

MINUTES

City Council's Virtual Strategic Planning Meeting Tuesday, February 23, 2021 8:30 A.M.

Facilitator: Anthony Starr, Western Piedmont Council of Government.

Participants via Teleconference: Mayor Joseph Gibbons, Mayor Pro-Tem Crissy Thomas, David Stevens, Todd Perdue, Ralph Prestwood, Jonathan Beal, Ike Perkins and Ben Willis.

City Staff Participating via Teleconference: City Manager, Scott Hildebran, City Clerk, Shirley Cannon, Finance Director, Donna Bean, Fire Chief, Ken Hair, Police Chief, Brent Phelps, Economic Development Director, Kaylynn Horn, Public Information Officer, Joshua Harris, Planning Director, Jenny Wheelock, Public Utilities Director, Radford Thomas, Public Works Director, Jared Wright, and Recreation Director, Kenny Story.

Others Participating via Teleconference: Kara Fohner, *News-Topic*.

Call to Order

Mayor Gibbons welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order. He stated this retreat is the most important meeting for City Council due to their establishing their priorities for FY2021-22. Mayor Gibbons also thanked City Staff for all of their hard work and being able to accomplish so many good things during the pandemic.

Mayor Gibbons introduced Anthony Starr, Western Piedmont Council of Governments, Facilitator, of the session. Mr. Starr reviewed the agenda and ground rules for the meeting.

Mr. Starr asked Council if there were any changes and/or additions they would like to address in the City's Mission statement. Following discussion, City Council was in consensus to make the following changes to the City's Mission Statement.

Mission Statement & Vision Review (Amendments in "Bold")

The mission of the City of Lenoir is:

- To serve our citizens and the community by providing a clean, safe, healthy, attractive living and business environment, through the efficient delivery of essential city services in a fiscally responsible **and equitable** manner.
- To identify, plan and act on opportunities for preserving and improving the quality of life of **all** of our citizens and the community.

Vision for the City of Lenoir:

- We aspire to be the city of choice for ourselves and future generations- beautiful, clean and safe.

We will achieve our vision through:

- A healthy economy

- Strong businesses
- Vital neighborhoods
- A vibrant downtown
- Extensive recreational and cultural opportunities

We will preserve Lenoir's friendly, small town atmosphere and celebrate the diversity of our people.

We require a city government that is:

- Accessible and engaged with the public
- Accountable
- Efficient and responsive
- Employer of choice
- Forward thinking
- Honest and ethical
- **Inclusive and equitable**
- Innovative and collaborative
- Transparent
- Fiscally responsible

State of the City Presentation –City Manager Hildebran

City Manager Hildebran reviewed a power point presentation “Hindsight 2020-the Future Looks Bright” regarding the current state of the City. (A copy of the complete power point is available for review at www.cityoflenoir.com. Also, a copy of a bullet point list of the slides is attached to these minutes as information. This list was prepared by Joshua Harris, Communications Director.)

City Manager Hildebran reiterated the City has accomplished much over the past year and expressed appreciation to all of the Department Directors. He also thanked Communications Director, Joshua Harris for keeping everyone informed via social media.

Mr. Hildebran reported that 21 new businesses opened up in 2020 and briefly reviewed each one. He further reported that Dairi-0 has recently inquired about obtaining a permit to possibly open a restaurant here.

Mr. Hildebran also shared upcoming private investment in the City of Lenoir which includes BioNutra, West Avenue Apartments, and renovation of 819 Harper Avenue. In addition, Mr. Hildebran remarked that residents are ready to build and showed photos of new market rate housing being built on Woodbine Place along with ongoing construction in the Summerhill Development. Two homes are already occupied in Summerhill.

Additional housing permits were issued for the following:

<u>Multi-family</u>	<u>Single Family</u>
Kattz Corner, LLC	Parkview
Blue Bell Lenoir, LLC	Georgetown Estates
	Stonecroft
	512 and 508 Hibriten Drive
	825 Mulberry Street

Mr. Hildebran shared that, in December 2020, the Education Foundation, Inc. of Caldwell County

completed a 3-unit townhome at 1015 Ashe Avenue. Mr. Hildebran reminded Council a Conditional Use Permit was approved in November 2018 allowing for the multi-family townhome. Also, Brushy Mountain Builders started construction on the first two of 18+ houses in the Parkview Subdivision near the corner of Zack's Fork Road and Nuway Circle. The City is also expanding the greenway from the eastern parking lot at the Soccer Complex south around Parkway and Scarlett Oak Court and north to Sassafras Court. Recreation Director Kenny Story stated the greenway was used daily and is an asset to the City.

COVID FUNDING ASSISTANCE

Mr. Hildebran shared that, due to the impact of COVID, the City received two Community Development Block Grants (CDBG-CV Cares Act Covid 19 Funding) in the amount of \$86,056 and \$88,397 from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (D-HUD). The City partnered with Caldwell County Yokefellow, Inc. in order to provide water/sewer bill payment assistance for City of Lenoir water, sewer and solid waste customers who live inside the City limits. Finance Director Donna Bean reported that Sharon Harmon, Executive Director, Caldwell County Yokefellow, Inc. submitted information showing that \$22,591 in water fund payments has been disbursed to 94 households covering 390 months and 234 individuals and \$71,103.41 in Covid rent/mortgage payments to 60 households has been disbursed covering 182 months of shelter for 165 individuals. These funds are being administered through the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG).

Legislative Update from Paul Meyer, Executive Director, NCLM

Mayor Gibbons and Councilmember Ben Willis introduced Mr. Meyer. As information, Mayor Gibbons currently serves on the NCLM's Risk Management Executive Board (RMS) and Councilmember Willis serves on the NCLM's Board of Directors as District 10 Director.

Mr. Meyer expressed the League's appreciation to Mayor Gibbons and Councilmember Willis for their service. He also expressed sympathy for the family of Kelly Kukura who recently passed away. Mrs. Kukura was on staff at the League for a number of years and will be greatly missed.

In addition, Mr. Meyer reported the League is working hard for the passage of the COVID Relief Fund Bill. Mr. Meyer also shared there are currently over 100+ municipalities and 13 counties on the State Treasurer's office Distressed List that are not managing their finances and pointed out they have been placed on a list for review by the Local Government Commission. The League has hired additional staff to visit these cities and offer the League's assistance regarding their financial situation.

Next, Mr. Meyer related that North Carolina House Bill 2 (HB2) has been brought back up by some legislators. HB2 is a non-discrimination ordinance that requires individuals to use public school restrooms and locker rooms based on the gender on their birth certificates. Mr. Meyer reported that 10 cities are in the process of adopting their own ordinances and remarked that HB2 is also not good for North Carolina.

Mr. Meyer discussed the subject of defunding police and pointed out legislators have made suggestions to defund cities that defund police. He emphasized the League would do their very best in addressing this issue for municipalities. Also, Mr. Meyer shared the League has taken an initiative pertaining to racial equality. The League has formed a 14 member commission who will be reporting from the League about this issue. The League is also working on cyber security and the topic of firefighters cancer related deaths. This issue has been identified as a health insurance benefit and firefighters would not have to contest whether their claim was a work related incident

these claims.

Also, Mr. Meyer remarked the North Carolina General Assembly was basically unchanged in the recent election, but pointed out that no in-person meetings would affect the success of the NCLM's lobbying efforts which in turn would affect municipalities. He encouraged Councilmembers to take the opportunity to contact their Legislators as often as possible to discuss any upcoming issues. Mr. Meyer also mentioned the League's efforts to rebuild their offices that were destroyed during the massive fire in downtown Raleigh in 2017 have been hindered by COVID.

Mr. Meyer also clarified for Council that House Bill 2 (HB2) affects every county and municipality. In addition, he clarified the next round of funding from the CARES Act would go directly to municipalities.

On behalf of City Council, Mayor Gibbons thanked Mr. Meyer for his time and the good report. Councilmember Willis informed everyone if they ever have any questions regarding what is happening at the League, to contact him since he serves on the Board of Directors.

