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The Work Session meeting of the Petersburg City Council was held on Tuesday, February 9, 2021, live streamed. Mayor Parham called the meeting to order at 11:02a.m.

**1. ROLL CALL:**

Present:

Council Member Charles H. Cuthbert, Jr.  
Council Member Treska Wilson-Smith (left at 12:43pm)  
Council Member Darrin Hill  
Vice Mayor Annette Smith-Lee  
Mayor Samuel Parham

Absent: Council Member W. Howard Myers  
Council Member John A. Hart, Sr (left at 12:35pm)

Present from City Council Administration:

City Manager Aretha R. Ferrell-Benavides  
City Attorney Anthony C. Williams  
Clerk of Council Nykesha D. Jackson

**2. UPDATES AND DISCUSSION:**

Mayor Parham stated, "I thank everyone for joining us here to have some updates and discussion. I know that we have a marathon of meetings and we have a lot going on. And we have a lot to catch up to and we want to take advantage of our time with having with our City Manager here with us. I know that time is ticking so we are going to be working right on up until that day. So, this is council's marathon of meetings to get council as well as constituents caught up on the things that is going on here in Petersburg. We are going to start off with 'Item A'."

a. Information on the Rate Study

Mrs. Benavides stated, "I am going to turn this over to Mr. Lyons. Because what we wanted to do was to give you just an overview of the process that we are undertaking. Annually, we look our water rates and billing rates and understanding that this has been an unusual year given the COVID Pandemic. Some of the orders which have come from the Governor's Office, which affect our water collection as well as the tragedy that many people are facing due to COVID. So, what we have done is that we are starting this process. Mr. Lyons has taken the lead in this process. I am going to ask him to take you through and give you an update on what is happening. They will come back to you with more information and more data. This is a preliminary discussion that is happening. Mr. Lyons will talk about it."

Mr. Lyons stated, "Mr. Mayor and council, I just want to bring you up to speed to where we are. Mr. Floyd and this team as well as our finance team, Mr. Floyd along with Randall Williams and his budget team have been working to provide some needed information to our financial advisors to look at. This is for where we are with our collection rates and where do we need to be moving forward. We also have a number of scheduled meetings with our financial advisors and others. We want to provide them additional information as well for them to evaluate and plug whatever holes for them to be able to come back to us. That would allow us to come back and talk with you all more specifically in terms of what we are seeing. What we are seeing right now is just like anyone else around the country. Some of our numbers may not be where we want to be but until we are able to do that final calculations with our financial advisor, we cannot give you a more holistic perspective. But we anticipate being back in front of you with more detailed information on where we go within the next 30 days. It is a priority issue that we are all looking at and following their lead. No doubt based on

\*Audio available upon request.

what COVID has impacted in some way, shape, and form but we also talking about collection rates in specific areas. There are things that we start to look at the numbers and we need to have a better explanation for. We meet with our financial advisors, Mr. Floyd, Mr. Williams, Mr. Gerrit, Ms. Patrice, and others, have all put their hands in this along with Mrs. Adams. I anticipate coming back within the next 30 days to bring back something much more concrete and solid in terms of where we are and where we go from here.”

Mrs. Benavides stated, “To tie into this Mayor, one of the conversations that we are having is not only the water rate from our collection but also det requirements from both ARWA South Central Wastewater. And we have been working with the state for financial support for necessary upgrades to go into that collection. We know that this is something that is very important to our residents. We have been able to hold our rates steady though there were some projected increases necessary based on our collections pre-COVID. Our concerns now are what is that impact of the COVID. When we submitted officially to the State for support for the utility assistance, we did a primarily run to identify how many individuals fell between the March and December and around that time October deadline of individuals who had fallen behind with their water payments. We were awarded around \$398,000. However, it was based on submitting somewhere close to over a million dollars in uncollectable during that time. This may have changed but that is transforming as part of where we are also going to look for more support from the State to help our residents who may have fallen behind this time.”

