

**City Council Planning Retreat
February 21, 2020**

The City Council of the City of Elizabeth City met for a Planning Retreat on Friday, February 21, 2020 in the Board Room at Sentara Medical Center at 1144 North Road Street, Elizabeth City, NC.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Bettie Parker
Councilman Chris Ruffieux
Councilman Michael Brooks
Mayor Pro Tem Johnnie Walton
Councilman Billy Caudle
Councilwoman Jeannie Young (*Arrived at 8:40 a.m.*)
Councilman Darius Horton
Councilman Gabriel Adkins (*Arrived at 11:06 a.m.*)

MEMBERS ABSENT: Councilman Kem Spence

OTHERS PRESENT: City Manager Rich Olson
Assistant City Manager Angela Cole
City Clerk April Onley
NC LEAD Fellow Shom Tvari
Interim Electric Superintendent Bob Vannoy
Finance Director Suzanne Tungate
Public Works Director Amanda Boone
Chief of Police Eddie Buffaloe, Jr.
Human Resources Director Montique McClary
Parks and Recreation Director Dexter Harris
ECDI Director Debbie Malenfant
Interim Fire Chief Chris Carver
Community Development Director Carter Thompson
Facilitator Mark Maland

The City Council Planning Retreat was called to order by Mayor Parker at 8:30 a.m. Mayor Parker welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. Agenda Approval:

Mayor Parker requested the Council's pleasure regarding approval of the prepared agenda.

Motion was made by Councilman Horton, seconded by Councilman Brooks to approve the agenda with a caveat from Councilman Walton that would allow the Council to add or switch the order of priority presentation depending on what time would allow. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Ruffieux, Brooks, Walton, Caudle, Young, and Horton. Against: None. Motion carried.

2. Opening Remarks:

Mayor Parker thanked the Councilors for attending and said she looked forward to a productive, on-task, respectful retreat.

3. Introduction and Purpose:

Mr. Olson advised the Council the purpose of the retreat was to flesh out Goals and Objectives, as well as pinpoint projects and tasks for the year ahead. He stated that it was also a good time for the Council to begin mentioning items they'd be interested in seeing produced in the budget.

4. Presentation – Future Challenges:

Mr. Olson explained that department directors were present to offer the Council a brief presentation on what their needs and hopes were for the coming year. The department directors would be departing the meeting following their presentations.

5. Review of Existing Goals:

Assistant City Manager Angela Cole presented the Council with a break-down of their Goals and Objectives, noting that based on conversations today, she would be cutting, changing, and making them more succinct for a presentation during the March work session. She presented the goals, as follows:

During the Elizabeth City Council Retreat held on February 8-9, 2018, the attending members discussed and deliberated prior years' goals and established an updated list of Goals and Objectives for the City of Elizabeth City. In keeping with the practice, staff is presenting the following January 2018 – December 2019 Goals & Objectives Final Progress Report.

Mission Statement

To create an attractive community that promotes opportunity for a good quality of life by engaging all cities through partnership and providing quality service.

Goals

1. Ensure sound fiscal responsibility
2. Improve the City's infrastructure
3. Strengthen inter-governmental relationships, including institutes of higher learning
4. Provide youth and senior activities
5. Deliver cost effective, quality services
6. Improve the quality and safety of neighborhoods
7. Increase community-wide business development opportunities to increase the quantity and quality of job

Among the seven goals outlined by the Council, there were thirty-six objectives identified for the organization. The status of each objectives is reported below.

