

**CITY OF NEW BERN
BOARD OF ALDERMEN SPECIAL MEETING – ANNUAL RETREAT
FEBRUARY 11, 2022 – 12:00 P.M.
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES CONFERENCE ROOM
303 FIRST STREET**

Board Members in Attendance: Mayor Dana Outlaw; Aldermen Sabrina Bengel, Jameesha Harris, Robert Aster, Johnnie Ray Kinsey, Barbara Best, and Jeffrey Odham. Absent: None. A quorum was present.

Also in Attendance: Foster Hughes, City Manager; Marvin Williams, Assistant City Manager; and Brenda Blanco, City Clerk.

City Manager’s Overview of Retreat

A very brief overview of the retreat was provided.

Departmental Overview and Vision for Next Fiscal Year

Mr. Hughes explained a salary study is underway, and Human Resources will discuss that during the budget process. American Rescue Plan (“ARP”) funds will play a role in next year’s budget. Considering this is an election year and that a new Board will likely be seated in June or July, a basic budget will be presented. However, the goal is for the incoming Board to have an opportunity to incorporate their goals and objectives.

After Mr. Hughes’ overview, a roll call was taken, the pledge of allegiance was recited, and Mayor Outlaw opened the discussions with prayer.

- **General Government (includes General Administration, Governing Board, PEG, IT, Legal and Elections)**

Administration and Governing Board

No significant changes will be sought. The elevator project will affect next year’s budget. Other issues at City Hall will also be reviewed, such as structural repair of the stairs and installation of a video security system.

Legal

The City Attorney is requesting an increase from \$285,151 to \$306,822. An increase is typically sought every two years and is based on the Consumer Price Index (“CPI”). The amount requested for legal services is significantly less than what is seen in neighboring cities.

Elections

The election is currently scheduled for May 17, 2022. A budget of \$40,000 will be established in case the elections do not occur by June 30th. If a runoff is activated, staff will request a budget amendment seeking additional funds to cover that cost. Alderman Bengel questioned whether the City would be a stand-alone

election, which would yield higher costs. Mr. Hughes indicated staff would check on this.

Information Technology

Information Technology (“IT”) will request capital project funding to replace equipment that is reaching its end of life. Operations will rise by approximately \$59,000 to cover an increase in maintenance contracts.

PEG

The PEG channel is exploring a city podcast as another means of circulating information and is also looking at a new mass notification system. Steps are being put into place to ensure city meetings and programs are available on various platforms. The implementation of closed captioning for PEG broadcasts would satisfy an ADA compliance need. Recognizing a lot of people are not subscribing to paid services such as Suddenlink, the City is looking at platforms such as Roku TV to make the City’s programming available to all citizens. Proposed capital projects and increased operating expenses were reviewed.

Alderman Kinsey inquired about contractors who assist with capturing events. Colleen Roberts, Public Information Officer (“PIO”), announced the City uses approximately six videographers and three still photographers. Alderwoman Harris asked for a list of the contracts, and Mrs. Roberts indicated she would share information on the vendors.

Alderman Best expressed concern about the elderly population that does not utilize technology. She wanted to ensure they would still be able to watch CityTV3 on their televisions. Mr. Hughes stated the ability to watch the channel on Suddenlink would not change.

- **Development Services**

Amanda Ohlensehlen, Economic and Community Development Manager, provided an overview of the department, budget requests, and data relative to permits and economic growth. She requested an administrative support position to assist her with community and economic development. Funding is sought for GIS hardware and reconfiguration at an expense of up to \$15,000. The job advertisement for Executive Director of Redevelopment Commission should post next week. The department received two additional positions in last year’s budget: a GIS Technician, and a Nuisance Abatement Officer.

- **Finance**

Kim Ostrom, Director of Finance, reviewed the department’s makeup, its Fiscal Year 2021 accomplishments to date, and future initiatives. Slide three referenced privilege license collections, which was clarified as beer and wine licenses. Staff is moving forward to close out as many FEMA projects as possible by the end of

the fiscal year. Alderman Aster noted it would be good to receive as much reimbursement as possible prior to the next hurricane season. No significant changes are expected in the department's budget. The current audit contract expires this year, and a Request for Proposal ("RFP") will be issued in Fiscal Year 2023.

- **Fire**

The department's vision and goals were reviewed by Fire Chief Bobby Boyd, as well as statistical information on growth, incidents, and response times.

(Alderman Kinsey momentarily stepped out of the room at 12:41 p.m., returning at 12:42 p.m.)

