

**City Council Work Session
September 28, 2020**

The City Council of the City of Elizabeth City met in work session on Monday, September 28, 2020 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
Mayor Pro Tem Johnnie Walton
Councilman Billy Caudle
Councilman Chris Ruffieux
Councilman Michael Brooks (*Arrived at 5:40 p.m.*)
Councilwoman Jeannie Young
Councilman Darius Horton (*Arrived at 6:05 p.m.*)
Councilman Gabriel Adkins (*Arrived at 6:05 p.m.*)

MEMBERS ABSENT: Councilman Kem Spence

OTHERS PRESENT: Interim City Manager Eddie Buffaloe, Jr.
City Attorney Bill Morgan
Finance Director Suzanne Tungate
Deputy Chief of Police James Avens
Interim Electric Superintendent Bob Vannoy
Human Resources Director Montique McClary
Public Utilities Director Amanda Boone
NC LEAD Fellow Shom Tiwari
Interim Parks and Recreation Director Bobbi White
Grants Administrator Jon Hawley
Fire Chief Chris Carver
IT Director Matthew Simpson
City Clerk April Onley
Deputy City Clerk / Executive Admin Doris Walton

The City Council Work Session was called to order by Mayor Parker at 5:30 p.m. Mayor Parker recognized Councilwoman Jeannie Young to provide 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 to approve the agenda. The motion was seconded by Councilman Chris Ruffieux. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Ruffieux, Walton, Young and Caudle. Against: None. Motion carried.

2. Statement of Disclosure:

The City Clerk read the statement of disclosure. No conflict of interests regarding items on the presented agenda were made.

3. Presentation – Walk EC / Pedestrian Plan;

Lead Fellow Shom Tiwari provided an overview of the Walk EC plan, which is the City's master pedestrian plan. The goal of the plan is to achieve walkability within the City as well as help secure funding for it. He noted that this plan was developed with a grant from DOT. A steering committee of 17 people with a balance of different background and expertise meets regularly to guide and discuss the plan. The steering committee looks at prioritizing connecting people to their destinations. They take traffic flow, distribution of assets and inventory and existing conditions into consideration. There will be two surveys, one of which has already been completed. The coming survey is recommendations for future improvements. Staff is committed to ensuring that the community can be involved

in public engagement, although COVID has changed what that looks like to a degree. Even with outreach efforts, there was a difference in respondents by race. Although the City is about 49% African American, only about 8% of survey respondents identified as such.

Mayor Parker asked how the survey was disbursed. Shom stated that they provided it online, to schools, colleges, nonprofits and churches, as well as social media posts. He agreed that there was a very small response from African Americans and the steering committee has been strategizing how they might do other forms of outreach to get to additional race groups for response. He noted that having an insert in the City of Elizabeth City utility bill might be a great way to elevate reach. He stated that the next steps are launching survey two, updating future recommendations, finalizing the plan and sharing it with the public.

Mayor Pro Tem Walton asked what the boundaries of the walking path would be. Shom explained that Walk EC is not one specific sidewalk or path; it looks across the entire city at where we want to build better sidewalks and multi-use paths. Councilwoman Young asked if we've already been approved for this grant. Shom replied that we applied in 2018 and were awarded in 2019. The grant money paid the engineering firm, Kimley-Horn to work on the implementation process of the plan with us. Mayor Pro Tem Walton asked Manager Buffaloe to find out how much we were awarded with this grant. He told Shom to contact ECSU because they trying to get a walking trail and he felt like we should coordinate together.

4. Consideration / Discussion – Pay Study:

Manager Buffaloe stated that staff had been instructed to return with a mid-year COLA discussion, so staff had gotten together with HR and looked into it. He requested that Director McClary brief the Council on what they were interested in doing. Director McClary said she had been lobbying for a compensation study throughout each budget cycle. We've lost public safety staff to other locals due to pay being so low and salary compression. She noted that a true compensation study would address salary across the entire organization. They had some additional money in their budget that could either be used for a 1% COLA or a compensation study. The cost of a study would be about \$30,000 and she felt that would be a better spend for City money.

