

**City Council Regular Session
February 10, 2025**

The City Council of the City of Elizabeth City met in Regular Session on Monday, February 10th, 2025 in Council Chambers, located on the 2nd floor of the Municipal Administration Building, 306 E. Colonial Avenue, Elizabeth City, NC.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Kirk Rivers
Mayor Pro Tem Kem Spence
Councilman Johnson Biggs
Councilman Joseph Peel
Councilwoman Katherine Felton
Councilman Ronnie Morris
Councilman Johnnie Walton

MEMBERS ABSENT: Councilman Javis Gibbs
Councilwoman Rose Whitehurst

OTHERS PRESENT: Interim City Manager Reggie Goodson
City Attorney Bill Morgan
Electric Superintendent Donnell White
Interim Police Chief James Avens
ECDI Director Debbie Malenfant
Public Utilities Director Dwan Bell
Fire Chief Chris Carver
HR Director Aresta Johnson
HR Manager Anna Spence
Deputy Finance Director Brian Lewis
Interim Parks and Recreation Director Stacy Williams
Grants Administrator Jon Hawley
IT Director Matthew Simpson
IT Systems Analyst Pedro Holley II
City Clerk April Onley

Mayor Rivers called the City Council's Regular Session to order at 7:00 p.m. He recognized Mayor Pro Tem Spence to provide the invocation after which Councilman Morris led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor Rivers offered the Council's support and sympathy to Councilwoman Whitehurst who was unable to attend the meeting due to the recent loss of her son.

1. Agenda Adjustments and Approval:

Mayor Rivers directed the Council's attention to the prepared agenda. He noted that two previously tabled matters were returning and should be added to the top of the Regular Agenda: *Consideration – Approve Previously Tabled TDA Applications for Coast Guard Marathon and Elizabeth City Rowing Club*. Item C on the Regular Agenda – *Consideration / Discussion – City Property Request* would be removed for further investigation by staff. *Consideration – Confirmation of Finance Director* and *Consideration – Hiring of Permanent City Manager* would also be added to the Regular Agenda. Lastly, the addition of a Closed Session as allowed by NCGS 143-318.11(a)(1) for *Discussion of Privileged and Confidential Information* would round out the meeting.

Motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Kem Spence, seconded by Councilwoman Katherine Felton to approve the agenda as amended. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Biggs, Peel, Spence, Felton, Morris and Walton. Against: None. Motion carried.

2. Comments from the Public:

Mayor Rivers asked the Clerk if there were persons present who wished to speak before the Council. Upon the Clerk's reply that there were, Mayor Rivers requested that they be called forward to offer their comments.

Zachary Ozuna - Elizabeth City – Zachary told the Council that he was a 9th grader at NEAAAT and had experienced multiple instances of racism while at the school. He had not retaliated in any way because he did not want to get suspended.

Kaileb Brothers – Elizabeth City– Kaileb said he was 10 years old in 5th grade at NEAAAT. When he first went to the school he thought it would be fun, but he had learned otherwise now. Recently, he went into the restroom and was accosted by numerous sixth graders. The incident only stopped when one of his friends was able to reach a teacher to help them.

Kawana Hall – Elizabeth City – Ms. Hall stated that the two boys who just spoke were her sons and she'd encouraged them to do so. She was employed with Chowan County as a Social Worker. In her role, she assessed and investigated situations for signs of abuse. On January 29, 2025, she felt that NEAAAT school failed to protect her son from abuse. She was told that an investigation was going to take place. Her son knows the children who were in the bathroom with him and only one of them was expelled. Bullying is a big problem in the school. She was told by the vice principal that there are other bathrooms that her son can use. She shared that she'd spoken with Councilman Peel and he told her that he doubted anyone tried to blame her son for being a victim of bullying. Kaileb's dad, Mr. Brothers is a taxpayer as is she, and the NEAAAT school is inside of city limits. She felt that something needed to be done to solve the bullying and racism in the school. Why are the children at the school so comfortable with calling their peers these names and making whip sounds at them? This school does not follow their own anti-bullying policies. She stated that she works every day to protect other people's children and she has failed to protect her own. She put a post on Facebook that was shared hundreds of times. There are four comments she would like to share: "It sounds like something NEAAAT would do." Another was from someone who pulled their son out due to the issues. Another said she pulled her daughter out for the same reasons. A white woman reported that she pulled her son out because he was being attacked for standing up to racism. Someone also said the assistant principal threatened to call the cops on her and she eventually had to pull her son out.

3. Approval of Minutes:

a. Consideration – Approve January 27, 2025 Work Session Minutes;

Motion was made by Councilwoman Katherine Felton, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Kem Spence to approve the minutes with any necessary corrections. Those voting in favor of the motions were: Biggs, Peel, Spence, Felton, Morris and Walton. Against: None. Motion carried.

b. Consideration – Approve January 27, 2025 Regular Session Minutes;

Motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Kem Spence, seconded by Councilman Johnson Biggs to approve the minutes with any necessary corrections. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Biggs, Peel, Spence, Felton, Morris and Walton. Against: None. Motion carried.

4. Consent Agenda:

Mayor Rivers read the Consent Agenda item into the record, as follows:

a. Consideration – Call for a Public Hearing – Adoption of City Ordinance for Fire Prevention;

b. Consideration – Acceptance of Access Grant Contract for Causeway Park Restoration;

c. Consideration – Adoption of ARPA Compliance Documents for NCDEQ;

Mayor Rivers requested the Council's pleasure on the Consent Agenda.

Motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Kem Spence, seconded by Councilwoman Katherine Felton to approve the Consent Agenda. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Biggs, Peel, Spence, Felton, Morris and Walton. Against: None. Motion carried.

5. Regular Agenda:

a. Consideration – Approve Previously Tabled TDA Applications for Coast Guard Marathon and Elizabeth City Rowing Club (As Added During Agenda Adjustments);

Mayor Rivers reminded the Council that both of these applications were tabled on January 13th. There is a special-called TDA meeting for Thursday. This consideration will be to give the Coast Guard Marathon \$25,000 and the Elizabeth City Rowing Club \$19,333.33. Councilman Walton pointed out that the Coast Guard originally asked the City for 1/3 of the total cost, which was \$33,333.33; however, the City requested our monetary contribution be lower because of all the in-kind services we provide for the marathon. The \$25,000 is \$8,000 less than the original request. The TDA make take over that other \$8,000 that would have been part of the City's portion. It was also stated to us that the ask is more than last time, but they won't ask for this much again next year. Until the marathon coordinators successfully get their policies changed, they are in a tough position and having a hard time. Federal dollars can sometimes be difficult. It's urgent that we make a decision. The County already said they would approve the 1/3 on their end, so they will pay their portion. We just need to decide if we are willing to do \$25,000.

Motion was made by Councilman Johnson Biggs to approve the request for TDA funding for the Coast Guard Marathon in the amount of \$25,000. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Biggs, Peel, Spence, Felton, Morris and Walton. Against: None. Motion carried.

Councilman Walton stated that the second application was for Elizabeth City Rowing Club and was another 1/3 request, which would have the City, County and TDA contributing equally. The application mentions the installation of a racing lane, which will be created by a world-renowned individual and will draw more rowing and rowing events to our community.

Motion was made by Councilman Johnson Biggs to approve the request for 1/3 TDA funding from Elizabeth City for Elizabeth City Rowing in the amount of \$19,333.33. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Katherine Felton. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Biggs, Peel, Spence, Felton, Morris and Walton. Against: None. Motion carried.

b. Consideration / Discussion – Adoption of Updated City of Elizabeth City (Event-Based) Banner Policy / Policy for Non-Event or Advertising Banners;

Manager Goodson reminded the Council that they previously gave their approval with the modifications for event-based banners during the January 27, 2025 meeting; however, they also asked staff to look into the promotional banners as well. Staff had proceeded as directed and several recommendations were provided for Council consideration. The "Banner Committee", which was comprised of the Chief of Staff, ECDI Director, City Clerk, Public Utilities Director, Electric Superintendent and the manager himself unanimously agreed that advertising or promotional banners should not be allowed. The banners on Ehringhaus Street are advertising banners and they were approved for a three-year contract, so they will obviously have to be grandfathered in. The Banner Committee is concerned about the over-proliferation of these type of banners. If the Council prefers to allow these sorts of banners, staff has gathered the information on the true cost of installation and provided a fee that should be assessed before hanging.

Motion was made by Councilwoman Katherine Felton, seconded by Councilman Joseph Peel to proceed with staff's recommendations, thereby approving the updates to the current event-based banner application and process, and prohibiting the installation of any non-event or non-community based banners. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Biggs, Peel, Spence, Felton, Morris and Walton. Against: None. Motion carried.

c. Consideration / Discussion – City Property Request (Removed During Agenda Adjustments);

d. Consideration – Confirmation of Finance Director *(As Added During Agenda Adjustments);*

Motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Kem Spence, seconded by Councilwoman Katherine Felton to confirm Mark DeMay as the new Finance Director for the City of Elizabeth City. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Biggs, Peel, Spence, Felton, Morris and Walton. Against: None. Motion carried.

e. Consideration – Hiring of Permanent City Manager *(As Added During Agenda Adjustments);*

Motion was made by Councilwoman Katherine Felton, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Kem Spence to hire Reginald Goodson as the permanent City Manager for the City of Elizabeth City. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Biggs, Peel, Spence, Felton, Morris and Walton. Against: None. Motion carried.

Manager Goodson thanked the Council for the appointment as permanent City Manager. He stated that this was not an appointment that he took lightly. He believed success was possible and it would come from all employees working together as a cohesive team. He was confident that the senior leadership of the City was strong and would do an excellent job moving Elizabeth City forward. They are already hard at work on the Capital Improvement Plan and beginning the FY 2025-2026 Budget and intended to continue tackling issues proactively.

6. Closed Session – As Allowed by NCGS 143-318.11(a)(1) for Discussion of Privileged and Confidential Information *(As Added During Agenda Adjustments);*

Motion was made by Councilman Johnson Biggs at 7:22 p.m. to enter Closed Session as allowed by NCGS 143-318.11(a)(1) for the Discussion of Privileged and Confidential Information. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Katherine Felton. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Biggs, Peel, Spence, Felton, Morris and Walton. Against: None. Motion carried.

Mayor Rivers announced there would be a brief recess in order to clear Chambers.

The Council returned to open session at 7:37 p.m.

7. Adjournment:

Having no further business to be discussed, Mayor Rivers adjourned the meeting at 7:38 p.m.

E. Kirk Rivers
Mayor

April Onley, NCCMC
City Clerk