Alderman Bengel pointed out medical calls were increasing as fire calls were decreasing. She questioned whether more focus should be placed on emergency medical services ("EMS"). Chief Boyd stated it was good that fires were decreasing, and he pointed out surveys indicate citizens expect fire personnel to provide medical care, especially in the first few minutes following a call when medical attention is most crucial. He explained the requirements that would be associated with use of designated vehicles versus fire apparatuses to respond to medical calls. Alderwoman Harris expressed support for two additional employees to respond by separate vehicle as that would extend the life of a fire apparatus. Chief Boyd noted all employees are now required to be trained Emergency Medical Technicians.

Noting the volume increase in fire, EMS, and police calls, Chief Boyd stated there was a need for one more telecommunicator in the Police Department. Alderman Odham requested an overlap report on how many times multiple calls are handled by the call center and how many times a station has a company out on a call and receives a second call that is for a fire. A conversation ensued about staffing in the telecommunication center. The center is usually staffed with three telecommunicators and one supervisor, although sometimes there are only two telecommunicators on duty. Alderman Odham questioned if agencies in other cities reimburse the call center.

Capital requests included replacement or refurbishment of equipment, replacement of a pumper and a service vehicle, a storage building, a temporary fire station in the Taberna/Carolina Colours area, and a permanent station for the Highway 43 corridor.

Revisiting the topic of the call center, Police Chief Patrick Gallagher voiced a desire for at least four telecommunicators and one supervisor in the room at any given time. He indicated he would research what is recommended. Mr. Williams suggested reviewing and considering the call volume. Alderman Odham felt the best situation would be to combine local call centers. The issue in the past has

been all parties felt there would be cost savings by combining the centers. However, that should not be the reason for the discussion. The discussion should focus on improving the level of service.

Alderman Aster discussed the need to replace the department's self-contained breathing apparatus ("SCBA"). This equipment is a necessity for the firemen, as it is their breathing apparatus when fighting fire. If funds are not received through a FEMA grant, Alderman Aster said the City would need to bite the bullet and plan to fund the replacements. A grant decision should be announced in April or March. There are a total of 39 units, which are no longer repairable. The replacement cost is approximately \$7,000 per unit, according to Chief Boyd.

- **Human Resources**

Sonya Hayes, Director of Human Resources, stated next year's budget will look at enhancing the wellness program, increasing funds for temporary help services and training for employees, and funding internships.

(Alderman Best momentarily stepped out of the room at 1:19 p.m., returning at 1:20 p.m.)

The department needs to significantly increase temporary help services from \$500 to \$10,000 due to the demand of handling matters related to COVID.

Alderwoman Harris asked if the wellness program would incorporate mental health, and Mrs. Hayes confirmed employee training would address both stress and mental health.

(Alderman Kinsey momentarily stepped out of the room at 1:32 p.m.)

Mrs. Hayes described the desire to offer a more robust internship program. She also announced the City's planned participation in the middle and elementary schools Career on Wheels ("COW") program. The City will have on display a fire truck, police car, street sweeper, dump truck, sewer truck with a camera, etc.

Alderman Best expressed a desire to bring back the employee picnic in the next fiscal year. She felt it would help employees become acquainted with one another and would boost morale. Alderwoman Harris concurred.

- **Parks and Recreation**

Kari Warren, Interim Director of Parks and Recreation, reviewed the department's vacancies, major projects completed this fiscal year and those in progress, as well as next year's goals. Mr. Hughes reviewed the timeline for the development of the Stanley White Recreation Center.

Noting one of the goals mentioned by Mrs. Warren was increasing the number of volunteers for large events and cleanups, Alderman Best inquired about employees who are required to work special events and whether volunteers would relieve some of that burden. Mr. Hughes explained volunteers could assist with tasks like manning inflatables, but set up and take down must be performed by staff. The department will try to hire part-time employees to assist, as temporary help has not been reliable. Mr. Hughes pointed out that even now he still works each big event, and Public Works staff also assists. Employees who work on the weekend are allowed to take time off during the following week unless it is a busy time of the year. In those instances, they are paid overtime. While events are beneficial to the public, they are taxing on staff.

Alderwoman Harris asked about salary increases for employees who obtain a commercial driver's license ("CDL") and the status of filling the Director's position. Mr. Hughes confirmed salary increases are given to those who obtain a CDL, and the Director's position would be advertised in March. Mayor Outlaw asked about covered shelters at the cemeteries and potential improvements or docks near the terminus of Broad Street. Mr. Hughes noted the shelters were presented at last year's retreat, but no action was taken. The department will request funding this year. With respect to the 75-foot strip of land near the Broad Street terminus, Mr. Hughes will soon distribute information about a potential dock and fishing pier. Improvements to Henderson Park should be implemented in 2022, if the change in scope of work is approved by FEMA.

