

June 7, 2022

A Regular Work Session of the Danville City Council convened on June 7, 2022 at 9:14 p.m. in the Conference Room located on the Fourth Floor of the Municipal Building. Council Members present were: James B. Buckner, L.G. "Larry" Campbell Jr., Bryant Hood, Mayor Alonzo Jones, Barry P. Mayo, Vice Mayor Gary P. Miller, Sherman M. Saunders, J. Lee Vogler, Jr., and Madison J.R. Whittle (9).

Staff Members present were: City Manager Ken Larking, Deputy City Manager Earl B. Reynolds, Jr., City Attorney W. Clarke Whitfield Jr., and City Clerk Susan M. DeMasi.

Mayor Jones presided.

WORK SESSION ITEMS

CONSIDERATION OF CHANGES TO THE CITY'S PERSONNEL SYSTEM REGULATIONS

Director of Human Resources Sara Weller noted changes to the Personnel System were brought to City Council every year; what was included in the packet were changes to the pay system. City Manager Ken Larking noted there was a slight modification to the personnel count. Under the Gang Prevention program, staff was recommending the position allocation be changed from two new positions to three new positions. In response to Council Member Campbell, Mr. Larking explained the program started with one position at the beginning, the City received a grant, and now has three outreach workers paid for with that grant. The budget did recommend two, but staff was asking for a slight change, with no budget impact, of three allocated position to increase the impact of the outreach work. Council had no questions for Ms. Weller.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Director of Economic Development Corrie Bobe stated over the past several months, staff sent out a request for proposals for a consulting firm to lead the City's Tourism Branding and Marketing Strategy. After interviewing several firms, they agreed to hire Eddy Alexander out of Roanoke, Virginia to help guide the City through the year long process. Staff wanted to provide Council with an overview of the plan; it will be about a twelve-month process. There will be opportunities for Council to be engaged and provide input related to the direction of the City's tourism program and the messaging that will connect to the tourism program. There will be plenty of opportunities for the community at large to engage in the process. Staff has asked Jennifer Eddy to give Council a brief update related to the process and the anticipated outcomes for the tourism plan.

Ms. Eddy reviewed her Presentation with Council, noting this was an exciting time for tourism in the region; it was more crucial and significant than ever before. Tourism has been playing a quiet role in helping the economy locally for some time, even before the pandemic. Looking at Danville and Pittsylvania County in combination, they were bringing in about \$2.4M in local tax revenue annually and supporting about 1,500 jobs, pre-pandemic. The new investment that was coming was a game changer for the community. Tourism was not just about celebrating visitors, because those visitors spend money in the community, and they bring dollars in that allow the City to provide for more programs. They want to drive a tourism program that was supporting the vision of the community, and it was important that as they were building out that messaging and strategy, that the community helped to shape the story. Eddy Alexander would come in and facilitate with the community, help build something that citizens can be proud of and serve as a unifying voice for initiatives.

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Ms. Eddy explained tourism was important not just because vacation was fun; from a City government perspective it was really about positive economic, environmental and social impact. That was why they invest in tourism and support some of the investment happening in the region around tourism; to bring outside money into the local economy. That matters because it allows the City to bring more jobs to the area, better public services, more abundant activities and it supports an intentional preservation of the things that matter, natural, historical and cultural assets. When there was an active, inviting tourism program, it allowed communities to build, protect and enrich the arts, allowed the City to protect cultural assets, history, to celebrate and preserve things, and it was also the front door to economic development.

Ms. Eddy discussed outcomes they like to measure; the first was Average Length of Stay. They want to track how long people were staying now and how long were they staying in two, three, and five years from now, on average; if there was an average room night of one night, they want to get to 1.2 or 1.3 average room nights. Because Danville has the scale happening with the Caesars coming in, there were a couple different ways to grow this number. Next was Citizen Satisfaction; they were going to survey the community, understand what they want out of the tourism program, what they were happy with in the community, what they were not happy with, and they were going to measure that over time. Last was Improved Reputation, what were people saying about living, working, playing and staying here.