Mr. Lyons stated, “During this time, Mrs. Adams, Ms. Patrice and others are working on a formula to make sure that the allocation of the \$382,000 that the manager is speaking about meets the guidelines that have been set up by the State. Second, we will be able to show you all the details in terms of the allocations. The one thing that the manager talked about, our application was in tune and we made the request and got about \$1.4 million and we got \$382,000 for utility assistance. The other thing as we move forward with the rate study and collection, we also got to evaluate what the \$382,000 do for us in terms of the collection rate as we provide that information to our rate study financial evaluators. And Mr. Floyd and others have been doing an excellent job in terms of keeping that conversation going and open and providing the necessary information that the financial advisors are seeking. The last thing that I would say along those lines are to keep in mind that the manager just alluded to with ARWA and South Central, which is our regional partners, a part of our letter to the State is requesting a total of \$125 million dollars for upgrades to South Central and ARWA. If we get what we hope that will probably 90% of those dollars and cents. That would still leave us with \$30 million dollars. We have to figure out the additional cost along with our debt service that would be associated with what we pay for South Central and others as it relates to collection for water and sewer in that process.”

There was discussion among City Council and staff.

Council Member Cuthbert asked can this item be brought back at the March 2<sup>nd</sup> Work Session Meeting for further discussion and until they develop a consensus of where they want to go and when the City go back into doing cut-offs like other jurisdictions.

Mayor Parham stated that they will add this to the March 2<sup>nd</sup> agenda.

b. Technology System Update-ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning System) Project

Mrs. Benavides stated, “I am going to have India take you. When we met before we discussed one of the challenges we have had and responsibility that we must accept is that we have been operating on antiquated technology. Mrs. India Adams-Jacob will have the project lead on rolling out our new enterprise resource system. And so, part of what we are looking at is one identifying and two is talking about the funding and three is making sure that post my departure this project moves forward. And so, we know that we have a great team with Gerrit and Robert and Patrice and all those guys. We want to have a point person who is not only going to take this football and pass it along but keep us moving forward. I am going to turn it over to India to talk a little bit and I will chime in when necessary.”

\*Audio available upon request.

Mrs. Adams- Jacobs gave PowerPoint presentation on the ERP Project.

Key points:

- Enterprise resource planning refers to a type of software that organization use to manage day-to-day business activities such as accounting, procurement, human resources, risk management and asset management.
- It manages the processes for local government agencies.
- Manages utility billing, tax collection, code enforcement, fund accounting and more.
- Tracks budget spending to ensure the right amount of money is being allocated to the right departments.
- Tracks collection of taxes and fees associated with services, licensing and permits.
- Makes sure that the City can streamline money collections.
- Project will take three to four years to complete.
- Phase 1 will take place in 2021 which is the planning phase. Phase 2 will take place in 2022 which is the pre-implementation phase. Phase 3 will take place in 2023 which is the actual implementation phase of human resource, payroll, and taxes. Phase 4 will take place in 2024 which is the implementation of utility billing and the remaining modules.

Mrs. Benavides stated, "Just to tie into what she mentioned. I spoke with Davenport a little bit about the funding opportunities with it and they were favorable with this opportunity. One of the key criteria's that we must focus on is although we will have India as the project manager, I strongly recommend that we bring in an outside technology firm to help with India and Gerrit in this process. Because it really is going to take some heavy lifting. We are a very lean IT organization currently and, in that organization, you have got Mr. Gerrit, Robert Slovak, Mr. Booker and one employee who has left. And so, we have two vacancies. But they still have day to day technology management in the City. I think that in making sure that this happen because this is the most important system that we will implement, and we have learned a lot of lessons from our last technology implementation with or water system. And so, I think that it is going to be at the top of the list of things to do in having a partner to assist with this. In rolling it out in a phased approach, I think that would be valuable to the City. And the most important thing that both teams are going to have to work on is data cleansing. The key to any system is making sure that the information that goes to the new system is clean data that will not start the problems that we have seen in the past where we start looking at accounts and start noticing multiple accounts and multiple account numbers that are assigned to people. SO, that is a heavy lift project. I do think that we have the dedication to keep this moving. My farewell to you all is that this is something that will transform our operation. I believe that talking to our financial managers and hearing that and even discussing it with our S & P Group on our bond, they recognize that this is very important for the City moving forward."