Objectives

Fiscal Responsibility

1. **Write and submit a minimum of 20 grants each year.** Staff has written and submitted 48 grants since January 1, 2018, representing a total of \$7,311,145 in requests for outside funding. Twenty-eight of those grants have been awarded as of February 20, 2020, representing a total of \$2,379,507.51 in outside funding awarded. Eighteen grants were denied or withdrawn, and two grant requests totaling \$36,645.00 are pending. In addition, staff has facilitated the filing of six grants worth \$15 million for unnamed economic development projects. City staff continues to seek and apply to various funding agencies. Since January 1, 2020, five grants have been or are pending submission, and an estimated 10 more submissions are speculated for the first quarter of the calendar year.
2. **Continue weekly financial monitoring (specifically cash, reserves, and receivables).** Finance Administration and Accounting email a weekly report to the City Manager and City Council for examination. Printed monthly reports are available to departments, the City Manager, and City Council (via the City Clerk's Office). Annually, the City conducts an independent audit. The Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) is published and presented the elected body in February.
3. **Sale of timber.** The intent of this objective when initially established was to generate revenue by harvesting the timber on two parcels of property the City owns. The property is within the Wellfield Road tract and another tract is located south of the airport within the sandpit tract. In total, the City has 320 acres available for potential timber harvesting. The market for timber is up 22% per NC State's Rajan Parajuli, Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist, Forest Economics. However, the return on investment is largely determined by the age of the tree and the number of trees available for clearcutting. Staff has also learned from our regional North Carolina Forestry Service Office, while they are not authorized to assess and value our available timber, they can inventory our land and then

develop a Timber Management Plan (TMP) based on our objectives. The TMP will allow the City to determine whether it is advantageous to abort, clear cut or thin portions of our land based on our short- or long-term objectives.

4. **Complete a personnel compensation study.** During the FY2019-2020 Budgeting process, Human Resources Department completed an informal study of public safety and electric distribution employee compensation. Results indicated several positions were not salaried at the same level as other municipal organizations of our size and within our region. Employees within the Police and Fire Departments, and the Electric Distribution Division received a cost of living adjustment (COLA) as a result of the informal study. All other employees received a 3% increase. Staff continues their appeal to the Council to allocate funding for a professional compensation study, with the opportunity to implement the adjustment in phases across multiple budget cycles. Until a formal study is completed staff is of the opinion that salary adjustments are a best estimate and may be insufficient.

Improve Infrastructure

5. **Complete migration of legacy systems (i.e. utility billing and account management software).** The migration of the Elizabeth City utility billing customer information software (CIS) from the Logics Eagle platform to the Tyler Technologies, Inc. Incode 10 platform went live in July 2019, and the project deemed complete in November 2019. Initiated by Council authorization on May 29, 2018, the project exceeded the one-year timeline by six months. The project was budgeted at \$400,000; however, the final budget impact was \$388,896.
6. **Develop an internal traffic management plan that includes maximum utilization of existing brick streets to the extent possible. Develop an Alternate Transportation Plan for pedestrians and cyclists.** City staff continues to maintain and repair all existing brick street surfaces. In support of achieving the second half of this objective and because the Council did not earmark funding, staff applied to the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) for grant funds. The City's grant award of \$60,000 has been received; including the requisite cash match the City has \$72,000 to complete the plan. Additional progress on this objective is pending action by the City Council to appoint two project committee members from their political ward, specifically the third and fourth wards.
7. **Repair infrastructure and repave Road Street from Ehringhaus Street to Elizabeth Street.** The NCDOT completed the repaving project in August 2018.
8. **Repair local roads.** Streets and Powell Bill funds combined, the Council budgeted \$65,000 in FY2019-2020 and \$60,000 in FY2018-2019 for paving and patching of local streets. However, the level and amount of roadway repair far exceeds the annual budget allocation. Staff continues to update the list of local roadways requiring repair. However, budget allocation precludes the City from achieving this objective.

Strengthen Inter-governmental Relationships

9. **Develop the *Tutorial for Gym Pass* plan (where college students tutor primary school students; tutorial participation is a requirement for summer access to school gymnasiums).** Due to a lack of favorable response from school officials, in 2018 the City Council modified this objective, focusing instead on the *Youth Leadership Academy* objective. (See No. 17 below.)
10. **Quarterly meetings with the County.** The City Council and County Commission have exercised this objective regularly during fifth Monday occurrences. The last Joint Meeting of the City and County was held on September 30, 2019. Topics included a presentation from the NEAAAT School, a solicitation from Hampton Roads YMCA, awarding of the Senior Center construction bid, reporting of the Tourism Authority Visitor Profile Research Study, address regarding the proposed economic development strategic plan, and presentation of a proclamation to the Student Council.
11. **Implement an internship program.** The City's internship offerings to collegiate and high school students continue. During the reporting period, the City has hosted six students of varied school classification, field of study / interest, and academic standing. Internships are both paid and unpaid, accredited and non-accredited. The Human Resources Department facilitates all internships with the City.