2020 Council Budget Priorities

As a reminder, City Manager Hildebran then reviewed the list of 2020 Council Budget Priorities and status of what has been accomplished. (A copy of the 2020 priorities list is attached to these minutes as information.)

Comments from Department Directors

- Planning & Police are working together using the I-WORQ software to track permits which is making the process more efficient. Plus demolition funding is being used more efficiently.
- Making progress regarding housing issues.
- The goal of foreclosures is to place the property back on the tax rolls.
- RCI Demolition is currently removing debris from the former Broyhill Furniture site. It was noted COVID has impacted several projects.
- The "hot box" the City purchased to patch potholes is very reliable and working well.
- Director Wright stated Staff would prioritize the list of streets to be paved and would work on connecting the Greenway together.
- Mike Engstrom will lead the City-wide Asset Inventory and Assessment project for City facilities and be meeting with all the other departments.
- Mr. Hildebran stated the City continues to make progress through a lot of hard work.

General Comments from City Council regarding their priorities.

- Crissy Thomas commended the Department Directors for their accomplishments during the pandemic and stated she is proud the housing issue is moving forward. Ms. Thomas further pointed out the goal should be to keep citizens informed and let them see how their tax dollars are being spent. She emphasized the City needs to do a citizen campaign in order to get information to the citizens as some may not have access to technology. It was also noted the City needs to try and provide public information to the Latino and Hispanic population in Lenoir.
- Jonathan Beal stated Council should considering looking at all parts of the City and used the Whitnel area as an example. Mr. Beal remarked Whitnel does not have a Greenway or park and mentioned there are several vacant properties including a large plant located there.
- Planning Director Wheelock agreed and stated the Whitnel area along with West End area are deserving of improvements and they will be considered in the next area plans.

➤Ike Perkins thanked Jenny Wheelock and Kaylynn Horn for the outstanding branding campaign and upcoming wayfaring signage which are great for Lenoir. Mr. Perkins shared the renovation of City Hall looks good along with downtown Lenoir.

➤David Stevens stated he is surprised at how much City Staff are doing and the projects that have been accomplished. He also stated he is proud of the significance of the City's financial planning and commended the City's great employees for continuing to work on carrying out Council's priorities.

➤Ben Willis stated Lenoir operates its government the way it is supposed to and pointed out a number of other cities are continuing to struggle financially. He also mentioned the City's property tax revenue should increase this year because County Staff has conducted a property revaluation. He further commented the next round of Covid funding may be substantial and he hopes the funds won't be restricted.

➤ Mayor Gibbons expressed appreciation to City Council and City Staff for their great leadership and how well everyone works together. He also suggested the City consider keeping the historic names of neighborhoods as well when the wayfaring signage project moves forward.

➤Communications Director Joshua Harris mentioned the City receives a lot of feedback and shared that he does pod casts, posts on Facebook and other social media outlets in order to share everything the City is doing.

Wrap-up & Adjourn:

Mr. Starr thanked City Council for the opportunity to preside over the meeting and also commended them for their great working relationship and comradery.

Mayor Gibbons thanked Mr. Starr for the great partnership between the City and the WPCOG and commented it was great to have such an outstanding organization the City can call on. In addition, Mayor Gibbons thanked the Department Directors and their Staff for all their hard work and talent in making the City of Lenoir a great place to live.

The second Planning Retreat Session will be held on Thursday, February 25 from 2:00 p.m.- 5:00 p.m.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:42 p.m.

HINDSIGHT : The Future Looks Bright

This is a bullet point list of the slides presented during the City of Lenoir City Council virtual retreat held Tuesday, February 23, 2021.

PRIVATE INVESTMENT IN LENOIR

Private Investment Opened In 2020

- Blue Ridge Energy
- Telco - January
- 818 Harper Ave - January
- Yokefellow - January
- Waterlife - February
- Google Greenway Extension - April
- Woodgrain Millworks Grant - April
- Caldwell County Farmers Market Moved Downtown - May
- Malouf Distribution Center Expanded Footprint - May
- Southern Roots Salon - May
- The Flour Shoppe - June
- Jonas Hill Hospital And Clinic - July
- Main Street Magic Café - August
- Caldwell Pediatric Dentistry Moved To New Location Downtown - August
- Lenoir Family Medicine - August
- Craftmaster Furniture Expanded To Lenoir- August
- Mandem Syndicate - August
- Hole Lotta Doughnuts - August
- Dollar General - September
- Moonjoy Meadery - October
- Teachery Townhomes - December
- Mmi Textiles & Mikan Printing Co- Located In Lenoir - December

Private Investment Opened In 2021

- Tumbleweeds Steak & Tavern New Ownership - January
- Mi Carreta - February

Private Investment On The Way

- Bionutra
- West Avenue Apartments
- 819 Harper Ave
- Housing Permits
- Multifamily
- Kattz Corner Llc
- Blue Bell Lenoir Llc
- Single Family Housing, A newly built single family house is for sale on Woodbine Place
- Parkview Subdivision (18+ houses) & New Greenway
- Parkview
 - 309 Sassafras Ct
 - 311 Sassafras Ct
- Georgetown Estates
 - 1318 Prince William Dr
- Summerhill
 - 1201 Winter Pl
 - 1207 Winter Pl
- Stonecroft
 - 436 Stonecroft Dr
- Other
 - 512 Hibriten Dr
 - 508 Hibriten Dr Sw
 - 825 Mulberry St
- Blue Bell, Depot, Steele Mill
- Kattz Corner
- Dairy-O
- Cubesmart Storage In The Lenoir Mall
- 814 Harper Ave

2020 Council Budget Priorities	
1. Employee Recruitment/Retention:	
Continue efforts to offer competitive compensation and benefits for employees	- Over the past five years, Council has approved a total of 16.05% in COLAs, including 3% COLAs for the past two years that have made progress toward closing the pay gap. - Feedback indicates employees feel positive about the increases. Specifically, the bonuses given over the past five years and the COLAs appear to have improved morale. - Continued reviewing the City's current pay plan and hiring practices with the goal of identifying opportunities to "rearrange" the starting pay and probationary raises to become more competitive while staying within the framework of the current pay plan. - Began offering an education discount opportunity in partnership with Lenoir Rhyne University. - Implemented a new floating holiday in July of 2020. - Provided employees with 80 hours of additional COVID leave. - Maintained quality health insurance. - Over the past few years, the Finance, Police, and the Water Distribution Division had pay plan restructures. In the future, we anticipate a review of the Lenoir Fire Department.
Increase Employee Engagement	- Monthly Employee Newsletter keeps employees engaged and recognizes various employee accomplishments. - Utilize employee evaluations and exit surveys to receive employee feedback. - Customer Service team recognized staff this past year and continued during COVID by having a virtual Christmas Raffle for employees and other Zoom activities.
Incentivize/Reward Efficiencies	- COVID impacted the development of an official program to recognize and incentivize efficiencies that would be offered in addition to the yearly Innovation Award plus recognition via Customer Service Awards. - Hopefully, 2021 will provide the opportunity to develop a program. - Employees continually look for creative ways to save funds with the understanding that if money is saved, it will go into COLAs.
2. Housing:	
Continue Minimum Housing & Code Enforcement (acquire tracking software)	- For budget year 20-21, the Police Department's nuisance budget and the Planning Department's demolition budget were increased 52% for an overall budget of \$54,710. 10 properties were sent for foreclosure. 13 abatements - 12 owners corrected the issues and one residence was demoed. 20 mobile home parks inspected - 17 passed and 3 parks failed and are currently under enforcement. - Audited all the floodplains in the City for unpermitted encroachments erected between 2014 and 2019 - 19 properties were put under enforcement for floodplain violations. - IWORQ software was purchased and is being implemented to help with enforcement tracking.