(Alderman Kinsey returned to the room at 1:52 p.m.)

Planned improvements include an increased playground area with more amenities, replacement of the fitness course, more blacktop games in addition to the basketball court, a rebuild of restrooms, and the addition of a shelter that could be used for picnics, a farmer's market, and a gathering area for special events.

Noting Craven County had partnered with Havelock on a project, Alderman Odham suggested the City also ask about a partnership. Mr. Hughes announced he had spoken with the County Manager and they were looking forward to possibly pursuing something in the upcoming budget.

Cemetery funding of \$225,000 includes a columbarium, shelters, and work on the fence at Greenwood cemetery. Funding of \$30,000 will be requested to install cameras for the parks that do not have them, \$180,000 for an ADA-compliant kayak launch at Union Point Park and a skate park at West New Bern Recreation Center, and the replacement of a pick-up truck.

Mr. Hughes reviewed the developments at Martin Marietta Park. Additional grants will be sought as well as sponsorships for big-ticket items such as an amphitheater.

- **Police**

Referencing an earlier question about the funding of EMS calls, Chief Gallagher explained the telecommuters handle every incoming EMS call and the dispatch for those calls. However, EMS does not contribute toward any of the operating costs, but does cover the cost and maintenance of their own radios.

Chief Gallagher reviewed the department's mission, strategies, and goals. Conference attendance will be reduced so more resources can be focused on critical training needs. Viper compliant radios will be a requirement in three years, and he is strategizing with the City Manager on ways to meet that mandate. No request will be made for additional personnel, although funding will be sought for a tactical robot. Forty-three percent of the department's vehicles are recommended for replacement. Yet only 14 vehicles will be requested in this budget, despite the concern for the fleet.

Since the parking enforcement vehicle is not air conditioned, Chief Gallagher proposed trading it and using available funds in the current budget to replace it with a small, traditional, gas-powered vehicle. That will promote safety and welfare of the parking staff. The new vehicle will cost \$20,000, and the trade-in allowance will be \$12,000. Thus, the residual cost would be \$8,000. The consensus of the Board was to support the trade-in if funds were available in the current budget.

Future departmental needs include a real-time crime center, a civilian Communications Director, an upgraded training facility with a driving track and shooting range, and an emergency services complex. The existing shooting range that is available for use is not state of the art and only meets basic needs. Alderman Bengel asked about the opportunity to partner with Craven County on a real-time crime center and the shooting range. Alderman Aster asked about an indoor range, and the challenges of such were touched on by Chief Gallagher.

(Alderman Aster momentarily stepped out of the room at 2:38 p.m.)

- **Public Works**

Public Works' operating budget is \$10 million for all its seven divisions. Al Cablay, Director of Public Works, reviewed the department's accomplishments. Alderman Odham asked for clarity on the Trent Road widening project, and staff confirmed only a drawing had been obtained and the project was not completed. Mr. Cablay clarified the staffing request should indicate one street division equipment operator instead of two, and two stormwater division equipment operators instead of one.

(Alderman Aster returned to the room at 2:44 p.m.)

Departmental challenges and opportunities were reviewed. One of the opportunities Mr. Cablay would like to pursue is accreditation through the American Public Works Association.

Alderman Aster noted one of the slides indicated the Category A project was complete. He questioned how that was possible when there are ditches that have not been touched. He said it would be hard for him to support additional staff when the City has not taken advantage of the \$36 million from this year. Alderman Best agreed and pointed out the Duffyfield canal was a major problem. Alderwoman Harris noted a map depicting areas that had been addressed and those scheduled to be addressed was requested last year by the Board. Mr. Hughes responded George Chiles, Public Works Engineer, was out, but would be consulted upon his return. Avery Smith, Stormwater Superintendent, explained when Draper Aden evaluated ditches in all the watersheds that there were stringent qualifications for what they considered Hurricane Florence sediment. Identifying ditches outside of those qualifications would have put the City in a situation. Alderman Aster said FEMA qualified the City for 360,000 cubic yards of debris removal, and it would not matter from what ditches the debris was taken. Mr. Smith confirmed it was true that FEMA did not have a master map of the ditches to be addressed, but the contractors did. Ditches can still be added as long as the Category A project is open, which closes on March 13th according to Alderman Aster. After that, it would require an extension, which the City may not receive since it has now been two years. Alderwoman Harris inquired as to how much sediment was removed, and Mr. Smith said he would check and provide that information. The Stormwater Division has five employees, and Alderman Aster restated he would never vote for additional stormwater employees until the City utilizes its contract labor. Mr. Williams asked if staff could report back next week on a listing of the ditches.