Ms. Eddy discussed marketing: awareness, consideration, preference, selection and experience, noting all people were consumers, they all buy things all the time. For example, if someone buys a can of coke, they must first be aware that coke exists. They will have to consider do they want a soda, was it relevant to the kind of thirst they have; then they have to prefer it over all other options provided to them. It will have to be easy to get their hands on, and they were going to have to have a good experience before they buy it again. It all sounds simple, it works for politics, for anything a person might buy, but this matters from a marketing perspective.

Ms. Eddy discussed doing a brand for a community, what that meant. People think of a brand as a logo, color palette, font style, market research; for them it was not really any of those things, those were all tactics. A brand was what people think and say about you when you were not in the room to influence it. They want to use every opportunity they can where someone was interacting or hearing about Danville, to start to build a reputation to match what they think of them today, with what you want them to think tomorrow. You want to create a visual identity, but also a messaging structure that every time someone was thinking about the City, they were thinking about it in ways that were positive, helping support the vision of the community and where the City was trying to go.

Ms. Eddy noted their project with the City was split into five phases, starting with a discovery phase. They start by listening; this was all about understanding what the community wants, and what they know already. There has been a lot of research done, and they want to start there. There was also research they can do; they were looking at things to heat map where some visitors were going in the community, and have real time data about what markets they were coming from. They were synthesizing that into a strategy that, if people were coming here for these reasons then how do they get them to stay longer, and spend more in ways that were supportive of the community's goals. From there, they will sit down, start to create visual identity pieces and messaging strategies; that will be when the City starts to see ads out in the community and messaging in terms of placed media with local news outlets. Once they implement a campaign, something that will hopefully run for a long time, it will continue to be optimized.

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Over the next couple of months, they will be focused on the discovery phase, doing a survey of the entire community. Every business and resident in the City was about to get a postcard that will link to a survey people can take from their phone, tablet, or computer and fill out information about who they were, what they think about tourism, what they want to see, and what they think about their hometown. Next would be to have focus groups and interviews of key stakeholders, asking the same kind of questions, drilling as deep as they can. They will take all that data, put it into a summary presentation and they will do two presentations to the community. They want to make sure that what they were presenting and what they were using to navigate, the community agrees with.

From there, they will develop several brand concepts, take those into focus groups with key stakeholders who have been engaged in the process from the survey through the focus groups, give them previews into the concepts and try and get a consensus around which direction to go. Next, they will start developing the print and digital ads, the event boosts for trade shows and things like that. Simultaneously they will be working on a marketing investment plan; looking at what other communities who were pulling from the same feeder markets were spending on their marketing program, what were they using it for, and what was and was not working for them. They benchmark that with where the City thinks they need to go, to get from where they were to where they want to be. Ms. Eddy explained they will put together a proposed marketing plan that, after being vetted with staff, will go to Council to consider the City's planning efforts moving forward. From there, they would be putting in place some recommendations in terms of infrastructure and technology that will be scalable, and help the City maintain and ensure that their programs were providing value year after year.

They have started the discovery phase, and were about one month in; the postcard will hit by the City at the end of the month. They will put out press releases, and will be running digital ads to citizens in both Danville and Pittsylvania County, so people will have many opportunities to see the survey and participate. By the end of that discovery period, they will be back in the community sharing that result presentation, asking for validation or redirection if they have missed anything and then will be moving into the creative phase. Their goal was around the end of the year, to have some creatives to share with Council and some recommendations in terms of going forward so that by early spring, they were launching a campaign into the market that was a new brand, can create some fanfare and hopefully get some attention locally, statewide and beyond.

Ms. Eddy noted it was a process; first they have to earn the community's trust and then they need to move from there to a place where they were actually designing at scale, which was a hard thing to do. When they develop brands, they look for 50% authentic and 50% aspirational, and there was a very specific reason for this. If they build the City a brand that feels like Danville today, the citizens will accept it, but their group has not given the City anything; they have given the City what it has, a mirror. They want to give the City something that helps it transition from where they were today into what they want to become, whatever that visual identity will be. It will be something new, it will feel new, but it also has to be authentic; it has to be rooted in the City's history, its people, what the City cares about. It has to be achievable, historically accurate and rooted in the community's self-sense of truth. It also has to be aspirational; it has to be differentiated from other markets and they need to make sure they stand out in the market. It has to be noteworthy; if it doesn't make people talk, they haven't really stretched what they do with the dollars as far as they can go, and it has to be aligned with the community's vision.