Pursue Market Rate Housing	• <i>Moving Lenoir to the Second Floor</i> initiative: ○ David Maurer completed the renovation of 818 Harper Avenue in Downtown Lenoir. The property has an apartment on the second floor, a commercial space at street level, and a full basement for storage for tenants. ○ Jesse Plaster is building five apartments at 1001 West Ave. in downtown ○ Steven Stewart is working on converting 819 Harper Ave. into a mixed-used building with office space on the first floor and an apartment on the second story. • Owners of Blue Bell Lenoir, LLC are building 46 market-rate apartments in Blue Bell plant on College Avenue. ○ The City facilitated this project with funding from: ▪ Brownfield Grant to perform an EPA Environmental Assessment ▪ ARC funding for the clean up of construction materials on the city-owned 14-acre parcel at College Avenue/Virginia. ▪ RTP grant for a portion of the intersection improvement and greenway crossings on Harper, College, and Light Street. ○ Foreclosed on the dilapidated structure at Underdown and College Avenue and demolished the building. ○ See the <i>Implement North Main Area Plan & Fairfield South Plan</i> section below for additional information. • Began discussing single-family home construction in the Parkview Estates subdivision. ○ Development of the subdivision was largely stagnant in recent years, resulting in many of the existing lots having tax delinquencies which led to the foreclose on the delinquent properties ○ Efforts were made to provide public improvements in this area and incentivize a potential, significant private investment in housing development. ○ Proposed roadway improvements on Ebel Place, a narrow City street that connects the Parkview subdivision to Powell Road, and a greenway connection from a proposed trailhead on Ebel Place to the existing trail near the Zack's Fork Soccer Complex. ○ Began working with John Moore, the owner of Brushy Mountain Builders, to facilitate the utilization of foreclosed property for building sites for market rate housing. ▪ Brushy Mountain Builders has begun the first two of what will be 18+ houses in the Parkview subdivision near the corner of Zacks Fork Road and Nuway Circle on the northeast side of Lenoir. • Some activity underway in the shovel ready residential subdivisions marketed on the City's website such as Summerhill, Park Ridge, Rocky Top, Stonecroft, Powell Park, Georgetown, and Huntington Woods.
Market City-owned Properties to Sell	• To date, the focus has been on strategic foreclosure and requests.
Encourage Downtown Living	• See Housing Section Above. • Main Street continues to encourage property owners to "Move Lenoir to the Second Floor."

Continue to promote shovel-ready areas such as Hibriten Mountain, Stonecroft, Huntington Woods, Summerhill, Park Ridge, Parkview, Heritage Hills (Woodbine/Williamsburg) & Georgetown Estates	Sites are listed on the City's webpage. Currently, there are two (2) homes under construction in the Summerhill subdivision and two (2) homes in Powell Park and one (1) in Georgetown Estates. Please see the <i>Market Rate Housing Section</i> above for additional information.
Work with WPCOG Vacant & Substandard Housing Task Force	- The Planning Department is the liaison for this project. - Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic delayed this initiative.
3. Community Beautification:	
Develop & Implement Branding/Wayfinding Signage	- With the help of funding from the Lenoir Tourism Development Authority (LTDA), Main Street and Planning Staff worked with Destination by Design to develop a vehicular way-finding sign plan and concept design for vehicular wayfinding signs. - Funding streams, including grants and the LTDA, are being researched in order to implement this project.
Support Code Enforcement (including Strategic Foreclosures)	- Since beginning our relationship with the Kania law firm, 15 parcels have been sold at foreclosure auctions that resulted in the collection of \$57,314.98 in taxes. - In 2020, five parcels were sold and \$7,990.00 was collected in taxes. This number was substantially reduced from what was planned due to the COVID-19 pandemic and courts being closed. - Planning staff continues to coordinate with the Police Department and identify strategic foreclosures to enforce minimum housing standards. - In 2019-2020, a budget line item was added to cover foreclosure expenses.
Work on Commercial Blight (city-wide & downtown)	- EPA Brownfield Grant assessments and ARC Old Furniture Site Clean-up Grant. - Repaired sidewalks and curb and guttering on Mulberry Street prior to resurfacing - Paved 19 streets segments in FY 2019-2020. Please see the <i>Paving Section</i> of this report. - Trimmed dozens of trees lining the streets, as well as public parking lots in Downtown Lenoir. This was done, in part, due to concerns that streetscape trees limited signal visibility at intersections. - In 2020, as mentioned above, Planning did floodplain enforcements, which lead to the cleaned up several junked vehicles on Creekway Drive. - The Zoning and Housing Inspector has made several sign sweeps that resulted in the removal of 100+ signs.
Address Major Visibility Issues (city entry corridors)	See the <i>Work on Commercial Blight</i> section above regarding tree pruning.
Develop West End Area Neighborhood Plan	- The Planning Department has conducted an in-depth GIS analysis on the parcels in West End and begun reaching out to stakeholders. - The plan to hold community meetings starting in spring 2020 was delayed by COVID gathering restrictions. - Planning will address some elements of West End as a part of the Comprehensive Plan and plans to move forward with enforcement on some of the delinquent and dilapidated properties, even if the full community "vision" for redevelopment has not yet been established.

	○ Planning will rely on field research and more informal interactions to develop a plan, which they anticipate will focus mainly on housing, the re-use of existing non-residential properties, and infill of vacant lots. ○ Initial analysis revealed a high rate of tax delinquent properties, which will be addressed through the plan recommendations.
Implement North Main Area Plan & Fairfield South Plan	• Fairfield South/Mill Projects had many exciting announcements in 2020 after being in development for many years. ○ Approved three (3) Certificates of Appropriateness from the Historic Preservation Commission (first ever in Lenoir!) – Blue Bell, Steele Cotton Mill, and Freight Depot ○ Started construction on 46 market-rate apartments. ○ ARC Old Furniture Site Clean-up Grant. ○ See the <i>Pursue Market Rate Housing</i> for additional information. • North Main Street Project has progressed and the design work for the JE Broyhill Park stormwater improvements is nearing completion, although the grant was delayed by COVID. Planning applied for a no-cost 1-year extension, and tentatively expects final plans this spring for summer construction.
4. Healthy Infrastructure:	
Technology/Cybersecurity/Digital Services	• Cyber threats for all municipal governments increased in 2020, fortunately, due to measures already in place; the City was able to remain secure. • To combat external security threats, multi-factor authentication was enabled on several accounts. • The new Sr. IT Specialist has an extensive cybersecurity background and was able to review our systems and allowed the City to avoid costs for contracting services for a security consultant. • The City gets three to ten serious virus threats and an average of 500 phishing attempts daily. In response to the increased cyber threats, the IT department plans to continue to explore ways to utilize multifaceted identification techniques to help with risk reduction. • IT's focus is taking a proactive rather than a reactive approach to cyber security and threats.
Street Paving	• Mulberry Street and Greenhaven Drive were identified as strategic paving priorities in CY2019. These streets were prioritized for improvements based on the completion of significant private improvements (Mulberry Street), and rapid degradation of a primary entrance to downtown (Greenhaven Drive). • Strategic paving initiatives for CY2021 will include: ○ Hospital Avenue, following the completion of the Hospital Avenue Sidewalk Project ○ Streets serving Parkview Estates. • Strategic resurfacing offers staff administrative latitude to make necessary improvements to streets, on a limited basis, outside of the predetermined resurfacing schedule dictated by the current pavement condition assessment (2017). Street conditions, economic factors, or development pressures may influence prioritization for certain street resurfacing through the strategic approach without significantly deviating from the larger resurfacing schedule. • 19 street segments were resurfaced in FY 2019-2020. • Developed a repair plan for Circle Drive because of street deterioration due to subgrade failure. This plan was presented to Council in October of 2020.