There was discussion among City Council and staff.

c. Status of Conversion of Wythe Street and Washington Street to two-way conversion

Mr. Lyons stated, "I apologize, I sent each and every one of you all the latest report in this process that we did back in August 2018. In addition to that Mrs. Innis provided a brief response to some of the more specific questions that was asked by a council member at the last meeting. As I am talking Gerrit, please allow Mrs. Innis to host and to share her slides. In excess and while she is pulling this up, really Timmons, we paid them an amount of money to come back and tell us about where we were in this process. Basically, to move forward with the next study, we were talking about \$110,000 for the next phase of the study. As Mrs. Innis, walks you through the process, not just Washington and Wythe, the report will also walk you through that they will have to do a review of intersections in 23 additional spots. The last thing that I would say before I let Mrs. Innis take us through this process, it is not just a one-way or conversion of those into one, we also have major utility challenges in the way that the streetlights are done. And the last piece was that if you move you are

\*Audio available upon request.

going to have major construction during this process.”

Mrs. Innis gave updated information on the scope of work.

Key points:

- Phase 1 Study would include compiling available VDOT average traffic and hourly directional traffic data on road sections and ramps located with the study area.
- Second phase would be a study to analyze different traffic as well as the pedestrian sidewalk and parking, etc.
- It would take 23 streets and intersections to be reviewed if council chooses to move forward with this. The City has not moved forward with this because funds have not been identified and they did not receive instruction on whether this is something of the council that the choose to move forward with.
- The total amount that would be spend for this scope of service should be approximately \$120,000 to complete the study of both phases.

Council Member Cuthbert asked that between now and March 2 to get information on grants for the study and potential grants for implementation for the conversion and bring back to council.

Council Member Wilson-Smith stated that she would like a study on the safety of a two-conversion and data from other surrounding areas that have done a similar study and conversion.

There was discussion among City Council and staff.

d. Update on long term fund balance goals.

Mrs. Benavides stated, “Well, Mayor we will probably have a lot more on that next week. We have made great strives as an organization in rebuilding our fund balance. If you can recall we talked about before the Bobb Group left, we were at a negative \$7 million dollar fund balance. We ultimately improved that to our last CAFR and reported a positive of \$8 million. As a result of that we wanted to make sure that we aired some caution on seeing this happening and making sure that we reestablish and increase out goal. We have talked a little bit, and I will ask Mr. Floyd to join me in this conversation about a 30-60 day, 90-day cashflow balance. And then we also have upgraded out policies to state some things to include the policies that we were initially budgeting a million dollars for the fund balance and in our new policies we moved to \$500,000 towards fund balance and \$500,000 toward capital improvements. Which is some of the things that we have been talking about today. Next week, we anticipate, at this time when we started this, we were not sure if we would have it ready, we anticipate bringing to council and the public our final CAFR which is a little past due. That will talk about where we are as a City as a whole. I need to start by saying that this CAFR is for ending on June 30<sup>th</sup>. So, it only covered a few months of COVID, so things were much better during that timeframe leading up to it. Most importantly as we start to move forward is where does that put us in respect to increasing our overall credit rating worthiness and credit rating. And so, we will be having discussions this week with the S&P to talk about our long-term financial plan, which we have updated recently. But also, where our draft CAFR is going to be and our final CAFR that will be presented next Tuesday to council and the citizens. As soon as, we get a final document and the reason that I would say to council you have not received it is that they are tweaking it and making sure that all the numbers are correct when presented. And once we receive that we will make that available to staff and council. Our auditors are anticipating being at our Tuesday meeting to present to us what they found for further discussion and then we can go from there with the next steps for staff. One of the main things is that we now have a fund balance that we must work collectively with our treasurer on is our investment policy. And part of that investment policy does fall under our treasurer and now that we have funds to work with the financial planners on not only having that fund balance but building that fund balance for the future. And I know that Mr. Pritchett has had some discussion and looked it, but we have not had much to work