12. **Schedule exploratory meeting with the School Board to investigate opportunity for interagency partnerships, especially summertime uses of gyms.** Several meetings were held at the staff level, including the City Manager and Director of Parks & Recreation. This objective was met with reservation and objection at the staff level. City Council has not reported the progress of meetings or discussions with Elizabeth City Pasquotank Public School (ECPPS) Board members.
13. **Create formal (in writing) joint use agreements with the School Board.** City staff has pursued this objective with ECPPS counterparts. School officials have expressed nominal interest in pursuing formal agreements with the City during this reporting period, and in years prior.

Youth and Senior Activities

14. **Construct a standalone senior center.** This objective will be achieved with the ribbon-cutting event scheduled for 4:00 p.m. Friday, March 6, 2020. On June 14, 2019, the City purchased The Daily Advance Building located at 215 S. Water Street. Prior to the City purchasing the building, the City entered into an Interlocal Agreement with Pasquotank County. The agreement required the City to issue the \$1.5 million for the purchase and remodeling of the facility. The County will annually pay one-half of the debt payment of \$87,075.60 each; additionally, they will pay one-half of the operating cost. The project was determined to be substantially complete on February 19, 2020, and turned over to the City. The estimated cost to furnish and outfit the building is \$1,728,417.
15. **Coast Guard Park Completion.** Coast Guard Park has been in “close out” status for three months since the end of November 2019. The expectation was to complete the project in November, hold a ribbon-cutting event in January 2020, and complete the operations plan for a springtime launch. However, due to ADA accessibility and asphalt paving concerns, the construction completion has been delayed. The project engineer is coordinating final repair of the pedestrian accessibility and the City’s engineer is overseeing the repaving element. The project includes installation of a 6-foot gangway to counteract Pasquotank River level differentials. The gangway will allow consistent access to the canoe and kayak launches. Again, staff and the project engineer met with each subcontractor last week to discuss project corrections. Final disbursements are pending.
16. **Create youth events and programs.** ECPC Parks & Recreation hosts a number of recreation and special events for our local youth and children, including: volleyball, T-ball, basketball, little league baseball / softball, Summer Camps – featuring cheerleading, ninja, sailing, tennis, flag football, and activity camp, Kids Flix, Independence Day Family & Community Celebration, and the Elizabeth City Christmas Holiday Parade. Starting fall 2019, Recreation staff updated the program schedule to include youth soccer. Reprogramming of the former Senior Center space at the Knobbs Creek Recreation Center (KCRC) is underway; a presentation will be afforded to the City Council in May 2020.
17. **Youth Leadership Academy.** This revised objective included a decision for the Council to facilitate a Student Council made up of current students attending Elizabeth City State University (ECSU), Mid Atlantic Christian University (MACU) and the College of the Albemarle (CoA). One of the short-term aims was for the students to plan and implement student-focused events and productions. Mayor Parker and Councilor Young have facilitated several meetings with students. Events were planned. Solely the Council determines the status of this objective.
18. **Change mindset of youth.** This is a Council-driven objective. No further definition, information, or staff input requested by the governing body regarding this objective.
19. **Completion of the Elizabeth City Middle School gymnasium.** During the Joint City / County meeting held in October 29, 2018, both elected officials agreed to take action to demolish and rehabilitate the Annex façade. The Council took subsequent action during the November 13, 2018 Regular Meeting, directing staff to authorize \$37,000 to be used for the designing of the façade of the Middle School. The County has tabled this item due to costs.
20. **Parenting Education.** This is a Council-driven objective. No further definition, information, or staff input requested by the governing body regarding this objective.