	• Paved sections of Greenhaven Street, Industrial Court, and Mulberry Street. ○ These were extensive repairs. ○ The Street Department performed full-depth removal and replacement of asphalt patches on Greenhaven Drive and Industrial Court prior to resurfacing. ○ Greenhaven Drive was resurfaced and now offers a smooth ride from Blowing Rock Boulevard to Arlington Circle. ○ Industrial Court was also paved from Morganton Boulevard to Polychem Court ○ Mulberry Street was paved from Morganton Boulevard to College Avenue. • Public Works is working methodically to take care of items prioritized in the Paving Plan. • Public Works continued to implement cost saving methods through the use of the “Hot Box” asphalt recycling equipment. The hot box allows for the recycling of pavement rather than purchasing new asphalt. This is especially beneficial in colder months when asphalt is not available. ○ The Hot Box was used in 90 incidents for the repair of 62 potholes and patching of 85 utility cuts. ○ Utilized the Hot Box at the Police Department to repair and pave a large section of the parking lot. PD had an estimate for approximately \$80,000 to repave their parking lot. The Street Department utilizing the “hot box” to repair the lot and only spent a total of \$4,721.04 in asphalt. The plan is to complete additional sections in coming budget years.
Sidewalks/Greenway/OVT	• Greenway planning remains a top priority and with the continual expansion of the City’s greenway trail and multiuse path network, we have made great strides in constructing additional trail sections in recent years. • These expansion projects included: ○ The Wilson Field loop -the addition of a new section to the Greenway at Wilson Park. The section added about 700 feet to the greenway and created a loop around the park. The loop is just over 3,000 feet or about .56 miles long. The construction of the upper loop connection required grading, stone subgrade placement, and asphalt paving. ○ Segments of the OVNHT from North Main Street to Morganton Boulevard (excluding the RTP grant funded section), ○ Optimist Park paths - Public Works constructed paved walking trails at Optimist Park, which required grading, stone subgrade placement, and asphalt paving. ○ Harrisburg Drive connector constructed by Google. Plans to work with NCDOT to design and permit a crossing of Hwy 18 in order to connect the Rail Trail with the “google” section of Greenway will continue in the coming year. • There are several other partially completed sections that are planned for completion in the current fiscal year including: ○ Sherlee Street to Severt Circle ○ Mulberry Recreation Center Complex ○ Zacks Fork Soccer Complex – Parkview Subdivision • As new trail sections are completed, we have had the opportunity to highlight gaps in the network and begin focusing on projects to connect existing and new trail sections. We anticipate continuing to work with Mattern & Craig to formally identify gaps in the network and actively seek funding opportunities to

complement general fund allocations for future trail construction.

- Two important connections that are already being planned include:
 - Segment through the former Lenoir Mall parking lot (including the WaterLife Church easement)
 - Morganton Boulevard crossing poised to connect OVNHT to a future expansion of the Harrisburg Drive/Google project.
- Detail of the expansion projects include:
 - Plans for the Over Mountain Victory Trail (OVT) are to design and build the road crossings and missing segments of the rail trail between Habitat for Humanity ReStore and the Freight Depo utilizing an ARC grant.
 - In April, 2020, City staff partnered with Mattern & Craig to submit a funding application to the state's Recreational Trails Program. The scope of the application included securing funding to complete the OVNHT trail connection between Harper/West Avenue and the former depot site south of College Avenue. During previous planning for the construction of OVNHT, staff had identified the complexity of street crossings(s) in these locations. With the trail largely following the existing rail bed, and the rail bed's crossing angles of Harper and College Avenue, the geometry of these crossings presented significant challenges to maintaining pedestrian safety. With these issues in mind, the RTP funding application was developed to include an engineered study, design, and construction of the connection between these points. In December, 2020, City staff was notified that the funding application was successful, and we were awarded a grant for the maximum amount of \$250,000.00. The City's matching contribution for this funding is \$62,500.00. Survey work in this area has been completed. As formal agreements are being recorded in the immediate future, a project timeline will be developed and work is set to continue.
 - A large culvert replacement project is ongoing on the greenway near US 321. The plan was presented to Council in September of 2020. City Public Works and Recreation staff has been alerted regarding sinkholes appearing in the greenway path directly above a 96-inch culvert near the Days Inn property. Staff has responded by filling the holes with hot mix asphalt or cold patch (temporary asphalt repair material). These temporary repairs were necessary to open the trail section to pedestrian traffic. The proposed design being developed will provide a permeant fix for the sinkhole issues.
- Upcoming Greenway goals include:
 - Paving a stretch from Seehorn Street to Severt Circle.
 - Continue work on the Rail Trail.
 - Completing a 1,900 foot section of greenway from Zacks Fork Road to the Parkview subdivision
 - Continue work with McGill Associates to design and permit a large culvert replacement on the greenway near US 321.
 - Finalize the Greenway easement across old Lenoir Mall (record WaterLife Easement).
 - Reach out to outparcel owners and remaining gaps to the Mulberry Connector.
 - Have easement discussions with Lenoir Golf Course to connect to Smith Crossroads/possible use of culvert and sewer easements.

City Facilities/Fleet

- Public Works is working on a City-wide Asset Inventory and Assessment for City facilities with the goal of assembling documentation about the architectural and structural integrity of each building or facility, including details about building system components:
 - Structural – foundations, walls, and roof covering conditions
 - MEP – mechanical systems including HVAC, electrical, and plumbing systems
 - Civil/site features – pavements, sidewalks, and drainage systems
 - This documentation will be used to forecast scheduled building improvements and direct programming for recurring capital improvements. We anticipate completing the facility assessments in CY2021.
- The Maintenance Department has made or supervised several improvements to the facilities including:
 - The renovations to City Hall in late 2019 and early 2020,
 - Replacement roofs at four (4) City facilities - Public Works and Public Utilities Facility, Water Treatment Plant, Fire Station 2, and the Police Department.
 - Replaced three (3) HVAC units at various facilities as well as one major repair.
 - Changed the City over to more energy efficient lighting.
 - Installed 1,249 new LED lights at several City facilities
 - 70 replacement bulbs in the decorative lamps that line the downtown streets.
 - Public Works saved 30% on its most recent power bill.
 - The Maintenance Department completed 135 work orders and did monthly inspections of the City's buildings.
- Building Maintenance has several recommendations for the coming year. Please see the year-end report for Public Works for detailed information.
- The Fire Department was able to move their VHF antenna from the County's building to the State's VIPER building site after they were informed they would have to find an alternative site to house the VHF equipment because the County dropped the contract with the building owner. The Fire Department was able to move all of the equipment to the VIPER building which is a climate controlled building that should prolong the life of the equipment. It was originally estimated to cost over \$9,000 for the move but through self performance and negotiations, the final cost was around \$3,500.
- Vehicle Services has worked hard to maintain the City's equipment fleet and is continually looking for ways to self perform repairs.
 - Costs for vehicle maintenance in the last fiscal year compared to the previous year were down over \$96,000 due in part to the addition of newer Sanitation trucks and preventive maintenance.
 - Off-site vehicle service calls have been reduced by 69% over the past five (5) years.
 - Notable self performance cost saving measures include:
 - Rebuilding of a lithium ion battery pack for a hybrid fleet vehicle. The core was provided free of charge and staff swapped the battery cells and individually charged them over the course of several days. The cost for a new Li-ion battery was \$9,500.00. Staff only had the cost of labor/shop time in rebuilding the replacement battery.
 - Performed an engine swap for a rear-loader garbage truck. This truck suffered a catastrophic

