

CITY OF COLONIAL HEIGHTS, VIRGINIA
City Council Retreat
Friday & Saturday, February 3-4, 2023
Captain Todd Lighthouse Suite, Smithfield Station
Smithfield, Virginia

Friday, February 3, 2023

I. Call to Order

The following members of City Council were present for the Friday session:

Present: The Honorable Kenneth B. Frenier
The Honorable Elizabeth G. Luck
The Honorable John E. Piotrowski
The Honorable Dr. Laura F. Poe
The Honorable Robert W. Wade, Vice-Mayor
The Honorable T. Gregory Kochuba, Mayor

Absent: The Honorable John T. Wood

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Kochuba at 1:03 P.M.

II. Development-Related Update and Discussion

A. Staff Economic Development Update

Mrs. Karen Epps, Director of Economic Development provided updates and information relative to the following:

- Projects completed in 2022**
- Implementation of the Economic Development website – the website is up and running with an increased number of visits.**
- Update on the Charles Dimmock Parkway Tier-4 Industrial Site further suggesting preparing the site to “level-ready” in an effort to move the current listing to Tier-5.**
- Funding updates from Virginia Tourism ARPA funds to Richmond Regional Tourism and Petersburg Area Regional Tourism (PART).**
- PART marketing campaign focusing on television and digital media.**

B. Discussion of Development Opportunities for Various Properties

Council and staff discussed the following properties:

- Pickwick Shopping Center**

To pursue the possible purchase of various properties located in the shopping center through a third party; in an effort to determine the level of interest in selling.

➤ **Cal's**

Mr. Joseph Carter, Planning Director, provided information relative to the uses of the property and possible RTA and DEQ issues. Additionally, Mr. Smith provided information relative to Brownfield studies and various grants to address possible redevelopment of the Cal's property. After further discussion by Council and staff, it was the consensus of Council to initiate discussions with James Meadow relative to the possibility of the sale and redevelopment of the property.

➤ **Home2Suites**

Mrs. Epps provided information relative to the specifications of the proposed hotel which included: 5 floors, 145 rooms, and a \$32M investment. Continuing, Mr. Smith provided information relative to staff-recommended tax rebate incentives. After further discussion by Council and staff, it was the consensus of Council for staff to move forward with tax rebate incentive discussions.

Mr. Smith provided information and timeline updates relative to the following properties:

- **City Health Department Building, Highland Avenue – It was the consensus of Council to execute vacation of the property by July 1, 2023 with a staff update from staff in May, as to the progress.**
- **City Hall Parking Lot expansion – Mr. Smith provided updates relative to the 211 James Avenue and 218 Highland Avenue properties noting proposed timelines for the asbestos abatement and demolition of the properties.**

C. Discussion regarding Sherwood Hills Swim Club Property

Mr. Smith provided updates relative to the amount of delinquent taxes and timeline for the proposed foreclosure sale of the property scheduled for March 22, 2023.

III. Break

IV. Planning and Code Enforcement Discussion

A. Code Enforcement and Potential City Code Revisions.

The following items are carry-over items of discussion from the January 17, 2023 work session:

- **Tall Grass** – It was the consensus of Council to revise the Tall Grass Ordinance to reflect the following changes:
 - Reduce notice time period from 10 days to 7 days.
 - Increase the Administrative Fee from \$30 to \$100.
 - Add a \$100 civil penalty for 2nd offense in the same calendar year.

An ordinance reflecting the above noted changes to be considered by Council at the March regular meeting.

- **Overgrowth and Accumulation** – After much discussion relative to the number of properties with severely overgrown vegetation and the lack of enforcement powers granted by state legislation; it was the consensus of Council for Vice Mayor Wade to discuss this issue with Delegate Mike Cherry in an effort to introduce legislative changes to address this ever-growing problem.
- **608 Hamilton Avenue** – Council recalled the previous action taken on the property. After much discussion, it was the consensus of Council for staff to contact the property owner to determine any interest by the owner, to sell the property.

It was determined that staff would forward a letter to the owner requesting their intentions, the week of February 6, 2023.

- **Inoperable Vehicles** – It was the consensus of Council to maintain the current enforcement as related to this item.
- **Exterior Storage – Clutter** – After much discussion and review information provided by Mr. Carter; it was the consensus of Council to add a definition of clutter to the City Code.

An ordinance reflecting the above noted change to be considered by Council at the March regular meeting.