Mayor Pro Tem Walton said he knew we had employees who were not satisfied with how they'd been treated over the past and didn't feel good because they hadn't been looked out for as well as others. He felt that if those employees wanted to present to the Council, they should be able to and we should try to bring their pay up. They come to work every day just like everybody else but they've been held back for whatever reason. Until we satisfy certain people, they'll always believe they haven't been treated fairly. Director McClary said they had factored into the budget a Christmas bonus, they just were not going to receive a mid-year COLA as they were looking to redirect that money toward a compensation study. She explained that the results of the compensation study could be shared with the staff so they knew that they were being looked into. Mayor Pro Tem Walton noted that when the Tyler Tech conversion happened, only certain people got a bonus and many of the people who worked on it were left out. We often did things like that and that beat our employees down.

Councilman Caudle asked how long a compensation study would take to complete. Director McClary replied that she believed it would be about a four-month timeframe. Councilman Caudle pointed out that this is almost October. If we did the RFPs, everything would be finished in time for our upcoming budget planning.

Motion was made by Councilman Chris Ruffieux to recommend that staff bring back results of an RFP for a compensation study, seconded by Councilwoman Jeannie Young. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Ruffieux, Brooks, Walton, Young, Horton, Caudle and Adkins. Against: None. Motion carried.

Mayor Pro Tem Walton said with the money that was leftover, we needed to allot it to go somewhere. Councilman Caudle asked where the money came from; how do we have it laying around? Manager Buffaloe explained that this was identified for the possibility of a 1% COLA. Mayor Pro Tem Walton asked how much money we have to put out for this

project? Manager Buffaloe stated that we would do a budget amendment. He noted we did get some money back from Blue Cross Blue Shield in the amount of \$170,000.

Manager Buffaloe said staff was awarded special pay at the end of certain projects after evaluation. Mayor Pro Tem Walton said that the ones who worked on Tyler did not. Manager Buffaloe said he couldn't speak to what happened before he became interim, but as of right now, he tried to address compression where he could and identify bonuses where they were needed.

5. Update – Senior Center Crosswalk;

Interim Parks and Recreation Director Bobbi White said they've been working with contractors since August to secure a crosswalk across Church Street to the Senior Center. Public Works Director Boone was presented to the County's Finance Committee and the Commissioners voted to approve the plan. During the next meeting at the Senior Center, two contractors were present and it was determined that funding would take longer to secure. Last Friday, sealed construction bids were scheduled to be opened, but none were received. They've decided that they will give contractors more time. With the Senior Center slated to reopen soon, the Police Department has offered to send over a crossing guard in the interim.

Councilwoman Young asked if the contractors didn't have enough time to get their bid in. Director White said during the first meeting, the County expressed interested in having a crosswalk that would not be conducive to the area, so they had to reassess the design. They looked at the crosswalk that already exists on the corner of Main and Water Streets and the contractors needed extra time to consider a redesign. Director Boone agreed that there were some vendor-specific items that were requested and it was taking some time to procure the costs from those vendors.

6. Update / Discussion – Council Travel Donation;

Manager Buffaloe noted that Councilman Brooks asked staff to bring this item back. He said staff had been in contact with the School of Government and they confirmed that money could not be given to private citizens. Councilman Brooks said when he said "research" he meant for them to research how it was done; he wasn't asking for a repeat of what he heard last time. He didn't know what this "mumbo jumbo" is and he felt like it was a way that staff was trying to stop from helping the public. He stated that he wanted it understood that all he wanted was someone to find out who this was done last time. He didn't care about the legal documents that staff kept bringing forward. He said he was disgusted with the whole process because everyone was throwing roadblocks up when he was trying to make an effort to help people who were suffering.

Councilwoman Young remembered that the Council sponsored the AAU basketball, but she remembered it came from the PAL board. Both were nonprofits and she believed that's why it worked.