	engine failure in 2020, but otherwise is one of the better rear loader trucks in the fleet. Sanitation staff desperately wanted to keep the truck for future use. Replacement engines ranged from \$7,000.00 (rebuilt) to \$30,000.00 (factory – new). With any of these options being cost prohibitive, Vehicle Services staff located a bus with the same engine in a nearby municipality and successfully bid on the bus through auction. The engine swap required the transfer of parts (turbo, wiring harness, etc.) and software programming, but the total cost of the swap was approximately \$2,500.00 (including bus and small parts). Vehicle Services staff also salvaged other parts from the bus chassis that will be used on fleet vehicles. The total value of salvaged parts is \$3,800.00 for a net gain of 1,300 excluding labor. ▪ Removed, straightened and rebuilt a boom on a mini-excavator and avoided the replacement costs that would have exceeded \$5,000.00. The total cost to perform the repair was only \$1,500.00. ▪ Like other departments, the highly skilled, creative staff has been instrumental in cost avoidance for the City and strives daily to work as efficiently and as cost effective as possible.
Water/Sewer Improvements	• Bernhardt Water Treatment Plant Project # 2 that began in February 2018 is complete. The project involved adding two new filters, the construction of a mechanical pre-treatment facility and other appurtenances to facilitate the addition of the two filters and mechanical pre-treatment. The cost of the construction was approximately \$8.1 million, with a total project budget of just over \$10 million. The plant is currently operating at a firm capacity of 12 MGD year-round. • Finley Area Water System /Pressure Improvements Project involves improving the low pressure concerns in the area around the Finley water tank through system improvements with the end results being better water pressure and improved fire protection to the identified area. Preliminary engineering has been completed and the report was used for a funding application that was submitted to the State Revolving Fund in the fall of 2020. The City was notified that the project was not funded this round, however the City plans to reapply in the next cycle. • Water Plant Capacity Expansion Study is underway with McGill Associates to evaluate the requirements for expanding the treatment capacity of the water treatment plant. Current capacity is 12 MGD. The study is looking at the construction, permitting, and site requirements for expanding to 14 MGD and in the future to up to 18 MGD. The evaluation of permitting requirements for expansion is on-going. • Water Distribution System Evaluation was performed to analyze the distribution system for improvements that may be needed to accommodate the potential new flow being distributed because of the improvements/expansion at the water plant and increased customer demands. • Water Meter Replacement Project is currently underway with continued work replacing meters over the next two months. Meter replacements are at approximately 65-70% completion. The new network is functional and city staff has already begun to use the analytical data transmitted from the meters to address customer concerns. The project is scheduled for full deployment in 2021. • Biosolids System Improvements has made great progress in spite of delays in manufacturing and shipping of certain pieces of equipment due to the pandemic. The notice to proceed with the construction project was issued in January 2020 and the contractor has been on site and project construction is well underway. The

	dryer unit and belt press are on site and installed. We have just received shipment of the conveyor system that moves the sludge from the belt press to the dryer and installation of this equipment is currently underway. • Smith Crossroads Sewer Line Project's design is near completion at this time as we finalize easement maps and minor design changes. • Completed a Risk and Resilience Study during the past year with the assistance of Freese and Nichols, Inc. to comply with the requirements for the American Water Infrastructure Act of 2018 (Sec. 2013 Community Water Risk and Resilience) and the North Carolina General Statute 130A-320, Source Water Protection Planning (15A NCAC 18C .1305). The next step will be a Source Water Protection Plan and an Emergency Response Plan.
Stormwater Improvements	• A Stormwater (SW) Utility Fee/Stormwater Capital Improvement Plan was developed in partnership with Freese and Nichols and provides an inventory of Stormwater needs, a tracking system/database to compile new issues, and information on the adoption of a SW utility fee to fund capital needs. • Transitioned SW management duties to the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) but remain responsible for the maintenance of the municipal storm sewer system, in addition to the cost for contracting with the WPCOG to handle the administrative tasks (education, outreach, enforcement, permitting) related to compliance with the Clean Water Act. Should the City choose to move forward with the adoption of a Stormwater Utility Fee, the funding could be used to pay for WPCOG services as well as to fund capital projects. • Public Works department submitted the "Notice of Intent" and application package to NCDEQ for the required Industrial Stormwater Discharge Permit and were giving a Certificate of Coverage for permit compliance. • Public Utilities Department is working in conjunction and sharing resources with the Public Works Department regarding stormwater permitting for several city facilities including the Lower Creek WWTP and Gunpowder Creek WWTP. • City Public Works and Recreation staff has been alerted to sinkholes appearing in the greenway path directly above a 96-inch culvert as mentioned above. A proposed design is being developed and will provide a permanent fix for the stormwater/sinkhole issues. • Public Works worked with a concerned citizen who had a stormwater issue. The City contracted with Freese and Nichols to assess the issue to determine liability and solutions. Based on the assessment, the citizen later hired a contractor to correct the problems identified in the assessment. • Future project includes: ○ Dealing with deterioration and stormwater concerns on Circle Drive, which are currently being assessed. In early fall, Public Works Department staff responded to comments from a resident of Circle Drive (Lower Creek area) regarding excessive asphalt cracking and a deteriorating roadway surface on this street. This area was previously investigated by staff for similar concerns, but during this site visit, it was determined that repairs should be expedited due to the rapid degradation of the street travel lanes and adjacent curb and gutter.

Downtown 2-Way Traffic Implementation	- Following the 2018 study completed by transportation engineer Ramey, Kemp & Associates, this large project was divided into potential phases should the City decide to move forward with converting the one-way streets of Harper and West Avenue to two-way. - The first phase, 1A, which included the public closure of Steele Street, has been completed appurtenant to the ongoing historic mill redevelopment projects. - Phase 1B includes geometric revisions to the Harper and West Avenue intersection (western end). Completion of this phase will complement development of the OVNHT trail connection from West Avenue to College Avenue. The trail connection has received grant funding to assist with design and construction. Field survey work related to the trail was also targeted to include this intersection, in anticipation of the large goal of intersection improvements in order to facilitate the trail crossing.
Bike/Ped Plan	- Future projects should begin to address the Bike/Ped Plan. - ADA Transition Plan and the Hospital Avenue Sidewalk Project will provide opportunities for this initiative as well as the upcoming Greenway Extension.
5. Economic Development:	
Encourage Public/Private Partnerships	- Facilitated work on the Lenoir Mills projects - Partnered with Caldwell County and the Caldwell County Economic Development Commission (EDC) to fund part of a School of Government Development Finance Initiative (DFI) mills study. As part of the much anticipated private redevelopment of historic mill buildings (Blue Bell, Steele) west of downtown, the City agreed to perform specific infrastructure improvements within the public right-of-way in the vicinity of these projects. These improvements are targeted to facilitate parking and driveway, pedestrian, and utility connections from the private development(s) to existing City infrastructure. The total project value for improvements has been estimated to be in excess of \$100,000. - The City also funded environmental studies on the site. - The HPC was able to declare Blue Bell an historic landmark, which opened up the property tax credits. City staff and Council members lobbied State elected officials to secure Historic Preservation Tax credits for the project. - City continues to work on the Linkside project which includes the paving of Hotel Street. The project has been ongoing for several years but hopefully, a resolution to this situation is on the horizon. - Working with Waterlife Church for an easement, which will allow the City to proceed with the greenway trail through the Waterlife Church parcel.
Continue Work with Caldwell EDC	- City staff, elected officials and the Caldwell County EDC continues working behind the scenes on market-rate housing. EDC Director Deborah Murray said market-rate housing is one of the primary needs employers say would attract and retain workers in the community. - Worked with the Caldwell County EDC on Building Reuse Grants for Craftmaster and Woodgrain Millwork as well as the Caldwell UNC Health Care Rural Hope Grant.
6. Public Engagement	
State of the City Presentations – Lenoir 2020	Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic made these goals unachievable in 2020. Hopefully, late 2021 will provide the opportunity to meet these public engagement goals.

Market Quality of Life Amenities	• The LTDA has worked in partnership with the Main Street Director to utilized Cares Act funding and credits to promote the City through the use of Facebook, a new video from Carl White and the development of various promotional materials as discussed at the January Committee of the Whole Meeting. The goal was to develop a foundation of various assets that could be used to move the City into a tourism recovery period in the coming months. The City utilized this funding not only for the current circumstances to promote safe travel now, but to retain these assets for immediate and long-term future use. • Increased social media presence by adding podcasts/videos and improving the website to increase visitor interactions. Please visit the City's website as well as Main Street's website for additional information. • Council authorized the extension of the mountain bike trail on Zacks Fork this past year and the LTDA allocated \$5,000 to assist with the expansion.
Neighborhood Meetings and Walk-through's	• COVID-19 pandemic made these goals unachievable in 2020. Hopefully, late 2021 will provide the opportunity to meet these public engagement goals. • The City provided public engagement opportunities during the pandemic through virtual opportunities via the website and social media.

