

MINUTES  
REGULAR MEETING  
JANUARY 11, 2022

The regular meeting of the Council for the City of Covington was held on Tuesday, January 11, at 6:30 p.m. at Council Chambers in City Hall, 333 W. Locust Street, Covington, Virginia.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Thomas H. Sibold, Jr. The invocation was given by Pastor Stephanie Clark, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll call of Council showed all members present as follows: Mayor Sibold, Vice Mayor David S. Crosier, Councilman William E. (Lance) Carson, Jr., Councilman Raymond C. Hunter, and Councilman S. Allan Tucker.

City Manager: Krystal Onaitis

City Attorney: Mark Popovich

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Vice Mayor Crosier made a motion to approve the agenda and to add a Special Presentation by Finance Director David Bryant for the second quarter financial report. Mr. Hunter added a second, and members agreed by consent to both.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

Covington Fire Chief Andrew Baker addressed the need for additional funding for replace the self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) and equipment necessary for many of the calls fire personnel answer. Chief Baker said a decision was made last week to purchase part of the equipment necessary using a FEMA grant for \$65,000 and an Aid to Localities from the State of Virginia Fire Programs for \$170,000. However, this is less than half of the \$375,000 needed to fully overhaul the SCBA and equipment. He praised Police Chief and Public Safety Director Chris Smith for his efforts in helping secure funding but stated that splitting the project and buying new carbon-fiber bottles in two separate fiscal years is putting firefighters at risk. Currently the fire department has 32 air packs or SCBA that were purchased in 1992 and an additional four ones after 2000. The department owns 62 carbon-fiber bottles that have a 15-year life span, and 43 "are at or beyond" their lifespan and can't be rehydrated. Some old steel bottles are still being used and will not pass the hydrostatic test required. Also, parts for the air packs are difficult to obtain because they're so outdated. The old bottles are filled at 2,216 pounds of pressure per square inch (PSI), and new ones are refilled (at lowest pressure) at 4,500 PSI. The current air compressor used to refill the bottles only puts out 4,200 PSI, so it will be unable to adequately fill new bottles.

New masks costing \$310 each are necessary for each firefighter in order to avoid Covid and other contamination. Each carbon-fiber bottle costs \$915.15, The air compressor will cost approximately \$79,000. The Cascade System for the firehouse and installation costs are estimated at \$78,988.99. Chief Baker said he will not put new bottles in service when he receives them in early spring because it is too dangerous to mix old and new bottles with very different air pressure rates; if firemen accidentally attempt to refill old bottles with the mandated 4,500 PSI, the weaker bottles will explode. This is a tremendous liability to the fire department and the City, and Baker stated that if SCBA isn't replaced soon, the fire department will not complete inside firefighting and hazardous materials response because of the outdated SCBA. "We are in dire need of air packs," Chief Baker summarized, stating that he is agreeable to waiting until the new fiscal budget year in July, but the SCBA needs to be replaced soon at an approximate cost of an additional \$200,000. Councilman Carson asked if Covid funds could be used for this project, and Ms. Onaitis said ARPA funds cannot be used and that FEMA funding only provided about half of what they asked for. Because the fire department has only one quote and another quote scheduled to arrive soon, they will need to bid out the process, use the state contract, or tag on to a cooperative agreement with another locality. She stated she will work with Chief Baker and Chief Smith and other public safety agency officials to purchase what they can and work together to secure funding for the rest. Vice Mayor Crosier asked if the fire department is looking at a depreciation schedule for the bottles, and Chief Baker agreed that they'll need to look at a schedule for replacing the bottles, possibly every five years for the ones that are damaged during use.

## CORRECTION AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

On a motion by Vice Mayor Crosier, seconded by Mr. Tucker, Council consented to approve the following minutes as presented: Work Session on December 7, 2021; and the Regular Meeting on December 14, 2021.

## SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

Finance Director David Bryant presented the second quarter budget summary, stating the unique situation in this report deals with availability of goods, compounded by the cost increases in supplies, materials, parts, equipment, and energy sources that will need to be closely monitored for the remainder of fiscal year 2022 to keep costs in check. Planned projects which were budgeted last spring have experienced large cost increases since being budgeted. Revenues in this quarter maintained a "steady pace" compared to last year. No functional area has overrun the projected budget to date. The Utility Fund has stabilized currently. The Resolution for Utility Relief passed in December 2021 will provide funding to more than 200 household accounts in the next two weeks, and 105 people have signed up for the payment plan.

The Utility Relief funds will not pay entire accounts of any household, but it will be helpful. The state moratorium to begin cutting off water and sewer was slated to begin on November 1, but because of the Utility Relief funds, cut-offs will begin on February 1 for people who did not register for the payment plan. Covington is the last locality in the area to end the moratorium on cut-offs. Mr. Bryant said staff will continue to review revenues and expenditures and make quarterly presentations to keep Council apprised. Fuel Costs for electricity, natural gas, and gasoline for daily operations have made the biggest impact, with electricity costs increased twenty percent, or \$13,000 more per this second quarter compared to last year. Natural gas showed a 53 percent increase at an additional \$5,100 per quarter, and gasoline costs jumped 70 percent, at \$13,650 quarterly. Ms. Onaitis asked for figures comparing costs during winter months for the last three years, and Mayor Sibold asked that be extended to cost analysis for the last five years, which will show impacts beyond the "Covid year."

## REPORT OF THE CITY MANAGER

1. Economic Development: The Economic Develop Corporation's rebranding efforts are going well, and a news story on Roanoke Channel 7 WDBJ was picked up on the news wire and appeared in *Richmond BizSense*, giving free media coverage to the EDC and providing positive coverage for the pad-ready site.

The Historical Main Street Revitalization Project option agreement for Project Sparkle was presented to and executed by during the Industrial Development Authority meeting on Jan. 10 provides a 12-month period for a developer to conduct necessary due diligence for the building and secure financing for preapproved uses in hospitality, retail, housing, lodging, and light manufacturing. The developer is a resident of Falling Springs and has been involved with Main Street revitalizations in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia.

The Rivermont Redevelopment Project has received a firm confirmation from Landmark Development for their Request for Proposal to receive five senior housing vouchers from the Waynesboro Housing Authority, which oversees Covington's housing needs. If awarded, these vouchers should help ensure that Landmark will be awarded the Virginia Housing grant for \$10,000,000 for development.

2. Pad-ready Site: Invitations for Bids for tree removal were sent out yesterday on the state procurement site, with two advertisements to be placed in the local newspaper and four local loggers receiving the bid package. The removal must be complete by April 1. A construction administration contract addendum was signed by IDA yesterday for moving ground for late March after trees are cleared. The \$40,000 contract will give Timmons' staff the ability to monitor quality assurance and quality control. A second plan submittal was received today and will take 14-21 days to get feedback before a bid can be submitted and contractors can begin to move dirt, keeping on the time schedule.

3. EQ Basin: Invitations for Bid were sent to preapproved bidders, and she is awaiting responses.

4. Maple Avenue Phase III: She held a meeting with department heads and VDOT officials, and she anticipates submitting the plans for review with Hurt and Proffitt in next two weeks. VDOT has committed to a two-week plan review, which will allow the bids to be awarded and work to begin in mid-spring.

5. Joint Services: The Inmate Housing Resolution passed last month has now been signed by all localities and forwarded to the state delegation. Work is underway to finalize requests for bid for the Regional Jail Facility Assessment.

6. Nettleton Property: Invitations for bid went out and a pre-bidding meeting was held last week. When the heavy demolition begins, the Recycling Center will likely be closed during each week for safety reasons, with recycling taking place on Saturdays and Sundays only. The contractor will be responsible for cleaning up the site each week to make it safe for the public. Public service announcements will be made. Moving the location is not an option because a great deal of electrical work would be necessary to ensure the high voltage necessary to run the compactor. Mayor Sibold noted that this will require staff to work full time on weekends.

