

**City of New Bern
Board of Aldermen Retreat
February 5, 2021 – 1:00 p.m.
City Hall Courtroom
300 Pollock Street**

Board Members in Attendance: Mayor Dana Outlaw; Aldermen Sabrina Bengel, Jameesha Harris (arrived at 1:01 p.m.), Robert Aster, Johnnie Ray Kinsey, Barbara Best, and Jeffrey Odham. Absent: None. A quorum was present.

Also in Attendance: Mark Stephens, City Manager; and Brenda Blanco, City Clerk.

Mayor Outlaw opened the meeting with prayer. The pledge of allegiance was cited.

City Manager's Overview of Retreat

Mr. Stephens provided an overview of the agenda and items to be discussed.

Amend Agenda for Closed Session

Alderman Bengel made a motion to amend the agenda to add a closed session pursuant to 143-319.11(a)(6) and to enter into the closed session, seconded by Alderman Odham. The motion carried unanimously 7-0, time being 1:04 p.m. The Board promptly went into closed session. The regular portion of the meeting resumed at 1:47 p.m.

Update on City Hall Elevator

Mr. Stephens introduced Tripp Eure, an architect with MBF Architects, PA. Mr. Eure shared a visual of the proposed exterior and provided a brief update on the project.

Discuss Kiosks at CAPS Office

Mary Hogan, Director of Finance, and Tony Gatlin, IT Manager, shared a PowerPoint describing options to implement kiosks for utility payments. The kiosks could be connected to the City's Munis software, which would immediately credit an account upon receipt of a payment. Kiosks are being used by other municipalities, most of which absorb the credit card transaction fees. The first year's estimated cost for four kiosks was \$350,000. Possible locations for the kiosks were discussed. Alderwoman Harris commented on the ease and benefit of using Pay-As-You-Go, and she and Alderman Bengel asked about the ability to accept payments on the City's website or through an app, noting that would also allow other City fees to be through those methods. Mr. Stephens voiced concerns about the cost of maintaining an app and compared it to Pay-As-You-Go, which has less than 100 participating customers. Alderman Aster felt that was the City's fault for not effectively marketing the program. If kiosks are implemented, Alderwoman Harris suggested the drive-thru be maintained and that hours possibly be adjusted for in-person payments or that service be reserved for those with problems. Alderman Odham suggested installing one kiosk at Fort Totten where First Citizens previously had an exterior ATM. Referring to the earlier comments about utilizing an app, Mr. Gatlin announced an app was available through the Munis software. Discussion of several possible options continued. Consensus was expressed to provide funding in FY22's budget for one exterior kiosk at the Fort Totten building.

Discuss Plans for Cemeteries and Cemetery Mausoleums

Foster Hughes, Director of Parks and Recreation, provided a general overview of the City's cemeteries. The cemeteries are not perpetual care, which would be costly and require the creation of a trust fund. The cost of a columbaria and mausoleums were reviewed, as well as potential locations in each of the City's cemeteries. If those items were made available, the structures would need to include the establishment of fees to provide perpetual care and maintenance. The City's annual revenue from burials is approximately \$121,000, and expenditures exceed that amount. Alderman Odham felt mausoleums would be a good option for providing additional revenue to offset future costs. Mayor Outlaw described the benefits of having a waymarking program to assist people with locating graves, and Alderman Bengel suggested the Tourism Development Authority may be a grant source. She reflected on the number of historically prominent people who are buried in New Bern and how their graves attract tourists. The Mayor also reflected on the work of the Earl of Craven Questers. Alderman Aster proposed a small budget be provided to the group, and Mayor Outlaw suggested the group make a presentation before the Board.

(Alderman Best momentarily stepped out of the room at 2:59 p.m.)

Alderman Odham mentioned the possibility of having nice shelters at the cemeteries to rent for onsite services.

(Alderman Best returned to the room at 3:02 p.m.)

