

**City Council Regular Session
February 8, 2021**

The City Council of the City of Elizabeth City met in regular session on Monday, February 8, 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 Billy Caudle
Councilwoman Jeannie Young
Councilman Chris Ruffieux
Mayor Pro Tem Johnnie Walton
Councilman Kem Spence (*Arrived at 7:30 p.m.*)
Councilman Darius Horton

MEMBERS ABSENT: Councilman Gabriel Adkins
Councilman Michael Brooks

OTHERS PRESENT: City Manager Montre' Freeman
City Attorney Bill Morgan
Finance Director Evelyn Benton
Chief of Police Eddie Buffaloe
Deputy Chief of Police James Avens
Interim Electric Superintendent Bob Vannoy
Assistant City Manager Angela Judge
Human Resources Director Montique McClary
Public Utilities Director Dwan Bell
Fire Chief Chris Carver
ECDI Director / Interim Community Dev Director Debbie Malenfant
Planner Kellen Long
Parks and Recreation Director Sean Clark
IT Director Matthew Simpson
City Clerk April Onley
Deputy City Clerk Doris Walton

(Clerks Notation: This meeting was conducted differently 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 public comments were received via email and are included in full as received.)

The City Council regular session was called to order by Mayor Bettie Parker at 7:00 p.m. Mayor Parker welcomed everyone to the meeting and recognized Councilman Horton to give the invocation, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. Agenda Adjustments and Approval:

Mayor Parker asked the Council's pleasure on the presented agenda.

Motion was made by Councilwoman Jeannie Young, seconded by Councilman Darius Horton. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Ruffieux, Walton, Young, Horton and Caudle. Against: None. Motion carried.

2. Statement of Disclosure:

The City Clerk read the Statement of Disclosure. No conflict of interest disclosures regarding items listed on the agenda were made.

3. Presentations:

a. Resolution for Sharon Riddick;

**Resolution # 2021 –02-01
Honoring Sharon Riddick**

WHEREAS, the City Council of the City of Elizabeth City takes great pride in the level of services provided to our residents and guests and to the unique City character and high quality of life these services afford to all who live, work, and visit here; and

WHEREAS, the City Council of the City of Elizabeth City recognizes the contributions their City staff make to enhancing and maintaining all that is special about the City of Elizabeth City; and

WHEREAS, Sharon Riddick was a 34-year employee of the City of Elizabeth City with a long history of dedication, commitment and service to the community; and

WHEREAS, Sharon Riddick was also a role model, leader, and mentor within the community and her efforts have touched so many lives in so many ways; and

WHEREAS, her untimely passing has left a void in the hearts of everyone she touched during her long tenure with the City of Elizabeth City; and

WHEREAS, her legacy will serve as an inspiration to all who live, work, and visit in the City of Elizabeth City for generations to come; and

WHEREAS, the City Council of the City of Elizabeth City is proud and honored to have had Sharon Riddick as a valued employee, and is grateful to her for all that she brought to our City, both personally and professionally during her 34 years of service.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council of the City of Elizabeth City, in recognition of Sharon’s love for and dedication to the City of Elizabeth City does adopt this resolution in honor of her memory and of her many years of dedicated service to our community.

ADOPTED, this the 8th day of February 2021.

Bettie J. Parker
Mayor

April D. Onley
City Clerk, NCCMC

Councilman Horton said he thought that was a good resolution. He said he was extremely proud of the remarks Chief Buffalo gave during Mrs. Riddick’s funeral. He said it was a “wonderful showing for someone who was a very dedicated employee.” He felt she was a great worker and the Police Department did a wonderful job honoring her.

