

MINUTES

City Council Planning Meeting J.E. Broyhill Civic Center, Room 215 February 23, 2024 8:00 A.M.

Facilitator: Anthony Starr, Western Piedmont Council of Government.

Participants: Mayor Joseph Gibbons, Mayor Pro-Tem David Stevens, Crissy Thomas, Todd Perdue, Ralph Prestwood, Jonathan Beal, Ike Perkins and Kimmie Rogers.

City Staff: City Manager Scott Hildebran, City Clerk Shirley Cannon, Finance Director Donna Bean, Fire Chief Norman Staines, Police Chief Brent Phelps, Economic Development Director Kaylynn Horn, Planning Director Hannah Williams, Public Services Director Radford Thomas, Public Utilities Director Jeff Church, Public Works Director Jon Hogan, Recreation Director Phil Harper, and Communications Director Joshua Harris. Customer Service Design Team member Autumn Moffett was also in attendance.

Others in Attendance: Matt Jaeger, Retail Strategies, Greg Icenhour, Mid-Atlantic Associates, Ben Willis, Western Piedmont Council of Governments and Appalachian State Intern Kate Starr.

Call to Order

Mayor Gibbons welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order. He stated this is the most important meeting of the year for City Council due to their establishing their priorities for FY2024-25. Mayor Gibbons thanked City Staff for all of their hard work and pointed out Council's goal is to decide on great things for the City.

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.

Mission Statement & Vision Review

Anthony Starr reviewed the Mission State and Vision for the City of Lenoir.

The mission of the City of Lenoir is:

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

Vision for the City of Lenoir

- We aspire to be the city of choice in Western North Carolina for current 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
- an employer of choice
- forward thinking
- honest and ethical
- inclusive and equitable
- innovative and collaborative
- transparent
- fiscally responsible

City Council was in consensus to not make any changes to the City's Mission Statement or add any bullet points to the City's Vision Statement.

Customer Service Update

Autumn Moffett, Customer Service Design Team Co-Chair, stated the City's Customer Service Program, (CST) which began in 2008, meets monthly and continues to provide training to employees. She reported the CST held 10 new hire customer service orientations throughout the year for both full-time and part-time staff. During each orientation, CST members give an overview of City departments and services, introduces the eight customer service keys, and set expectations for new employees. In 2023, the CST continues working on current employee training videos with each video highlighting a service key and demonstrating good customer service. City employees also gave out 30 Golden Ticket nominations to their coworkers in 2023. Golden Tickets are given to employees who go above and beyond to provide customer service. The CST will be announcing the 2023 Annual Golden Ticket Winner in March.

Ms. Moffett shared the CST organized an employee cereal box food drive in December with the supplies being donated to Yokefellow to help those in need. A raffle competition was planned for the drive with the prize being 8 hours of vacation time. Ms. Moffett shared the CST's goals which are 1) continue current employee appreciation programs, 2) create at least two more Customer Service training videos, and 3) assist with at least two local community fundraiser events such as the School Tools Drive and food donations.

In addition, the CST hosted the Bo's Employee Appreciation event in August where employees were invited to come and enjoy fun, free food and good company.

Employees held two Employee Litter Sweeps in 2023 with around 60 staff picking up 40 bags of trash during the spring litter sweep and around 50 employees participated in the fall litter sweep.

On behalf of the CST Team, Autumn and Joshua thanked City Council for all of their support.

Mayor Gibbons stated implementing the City's Customer Service Program was one of the best decisions the City has done. City Manager Hildebran stated the program is employee driven and he

appreciates everyone's hard work.

State of the City Presentation – Mayor Gibbons and City Manager Hildebran

Mayor Gibbons and City Manager Hildebran reviewed a power point presentation “State of the City 2023 Review”.

A link to the 2023 State of the City Slide Show is included at the end of these minutes.

City Manager Hildebran reported Staff began livestreaming Council meetings in 2023 with the first Council meeting livestreamed on September 5, 2023. He stated meetings are available to the public as soon as they go live and automatically show up in the Council Meetings playlist on the YouTube Channel as well as the Council Meetings page on the City website.

Lenoir Retail Update – Matt Jaeger, Senior Portfolio Director, Retail Strategies

Mr. Jaeger reported their partnership with the City of Lenoir began in 2020. He stated Retail Strategies provides retail recruitment, retail academy, downtown strategies and small business support. Mr. Jaeger shared they refresh market data for the Lenoir custom trade area annually along with visiting the area to update their inventory of real estate assets. Mr. Jaeger stated it is important to build relationships with prospective retailers and local brokers. In addition, he reported staff stays in contact with national retailers and attends trade shows. Mr. Jaeger reported their goal is to multiply the results of the City of Lenoir by focusing on retail recruitment and promoting opportunities in Lenoir. New businesses recruited by Retail Strategies include Chipotle, Hwy 55, Popeyes and Biscuitville, which is currently under construction.

Mr. Jaeger further shared Retail Strategies is primarily looking to attract a new grocery-anchored shopping center development in Lenoir. Additional retail options are furniture stores, restaurants, clothing, home improvement, health care & personal care, hobby/craft retailers, regional & national convenience stores and general merchandise stores. He reiterated they want to establish Lenoir's unique market position with national retailers, brokers and developers and recruit large-market, NC-based developers to actively monitor Lenoir's market for opportunities.

