

**City Council Emergency Meeting
April 21, 2021**

The City Council of the City of Elizabeth City met in budget work session on Wednesday, April 21, 2021, in Council Chambers, located on the 2nd floor of the Municipal Administration Building, 306 E. Colonial Avenue, Elizabeth City, NC.

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

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

OTHERS PRESENT: City Manager Montre' Freeman
Finance Director Evelyn Benton
Chief of Police Eddie Buffaloe
Fire Chief Chris Carver
Interim Electric Superintendent Bob Vannoy
Parks and Recreation Director Sean Clark
Assistant City Manager Angela Judge
Human Resources Director Montique McClary
Public Utilities Director Dwan Bell
Fire Chief Chris Carver
ECDI Director Debbie Malenfant
IT Director Matthew Simpson
City Clerk April Onley

(Clerks Notation: This meeting was conducted remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Councilors met in Chambers and staff members participated remotely through Google Meet. The meeting was live streamed on Channel 11 and the City's website for the public, who were not allowed to attend the meeting.)

The City Council emergency meeting was called to order by Mayor Bettie Parker at 6:00 p.m. Mayor Parker welcomed everyone to the meeting and recognized Councilman Spence to give the invocation, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. Discussion – Shooting Incident:

Mayor Pro Tem Walton asked that a moment of silence be given for the Brown family.

Mayor Parker explained that the Elizabeth City Police Department was not involved in the shooting that occurred, and that it was the Pasquotank County Sheriff's Office. The ECPD did not respond until a "shot's fired" call went out. All questions and comments about the incident should be directed to the Pasquotank County Sheriff's Office.

Chief Buffaloe expressed sympathy for the Brown family. He said the ECPD is fully engaged to bring peace and calm to the community. He had been speaking with community leaders all morning regarding the event. The ECPD was not involved with the search warrant, but responded after the call for "shot's fired" went out. They assisted with securing the perimeter. The SBI is leading the investigation at this point. He said the ECPD remains vigilant for the citizens of the City.

Mayor Parker explained that Councilman Horton, Adkins and Brooks called for the emergency meeting and she wanted to hand it over to them for their thoughts first. Councilman Adkins said he was also recording for Facebook Live, and he had 600 people

watching right now. He said he wanted to call the emergency meeting because this had happened in our city and there were a lot of hurt people in our city due to these actions. He stated that he went to the scene earlier and people said, "Here comes the City Council who don't care about us, who don't voice our concerns." And he said that bothered him. He said he wanted to bring unity. He felt that people needed help and answers as to why this tragedy occurred. He did not want to overstep his boundaries, but people in the community looked to Councilors when they had questions. He said they were told by the officers on site that they needed to back up and "stand down", and were unable to speak and give peace to anyone who was there. He urged the City to come together "like never before." He said he didn't think a lot of people understood what really happened today – the eyes of the world are now on Elizabeth City. People are afraid. Businesses on Ehringhaus are boarding up their buildings in fear of riots and shooting. He said that as a Black man, he had to say that he was afraid for his own life. He now felt that he was targeted. "What will I tell my three Black sons coming up in this world? What will I tell them? Will I even be here to tell them anything about the police or the law enforcement? We're afraid. As a Black man, I'm afraid. We talk about transparency – I'm afraid as a Black man in this city." He said he didn't want an officer to get behind him if he was doing something wrong as he might be the next one that his family had to see on the news that had been gunned down. He pointed out that he called this special meeting because he wanted the citizens to know that the City stands behind the Brown family and wants the SBI to bring the facts to us. "We know that everyone is hurt and there are questions that people want answers to and we're still early in the investigation. We don't know the answers. We just want to make sure that it's transparent. We don't want covering up. We want the SBI to do their job and the City Council to stand behind our citizens and keep the City as safe as we can. We can't control what people do. People say we "let" this happen – No, that's not true. I don't want those things to happen." He said he was praying that "God's grace and mercy would keep us covered." He noted that there were those around the table that didn't understand what it was like to be a Black man. "You aren't wearing a Black lives matter shirt. We are being targeted. We need help. This day and time is sad. It hurts. It hurts to be a Black man this day and time. It hurts because of what we have to go through and see what other Black men have to go through in this town. I dare not let someone of the opposite race tell me it's going to be okay. You don't know." He said he just wanted the people of Elizabeth City to know that "we hear you." He stated that if people have been watching the Council meetings, they've been talking about the violence and the need for more police officers for a long time. He thanked Chief Buffalo for all that he and his officers did to try to protect and keep the citizens of the City safe. He said the people watching live may not agree with thanking the police department, but he believed that what they did mattered. He urged those watching to try to stay calm. He said we must trust that the SBI would do their job and keep the community safe.

Councilman Horton concurred with Councilman Adkins and noted that he'd said almost everything he wanted to say already. He agreed that the world was dangerous and the Council must do something about the incident. He stated that he was asking for transparency and accountability because we deserve it.