\*Audio available upon request.

with. Starting out with at least an \$8 million dollar fund balance I think that we are at a point right now that we are available. The other thing is that we have taken the need away of the RAN which was the high interest short-term loan. At that is a beauty and part of that is having a fund balance that supports us through the ups and downs of our cashflow. So, I think that most of this conversation will happen next Tuesday. And what we look at as we get out final number is if we need to do any of the changes to our policies which I do not see right now but we also want to move out of dollar figure which we used to talk about \$6 and \$7 and \$8 million to making sure that we can adequately state 30-day, 60 day, 90 days. And have a policy for once you reach that 30, 60, or 90 day or whatever we decide on, where the funding would be used for. Because what we do not want to do is to immediately start spending funds just because we have it in our savings account. Mr. Floyd, I know that you are there can you add anything to that conversation.”

Mr. Floyd stated, “No, ma’am. I think that you wrapped that up well. But I think that it is important that we move into the development of the 2021-2022 budget and that we do start having a lot of these conversations as it relates to the use of the fund balance and things of that nature. It was very timely that this was put on the agenda at least to bring to the attention of council knowing that we will be coming back on the 16<sup>th</sup> with the results of the CAFR.”

Mrs. Benavides stated, “And Mr. Floyd has already kicked off the budget process. We are now looking more apprehensively at our budget to not just budgeting but also tying this and linking this to our strategic plan. He is meeting with the staff one-on-one and having some very meaningful discussions. If you want to mention that Mr. Floyd.”

Mr. Floyd stated, “I was actually going to do a nice little presentation on March 2<sup>nd</sup> for our Work Session to actually go through methodically what we are doing this year as it relates to the budget process and what our goals and objectives are for the budget process are as it relates to that.”

e. Future Development Plan in City with regards to restaurant, housing, and jobs

Mayor Parham stated, “We put this on Mrs. Benavides, just to get your insight. You have been here for some time now and I would like to just pick your brain on this topic of the things that we can do to grow these areas in the City.”

Mrs. Benavides stated, “As we talk about what the future of Petersburg looks like I think that building up our planning and economic development team has been really important to this. Looking at our comprehensive plan and our future land use planning it is important not only to focus on where we are right now and where we want to be. And that is a strategic conversation not just with the City Council but with citizens and our business community. As we start focusing on developing and redevelopment, which is what we are focusing on heavily in our City is how do we make sure that we have the proper balance between our housing mix and our industrial mix. We have been fortunate enough to have a strong economic development partner that has come in most recently, AMPAC, and the jobs that are being created. But we also must create the synergy to think about what the things are they need in order to attract the people that work there to also not only work in Petersburg but reside in Petersburg. And that is going to be focusing on two parts. One is or housing component and our housing availability. But our housing is only as important as working with our public schools. We have got to continue our relationship with our schools. When people look to relocate to a community, they are looking not only at the low cost of living that we have available here but what about the educational opportunities that we have available. We got to continue to not only work with our public schools but even our governor school to make sure that we are creating those environments. And economic development is based on those components. When we look at our downtown development, we brought a lot of businesses in. and one of the conversations that we have had there is not only that we need to bring those businesses in but that we must focus on the retention. And we got to focus on what are those things that prevents them from closing when we get to a pandemic because we do not have the support structure and

\*Audio available upon request.

early on identification. As we are transitioning our Chamber of Commerce, I believe that it is important that the role that they play when I got here was vital to support in our local businesses. So, we have got to keep that component tied back into it. We have had unlike most communities; I can say at least four ribbon cuttings during this pandemic of new businesses opening in our community. Now, our goal is to not only cut the ribbon but to come back a year later to celebrate their one-year or two-year anniversary. And so, that targeted effort is important for us to start back marketing that we are open for business so come join us and come be apart of out community. And that is the holistic thing that must happen. And when I got here, we had merged and talked about planning and economic development. those two things go hand in hand. You are not going to economic development without planning and vice versa. And creating that creates synergy there for both.”