7. Pavement Condition Index: This assessment of evaluating city-maintained roadways is in progress. Each road will be rated and assigned depreciation information and the best method of surface treatment, and all information will be entered into the GIS system by Timmons' staff.

8. Sinkhole on Chestnut and Lexington: Hammond-Mitchell, Inc. employees have completed work on replacing a 14-foot piece of collapsed pipe that required excavating 17 feet deep and 200 tons of gravel, completed per VDOT standards. The City supplied the pipe and gravel at a cost of approximately \$4,200, and the contract for HMI was \$12,800.

Ms. Onaitis also praised Public Works and Parks & Recreation employees for their efforts in snow removal on January 3 and January 9. Six drivers and one mechanic completed pavement clearing on all corridors, logging 428 miles and applying eighty tons of salt to all roads.

#### UNFINISHED/OLD BUSINESS

Concerning the Deed of Bargain and Sale of City Real Estate/Land, Lot 1020 Idlewilde, White Oak Lane, to Michael H. and Lisa K. Persinger, Vice Mayor Crosier made a motion to accept. Mr. Tucker seconded, and a roll call vote showed a unanimous decision: Mayor Sibold: For; Vice Mayor Crosier: For; Mr. Carson: For; Mr. Hunter: For; and Mr. Tucker: For.

On a motion from Mr. Crosier, seconded by Mr. Tucker, Council voted unanimously to approve R-22-01, an Appropriations Resolution for the Joint Pad Site from the Joint Pad Site GO Bond in the amount of \$3,000,000. The vote showed Mayor Sibold: For; Vice Mayor Crosier: For; Mr. Carson: For; Mr. Hunter: For; and Mr. Tucker: For.

Vice Mayor Crosier made a motion to approve Resolution R-22-02 Designating a Revitalization Area, Exhibit A (the Historical District map) and 410 W. Main Street. Mr. Tucker added the second, and the unanimous vote showed Mayor Sibold: For; Vice Mayor Crosier: For; Mr. Carson: For; Mr. Hunter: For; and Mr. Tucker: For. Ms. Onaitis said this address blight, improvement, and tax incentives for investors interested in the area. It also helps program ARPA funds for the revitalization zone.

#### NEW BUSINESS

Mayor Sibold stated that the pavement on Durant Road in front of Wendy's has gotten worse with recent bad weather and needs mill and overlay. Ms. Onaitis said it will need to be completed in spring to ensure success. She announced that the Board of Zoning Appeals will be meeting on January 24 to consider granting a parking variance for Wendy's in anticipation of their constructing a new building.


#### CLOSED SESSION

Vice Mayor Crosier made a motion to enter into closed session for the limited purpose of (1) discussing a prospective business where no previous announcement has been made of the business' interest in locating facilities in the city; (2) the investment of public funds where competition or bargaining is involved, where, if made public initially, the financial interest of the

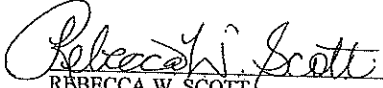
City would be adversely affected; and (3) consultation with legal counsel requiring the provision of legal advice, all as it relates to several economic development efforts currently under consideration by the city, pursuant to Section 2.2-3711(A)(5), (A)(6) and (A)(8). Mr. Tucker seconded, and members consented with an "aye" vote.

After returning from Closed Session, Council voted by consensus to certify that only the matter stated was discussed on a motion by Vice Mayor Crosier, seconded by Mr. Tucker.

With no further business to come before Council, the meeting was adjourned on a motion from Vice Mayor Crosier and seconded by Mr. Tucker.

  
THOMAS H. SIBOLD, JR., MAYOR  
PRESIDENT OF THE CITY COUNCIL AND,  
AS SUCH, EX-OFFICIO OFFICER OF THE  
CITY OF COVINGTON, VIRGINIA

ATTEST:

  
REBECCA W. SCOTT  
CITY CLERK