of the participants are local (OBX, Edenton, Virginia Beach), She expected that this will be a huge tourism event. We have local, regional and national level sponsors. The half marathon is 13.1 miles, which begins at Waterfront Park, carries out to ECSU, the Coast Guard base and ends back at Waterfront Park. The race has been certified and sanctioned. She pointed out that this is a Boston qualifying race, which is extremely important for a first-year race. Additionally, this is probably the flattest course in the entire world.

She explained how quickly marathon events grow and the direct economic impact they bring to the area. Even small marathons drive over half a million dollars in economic impact. They are currently projecting 2,000 in-person runners who will bring one-and-a-half people with them. She requested that the City and County adopt an official resolution of support in honor of the Coast Guard Marathon and declare the first weekend in March as Coast Guard Marathon Weekend, and offer various in-kind services. She also asked that we help raise awareness of this new event in our community. Visit Elizabeth City is doing everything they can and they need the help of both bodies to make it a repeat event each year.

Councilwoman Young asked if registration was still going on at this time. Director Ruffieux said it was still going on until February for both the full and the half marathon.

Chairman Griffin noted that the airport was helping out as well.

Commissioner Overman said he was very excited and liked how Director Ruffieux always spread her excitement to the boards. He said he ran it virtually last year and it took him four days.

Mayor Parker confirmed that this was a huge event and could certainly put us on the map. Elizabeth City is in the spotlight and she liked being able to share positive information. She noted that she'd be traveling to New York City to meet with the First Lady soon and she was excited to be able to give out exciting information like this.

7. Adjournment:

Chairman Griffin thanked the City for hosting the meeting tonight. He said he looked forward to meeting with the managers and the mayor to discuss the Human Relations Commission.

Mayor Parker thanked Parks and Recreation for letting us use their facility, and for allowing everyone to be here comfortably and having such a nice meeting.

A vote was cast by County officials to adjourn the meeting.

Motion was made by Councilman Kem Spence, seconded by Councilwoman Jeannie Young to adjourn the meeting. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Spence, Ruffieux, Brooks, Walton, Young and Caudle. Against: None. Motion carried.

There being no further business to be discussed, both Chairman Griffin and Mayor Parker adjourned the joint meeting at 7:17 p.m.

Bettie J. Parker
Mayor

April D. Onley, NCCMC
City Clerk