B. Other Potential Planning-related City Code Revisions

There was discussion by Council and staff relative to the following items; with the following action to be taken:

- **Short-term Rentals** – It was the consensus to bring this before Council at a future work session.
- **Resident Zoning District Review** – It was the consensus of Council for staff to proceed with research on this item.

- **Landscape Code Review** – It was the consensus of staff to proceed with research on the issue for presentation at a future work session.

V. Break

VI. Planning and Code Enforcement Discussion (Continued)

- **Planning Code Standards Cleanup** - It was the consensus of staff to proceed with research on the issue for presentation at a future work session.

Staff determined a target date for further discussion and consideration of the above items at a work session would be late spring or early summer.

VII. Roundabout Area Enhancement Discussion

Mr. Wade presented the following information relative to a Phase I and Phase II development of the roundabout and the area around the pond at the roundabout:

- **Phase I – Roundabout**
 - Illuminated flag poles and low plantings in the central island.
 - Stamped concrete in the current open median areas.
 - Small plantings with possible large rock in the splitter islands. (Authorization from VDOT must first be obtained before placement of rocks.)
 - Review of proposed plan by the City's Transportation Safety Commission before initiation of work.

- **Phase II – Area around the pond**
 - Clearing of hillside around the pond pending VDOT approval.
 - Installation of additional larger fountains in the pond.
 - Installation of hillside Colonial Heights sign.

Additional discussion and comments relative to the following improvements in the City to be discussed at upcoming work session(s):

- Complete the remaining number of updated street lights along the Boulevard.
- Relocate the City Christmas Tree to a more central location.
- Enhanced Christmas decorations along the Boulevard.

VIII. Break for Dinner

IX. Reconvene

X. Financial Overview

A. Revenue Trends

Mrs. Rhodes, Director of Finance, advised that the revenue trends for 2022 came in slightly higher than estimated, with the sales tax coming in well above the projected numbers and personal property tax projections on target.

B. FY 23-24 Budget Preview

Mr. Smith noted key dates listed in the Budget Schedule and provided several key items for discussion:

- Employee compensation**
- Increase in employee insurance costs**
- Possible increase in utility rates**
- Submission of grant application for Phase II of Violet Bank Restoration Project**
- Grant awarded for completion of the Pickle Ball courts with estimated completion by June 2024**
- Review and update of the Smartscale Grant applications for the Boulevard trail spur and Phase 6 of the Appomattox River Greenway Trail projects**
- Review and update of the Phase 2 Lakeview Avenue and Boulevard Modernization grant applications.**

C. Quarterly Finance Report – Second Quarter FY 23

Ms. Rhodes provided information and discussed the increase in the real estate and personal property taxes paid compared to those collected the previous year.

D. Project Updates

- Enforcement of the Cigarette Tax stamps**
- Progress on the Munis Financial System**
- Possibility of the installation of a bill-pay kiosk in City Hall**
- City-wide security project**

E. Other Finance Items

Mr. Smith provided updates relative to the submission of the City's Annual Audit.

XI. City Holiday Schedule for 2023

It was the consensus of Council to add Juneteenth to the official City Holiday Schedule.

XII. Recess

Saturday, February 4, 2023

I. Breakfast

II. Reconvene/Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Kochuba at 9:03 AM with the following members of Council present:

**Mr. Frenier
Mrs. Luck
Mr. Piotrowski
Dr. Poe
Mr. Wade
Mayor Kochuba
Mr. Wood - ABSENT**

III. Tax-Related Discussion

A. Personal Property Tax Discussion regarding:

1. Proration

Mr. Bill Feasenmyer, Commissioner of Revenue, joined the meeting via telephone.

Council and staff discussed the pros and cons of prorating taxes and the number of Virginia localities that currently prorate taxes; they also discussed tax relief on high mileage vehicles.

By majority consensus of Council, with Dr. Poe being the dissenting vote, it was decided not to change to prorate taxes. VOTE: 5-1

2. Tax Rate

Council and staff recalled and discussed the reduction of the tax rate during COVID; however, it was the consensus of Council for the rate to revert back to \$3.50 for FY23-24. VOTE: 6-0

3. Relief Percentage

Mr. Feasenmyer provided information relative the personal property tax relief percentages. After further discussion and consideration, it was the consensus of Council that the current Personal Property tax Relief percentage should remain at 46% for the calendar year 2023. (VOTE: 6-0)

Mr. Smith advised staff would bring the final recommended percentage rate to Council in March.