Council Member Cuthbert stated, “I think that we need some outside help in devising a plan for our future. We are so used to looking around Petersburg and thinking that it is just great because it is so comfortable. But you get an outside in here and I think that we might get a different assessment. And with that different assessment, I think will come more imaginative and aggressive ideas for turning this City around. If we drop back and look at what we have accomplished as four years in the way of planning, it is meager. We have certainly been blessed with AMPAC. I do not know if that is due to anything other than good fortune. But I think that we need to take our future into our hands and try to shape that future. And I do not know when council did that. I think back over Petersburg history for the last 75 years I do not see any evidence of long-term planning from City Council. I think City Council has reacted rather than led and I think that we need to be the first City Council in a long time to lead the direction of the City. Now, I suspect that everyone would agree with that. Then the question is going to come in how we lead this City. And I would welcome the thoughts of everyone on this council. And maybe my perception is challenged. Maybe everyone thinks that council is taking an aggressive proactive approach to planning for the future. But it is more than just a comprehensive plan every five years. We have got problems that we need to recognize and address. The problems with the health of our citizens 133 out of 133 at the very bottom of the heap. We have got an extremely high rate of illiteracy within our public schools. We have got a mind-numbing amount of poverty. The numbers that were given to us in the most recent meeting of council about the different measures of poverty in Petersburg. There is the product of a very sick economy. And we need to recognize those facts and try to change them. But how do we go about changing them. I think that we would benefit from somebody coming here with Virginia experience and not somebody from California or Indiana. But Virginia law, Virginia possibilities, Virginia grant programs and certainly we can learn from City’s outside of Virginia but somebody that is familiar with Virginia law and municipal government to advise us and come up with a game plan which we can either accept or reject. But I think that is going to be essential. I do not think we have the knowledge ourselves. I think that it is going to take a professional urban planner to help direct us or someone with strong urban planning background to direct us. What are the specifics of where we go from where we are? I guess this discussion is a beginning and I would like to see what everyone else’s thoughts are and see where those thoughts might help us go in terms of an evolving plan for addressing our various measures of disappointment in terms of being a thriving municipal government. And I welcome everyone else’s thoughts.”

Mayor Parham stated, “I just want to chime in on that. Because it is like I want to first start off that it takes council having a leadership team that can deliver. And that is something that Petersburg has not had in some time and I really like to applaud the City Manager and her staff. They have gone above and beyond with the whole AMPAC and Civica deal and Phlow. I think that very few people know the amount of work that our team has done behind the scenes. It has been a tremendous amount of work, a tremendous length, and a lot of meetings with the State in asking for their assistance and funding. We had designated personnel talk to these companies. Aretha was a genius in getting all these company’s together when we hosted a lunch for them at the McIlwaine House which was phenomenal. And it starts with us selling the City ourselves. And Mrs. Benavides crossed it and everybody from Phlow, AMPAC to Civica says hey this is a neat place in Petersburg and we really need to take a strong look at building our facilities here. So, it starts at the top and works its way down. We have company’s that are interested in doing those long-term planning’s. And Mrs. Benavides and I have been in several meetings with a lot of these outside planners that are interested in doing business here in

\*Audio available upon request.