Cost Effective, Quality Services

21. **Conduct at least three Community Information Sessions (town hall meetings), annually.** This is a Council-driven objective. No further definition, information, or staff input requested by the governing body regarding this objective.
22. **Begin thinking about a public works multiplex facility.** This objective has been researched and discussed among staff, and informally reported to the Council. Staff advises that developing plans for a new facility, while greatly needed, is not financially feasible at this time; neither is construction. There are a growing number of infrastructure-related repairs and replacement projects that outweigh this aim. For the time being, the City's better investment will be to repair and renovate the existing physical campus and facilities. Staff recommends deferring a needs assessment until 2022 and future site development until 2025.
23. **Complete the Smart Grid implementation.** The electric advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) project was authorized by Council action during the January 27, 2020 Regular Meeting. The \$3 million project will require a phased change out of every residential and commercial electric meter in our utility service area. During February, staff will be completing document execution, delivery staging, and pilot data integration into the Incode10 CIS. The first meters are anticipated to arrive in May 2020, with installation to begin immediately. Staff hopes to complete the project by the end of the 2020 calendar year. The water AMI project was also prepared and considered by the Council during the January 27 Regular Meeting. However, the Council deferred implementation, requesting additional information from staff. An independent analysis of water utility / system privatization was presented to the Council during the February 10, 2020 Regular Meeting, during which staff received authorization to prepare a second financing package for the Council's consideration. All other elements of water AMI project are prepared and on standby for action, including contract negotiation and meter ordering. The water AMI implementation is estimated to cost \$5 million.
24. **To update, approve and promulgate the revised Customer Service Policy and Procedures (CSPP) manual using citizen input.** The Council indicated their desire to complete this objective with public input and by subcommittee. Councilors nominated individuals from the community to serve on the CSPP Committee. The Council supported staff's request to defer working towards this objective until after the utility billing software conversion was completed. The Council requested an update on or before November 2019. Since completing the software conversion, staff started an in-house process mapping and standard operating procedures (SOPs) development based upon the Incode 10 CIS. These documents will be used to rewrite the Elizabeth City Utility Customer Service Policy Guidebook. No committee action will be initiated until the mapping and SOPs are documented and ready for committee presentation.

Improve Neighborhoods

25. **Develop a pilot Neighborhood Master Plan, including a Council workshop and significant public involvement.** Although staff estimated a potential \$60,000 — \$70,000 budget impact, this objective was not funded during FY2018-2019 or FY2019-2020. No progress has been made towards achieving this objective. Alternatively, staff continues to recommend completion of a Comprehensive Plan prior to beginning this objective.
26. **Develop a plan for downtown and midtown development to include a special overlay district for Ehringhaus Street.** Although staff estimated a potential \$60,000 — \$70,000 budget impact, this objective was not funded during FY2018-2019 or FY2019-2020. In 2019, staff identified a few key properties along the perimeter of downtown and along the E Ehringhaus Street corridor that are keen for redevelopment and, when rehabilitated, would serve as catalysts for future investment. However, staff would rather refocus efforts towards drafting a comprehensive plan for Council consideration and adoption. A corridor plan for the Ehringhaus/Midtown/Downtown area can be incorporated into the all-inclusive plan.
27. **Create Neighborhood Identity Signage program and present to Council.** To the degree this objective is intended to affect residential neighborhoods, staff advises activity for this aim should be initiated after the completion of a comprehensive plan and in conjunction with individual neighborhood plans. Alternatively, the Tourism Authority, with input from three commerce-oriented agencies (Elizabeth City Downtown, Inc. (ECDI), Elizabeth City-Pasquotank

County Economic Development Commission (ECPCEDC), and the Area Chamber of Commerce), has developed a wayfinding signage plan that can be used citywide. The plan includes the Viking Way concept introduced by the previous Council. The Council is projected to receive a formal presentation about this project sometime in the spring.