MINUTES

City Council's Virtual Strategic Planning Meeting Thursday, February 25, 2021 2:00 p.m.

Facilitator: Anthony Starr, Western Piedmont Council of Government.

Participants via Teleconference: Mayor Joseph Gibbons, Mayor Pro-Tem Crissy Thomas, David Stevens, Todd Perdue, Ralph Prestwood, Jonathan Beal, Ike Perkins and Ben Willis.

City Staff Participating via Teleconference: City Manager, Scott Hildebran, City Clerk, Shirley Cannon, Finance Director, Donna Bean, Fire Chief, Ken Hair, Police Chief, Brent Phelps, Economic Development Director, Kaylynn Horn, Public Information Officer, Joshua Harris, Planning Director, Jenny Wheelock, Public Utilities Director, Radford Thomas, Public Works Director, Jared Wright, Recreation Director, Kenny Story, Hannah Williams, Planning, and Maria Swanson, Recreation Department.

Others Participating via Teleconference: Kara Fohner, *News-Topic*.

Call to Order

Mayor Gibbons welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order.

CUSTOMER SERVICE UPDATE

Hannah Williams, Chairperson, and Maria Swanson, Co-Chair of the Customer Service Design Team, stated the Team continues to boost employee morale and equip City staff to provide "Service beyond Measure." Ms. Williams reported the Team resumed their monthly meetings in October 2020 and stated Maria Swanson was voted in as Co-Chair. The Team Talk employee newsletter is also an opportunity for employees to share good news with one another. The newsletter includes upcoming birthdays, announcements, promotions, and employee profiles.

Ms. Swanson reported Joshua Harris assisted the Team with developing the new City of Lenoir contact cards. As reported, these cards contain telephone numbers for various City resources which are beneficial for citizen use. In addition, they conducted new employee Customer Service Training in January, March and December, but began leading trainings via Zoom in late 2020 due to Covid-19 restrictions. The goal of the Customer Service Team training is to provide an overview of City departments and services to new employees, review the customer service keys, and set expectations for new employees.

Mayor Gibbons remarked that implementing the "Service beyond Measure" program was the best thing the City has ever done. He stated that City Councilmembers also went through the training. Ms. Williams reported the Team is currently working on offering an updated session of training to Staff and City Council.

Update; NCLM Board of Directors Meeting

Councilmember Ben Willis reported the Board discussed the upcoming election and how the Census will affect redistricting at their recent meeting. He shared that all elections for 2021 may be pushed back to 2022 due to the number of legal issues regarding compliance with the U.S.

Voting Rights Act and districting.

Councilmember Willis further shared that Beth Woods, State Auditor, is working to provide financial assistance to cities that need it. He mentioned they are also trying to advance legislation that could take away a City's Charter should they fail to comply with the state's regulations and guidelines.

Next, Councilmember Willis reported that Powell Bill funding may be severely reduced this year and the City could experience a 28% reduction in its allocation of Powell Bills funds. Mr. Willis remarked that, due to a lot of unknowns, he is unsure how much state funding the City may receive.

Update; Reval Year, Monty Woods, Caldwell County Tax Administrator

Mr. Monty Woods stated the County's appeals process is underway and going well. He said he has discussed projections with City Finance Director Donna Bean and noted that, based on the County's recent reevaluation, there was an anticipated overall increase of 10% in assessed property tax values before appeals. The real property values are projected to be \$1,525,000,000 compared to \$1,375,373,548 in the previous year. It was noted that these numbers exclude Google's valuations. The average overall residential (single family) values increased an average of about 15% while commercial/industrial values increased about 7%.

Mr. Woods pointed out there is a lot of new construction going on despite the cost. Mr. Woods explained Caldwell County has four appraisers who do revaluations and shared the County is on a sixteen-year cycle. Mr. Woods further explained Staff reviews the cost of the land minus depreciation to determine the revaluation. As information, he shared it takes approximately 18 months for the appraisers to travel around the entire County to complete their assessments.

Mr. Woods stated the online appeals process is new this year and encouraged anyone who has questions to give him a call. Mr. Woods thanked City Council for giving him the opportunity to come and speak to everyone about the revaluation process.

On behalf of City Council, Mayor Gibbons thanked Mr. Woods for the good report and for the good partnership the City and County experience.

Update; 2020 Accomplishments

Planning Director Jenny Wheelock reviewed a list of the department's accomplishments in 2020. (Please refer to the attached list for a complete review of 2020.)

Update; 2007 Comprehensive Plan

Planning Director Jenny Wheelock further presented an overview of Lenoir's current comprehensive plan that was adopted in 2007, and discussed the process for updating the plan as required by N.C.G.S. §160D. Director Wheelock discussed many of the strategy recommendations that have already been accomplished, like the adoption of a Phase 2 Stormwater Ordinance for the City, changes to the sign code, the adoption of commercial design standards, requirements for sidewalks, and a greater focus on historic preservation.

Director Wheelock also reviewed the planning efforts that have occurred since the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, like the small area plans, neighborhood map, and bicycle and pedestrian planning efforts. Director Wheelock will work with the Planning Board over the next year to draft revisions to modernize Lenoir's Comprehensive Plan.

NCGS Chapter 160D Ordinance Updates

Director Wheelock reported that Staff addressed this project “in house” and completed the majority of updates in late 2020, with formal adoption by City Council in January 2021. However, Director Wheelock stated they still have work to do regarding subdivisions, etc. She clarified that changes were made to add clarity and consistency to the administration and enforcement sections along with reinforcing our goal of simple, straight-forward, and transparent regulations. The deadline to submit the completed Chapter 160D to the state is July 1, 2022.

City Manager Hildebran also shared that both the North Main Street improvements project and the Funky Town project have been very successful.

City Council Priorities

Next, Mr. Hildebran reviewed the list of Council’s 2020 Budget Priorities. Mr. Starr asked Councilmembers to add or delete items and then prioritize the remaining list to reflect their most important items for 2021.

2020 Council Budget Priorities

1. Employee Recruitment/Retention:

- Continue efforts to offer competitive compensation and benefits for employees
- Increase Employee Engagement
- Incentivize/Reward Efficiencies

2. Housing:

- Continue Minimum Housing & Code Enforcement (acquire tracking software)
- Pursue Market Rate Housing
- Market City-owned Properties to Sell
- Encourage Downtown Living
- Continue to promote shovel-ready areas such as Hibriten Mountain, Stonecroft, Huntington Woods, Summerhill, Park Ridge, Parkview, Heritage Hills (Woodbine/Williamsburg) & Georgetown Estates
- Work with WPCOG Vacant & Substandard Housing Task Force

3. Community Beautification:

- Develop & Implement Branding/Wayfinding Signage
- Support Code Enforcement (including Strategic Foreclosures)
- Work on Commercial Blight (city-wide & downtown)
- Address Major Visibility Issues (city entry corridors)
- Develop West End Area Neighborhood Plan
- Implement North Main Area Plan & Fairfield South Plan

4. Healthy Infrastructure:

- Technology/Cybersecurity/Digital Services
- Street Paving
- Sidewalks/Greenway/OVT
- City Facilities/Fleet
- Water/Sewer Improvements
- Stormwater Improvements
- Downtown 2-Way Traffic Implementation
- Bike/Ped Plan

5. Economic Development:

- Encourage Public/Private Partnerships
- Continue Work with Caldwell EDC

6. Public Engagement:

- State of the City Presentations – Lenoir 2020
- Market Quality of Life Amenities
- Neighborhood Meetings
- Walk-through's

Following much discussion by Council, employee compensation remained ranked as their number one priority. Council also chose housing as their second priority. Mayor Gibbons also remarked that the remaining issues not mentioned were still important and Council should consider keeping those as well.