Mr. Jaeger emphasized retail builds on retail. Retail economic impact adds up quickly plus attracts the workforce that attracts the primary jobs. Further, retail influences executives looking to locate their company in a community. He commented that retail enhances the quality of life and quality of life encourages the future growth of your community.

Next, Mr. Jaeger discussed why invest. He presented information regarding an app analysis which is a mobile tracking device used to see what businesses customers are supporting. Mr. Jaeger reported the Lenoir Wal-Mart store is the number one store in North Carolina that customers visit.

A brief discussion was held regarding the available sites in the City. Mr. Jaeger thanked the City for a really productive partnership.

Brownfield Program Update – Greg Icenhour, VP/Charlotte Branch Manager, MidAtlantic

Mr. Icenhour reviewed a slide presentation of the City's Brownfield program and noted the City received its first Brownfield grant in the amount of \$300,000 in 2018. In 2021, the City submitted another application and was awarded a \$500,000 grant. Mr. Icenhour stated the Fairfield South Corridor was identified as a major redevelopment target area and noted the City has completed or partially completed assessments on 8 projects. The City is currently working on 3 projects which include the American Efird facility, East Harper building, and former Lenoir High School (LHS). He

also reviewed a map showing the locations of these buildings and commented they will provide additional opportunities for the City.

Mr. Icenhour stated they are currently working with Caldwell County EDC to identify sites with high redevelopment potential. He shared they have identified 9 additional possible sites and are working on site access which is necessary to begin investigations. Mr. Icenhour stated they always welcome input from the community for other sites that may not be in their inventory.

Homelessness Response Team Program Update – Ben Willis, Community & Economic Development Director, Western Piedmont Council of Governments

Ben Willis gave an update regarding the Homelessness Response Team that was formed by the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) in July 2023 and achieved full staffing in November 2023. He explained the City of Lenoir, non-profit organizations, businesses along with other groups met and discussed creating a Homelessness Response Team which is comprised of a group of individuals who have a variety of experience and would be responsible for compiling pertinent information provided by homeless individuals throughout the four-county area. These individuals would be directed about where to go for mental health services, temporary housing and how to properly navigate the system. Mr. Willis mentioned housing would be transitional and pointed out Habitat for Humanity may be an option for some of these people. He also mentioned the WPCOG has funding to provide Tenant Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) through 2030.

In addition, these individuals would be directed to NC Works & Workforce Development for assistance on how to get a job. In conclusion, Mr. Willis reported these are federal programs available, but the process is hard to navigate. He referred to how these people need to obtain identification cards and other supporting documents as an example of the barriers they face and, with the help of the Homelessness Response Team, they would be properly navigated through the process. Mr. Willis gave an overview of how they created the recent PIT (Point in Time) card and showed a chart of how this option works. PIT is comprised of a group of individuals who participate in taking a count of the homeless and they work in conjunction with other departments.

Mr. Willis shared the Five Key Principles as follows:

1. We work for local government.
2. We will be supportive of law enforcement.
3. Regional coordination is essential for effectiveness to help mitigate this problem.
4. Promote best practices addressing emerging needs strategically with new services.
5. Ensuring a positive impact without worsening existing issues.

Anthony Starr, Executive Director, stated the WPCOG will come up with some way to continue to assist the homeless people until the state does something, but pointed out there won't be an immediate change.

Mr. Willis emphasized the goal is to have a coordinated effort to get these individuals through the process.

On behalf of City Council, Mayor Gibbons thanked Mr. Willis for the good report.

Population, Housing & Employment Update

Anthony Starr reviewed a number of slides/charts/information pertaining to the following:

- Caldwell County Population Projections by Age Group from 2022-2042
- Hickory MSA Unemployment Rate from December 2013 through December 2023

- Hickory MSA Labor Force Number of Employed Workers from December 2013 through December 2023
- Hickory MSA & Caldwell County Employees by Industry
- Hickory Metro Jobs from 1990 through 2023.

In addition, Mr. Starr reported Caldwell County issued 285 new residential building permits in 2023 and 2 multi-family apartment units. He also displayed a map that outlined the locations of single family homes from 2021 through 2023.

A link to all of the charts and data is included at the end of these minutes as information.

Review of 2023-24 Strategic Priorities – Scott Hildebran

City Manager Hildebran reviewed the FY2023 Council priorities as listed below and stated that employees continue to be the City's number one asset.

2023 City Council Priorities

1. Continue Efforts to Offer Competitive Compensation and Benefits for Employees.
2. Develop a new Comprehensive Plan (which will include a focus on neighborhood planning including West End, Whitnel, and other neighborhoods and Parks & Recreation Master Plan.
3. Continue to develop Strategies to Support Affordable, Workforce, and Market-Rate Housing.
4. Continue to Fund & Support Water/Sewer Capital Improvements Plan.
5. Continue to Support Minimum Housing and Code Enforcement.
6. Continue to evaluate organizational staffing needs, and encourage succession planning and professional development.