the City but its like with most other parts of the United States right now with COVID we must get past this to get to that level of community engagement. And right now, when we talk to a lot of these past planners, last year, it was not the time to invest hundreds of thousands of dollars when we could not get together as a group. So, that is slow. So, on top of that it takes a team at the top and I just do not want to short a lot of the efforts that our team has done here. Because it has been some great achievements for a City that has not had a whole lot of hits. And I think that part of that is being addressed now on the State stage of the Commonwealth of Virginia which they realize that a lot of the primarily minority communities in the Commonwealth have not had that type of support and resources in order to attract those large-scale developers. And they must be a partner in this even in the planning process. We just have to admit that Petersburg along with the other City's in the Commonwealth have been red lined by a lot of banks as far with lending. There is still an issue with lending in primarily African American communities. They ran into that with a lot of areas like even with the Trailways Bus Station. I think that now with Commonwealth with Governor Northam is doing everything that he can to support us in those efforts. Because in just being a smaller City we do not have the resources as like the Chesterfield's of the world who have over a dozen people in economic development and another twenty something people in planning. We really have to rely heavy and admit that we are behind and that we have these huge disparities, and the world has not been fair to Petersburg. We have to also make sure that we have a progressive staff. So, it takes council making those right decisions and permanent management when Mrs. Benavides leave. We need someone with a visionary and that is aggressive. Because we do not have anytime to be complacent. Like Mrs. Benavides said we have been fortunate. You drive through other localities and you see other strip malls closing and other areas when they were once retail and our smaller businesses in the City are growing and they are excited. And I am quite bullish on the Petersburg economy growing. Because something that we have that we have seen in a lot of when we were going to Virginia Municipal League and to the National League of Cities. We were saying that everyone wants a strobe district and that is something that Petersburg has that is attractive to a lot of our millennials and younger people that are still moving into Petersburg. Lots of the counties are losing population now because people do not want to stay. Because they wan more of the amenities of the fancy lofts with gyms and having restaurants around them. I believe that we are on our way, but we definitely have to stay progressive and get leadership in place to execute those goals. And part of the problem has been continuity. And we managed to do some great things as a council because we all managed to stay in our seats. But when you have that long-term council planning's and when council turn over like a lot of them do. Just because this 2021 is the plan that we put together long term for the City in two years things can change with three or four new people that say that we want to do something different. So, it takes strong management in getting those people in place to definitely grow the City."

Council Member Hill stated, "I am going to get off this line in a minute because I have a dental appointment to go too. But I will just say this. I know a lot of times we see a lot of things that we want but I like to celebrate from which we come to where we are now. We do have a way to go and that is not to say that everything is done that we want to get done. But I can remember coming on council when everything happened, and the bubble dropped, and finance was in a shamble and where we are now. But I think that one of the problems that we have as a City is this council that the most senior members of council that has been on the longest has been so busy putting out fires. And now we are at a point now where we can really set the direction from four to five years ago to now. We still have financial restraints on us, but we are not the way that we were. So, I would like to celebrate all the things that we have done thus far. AMPAC is a game changer. There are only three of them in the country and one of them are here. There is one in Texas and one in California. And there are other plants that have closed all over the country. We have a lot of development. People are looking at the cow patch down there across the street from Thacker's. We have a lot of things that are in the pipeline. So, I think our major point is to help us grow economically and continue to build up our planning department. And continue to get us an economic developer that will be in place to bind the position of the City. We all have our ideas of what the City should look like. At the end of the day, we want to take care of our children which is the school system. And we have a relationship with them now and we are building a bond with them. The City Manager with her team with a lot of leg work that I guess most other City's did not have to do because of whatever their economic situation is. We have been so busy putting out fires and trying to get us

\*Audio available upon request.

to a level of where we are now. So, I want us to continue to celebrate the things that we have done thus far. But still look towards the future. And we can come together with an economic plan. But when you get different people on board, they may have different visions. Not saying that it is not a good vision of the City, but you just do not know. Everyone has their strong suite and what they would like to see in the City of Petersburg. Me and the Mayor often talk about industry and things of that nature. But small businesses are things that drive this City. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.”