Councilman Brooks said he people started calling him as soon as the shooting happened. He said Councilman Horton and Adkins were already on site as soon as he arrived there. He noted that he had been arrested four times in his 12 years on Council. He said this meeting was called because the people wanted answers. He wanted to let the people hear for themselves what happened. "If it's unjustified, it's murder," he said. He reminded that the County and the City were part of one another. He said the answer to what the objective is, is simple. The objective is justice. He pointed out that these people are mourning the death of a loved one – let them vent in their way. He mentioned that he had three sons and he could not imagine if something like that happened to one of his sons. He said he would go straight to the Sheriff's Office and say "lock me up because I don't know what I might do." He felt the purpose of this meeting was not to showboat but let people grieve in their way. He said he was not surprised that an event like this happened because the Council had been voicing their concern about violence and the need for more law enforcement personnel for quite some time.

Councilman Spence said this happened in his ward, the third ward, and he wanted to give the family his condolences. He urged the family to trust the process right now. We don't know many facts right now. He promised that he would not settle for just any answer and he had faith in the city and government that we would do what was right, and if not, it

would not be accepted. He appreciated our Police Department and the Chief. He said even today, he saw them talking to people even though they were getting abused. He reiterated that this was not the Elizabeth City Police Department and all questions should be directed to the Pasquotank County Sheriff's Department. He said his prayer was that God would have peace for the family and the officer involved in the shooting as well.

Mayor Pro Tem Walton said you can think you're making the right moves and sometimes you're making the wrong moves. It's too fresh right now. He asked Chief Buffaloe if the protocol had been gone through yet. Chief Buffaloe said the Sheriff's Office had turned it over to the SBI, which was the proper protocol. Mayor Pro Tem Walton stated that social media was questioning why an out-of-county officer and a county officer were serving a warrant without letting our PD know it was happening. He noted the crowd outside was getting louder and louder, but we should let them vent the way they needed to vent. He said "leave it in God's hands."

Councilman Caudle said he didn't think he could add anything that wasn't already said, but he thanked the Councilors for calling the meeting because he thought it was a step in the right direction. He thanked all the Councilors for coming together on such short notice to talk about this issue.

Councilman Young said it was premature for her to make a statement other than it was a tragic loss of life and her heart went out to the families involved. She was glad to hear the SBI was involved and beginning their investigation. She said she thought that we needed to "slow down" and let the SBI conduct their investigation as to how and why this happened. She pointed out that while we definitely need answers, and the family and community need and deserve answers, we need to make sure we have all the facts. She stated that we need "accurate answers, not just fast answers." She said a lot of people are hurt and they need accurate answers so they can heal.

Councilman Ruffieux said he was deeply saddened by this tragedy. His thoughts and prayers were with Mr. Brown's family and with everyone who had been impacted, as well as with the entire community.

Mayor Parker reiterated that it was not the ECPD in any way – they had no answers to give. Just because this happened in the city did not mean it was our officers or our Police Department. She explained that Pasquotank County had their own police department and ECPD was involved in no way with serving this warrant or the following gunfire. She said the Council had shown the utmost concern because the entire body had gathered on very short notice and given their comments.

Councilman Brooks echoed that ECPD had nothing to do with the incident, but the City is part of the County, so in that sense, the Chief could talk to the Sheriff. But he said since it was in the hands of the SBI, he believed that was probably a moot point now. He thanked the Council for being engaged. He said we must wait for the facts to come out, but we had to be mindful of outside agencies coming in and throwing "fuel on the fire."

Mayor Parker agreed, and said that's why she wanted to make sure people understood that it was not our Elizabeth City Police Department and just an effort on our behalf to show transparency and express our concerns. She said the community thought very highly of Chief Buffaloe and his department because they were engaged with the citizens.

City Manager Freeman said the next two matters were the curfew and the state of emergency. We are currently under a state of emergency, but it's related to COVID-19. He said we can't call in the national guard without a state of emergency. He said we don't have to do it today, but we need to discuss it in case it may need to be done.

Chief Buffaloe felt that at this point, the assemblies had been peaceful and people had the right to express their views. He said he would contact the City Manager if he felt that was swaying and we would enact a curfew if necessary. Manager Freeman said if we enact a state of emergency and need national guard help, we are three days out for getting that assistance. He noted that he would be in constant communication with Chief Buffaloe and he would be making sure the safety and security of the citizens was top priority. Councilwoman Young asked if we had mutual aid other than the national guard. Manager Freeman said we had 150 officers on the ground at this time from surrounding areas.

Mayor Pro Tem Walton asked for an update on the Monday night meeting if anything changed. Manager Freeman replied that as of today, the meeting was still on for Monday, but he would notify everyone of any changes.

2. Adjournment

There being no further business to be discussed, Mayor Parker adjourned the meeting at 6:56 p.m.

Bettie J. Parker
Mayor

April D. Onley
City Clerk