Following a discussion of Council's top concerns, Mr. Starr asked Council to evaluate their concerns for consideration of any new priorities and vote on their top priorities. Following the votes, the top five items were listed below as Council's priorities for 2024.

2024 Council Budget Priorities

1. Continue efforts to offer competitive compensation and benefits for employees to improve recruitment and retention.
2. Develop options to increase code enforcement and improve beautification in three primary areas:
 - Abandoned/neglected housing
 - Dilapidated commercial properties
 - Appearance of downtown buildings
3. Continue to develop strategies to support affordable, workforce, and market-rate housing.
4. Continue to fund and support the Water/Sewer Capital Improvements Plan.
5. Continue to evaluate organizational staffing needs, and encourage succession planning and professional development.

In addition, Mr. Hildebran stated the City has good health care insurance with a lower deductible (80-20) and funding for the Downtown Master Plan. He shared the number of permits the City has issued for the Summerhill development and reported John Moore is developing workforce housing for teachers, etc. Also, Mr. Hildebran shared the Crescent Point apartments are based on income levels.

Grant Funding Presentation – City Manager Scott Hildebran and Finance Director Donna Bean

City Manager Hildebran and Finance Director Donna Bean presented a review of Grant Funding/Projects Review. Mr. Hildebran reported a number of projects are 95% to 100% complete and

explained the funding for the projects. Mr. Hildebran also reported a copy of the Downtown Master Plan is available on the City's website.

Mr. Hildebran gave an overview of projects that have been completed including the Smith Crossroads Gateway Sign, Mack Cook Stadium Lights, Engine No. 2 Fire Truck (purchase) Rear-Loader & Pac Mac Sanitation Truck (purchase) to name a few.

Next, Mr. Hildebran gave an overview of current projects that are underway including Wayfinding Signs, the W & S System Asset Inventory, Brownfields Grant No. 2, Clock Tower Sculpture, Farmers Market Pavilion, Hospital Avenue Sidewalk Project along with the OVNHT Greenway Link to name a few.

The projects that have not been started include the Downtown 2-Way Streets and Traffic Signage and the Comprehensive Plan.

A link to the complete list of all projects, costs and funding is included at the end of these minutes as information.

Code Enforcement

Much discussion centered on code enforcement and how to address this issue. Planning Director Hannah Williams referred to available staffing and also mentioned they are trying to evaluate and develop options to consider to address this issue.

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 City Manager Hildebran for his great leadership, Department Directors and Staff for all their hard work and talent in making the City of Lenoir a great place to live.

Mayor Gibbons stated the City of Lenoir is fortunate to have Mr. Hildebran as he is well-known and well respected across the state.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:17 p.m.

Council Retreat, Feb. 23, 2024, Presentation Links

Mission Statement & Vision Review - Anthony Starr

- <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/qlxyknp25bxnwzgi8ykc1/01-Mission-Vision-Statement-2023.pdf?rlkey=8mlmp6c0ewuxhiogokkez05to&dl=0>

State of the City “2023 Review” Presentation - Scott Hildebran/Mayor Gibbons

- <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/ykcluzy3ayyhzogylwp35/02-State-of-the-City-2024-Retreat.pdf?rlkey=576rmkn4sbujp1icsp7esw8hk&dl=0>

Presentations

- Lenoir Retail Update - Matt Jaeger, Senior Portfolio Director, Retail Strategies
 - <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/tx4matq54vl087013e9i2/16-Retail-Strategies-Update-Retreat-Presentation-2024.pdf?rlkey=oojbr19by9su20u5mhewfjf15&dl=0>
- Brownfield Program Update - Greg Icenhour
 - <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/67orrt5zdza8fz0665lya/17-Brownfield-Program-Update-Lenoir-Planning-Retreat-2024.pdf?rlkey=94gtll07h8e6jiqu4k6xuo7tw&dl=0>
- Homeless Response Team Program Update - Ben Willis
 - <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/h0ry39onqrv8qbokv7818/18-Homelessness-Response-Team-Presentation-Lenoir-2024.pdf?rlkey=iss8j6nkyetuhph92ez5oueem&dl=0>
- Population, Housing & Employment Update – WPCOG
 - <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/6ymqpf9exnymh0y5wcstx/19-WPCOG-Population-Housing-Employment-Update.pdf?rlkey=s8qy5kjakan0arzg6j97dmhl7&dl=0>

Review of 2023-24 Strategic Priorities - Scott Hildebran

- <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/rbiy1g6w3hectoia1zbee/20-2023-Council-Budget-Priorities.pdf?rlkey=ybhe1ni3r3arvda2wbgis7zk4&dl=0>

Grant Funding/Projects Review - Scott Hildebran/Donna Bean

- <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/c827qi585k6n1p9igr7nf/21-Project-Funding-Presentation-2024.pdf?rlkey=a7w4tph8ergqjfsq6kw4zghbq&dl=0>
- <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/u2itgpqklb7xy5ng6we6q/22-Funding-Projects-Summary-Retreat-2024.pdf?rlkey=uq1d3n7qlhenueem26au3axbd&dl=0>