Mayor Outlaw asked if \$500 to \$1,000 was available in the PEG budget to film a 30-minute section on The Questers, and Mr. Stephens confirmed the availability. Mr. Stephens also noted staff would obtain cost estimates for a waymarking program and report back with that information. After hearing The Questers' presentation, Mayor Outlaw stated the Board could then decide on the location for the addition of a columbaria or mausoleum.

Discuss Suddenlink Issues

Since January, the City has received a total of 135 emails from individuals with complaints about Suddenlink. Those emails have been submitted to the Attorney General and legislative officials, and they will continue to be updated.

Mayor Outlaw reported on a Zoom meeting with Kinston's Mayor Don Hardy, Ayden's Mayor Steve Tripp, and three lobbyists with the NC League of Municipalities. Several cities have the same concerns and needs. Congressman Greg Murphy has reached out to high-level management at Suddenlink and the FCC regarding the issues.

Mayor Outlaw suggested other cities follow New Bern by offering information on their website as a means for customers to submit their complaints. Alderman Best said Suddenlink was not only providing bad service, but was increasing monthly costs. Alderman Bengel noted the need to band together as a region. She reported on a bill that she believed had been passed by state legislators for rural broadband. She questioned what that would entail and expressed a desire to know more. Mayor Outlaw and Alderman Bengel briefly reported on plans by several local investors to provide

internet service, although it would not include cable service. Alderman Odham expressed a need to keep the pressure on the topic, but to also look at alternative options. Mr. Stephens shared the response that was sent to the City Clerk after copies of the email complaints were forwarded to Suddenlink.

Alderwoman Harris asked about the potential for public private partnerships or grants to help the City provide the service. Mr. Stephens outlined the restrictions and prohibitions. Charlie Bauschard, Director of Public Utilities, stated the City could offer the service, but only for free as it could not undercut the private sector. Mr. Bauschard also discussed a couple of other options, one of which included marketing New Bern, and he reported on a meeting scheduled for the following week with a representative from the NC Broadband Infrastructure Office.

(Alderman Kinsey momentarily stepped out of the room at 3:31 p.m. He returned after a recess.)

Noting the City's utility lines reach beyond the municipal city limits, Mr. Bauschard commented that New Bern's market may be larger than it realizes. Mayor Outlaw asked about the age of the City's fiber optics, the strength and location of its broadband, etc., and Mr. Bauschard stated he would share information during his department review.

Recess

Alderwoman Harris made a motion to take a brief recess, seconded by Alderman Aster. The motion carried unanimously 7-0, time being 3:36 p.m. The meeting resumed at 3:45 p.m.

Departmental Overview and Vision for Next Fiscal Year

Mr. Stephens explained each Department Head would share the direction in which they wanted to take their department in the upcoming year and the items they planned to request in their budget.

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

Administration and Governing Board

No real significant changes will be sought. Discretionary spending for the Board will remain the same unless staff is instructed otherwise.

Legal

With the addition of an Assistant City Attorney, the budget will increase by \$50,000, bringing the legal budget to \$285,151.

Elections

A budget of \$40,000 will be established. If a runoff is activated, staff will request a budget amendment seeking additional funds to cover the cost of a runoff.

Information Technology

Information Technology ("IT") will be requesting the addition of a Senior IT Technician. Four capital project requests were reviewed. An increase of \$50,000 was anticipated in operating costs. There may potentially be a request to restructure the division to incorporate GIS and create an Information Systems Department.

(Alderman Kinsey momentarily stepped out of the room at 4:03 p.m.)

PEG

The PEG operating budget will increase by \$11,500 to enhance Zoom capabilities and cover the increase in meetings that are recorded and broadcast. The Housing Authority has confirmed their intention to utilize City Hall over the next two years as their meeting location. The first three meetings were held at no charge, but subsequent meetings have and will be billed monthly.

(Alderman Kinsey returned to the room at 4:06 p.m.)