4. Comments from the Public:

Rose Whitehurst – SOULS Coordinator – (Received via Email and Recorded in Full); “SOULS is a volunteer ministry that works collaboratively with approximately 40 church, a few business and a few private individuals. We have been providing a meal every night of the week for about 14 years– currently operating out of the old Jr High Band room. This building is under contract and we do anticipate having to vacate sometime during the summer. In the past, we have collaborated with local churches to provide emergency overnight shelter during the winter months – known as The Room in the Inn. However, due to COVID this program did not provide any services this year. SOULS ministry responds in good faith to those in need. Recently, we had approximately 40 individuals/families that became homeless, with very little notice. Apparently a local housing service was providing temporary housing, in hotel rooms, for many who were waiting for permanent housing. I have been told – the grant to continue those services did not come through and unfortunately this created a crisis for our area in early January. Most of these individuals reached out to SOULS for help. SOULS did validate the story.

Unfortunately, this happened during a time when we are having severe weather and unusually cold temperatures. We were able to send out a cry for help within our Church community. We began providing as much temporary shelter through hotels as we could. The cases that involved children have been reported to Social Services.

We have provided the following:

- Survival Weather Bags
- Sleeping Bags
- Coats, shoes, socks
- Food
- Hotel rooms
- COVID Vaccination – local health care workers have come to SOULS to provide this

I would like to thank the Salvation Army, who also has provided temporary shelter for many. We have referred our clients to call 211 – Which is part of United Way. Many have been connected to a case worker and have a two to four-week plan on how to move forward. We have also shared our client list information with River City Housing and our Local United Way. I have estimated that we are currently working with 50 homeless clients who are living in vehicles, abandoned buildings/houses or outside. January: we raised \$7000 and purchased \$6335 in hotel rooms. We tried to give clients a couple nights each week during the worse weather. We still have 4-6 weeks of very cold weather. I am asking the City Council to support SOULS with a one-time monetary gift of \$5000. For anyone that would like more information or review the financial records – please contact me at 252-267-0298. Thank you for your consideration.”

5. Public Hearings:

a. Hold a Public Hearing – Nomination of Elizabeth City Industrial Historic District;

Planner Long explained that the City is currently home to six national historic districts included on the register of historic places. When reviewing a nomination, consideration is given to the quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology and culture that is present in the districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects that possess integrity, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. Consideration is also given to structures or properties that are associated with events that have made significant contribution in the broad pattern of our history or that are associated with the lives of a person or people significant in the past.

Ms. Long advised that the proposed district is located just north of the commercial core of Elizabeth City on the west bank of the Pasquotank River and includes five city blocks, bounded on the northwest by the Northside National Register Historic District and Mid-Atlantic Christian University. It includes 12 primary industrial and commercial resources, including buildings and building complexes onsite. The district is entirely industrial. The nomination was initiated and funded by a private property owner within the proposed district. The owner hired a preservation consultant to survey the district and ultimately produce the nomination. Once a nomination has been reviewed by the state, all certified local governments are required to review the proposed nomination and give opportunity for public comment during a 60-day public comment period.

Motion was made by Councilwoman Jeannie Young that “We, the Elizabeth City Council have reviewed the nomination for the Elizabeth City Industrial Historic District and find that the property meets the criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as stated in Section 8 of the report. We therefore recommend that the property be submitted for listing in the Register.” The motion was seconded by Councilman Chris Ruffieux. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Ruffieux, Walton, Young, Horton and Caudle. Against: None. Motion carried.

6. Approval of Minutes:

a. January 11, 2021 – Regular Session;

Motion was made by Councilman Darius Horton, seconded by Councilwoman Jeannie Young. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Ruffieux, Walton, Young, Horton and Caudle. Against: None. Motion carried.

7. Consent Agenda: *(City Manager Recommends Approval)*

Mayor Parker asked that City Manager Freeman read the items on the Consent Agenda into the record.

a. Consideration – Authorize Application to FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program;

b. Consideration – Call for a Public Hearing: CASE NO: RZ 01-21 filed by Woda Cooper Development, Inc. to rezone two parcels from GB (General Business) to (AD) Apartment District;

c. Consideration – Call for a Public Hearing – CASE NO: TA 01-21 to amend UDO to allow use of microbreweries in additional zoning districts;

d. Consideration – Application for Wal-Mart Community Grant Program for 2021;

e. Consideration – Declare City Property as Surplus and Begin Upset Bid Process– 207 East Cypress Street;