City Council was in consensus the list of Council's 2021 Budget Priorities below reflects their priorities:

2021 Council Budget Priorities

1. Continue Efforts to Offer Competitive Compensation and Benefits for Employees
2. Pursue Market Rate Housing
 - Encourage Affordable Housing Opportunities
 - Implement Branding/Wayfinding Plan
 - Develop Strategies to Address Commercial Blight (city-wide & downtown)
 - Address Major Appearance Issues (city entry corridors)
 - Continue to Fund Street Paving Plan
 - Continue to Fund Water/Sewer Capital Improvements Plan
 - Develop Strategies for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
3. Continue to Fund Sidewalks/Greenway/OVT
 - Develop West End Area Neighborhood Plan
4. Support Code Enforcement (including Strategic Foreclosures)
 - Develop Plan to Address Litter in Community (State, Local Partners)
 - Re-Initiate Neighborhood Meetings (once safe to do so)
 - Encourage Whitnel & West End Area Improvements

Other Areas of Focus:

Employee Recruitment/Retention:

- Increase Employee Engagement
- Incentivize/Reward Efficiencies
- Develop Continuing Customer Service Education

Housing:

- Continue Minimum Housing & Code Enforcement
- Market City-owned Properties to Sell
- Encourage Downtown Living
- Continue to Promote Shovel-ready Residential Subdivisions
- Participate in WPCOG Vacant & Substandard Housing Task Force

Community Beautification:

- Continue Implementation of North Main Area Plan & Fairfield South Plan
- Consider Gateway Enhancements at Smith Crossroads

Healthy Infrastructure:

- Support Technology/Cybersecurity/Digital Services
- Continue to Fund City Facilities/Fleet Plan
- Continue to Fund Stormwater Improvements
- Implement Downtown 2-Way Traffic Plan

- Implement Bike/Ped Plan
- Improve/Implement Public Wi-fi at City Parks/Facilities

Economic Development:

- Encourage Public/Private Partnerships
- Continue Partnership with Caldwell EDC

Public Engagement:

- Share State of the City Presentations
- Market Quality of Life Amenities
- Schedule Neighborhood Walk-through's
- Develop Strategic/Targeted Communication (multi-lingual)
- Promote Smart City, Online Interaction

Other

- Pursue COVID-related Funding Opportunities to Help Citizens

Additional general comments and thoughts from Council included the following:

- Employees are City's greatest asset
- Recognize employees for their hard work
- Try to be more diverse
- Be inclusive
- Appreciates the great progress made by Staff to address Council's priorities
- City is headed in the right direction
- Seek ways to better inform public of what is happening in the City and their neighborhoods
- Address infrastructure needs
- Concentrate on Whitnel and West End neighborhoods
- Staff continues to think outside the box and move forward with projects

Mayor Gibbons commended City Council and Staff for working so well together which contributed to the City's great success and many accomplishments over the past two years. He stated Lenoir's City Council was the best in the state because of how well they work together. Mayor Gibbons further remarked that Council could not do anything without the assistance of such a great Staff and commended Mr. Hildebran for his good leadership as manager and for what he means to everyone.

Mr. Starr also commended City Council and City Staff and noted this was an important list of accomplishments. He stated the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) supports the City and he thanked Joshua Harris for all of his assistance.

Mayor Gibbons further thanked Mr. Starr for the great job as facilitator and also thanked members of the WPCOG for the great partnership plus all the leadership, guidance, and support they provide to the City.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:42 p.m.



2021 Strategic Planning Retreat Planning & Community Development Initiatives & Projects

Accomplishments in 2020

- **Fairfield South/Mill Projects progress** – 2020 brought many exciting public announcements on projects that have been in development for many years. Blue Bell received a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic Preservation Commission (the first one ever in Lenoir!) and started construction on 46 market-rate apartments. Funding through ARC led to (currently underway) clean up of construction materials on the city-owned 14-acre parcel at College Avenue/Virginia. We applied for and were awarded an RTP grant for greenway crossings on Harper, College, and Light Street. We foreclosed on the dilapidated structure at Underdown and College Avenue, and demolished the building.
- **North Main Street progress** – Design work is nearing completion for the JE Broyhill park stormwater improvements, although the grant was delayed by COVID. We’ve applied for a no-cost 1-year extension, and tentatively expect final plans this Spring for summer construction.
- **NCGS Chapter 160D Ordinance Updates** – Planning staff tackled this project “in house” and completed the majority of required updates in late 2020, with formal adoption by City Council in January 2021. Changes to add clarity and consistency to the administration and enforcement sections, reinforcing our goal of simple, straight-forward, and transparent regulations.
- **Stormwater Audit/Program Changes:** Our draft Stormwater Management Plan (SWMP) was approved by NCDEQ, and they released us for public comment. We are technically still “out of compliance” until the SWMP is approved by EPA and adopted by Council and our new NPDES permit is issued through DEQ – but we are complying with our enforcement deadlines and in good standing with DEQ as far as our responsiveness. We also are taking steps to meet the mapping requirements we committed to in the draft SWMP, which requires us to have the entire MS4 mapped including roadside conveyances.
- **Way-Finding Signs:** Developed a vehicular way-finding sign plan and concept design for vehicular wayfinding working with DBD (partner project: Citywide Branding).
- **I-worq Permitting/Code Enforcement Module:** Successfully implemented new software for permit management.
- **Total Audit of Powell Bill Maps/ROW books:** Reconciled field notes, recorded easements, plats and GIS information to correct inconsistencies between datasets related to street lengths and right of way

widths, next steps will be to add/refine/field verify details on pavement widths and stormwater infrastructure (curb/gutter and swales)

- **Enforcement:** We had 13 owner-abated minimum housing cases; 12 made repairs to restore the home to livable condition, and one owner demolished the structure (demolition was on Bradford Mountain Rd). We assisted Lenoir Police Department on several nuisance property cases (Circle Drive/Ridgecrest and Norwood Street chickens). We inspected 20 mobile home parks and renewed 17 operating permits – 3 parks failed inspection and are currently under enforcement. We sent 10 new properties for tax foreclosure, and had 3 properties sell at auction (all park view lots). We also audited all the floodplains in the City for unpermitted encroachments erected between 2014-2019, and put 19 properties under enforcement for floodplain violations.

Ongoing/Active Projects & Next Steps

- **Greenway Planning (Top Priority):**
 - **OVT:** design and build the road crossings and missing segments of the rail trail between Habitat for Humanity ReStore and the Freight Depot (ARC grant implementation)
 - **OVT:** work with NCDOT to design and permit a crossing of Hwy 18 in order to connect the Rail Trail with the “google” section of Greenway.
 - **Mulberry Connector:** finalize Greenway easement across Old Lenoir Mall (record Water Life Easement; reach out to outparcel owners and remaining gaps)
 - **Mulberry Connector:** easement discussions with Lenoir Golf Course, to connect to Smith Crossroads/possible use of culvert and sewer easements.
- **160D streets and subdivision updates/ Technical Review Committee:** Updates to the streets and subdivision ordinance are forthcoming, in order to reconcile our ordinances with each other and with the state requirements. As a part of this process, we will incorporate our long-time goal of establishing technical review/coordination as a formal part of the subdivision and site planning process – in particular related to the dedication of streets and sidewalks, the location of new driveways, and coordinated access management planning.
- **NCDOT Transportation projects:** NCDOT completed feasibility analysis on several possible state roadway projects in Lenoir in 2019 – upgrades to facilitate SW Boulevard/Harper/Creekway driveway to be used as a by-pass (in lieu of huge impacts from an upgrade to Smith Crossroads intersection), and access management planning (medians, consolidation of driveways, “super street” concepts) for both US 321 and for Hwy 18 (Wilkesboro Blvd). The final projects that were included on the prioritization list for the next funding cycle (in public comment now) were:
 - Access Management on US 64/NC 18 Wilkesboro Boulevard from Linkside Ct. to US 64/90 (“Regional Impact” project – higher chance of funding)
 - Arterial-to-superstreet project on NC 90/SR 1300 (Harper Avenue/Creekway Drive/North Main Street) from US 64 to US 321 (“the bypass”) (“Division Needs” project – more competitive than regional or statewide projects)