28. **Develop a plan for downtown waterfront and waterway.** This objective was determined complete with the Council's adoption of the Waterfront Master Plan and Charles Creek Flood Mitigation Plan in May 2018. Implementation is pending Council consideration and funding during the annual budgeting process.
29. **Develop community-focused programs to address blight in neighborhoods.** The Council clarified this goal to include developing an inventive-based program to generate property owner interest to self-correct and/or abate nuisances and blight. No incentives were developed in association with this objective during the reporting period for lack of funding and staffing levels. Rather, staff continues using State Building Code, Fire Code, Community Policing, and Zoning Code Enforcement to address blight until new policies are established. Efforts to achieve this aim within the historic downtown have been positive by means of Business Improvement Grant (BIG) and Façade Grant funding.
30. **Open a new satellite Customer Service Utility Payment Office location.** The Customer Service location previously located at the Southgate Mall was relocated to 407 Griffin Street and opened in July 2018. The total expenditure (between two fiscal years) for the project is \$28,079. Staff reinforced alternate payment sites by installing a self-guided 24-hour payment kiosk location alongside the City Hall drive-thru.
31. **Councilors meet with constituents in their (political) wards.** This is a Council-driven objective. No further definition, information, or staff input requested by the governing body regarding this objective.
32. **Increase police staff and additional improvements to equipment.** There are sixty-four (64) sworn police officer positions within the Police Department. The department maintained this staffing level until 2013. In subsequent years, the department sworn personnel positions increased annually, adding one officer each year until 2017. All four of the new positions received partial compensation funding from the Department of Justice Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Office. During the FY2019-2020 budgeting process, the Council decided to halt hiring four of the sixty-four sworn police officer positions temporarily. There were approximately ten (10) vacancies at that time. The Council indicated a desire to revisit the hiring freeze only after the first sixty (60) positions had been filled. As of February 2020, all ten vacancies have been filled, resulting 60 sworn personnel. Council will be receiving a request to unfreeze the remaining four sworn positions. The Council receives the Monthly Surveillance Camera Report (MSCR) via email. All City-issued communication devices, equipment and other department-required apparatus are in good standing and/or condition. However, staff will be requesting funding to replace several of the body worn cameras and tasers that are outmoded and/or reaching programmed obsolescence.

Business Development & Jobs

33. **Rebrand the City, incorporating input from university and college art program students.** Although staff estimated a potential \$100,000 budget impact, this objective was not funded during FY2018-2019 or FY2019-2020. No progress has been made towards achieving this objective. Because this objective initiates from an effort to generate commerce, staff would support sharing this aim with the official economic development agency for the city as a part of their strategic plan development.
34. **Conditional zoning for the Weatherly Building and for the building to obtain landmark status.** Conditional zoning was completed for the Weatherly Building in May 2018. The building was designated a local landmark by the Elizabeth City Historic Preservation Commission (ECHPC) and confirmed by the Council. In keeping, the Council authorized a redrawing of the official historic district overlay. The City's application is under review by the NC Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). A determination report is anticipated in March 2020.
35. **Research and development for a conference center.** City staff and area agency partners informally evaluated the need for and feasibility of a conference center and determined that our local market does not warrant a center of any magnitude

at this time. However, with Council authorization, staff can request a formal feasibility study by our partners with ElectriCities.

36. **Attract new downtown businesses.** During the reporting period, forty-seven (47) new businesses have opened or existing operations have expanded. Several residential projects were initiated during 2019, and by July 2020 an estimated 81 new residential units will be available in the downtown area. Through the City's Business Improvement Grant (BIG), thirty-six (36) grants have been awarded, totaling \$488,364. The BIG match requirement has resulted in an estimated total investment of \$3.5 million, and the creation / retention of 188 jobs.

The Council provide general direction and asked for an updated version to be presented during the March 23, 2020 Work Session.

6. Briefing Papers Prepared at Council Request:

City Manager Olson presented the Council with a series of briefing papers including:

- Salary Savings
- Professional Compensation Study
- Employment Recruitment, Training, and Retention
- Teen Center
- Inmate Services Agreement
- Homeless Voucher Program
- Homeless Shelter Discussion
- Finance Committee Discussion
- City Council Benefit and Compensation
- City Partnership with ECSU
- Tyler Implementation Compensation and Associated Costs
- Water Leaks
- Fund Balances Report

Of those items, the Council requested further information and discussed on the inmate services agreement, the homeless voucher program, and the City Council benefits and compensation. Mr. Olson stated he would have those requested items presented on an upcoming agenda for consideration.

7. Establishment of New Goals / Prioritizing Goals:

The Council continued their discussion of the Goals and Objectives, indicating placement and changes to Assistant City Manager Cole to present during the March 23, 2020 Work Session. Mrs. Cole took their requests and stated she would incorporate them into a document for presentation in March.

8. Adjournment:

There being no further business to be discussed, Mayor Parker adjourned the retreat at 3:55 p.m.