



CITY OF
ELIZABETH CITY
HARBOR OF HOSPITALITY *North Carolina*

TO: Mayor and Members of the City Council
FROM: Rich Olson, City Manager
REF: City Manager's Weekly FYI ~ August 14,2020
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For the last 17 years, I have been providing the citizens of Elizabeth City information regarding the City through this FYI format. I have been writing FYI's to educate our citizens on the positive items going on in the City. The FYI is now emailed to over 5000 people and is being sent to multiple counties. A number of groups resend the FYI out as an email blast. Weekly, The Daily Advance writes follow-up stories about the items discussed in the FYI. Seventeen years ago, I was the one who wrote most of the items within the FYI, now I receive plenty of help from the dedicated staff we have at the city. I provided you this insight to let everyone know firsthand what's going on in Elizabeth City. The reason I mention this is that this FYI will be my last as City Manager of Elizabeth City. I have decided to retire and move closer to my family. My retirement is effective next Saturday. You may ask yourself "why does a public sector employee retire on a Saturday?" There are many reasons, but mainly as City Manager you work 24/7. You are never "off duty".

I first came to Elizabeth City in July of 2003 and returned in August to sign my employment agreement. My start date was scheduled for October 1, 2003. However, on September 18, 2003, while in Charlotte for the International City / County Management Association annual conference, Hurricane Isabel hit Elizabeth City causing massive damage. At that time, Mayor Bell wanted to know what I was doing. John Bell could be very persuasive. I told him I would rent a car and be there in a couple of hours. That statement demonstrated I did not know the geography of North Carolina back then. I do remember it took about five and a half hours and during the last 40 miles I was following an NCDOT truck that was removing the fallen trees off of US 17. When I arrived in Elizabeth City, I could not believe the destruction. I had been through four tornados and two hurricanes prior to this time and I was still shocked by the damage. The City was without power for five days and the sound of chain saws were common place. For five days all I ate was North Carolina pulled pork ~ a different style of BBQ and fried chicken. What I realized very quickly was the hard work of our city employees and our partnering agencies. The community

came together to address what needed to be done. I knew then that I had made the right career decision. Those early days are still stuck in my mind as I leave.

Elizabeth City is filled with challenges; however, I have a vested interest and I believe we have accomplished quite a bit. Including the construction of Aviation Park, South Park and River Road Complex, growth along the Halstead corridor and the continuing revitalization of the downtown, sale of the generating assets, which allowed us freedom from high electric rates, and finally receiving over \$100 million in state and federal grants that allowed us to address critical needs within the community at a fraction of the cost. However, I am constantly haunted by what we could have accomplished under the right circumstances.

I was recently interviewed by The Daily Advance concerning my retirement. I shared with them some of my basic management philosophies and beliefs. The first and primary is I work for the citizens of Elizabeth City through the City Council. My recommendations have always been based on what is best for the City. Ultimately, the City Council makes the policy decisions and we will follow their directive because they are the elected body that represents the citizens. Staff's recommendations have always been based on advance analytics and / or common sense. Sometimes we had neither.

Elizabeth City has a bright future mainly due to the dedicated staff which remains. I am confident that God will continue to shine down on our community. Elizabeth City will continue to hold a special place in Gayle's and my heart. We have enjoyed our time here and thank you for your support and friendship over the years.

Farewell!