With respect to elections, Alderman Bengel had asked the City Attorney to perform some research. If the City truly desired to save money and move elections to an even year, a statute exists that would allow the current Board to extend its term by one year. The City of Archdale was allowed to make such a change.

- **Development Services**

Jeff Ruggieri, Director of Development Services, reviewed the department's goals for the next fiscal year. The department intends to request three additional positions: a support position for Community and Economic Development, an additional inspector to assist the Redevelopment Commission, and a GIS Technician. The cost to update the land-use plan will be somewhere between \$50,000 to \$100,000. There will also be requests to replace two vehicles and upgrade the conference room audio.

Mayor Outlaw reflected on Charlotte's buy-out program and expressed an interest in seeing whether New Bern's budget could accommodate a similar program. Alderman Best felt it would be beneficial to have an additional staff person to assist with tracking the FEMA buyouts and claim applications. Mayor Outlaw expressed concern about the disconnect between Development Services, the departmental review, and Public Works. He felt there was a need for better communication about the jobs being permitted by Development Services and the enforcement needed by Public Works. The Mayor pointed out the information available on the City's website to help citizens understand the new base flood elevations, etc. He suggested the PEG channel be used to explain the FEMA mapping more efficiently and to incorporate comments from the CARE Group.

- **Finance**

Mary Hogan, Director of Finance, reviewed the department's Fiscal Year 2021 accomplishments and initiatives to date.

(Alderman Kinsey momentarily stepped out of the room at 4:27 p.m., returning at 4:28 p.m.)

Because of an increase in grant receipts, the addition of a Grant Accountant position will be proposed. Currently, the City pays \$15,900 annually in maintenance fees for a Munis timesheet software component that it does not use. Munis has been notified that the City will not pay the maintenance going forward, as Mrs. Hogan noted it was her intention to implement new timesheet software at a cost of \$17,000 annually. Capital improvement funding will be sought for upgrades to the Fort Totten building. With the impending implementation of kiosks, Mayor Outlaw said it would be beneficial to know anticipated staffing needs five to ten years from now to gauge how much should be spent on building capital improvements. Alderman Odham suggested a strategic approach to analyze projected space needs, which he felt could be accomplished through staff. Alderman Bengel expressed a need to review all city-owned buildings, the benefit of possibly selling some, and then using the proceeds to construct new structures. Mr. Stephens said he and staff would begin looking at city-owned properties.

The Warehouse Division will request funding for security cameras at their facility and replacement of a pick-up truck. Alderman Odham asked for an update of all city vehicles to be sent to the Board, and Alderman Aster asked for the Board to receive spreadsheets reporting the status of FEMA claims as they change. He was interested in knowing the projects that had been completed, projects outstanding, payments received, payments outstanding, etc.

- **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. Accreditation of the department is anticipated by July 2021. Next year's budget will include requests for two temporary fire stations and eight additional employees (six firefighters, an accreditation manager, and an office assistant). Chief Boyd felt these positions could be added through previous and future retirement attrition.

(Alderman Kinsey left the meeting at 5:08 p.m.)

Noting the construction movement in West New Bern, Alderman Aster asked for Mr. Stephens' thoughts on an additional fire station. To meet the short-term needs, Mr. Stephens suggested building a Public Works facility on the Water Resources parcel, moving the maintenance division of Parks and Recreation to the current Public Works site, and building a two-bay station at the water treatment plant until a joint-use facility could be built for Fire and Police. With the recent purchase of a new ladder and fire engine, the older apparatuses could be retained and utilized at the new bay. Alderman Bengel expressed a need to know the overall vision so bonds could be discussed. Mr. Stephens stated someone would be attending the Board's first meeting in March to provide information on bonds.

Chief Boyd stated the Administrative Assistant made around \$8,000 in overtime last year. The training officer is also working a lot of hours each week. Alderman Aster asked Chief Boyd to confirm his earlier statement that an Office Assistant and Accreditation Manager could be added at no cost, and Chief Boyd confirmed that was possible through attrition. Alderman Aster expressed a desire to see the two positions filled as soon as possible.