**Resolution # 2021 –02-02
Declaring Real Property Surplus
and Authorizing Sale by Upset Bid Process**

WHEREAS, the City of Elizabeth City is the owner of real property identified on the Pasquotank County Registry as PIN: 891420818470 and Map 12-B-4 and having a physical address of 207 East Cypress Street; and

WHEREAS, the City of Elizabeth City has no current or future need for the property; and

WHEREAS, the City Council has authorized an opening bid of \$15,000 received from Mr. Darrin Johnson. via email correspondence; and

WHEREAS, the City Council has authorized notice to be published to solicit bids for the sale of the property, pursuant to the upset bid process as outline in NCGS §160A-269.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of the City of Elizabeth City that the parcel of property identified on the Pasquotank County Registry as

PIN: 891420818470 and Map 12-B-4, located at 207 East Cypress Street is hereby declared surplus to the needs of the City of Elizabeth City; and

FURTHER, the City Clerk shall be authorized to begin the upset bid process as required by North Carolina General Statute §160A-269, with an opening bid of \$15,000.

ADOPTED, this the 8th day of February 2021.

Bettie J. Parker
Mayor

April D. Onley
City Clerk, NCCMC

(End of Consent Agenda)

Mayor Parker asked Council's pleasure on the Consent Agenda, as presented.

Motion was made by Councilman Billy Caudle, seconded by Councilwoman Jeannie Young to approve the Consent Agenda. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Ruffieux, Walton, Horton, Young, and Caudle. Against: None. Motion carried.

8. Regular Agenda:

a. Any item Pulled from the Consent Agenda

There were no items pulled from the Consent Agenda.

b. Consideration – Mayoral Appointments (By Motion and Roll Call Vote);

Mayor Parker noted that on occasion, members of the Council find their work schedules or other commitments change over the course of their service to various boards, and they may approach her about being removed or placed on another board that better aligns with their schedules. Councilman Adkins has asked to be removed from the EC-PC Economic Development Commission where he has served since his appointment in January of 2020. Councilman Spence has agreed to serve in Councilman Adkins' stead. Additionally, Councilman Brooks resigned from the Community Development Commission via hand-delivered letter at the end of January 2021, and Councilwoman Young has offered to join the board in his place.

Motion was made by Councilman Darius Horton, seconded by Councilman Billy Caudle to appoint Councilman Kem Spence to the EC-PC EDC. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Ruffieux, Walton, Young, Horton and Caudle. Against: None. A roll call vote followed, which yielded the same results. Motion carried.

Motion was made by Councilman Billy Caudle, seconded by Councilman Chris Ruffieux to appoint Councilwoman Jeannie Young to the Community Relations Commission. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Ruffieux, Walton, Young, Horton and Caudle. Against: None. A roll call vote followed, which yielded the same results.

c. Consideration - Declare City Property as Surplus – 700 & 703 South Martin Street;

Manager Freeman explained that the staff had received opening offers for 700 and 703 South Martin Street in the amounts of \$1,000 and \$500, respectively. In reviewing the

appraised value, it was determined that these are very low amount. He said he recommended that the Council did not move forward with opening the bidding floor with the proposed offers. Attorney Morgan said he was in agreement with Mr. Freeman. He reminded the Council that they had the right to reject the bids and not move forward with declaring the properties surplus and he believed this would be the best course of action for the moment.