B. Real Estate Tax Discussion regarding Elderly/Disabled Tax Exemption

Mr. Feasenmyer provided information his office used to determine the exemption; specifically noting that the income and asset limits of the applicant are based on the previous year's income. Mr. Feasenmyer advised that the city was currently mid-range in comparison to other localities for income limits; however, the city's asset limits were lower (currently at \$80,000).

After further discussion, it was the consensus of Council to support an increase in the income limit by 10% to \$44,000; and the net worth (assets) to \$100,000 to be effective this calendar year. (VOTE: 6-0)

IV. Break

V. Human Resources Discussion Items (and working lunch)

The following items were discussed and/or considered by Council as presented by Ms. Jennifer Carpenter, Human Resources Director, and Mr. Smith:

A. Public Works Compensation

- Staff provided an overview of survey results for maintenance positions and potential revisions to pay ranges/pay rates for various Public Works positions.**
- Staff to review entry-level Public Works salaries to consider a higher pay rate.**
- Staff to review a system for moving employees through the pay plan with recommendations presented during the upcoming budget discussions.**
- Staff to prioritize completion of annual evaluations**
- Staff to review a possible evaluation award program.**

B. Other Compensation Items

- **Employee Bonuses** – Council supports a \$1,000 bonus for all full-time employees not part of the Public Safety pay plan. Staff to present to Council in March.

C. Employee Moral Initiatives and Discussion

- Staff reviewed the results of the Employee Survey with Council.
- Staff presented various employee initiatives
- Staff reviewed annual leave accrual policy.
- **Vacation Payout** – Council supports bringing back a proposed one-time vacation leave payout for employees over the accrual limit. Staff to bring back for Council’s consideration following completion of the annual audit.
- **Vacation Code Change** – Council supports changing the City Code to remove the restriction on new employees using vacation time during the six-month probationary period. Staff to bring before Council in the form of an ordinance.
- **City Hall Work Hours** – Council supports changing work hours at City hall to 8:30 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. for all offices at City Hall. Employees previously grandfathered would remain on the normal schedule.
- City Manager to emphasize guidance to departments for limited telework situations.
- **Employee Suggestion Program** – Staff to establish an ongoing suggestion form for employees to anonymously submit suggestions to the City Manager.
- **Years of Service Recognition** – Staff to reinstitute the Employee Years-of-Service Recognition Program with additional options for recognition awards for employees.
- **Department On-site Meetings** – The City Manager/Human Resources will be starting a series of on-site meetings with employees at their department locations. The City Manager and Human Resources Director will provide updates. The first series of meetings to be scheduled beginning March 2023.
- Upcoming on-site harassment/discrimination training for employees to be forthcoming.
- **Employee Vacancies** – Council was provided with a report containing employee vacancies by department.
- Sick leave payout at retirement – Council supports increasing the maximum payout amount of sick leave upon retirement from \$8,000 to \$10,000. This item will be brought before Council in the form of an ordinance.

D. City Attorney’s Workload Pertaining to the School System.

Mr. Fisher reported that between 20 and 25% of his work day was dedicated to School Board work. After Mr. Fisher's comments, Discussion ensued between Council members regarding sharing duties of the City Attorney with the School Board and should this practice continue. It was the consensus of Council to discuss this topic further during the budget process.

VI. Consideration of Real Property Tax Exemption Request by Keystone Truck & Tractor Museum, Inc.

After brief discussion by Council members, it was the consensus of Council to deny the request.

VII., Wrap-up/Adjourn

City of Colonial Heights Audit Statement

In accordance with requirements in the Code of Virginia §15.2-2511, if a locality's audit is not completed as required by this statute, the locality must promptly post a statement on its website, if such website exists, with the following information:

- That the required audit is pending,**
- The reasons for the delay,**
- And the estimated date of completion.**

City of Colonial Heights Audit Statement

The City of Colonial Heights audit for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2022 is pending. The major factors for the delay of the audit are the implementation of a new financial system and vacancies in various important positions related to the audit: the Director of Finance (vacant for a significant portion of FY 21-22) and the Deputy Director of Finance. The City of Colonial Heights finance team is working diligently to complete their tasks for the auditors to prepare the audit report. Our estimated date of completion for the audit report is February 28, 2023.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Dr. Poe, seconded by Mr. Piotrowski, and approved on voice vote to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 1:28 PM.

APPROVED:

T. Gregory Kochuba, Mayor

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ATTEST:

Pamela B. Wallace, City Clerk