- NOTE: NCDOT's funding has been severely impacted by COVID shut-downs and reduced gas tax revenues. We anticipate a backlog of projects waiting to be funded, which will likely delay these projects a few years in Lenoir.
- **Comprehensive Plan Updates/Implementation:** A new planning requirement was adopted by the NC Legislature in 2019, which requires a "reasonably recent" comprehensive plan to be adopted by any jurisdiction enforcing a zoning ordinance. Lenoir's Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2007, and is in need of updating. We plan to do the updates in-house, and build off of previous planning efforts in order to tie together all of the good planning that's already happening. We will use the extensive public input that we've received through other initiatives to update and modernize the 2007 Comprehensive Plan.
 - **North Main Small Area Plan**
 - **Fairfield South Vision**
 - **Pedestrian Plan**
 - **Bicycle Plan**
 - **Neighborhood Mapping**
 - **Historic Preservation survey/study-listed districts**
 - **Greenway Planning**
 - **Downtown/Main Street Master Plan and Branding**
 - **Citywide branding/wayfinding plan**
 - Environmental justice issues
 - Erosion/Stormwater/Floodplain issues and solutions
 - Infrastructure – rural internet access
 - Housing issues
 - Future neighborhood studies/small area plans: West End, Whitnel, zoning/access management for the by-pass, Lower Creek Drive
 - Future code amendments/updates: Revised design standards for highway business districts, streetscape/sidewalk requirements based on corridor rather than zoning
- **New Small Area Plan: West End:** We have conducted in-depth GIS analysis on the parcels in West End, and begun reaching out to stakeholders. Our plan to hold community meetings starting in Spring 2020 was delayed by COVID gathering restrictions. We will address some elements of West End as a part of the Comprehensive Plan, and plan to move forward with some of the delinquent and dilapidated properties even if the full community "vision" for redevelopment has not yet been established. We can't wait any longer, so we will have to rely on field research and more informal interactions. We anticipate the plan will focus mainly on housing, the re-use of existing non-residential properties, and infill of vacant lots. Initial analysis revealed a high rate of tax delinquent properties, which will be addressed through the plan recommendations.
- **Minimum Housing Enforcement:** The need for city abatement of dilapidated houses continues to exceed the budgeted amount for demos each year. This need will increase with the in-depth planning efforts in West End. We continue to send properties to tax foreclosure as well as push for owner abatement, and

we have essentially cleared the “back log” of cases that built up prior to implementing the Minimum Housing Priority Formula. Planning staff continues to coordinate with the Police Department.

- **Neighborhood and Greenway Signs:** Lenoir, like all cities, is a city of neighborhoods, and many times neighborhoods are more cohesive and inspire more loyalty than the city as a whole. However, the historic names of many neighborhoods are not a part of the collective conscious of many residents, especially as new residents are attracted to the City. Using the recently created neighborhood map and input from the public at the neighborhood map meeting, staff proposes an inexpensive project to add historic neighborhood markers to the street signs around the downtown neighborhoods (at least as a “phase 1”. These are little “love notes” that help communicate that these neighborhoods are unique and special places within Lenoir. Now that we have successfully developed a city-wide brand and design concept for vehicular wayfinding, we can use these design concepts to explore smaller off-shoot projects like neighborhood signs and signage on the greenway.
- **Strategic Property Acquisition:** In addition to continuing to use strategic tax foreclosure to get properties back into private hands, staff also has several properties that would be strategic for the City to acquire:
 - Former Knotty Pine Grill property and neighboring property in Freedman (340/342 Finley Avenue) – Currently going through foreclosure for delinquent taxes
 - Current Perez Tire site in Fairfield (two parcels; south of Gibbon’s Electric) adjacent to OVT rail trail
 - Former (recently demolished) service station on N. Main adjacent to OVT rail trail (709 N. Main Street)
 - **(new)** Outparcels in front of Lenoir Mall – they cannot be developed due to floodway restrictions, but are strategic connections for our greenway, which we can build at or below the existing grade in compliance with FEMA’s restrictions.
- **Business Friendly/Transparency:** Using enhanced online presence, updated websites, interactive maps, and printed materials, Planning Staff would like to increase our ability to provide coordinated information in enhance customer service. Lessons learned from telecommuting and implementation of the iworq permitting software will be applied to enhancing our ability to conduct business virtually, and provide easier ways to disseminate information on common questions.

Outstanding Projects (No Changes)

These are projects that have been lower priority, or have implementation challenges, and have not had progress in several years. They are still good projects, and we intend to work on them as opportunities/needs arise.

- **Watershed Property:** This property, while annexed, still has no city zoning. At one time, we had contemplated a Conditional Zoning district on this property that would basically implement the conditions of the conservation easement as the only zoning standards for the property.

- **Stormwater Utility Fee/Stormwater CIP:** Freese and Nichols has created an inventory of SW needs, a tracking system/database to compile new issues, and provided information on the adoption of a SW utility fee to fund capital needs. This project was completed at the same the City transitioned SW management duties to the WPCOG. However, the City remains responsible for the maintenance of the municipal storm sewer system, as well as the cost for contracting with the WPCOG to handle the administrative tasks (education, outreach, enforcement, permitting) related to compliance with the Clean Water Act. Should the City choose to move forward on the adoption of a Stormwater Utility Fee, the funding could be used to pay for WPCOG services as well as fund capital projects. Next steps for this project (if any) will likely be implemented by the Public Works and/or Finance Departments.
- **Creation of Two National Register Districts:** A high level of community interest in finalizing the two National Register Districts that were study-listed as a result of SHPO's survey in Lenoir. This would make homeowners in two neighborhoods – Fairfield (west of Downtown) and Maehill Park/Oak View (south/east of Downtown) – eligible for historic preservation tax credits. (No changes since 2019 – finding a “champion” for the project has been difficult. We need to do “fundraising” if it is not going to be funded through the City directly, and no one has emerged to lead this effort. We will have to return the \$5,000 grant we received to use towards this project if we are unable to complete it.)

Department Budget Requests

- **Historic Preservation Consultant for NR District Nominations:** The estimated cost of preparing the necessary research and reports to finalize these districts is approximately \$30,000 – this assumes doing both districts at once to realize efficiencies in consultant travel expenses. Planning staff applied for a grant to help fund this project through the Covington Foundation, and have had some promising conversations with local charitable organizations. The Covington Foundation has given us \$5,000 towards this project. A few years ago, some initial conversations with Fairfield Chair, Broyhill, and Bernhardt were favorable in those entities contributing 5,000 each, however the City has since made other requests for higher priority projects and there have been some leadership changes. The project still has a funding gap of about 10,000.
- **Building Demolition/Legal Fees for Foreclosures:** Continue to fund at current levels for demolishing structures as well as legal fees related to foreclosing on abandoned houses that are still salvageable. Consider separate line item for additional funds for West End demolitions; needs estimated at 30,000 to demolish at least 6 structures. Could split over two fiscal years.
- **Neighborhood Branding Signs:** We can do these in-house, with some equipment upgrades. This was ranked as a high priority last year, I'd like to see an actual budget line item for these so that we can determine which neighborhoods we can implement these in first. We've done the neighborhood maps so we are ready now to implement this item if it is funded. (City-wide branding and way-finding sign plan established a brand that we can now use to develop these types of small signs.)
- **Technology Upgrades:** Our large-format printer is considered at it's “end of life” and replacement parts may not longer be available if we have issues with it moving forward. The cost of a large format printer

new is about \$15,000, and there are also leasing options available. Right now, IT pays for a service contract on this printer, which covers maintenance and repairs, but the cost of this would go up if we needed to replace the printer and opted for a lease option. Right now, the printer is functional.