Motion was made by Councilman Darius Horton, seconded by Councilwoman Jeannie Young to reject the proposed offers and not move forward with declaring the properties surplus at this time. Those voting in favor of the motion were; Spence, Ruffieux, Walton, Young, Horton and Caudle. Against: None. Motion carried.

d. Consideration - Allocation of Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Budget Earmark for Homeless Sheltering / Homelessness Policy (Council Request);

Manager Freeman began by saying that he believed the only way to eradicate homelessness would be to have a joint effort between the City and the County. Councilman Horton thanked River City CDC for all they do in the community. He said it was also good to hear how much SOULS had been doing. He said his problem with the City's voucher program was that we had such misuse of the program and many of the individuals using it were not homeless. He stated that even though we have set aside some \$47,000 and Representative Hunter was trying to secure \$100,000 for the cause, it was easier to receive funds for programs than it was to receive funds for brick and mortar facilities. He pointed out that even tonight, they've just had SOULS request money to help with their cause, and they also had River City CDC present, who both have a desire to help combat this issue, "but we as the Council have to make a decision about which is best in the long run. If I put somebody in a room and give them a warm place to stay, which is a good thing to do, but nothing along those lines of assisting with rehabilitation, that doesn't help with drug abuse or mental illness. We need to have a centralized program, whether run through River City CDC or another nonprofit." He said he'd like to see this placed on the retreat because they haven't had a discussion with the new manager yet about what they're really looking for. He noted that he would personally like the money be used for brick and mortar instead of just being used for a warm room. He wondered if these programs were also asking the County for money or assistance. He opined that the City itself did not need to start running a homeless shelter, but should find a nonprofit to do so. He said his idea of a homeless shelter was an "emergency home" for people to go to get the help they need, to learn how to get jobs and skills, etc. He said this needed to be a serious retreat conversation because there are a lot of organizations trying to tackle homelessness. There is a great need, but "we must be good stewards." Some of the people who got rooms from the \$22,000 in vouchers last year still need a room this year because no one really helped them. He stated that we need to come up with a direction before we just start giving out money and end up with the same problem next year.

Councilwoman Young said she agreed with Councilman Horton about the need going beyond homelessness alone. She pointed out that a lot of the homeless population in Elizabeth City were suffering from mental health problems and needed more than just a night at a hotel. She said she did not think the City needed to be in the business of running a homeless shelter, but she did think the City needed to collaborate with existing organizations. She agreed that this would be a good topic for the retreat. She agreed that River City CDC had a great program, as did SOULS and appreciated the work that both organizations did.

Motion was made by Councilman Kem Spence, seconded by Councilman Darius Horton to table further discussion on the item until the Council retreat. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Spence, Ruffieux, Walton, Young, Horton and Caudle. Against: None. Motion carried.

9. Comments and Inquiries on Non-Agenda Items:

Councilman Caudle had no comments.

Councilman Horton had no comments.

Councilwoman Young stated that some exciting things had been happening and she was proud of the Mayor for getting the City recognized on a national level. She said the new city manager had gotten his feet wet and was doing a good job so far. She commended Chief Buffalo for his appointment as the President of the NC Chiefs Association.

Mayor Pro Tem Walton congratulated the Mayor on her accomplishments. He suggested we start looking into ways to use more TDA money as there was nearly \$300,000 in the fund.

Councilman Ruffieux had no comments.

Councilman Spence apologized for being late, as he'd been tied up with work.

Mayor Parker named two of her elementary school teachers who are now in their 90s and "still going strong." She reminded citizens to remain vigilant in their fight against COVID, even if they have been inoculated. She noted that there are new variants of the virus that have entered the country from the UK and South Africa, which are even more highly contagious. Americans are now being asked to double mask in light of this. She said the vaccinations do not guarantee that you will not contract the virus, it just lessens the likelihood of extreme sickness or death. She said we are still holding out for herd immunity, but we are nowhere close to that at this point. She mentioned that she had another major interview coming up and that the City was the focus of many people across the nation.

10. Closed Session as Allowed by NCGS 143-318-11(a)(6) for Personnel;

Motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Johnnie Walton, seconded by Councilman Darius Horton to go into closed session at 7:55 p.m. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Spence, Ruffieux, Walton, Young, Horton and Caudle. Against: None. Motion carried.

Mayor Parker advised there would be a three-minute recess to clear the room.

The Council returned to open session at 8:07 p.m.

11. Adjournment

There being no further business to be discussed, Mayor Parker adjourned the meeting at 8:08 p.m.

Bettie J. Parker
Mayor

April D. Onley, NCCMC
City Clerk