- **Public Utilities - Water Resources**

Jordan Hughes, City Engineer, reviewed the five divisions of Water Resources, their functions, goals, and challenges for next fiscal year. Continued investment is needed in infrastructure rehabilitation and replacement, as well as large capacity water and sewer projects. Mr. Hughes noted the complications associated with increased costs and availability of labor, materials, and contract services. Customer growth is trending upward at 3%. There is more sewer than water customers, which is attributed to the sewer customers in the James City area. Revenue is also continuing to grow at 3%. However, the bad news is construction costs are trending upward at 12-15%. Alderman Bengel questioned whether the City needed to increase its charges. It was unknown if construction costs would continue to increase or would level off after a few months. Fortunately, per the City Engineer, water resources has been well managed financially and has some "rainy day" money. He stated he would pay attention to the local and national markets, budget conservatively, and update the Board in the middle of the fiscal

year. At this time, rate increases are not projected as part of the budget. Alderman Odham asked if it would make more sense to adjust the tap fees versus rates since the rise is in construction costs and not so much operational. The City Engineer explained the City is not impacted by development costs as those are covered by the developer. However, increased construction costs impact the City's infrastructure repairs.

- **Public Utilities - Electric**

Charlie Bauschard, Director of Public Utilities, did not forecast any rate increases. However, like Water Resources, cost increases are being experienced and are expected to continue for goods and services. The Utility Business Operations ("UBO") and Customer and Payment Service ("CAPS") divisions were realigned and now report to and fall under Electric.

Power supply rates are forecast to remain flat through 2024. In 2025, the City should satisfy \$3.39 million in annual debt service. While no new positions will be requested, reclassification or realignment of key positions will be sought. COVID is continuing to impact staffing levels. An additional challenge is the continued battle with Duke regarding battery energy storage systems.

(Alderman Best momentarily stepped out of the room at 3:18 p.m.)

Things are going well with MetroNet. Alderman Bengel suggested MetroNet representatives provide an update to the Board. Noting his involvement in a monthly meeting with MetroNet, Mr. Hughes reported they installed in New Bern alone over 12,000 linear feet of infrastructure last month.

(Alderman Best returned to the room at 3:21 p.m.)

Alderman Odham asked about the possibility of obtaining Duke's rate schedule so it could be compared to the City's. He noted the importance of that information for future planning considering the debt that will be satisfied in 2025, the need for infrastructure improvements, and potential relief to customers.

Alderwoman Harris asked for an update on Pay-As-You-Go. Mr. Bauschard stated the program was extremely underperforming. At last glance, there are approximately 90 participants. Alderman Aster suggested a campaign for the program, and Mr. Bauschard stated it had been marketed on several levels. The costly program is still operating under a pilot project, and Mr. Bauschard did not see where it brought any value to the City. With the current deposit policy, the program is not enough to incentivize customers. Mr. Bauschard also indicated the pre-pay service was staff intensive and would put a burden on staff if the program grew. The utility billing system is in the process of integrating with Munis, which may yield some efficiencies. However, none are projected at this time. Mr.

Hughes said Public Utilities would work with the PIO to push out information on the pre-pay services.

Alderman Aster reiterated his previous suggestion about using ARP funds to backfill for employees who have been out of work with Covid.

(Alderman Odham left the meeting at 3:32 p.m.)

Ms. Blanco was asked by Alderman Aster to distribute an updated cellphone list of department heads and key staff.

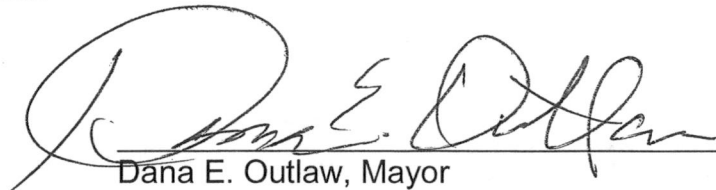
Adjourn

Alderwoman Harris made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Alderman Aster. The motion carried unanimously 6-0, time being 3:33 p.m.

The attached documents are incorporated herewith and are hereby made a part of these minutes.

NOTE: For additional details and information on the Board of Aldermen meetings, please visit the City of New Bern's website at www.newbernnc.gov. Video and audio recordings of the meeting have been archived.

Minutes approved: March 08, 2022



Dana E. Outlaw, Mayor



Brenda E. Blanco, City Clerk