Council Member Wilson-Smith stated, “When we talk about leadership, I think that it is important to examine ourselves, And I think that we could be a lot further and what we are and could do a lot more than what we have done if we would come together as a whole. There are suggestions made to this council by the citizens who come to use with good ideas on things that we can do. I know for a fact I sit there, and I come up with things like hey you all I got a good idea. Not that all my ideas have to be taken and I understand that. I think one way and there is a big age gap. And I understand that as well. But I remember in 2018, I presented an idea to us that clearly stated that if we focused on our African American history, we could pocket a lot of money. Can you imagine going into the home that Judge Roger Gregory grew up in and people being charged to go into that home. That is money for the City. From developers who have come here and clearly stated to us in a council meeting that if you were to promote your African American history this City could thrive. You could go to Philadelphia and see a statue of Moses Malone, but you cannot see nothing but a t-shirt about him here in this City. We do not want to say anything about any of that because one person does not believe in it and one person does. We have got to look within ourselves. We cannot say that our children in the school system are illiterate if they are in school, I doubt that they are the illiterate ones. It would be people who graduated and did not get somethings. That is a whole system that we must look at. But we all got to be on the same page with the understanding that we have got to pour our money into our schools for our schools to flourish. Once our educational system becomes top notch then people would move to Petersburg even if they had to sleep in a cardboard box. Everybody wants their child to be educated. We have got to get our priorities in order, and we must got to be not afraid to listen to somebody else who is almost just as old as you Mr. Cuthbert that just has a different take on things. Yeah, the African American experience in this City would do well. We keep promoting ourselves as a historical City, but we promote the Civil War. We do not promote anything else. And how do you call yourselves a group of African American leaders who cannot promote its own history. I have an issue with that. And I am going to calm down because I have something to go do but that is my take on leadership. We do not need anyone else to come in here and tell us what to do. Not if we are true leaders. We just need to get off our high horse and not be afraid to listen to one another and not be afraid to agree with one another sometimes. Just ask ourselves what can we do as a group? What is our role as the people that we are? It is African American history month, and this City does not have anything planned. I think that is sad. I am finished thank you.”

Council Member Cuthbert stated, “The fact remains that we have not plan. And we are going to continue to drift without a plan. Just like the last 75 or 100 years of City Council have drifted. We have no plan. And denying that problems exist is not going to lead us to solve the problem. We do have a tremendous problem with illiteracy in our public schools. Fewer than 50% of our children cannot read at grade level as of 2018 in the third grade. If we are going to maximize the opportunity of those children, then we have got to teach them to read. And to just say that we have aspiration for building a good relationship with the school board is not going to change the numbers on kids reading. Now the only reason I scoffed at Mrs. Wilson-Smith’s comments, she asked a rhetorical question of can you imagine of people wanting to line up to go through Roger Gregory house in the Heights. I cannot. On a day-by-day basis of people lining up to go through the house. No, I cannot. I do not think that is realistic. It might make us feel good to say it, but I do not think that it is realistic, and I do not want to get lost in that. Let me go back to the plan. We have no plan. Just like the last 50 or 100 City Council Members before us has had no plan. We need a plan, and we need someone to help us to develop it and it is more than hiring an economic development director. We need a written document that we can all support and we do not have it. I think that four years from now we are going to be continuing to drift without a written plan. That is where I am. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.”

\*Audio available upon request.

Mayor Parham stated, "Council Member Cuthbert are you in favor of bringing in a professional planning firm just to get a fill of someone coming in a drawing up a long-term plan?"

Council Member Cuthbert stated, "I think that we should solicit proposals from planners to guide us. Yes. Now whether we accept their proposals remains to be seen. It depends on of course what the proposal is or some insight that the planners may give us into what the proposal would be. But I certainly think that we should be soliciting interest from long-term planners with municipal experience in Virginia to help guide us. Because the numbers that we got in this City in terms of poverty, literacy, and health, they are huge to Petersburg's future. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. The answer is yes."

Mayor Parham stated, "Thank you."