Alderman Odham asked for Chief Boyd to explain the need to send the fire department to a medical call or a wreck versus an ambulance that gets paid to respond. Chief Boyd explained the “golden hour” and stated the department only responds automatically to echo calls, which are heart attacks, no breathing, overdoses, etc. – cases where Fire can make a difference and the victim is more likely to survive by receiving attention much quicker. The department only responds to non-echo calls when requested to do so.

Alderman Bengel asked if the positions of an Office Assistant and Accreditation Manager could be added this fiscal year. Mr. Stephens stated he would have to review the numbers and report back to the Board. Alderman Best expressed a dire need for a temporary station in Hwy. 43 due to the increased growth.

Noting Sonya Hayes, Director of Human Resources, needed to leave momentarily to address an issue, Mr. Stephens said Parks and Recreation would present before Human Resources.

- **Parks and Recreation**

Foster Hughes, Director of Parks and Recreation, announced the department was reaccredited by CAPRA in 2020, and he displayed an award that was recently received. Mr. Hughes reported on projects that have been completed this fiscal year and those in progress. He also reviewed goals for next fiscal year. Budget requests will include funding for three additional staff members, playground and park improvements and upgrades, replacement of three vehicles and three mowers, security cameras in the parks, and funding for cemetery preservation.

Alderman Bengel voiced a need for the chess park to be completed. She said a local group was looking to raise funds for the installation of a fountain. Mr. Hughes stated four conceptual plans had been circulated over the last 10 years or so. Because of the small size of the property, there is a need to close off the “cut through”. Alderwoman Harris asked if the closing of the “cut through” could be considered by the Board at its February 23, 2021 meeting. Matt Montanye, Director of Public Works, felt the only adjustments would be in curbing, etc., which would not require Board approval. Mr. Stephens stated staff would like at what would be needed to close the “cut through”.

Noting mowing season was nearing, Alderman Best questioned whether additional staff would be needed to maintain all the grass. Mr. Hughes confirmed that all mowing was handled internally, and inmate help was not being utilized currently due to COVID-19.

Alderman Best made a motion to take a five-minute break, seconded by Alderman Odham. The motion carried unanimously 6-0, time being 5:59 p.m. The meeting resumed at 6:08 p.m.

- **Human Resources**

Mrs. Hayes stated the past year had been challenging due to COVID-19, and Human Resources had taken on additional tasks associated with the pandemic. Goals for FY22 were reviewed, which included complimentary safety training through Gallagher CORE 360.

- **Police**

Noting he had worked with the City for nine years and in law enforcement for almost 45 years, Police Chief Toussaint Summers reflected upon his upcoming retirement and announced his last day with the City would be March 19th. Before reviewing budget requests, he described departmental strategies and goals. COVID-19 hindered training in the current year, so an increase will be reflected in next year's training budget. Replacement of 11 vehicles will be sought, as well as an emergency services complex. Eight additional positions will be requested, seven of which will be sworn. The department currently does not have body-worn cameras, and that technology will be requested at a preliminary cost of \$150,000 to \$200,000. Additional requests were also reviewed, such as updating the security camera system at the Police Department.

Alderman Aster asked if the additional officers would be permanently assigned to the Carolina Colours zone, and he expressed concern about the amount of time it would take for a police officer to respond to an incident in Evans Mills, Brices Crossing, etc. Chief Summers stated the officers would never permanently be in an area, but would be assigned to an area. There will certainly be scenarios or emergencies for which officers would be pulled to respond outside of that area. Chief Summers explained there is currently one officer assigned to the area. Alderman Aster stated he would support the request for additional officers if he could be reassured that an additional officer would be assigned to the area.