Councilman Caudle said they just wanted to know what was the Council's contingency fund. He noted he did remember repurposing Council travel for nonprofits. The law says you can't give money to individuals, but you can make a grant for organizations who give money to help. He didn't believe the City ever gave money directly to individuals, but he did remember giving money through an organization, not unlike what we do for the Boys and Girls Club.

Manager Buffaloe apologized for misunderstanding. He said he was under the impression the Council did not have a contingency fund and there had not been a contingency fund for at least the last three years. Staff does not disagree that this happened, but staff believes it was improper. Yes, it was done in 2010; however, based on what we understand, we cannot give individuals money, only nonprofits and there's still a special way to do it.

Councilman Ruffieux said he thought he was hearing that the end goal is to take Council travel that's not being used due to COVID and to distribute it somehow to people who need assistance with their electric bills. He was also hearing it had to go through a conduit, a nonprofit of sometime. He asked if we could go through United Way maybe, like how

we're going to do with the Coronavirus Collaborative Care grant? Manager Buffaloe said he felt like they probably good, although he didn't know if it would affect their grant chances. He said they'd have to get further clarifications from the School of Government because we can't make adjustments to Council's travel except during the budget ordinance adoption. He reiterated that this money was earmarked for Council travel and Council pay, including their travel pay had red tape involved. He liked the idea of running it through a nonprofit, but he wanted to make sure we could run it through a nonprofit.

Councilwoman Young stated that unless something has changed, her understanding was that we had to be in the budget cycle to do this. Mayor Pro Tem Walton asked how much money was in Council travel right now. Manager Buffaloe said it stood at \$10,000 right now. Councilman Ruffieux said he'd like to see something come back that's a little more collaborative now that we have clarity on what Councilman Brooks is looking for. Councilman Horton asked if there's somewhere else in the budget we could identify funds to assist people who are in need of help. Councilman Caudle noted that would probably be like a community support grant, but you'd still be bound by many of the same rules. Councilman Adkins agreed that they'd have to be a nonprofit. Mayor Parker said she felt this was a good idea, but we had to make sure we were good stewards of the citizens' money and we would have to get the money to a nonprofit that could handle this for us.

7. Committee Reports:

a) EC-PC Economic Development Commission: Councilman Adkins, Councilman Caudle, Mayor Parker –

Councilman Caudle said they had not met in September due to COVID.

Manager Buffaloe noted that they had lost connection and would need to move into their 7:00 p.m. regular session. Councilman Horton asked if they couldn't just carry the rest of the Committee Reports into their regular session and Mayor Parker said she thought that would be best.

Motion was made by Councilman Darius Horton, seconded by Councilwoman Jeannie Young to carry the Committee Reports forward to regular session. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Ruffieux, Brooks, Walton, Young, Horton, Caudle and Adkins. Against: None. Motion carried.

b) Central Communications Advisory Board: Councilman Brooks

c) Fireman's Relief Fund Board: Councilman Adkins, Councilman Spence

d) NC Eastern Municipal Power Agency: City Manager Olson and Mayor Parker

e) Elizabeth City Downtown, Inc.: Councilwoman Young

f) Elizabeth City Area Chamber of Commerce Board: Mayor Parker

g) Finance Committee: Mayor Parker, Mayor Pro Tem Walton, Councilman Caudle, Councilwoman Young, Councilman Brooks, Councilman Adkins, Councilman Ruffieux, Councilman Horton, Councilman Spence

h) Parks and Recreation Advisory Board: Mayor Pro Tem Walton

i) Storm Water Advisory Board: Councilman Spence, Councilman Ruffieux and Councilman Horton

j) Tourism Development Authority: Councilman Walton

k) Community Relations Commission: Councilman Brooks

l) Airport Authority: Councilman Caudle

m) Albemarle RPO Transportation Advisory Committee – Councilman Ruffieux

8. Adjournment:

There being no further business to be discussed, Mayor Parker adjourned the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Bettie J. Parker
Mayor

April D. Onley
City Clerk, NCCMC