Mrs. Benavides stated, "To tie into what Mr. Cuthbert said and I think we talked about this in the beginning when we started. The plan that you all have is a strategic plan and a comprehensive plan. You can also have an economic development strategic plan. All these plans are what guide what you do and those are policy documents set. Strategic plan is by council with implementation by staff. Your comprehensive plan starts with your planning commission but still adopted by council. And so, the economic development plan can be done by the EDA or the staff but adopted by council. A plan is a sheet of paper or a book. It only matters if you follow the plan. And I do believe that you can bring in external experts who can come in. Like Council Member Cuthbert said there are company's and City's out there that have hired. But what they are going to give you is a comprehensive plan. In the District of Colombia, we had one and in California it is required by law. And many states require that. The key in any plan is the ability to implement the process. The second thing is the agreed upon of what does it look like. I remember when I first came here, and I heard everyone say that we have a problem with economic development. But what does that mean. So, having someone who is outside and not a staff person, because in most organization we would love to spend \$400,000 to \$500,000 for someone outside to tell us what to do so that we can feel better. But in some cases, it takes outside to tell us what to do who have worked with different jurisdictions like ours to come in to help us to pull out the thoughts in our head. But the key to the plan that I would say to Mr. Cuthbert and the Mayor and everyone on council and the residents, is our ability to stick to the plan and follow that plan. And that will be the most important next step for this City once you have an identified plan. And I think that within our staff and leadership I believe that it is possible, and I believe that all things are impossible but the agreed upon plan must be implemented and followed through in the long run."

Mayor Parham stated, "Thank you. So, we will definitely look at putting out an RFP to at least look at some proposals on."

Mrs. Benavides stated, "We have actually done that Mayor. We started the process with Michelle in looking at someone to take the lead. Because when Michelle left, we started a transition. I think what I would say to you because this is a planning function that first you direct staff to solicit and to encourage them to solicit a vendor to partner with the City in developing this plan. It falls under Mr. Lyons and Reggie. I believe that it is something that is doable. I believe that we put money in the budget initially for this project. If this is the wish of council, I just think that we need to bring back just like we did with the ERP a solicit in moving forward with this."

Mayor Parham stated, "Thank you can you bring that back to us and e can make a decision in which direction we want to go."

Mrs. Benavides stated, "Yes. Before I leave, I will work with Mr. Lyons and Mr. Tabor and Mr. Jeremy on how we can go forward with this in bringing in some outside help. Because I think that it will be valuable to you."

\*Audio available upon request.

Mr. Lyons stated, "Mr. Mayor, if you do not mind, not only will be bring that back but at a future work study session we want to sit down and educate the entire City Council on the development projects that we have on the table. You all need the comprehensive list for us to walk you through. Second, we want to be able to talk to you more thoroughly about stuff that we have done in the code area. Third, we want to be able to highlight to you all the work that we have done as it relates to overall economic development including how we perceive getting through the liquidation of City owned properties. One of the things that we will also bring back to you at a later day as well we have to also talk to you as we have this conversation about water, sewer moving forward. All those things that we are talking about specifically from an economic development is the kind of conversation that you all need to hear working on pulling together that information. So that you will have a better understanding of the potential upside and moving forward as well."

Ms. Elliott stated, "Madam City Manager made a very good point. One option that you can pursue as well is an RFI (Request for information). That is a different procurement mechanism where if you do not know what you are looking for and you just want vendors to give you ideas that is non obligating and does not cost a penny. Because at the end of the day they want to win the work. They can give you some ideas and from there you can convert it to an RFP and so Reggie can even provide some vendors that he has in mind that you want o ping. That way we do not have to write the scope or do anything. All we have to say is that this is what we want to do you tell us how we can do it and that because your scope and RFP going forward."

Mayor Parham stated, "Thank you for that information on the RFI. So, we will get all of that information maybe at the work session on the 2<sup>nd</sup>."

**3. ADJOURNMENT:**

City Council adjourned at 12:50 p.m.

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Clerk of City Council

APPROVED:

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Mayor