Alderman Odham asked how the request for additional officers would be impacted by the School Resource Officers ("SRO") who would no longer perform SRO duties. Chief Summers stated he did not factor that into his request. Alderman Odham noted that meant the request for additional officers would be reduced to one. He announced Craven County had decided to fill the need for SRO's instead of utilizing the City's police officers.

Alderwoman Harris asked if the department's current building was sufficient, and Chief Summers felt the existing headquarters would suffice if two substations could be added in the Taberna and Hwy. 43 areas. Chief Summers commented that the addition of a part-time Animal Control Officer had assisted with the ability to respond to animal issues.

Alderman Best inquired as to how often the parks were patrolled. After answering that question, Chief Summers noted it may be necessary to add a park officer or a police officer to patrol all parks, especially once the Martin Marietta Park becomes fully operational. Noting Chief Summers' previous concern about not having a facility in which a vehicle could be driven in to securely transfer suspects from the vehicle to the building, Alderman Odham questioned whether that was still a need. Chief Summers said there was a need for a secure lot to take sieged vehicles. He explained a city-owned lot with a climate-controlled garage would be better for maintaining and processing the vehicles.

- **Public Works**

Mr. Montanye stated he had emailed the Board a list of all vehicles as requested earlier in the meeting. He announced staff had received a quote and was in the process of adding cameras to City Hall, and Alderman Aster asked for smoke detectors to also be added.

A quick review of the current fiscal year was provided, as well as an outlook for next fiscal year. Capital improvement requests will include funding for several projects, including the City Hall elevator. The budget will also include a request for three additional staff positions.

While expressing appreciation for the work of the Public Works staff, Mayor Outlaw noted the need for the sidewalks to be properly trimmed and maintained. Mr. Montanye reported on a 12-week period when temporary and regular employees would be addressing sidewalk maintenance and the grates around the downtown trees.

Mr. Stephens reported thus far, 26 employees had been requested in the General Fund budget and capital improvement projects totaled roughly \$8 million.

- **Public Utilities - Water Resources**

Jordan Hughes, City Engineer, began his presentation by providing an overview of the current year's goals and projects.

(Alderman Aster momentarily stepped out of the room at 7:06 p.m., returning at 7:09 p.m.)

No additional staff would be sought. Large capacity improvement projects will include improvements to the West New Bern water system and Phase III improvements to the Township 7 sewer system. Mr. Hughes reviewed challenges anticipated in FY22 and the trend in customers and revenue.

- **Public Utilities - Electric**

Charlie Bauschard, Director of Public Utilities, reviewed the five divisions of Electric, the department's overall functions, and trends for both customers and revenue. He

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- **Public Utilities - Electric**

Charlie Bauschard, Director of Public Utilities, reviewed the five divisions of Electric, the department's overall functions, and trends for both customers and revenue. He reviewed a five-year forecast for the wholesale power contract and stated he did not anticipate an increase in the cost for the upcoming fiscal year. In 2024, a 9.5% decrease is expected, and a total debt service of \$15 million will roll off in 2025. Mr. Bauschard indicated the fee schedule would be reviewed during the upcoming year with respect to unmetered service and streetlighting.

(Alderman Best momentarily stepped out of the room at 7:35 p.m., returning at 7:37 p.m.)

The utility billing system will be converted to Munis in the fall of 2021.

A very brief discussion ensued about broadband and fiberoptics.

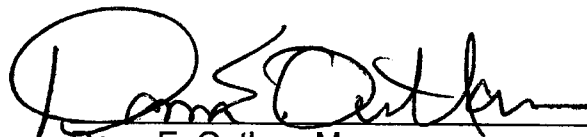
Adjourn

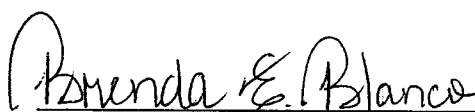
Alderman Harris made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Alderman Odham. The motion carried unanimously 6-0, time being 7:48 p.m.

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 09, 2021


Dana E. Outlaw, Mayor


Brenda E. Blanco, City Clerk