Ms. Eddy thanked Council for the opportunity to speak, and was excited to start this project with the City; Mayor Jones thanked Ms. Eddy for being here tonight.

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Mr. Vogler thanked Ms. Eddy for the presentation, noted he looked forward to speaking with her and was excited about this process. Dr. Miller noted he traveled from Memphis this past weekend, and knew he was going to have to stop somewhere in Tennessee; at one of the rest stops he got a coupon book that covers the entire state. Was there some way to get the local hotels or venues to give discount coupons; Ms. Eddy noted they could look into this. Director of Tourism Lisa Merriweather noted in front of Council was the 2022 Virginia Tourism Corporation State Travel Guide; one of the first things they knew they needed to do was to have a presence of the community in the guide. The guide comes out annually, and she has earmarked the full-page ad in the guide for the City of Danville.

City Manager Ken Larking reminded Council that Danville serves as the designated marketing organization for both the City and the County; this effort will encompass the region. When people come to the community and want to visit, they want to see what was in the City and the County, as well as surrounding counties, but they stay in the City hotels and eat at City restaurants. The City of Danville benefits greatly from people coming to visit the region.

CLOSED MEETING

At 9:45 p.m., Vice Mayor Miller **moved** that this meeting of the City Council of the City of Danville, Virginia be recessed, and that Council immediately reconvene in a Closed Meeting for the following purposes: Discussion or consideration of the acquisition and/or disposition of real property for a public purpose where discussion in an open meeting would adversely impact the bargaining position of the City as Permitted by Subsection (A)(3) of Section 2.2-3711 of the Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended and more specifically, discussion regarding the sale and/or potential purchase of a specific parcel of property for use by prospective industrial, commercial and residential projects looking to locate to the City, and an Economic Development discussion and update concerning prospective business or industry where no previous announcement has been made and/or the expansion of an existing business or industry where no previous announcement has been made as permitted by Subsection (A)(5) of Section 2.2-3711 of the Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended and more specifically to consider: an update on multiple prospective commercial, mixed use, and industrial projects considering locating within the city and/or locating within the region in cooperation with the City's regional partners; and discussion or consideration of the investment of public funds where bargaining is involved, where, if made public initially, the financial interest of the governmental unit would be adversely affected as permitted by Subsection (A)(6) of Section 2.2-3711 of the Code of Virginia, 1950 as amended and more specifically to consider an economic development Memorandum of Understanding regarding a mixed use project.

The Motion was **seconded** by Council Member Mayo and carried by the following vote:

VOTE:	9-0
AYE:	Buckner, Campbell, Hood, Jones, Mayo, Miller, Saunders, Vogler and Whittle (9)
NAY:	None

Upon unanimous vote at 10:59 p.m., Council reconvened in open session and Vice Mayor Miller **moved** for adoption of the following Resolution:

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CERTIFICATE OF CLOSED MEETING

WHEREAS, the Council convened in Closed Meeting on this date pursuant to an affirmative recorded vote and in accordance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act; and

WHEREAS, Section 2.1-344.1 of the Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended, requires a Certification by the Council that such Closed Meeting was conducted in conformity with Virginia Law;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Council hereby certifies that, to the best of each Member's knowledge, (i) only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements of Virginia Law under Section 2.2-3711 were heard, discussed or considered, and (ii) only such public business matters as were identified in the Motion by which the Closed Meeting was convened were heard, discussed or considered by the Committee.

The Motion was **seconded** by Council Member Mayo and carried by the following vote:

VOTE: 9-0
AYE: Buckner, Campbell, Hood, Jones, Mayo,
Miller, Saunders, Vogler and Whittle (9)
NAY: None

Council discussed a possible retreat and the various partnerships they have with entities in the City.

MEETING ADJOURNED AT 12:03 A.M.

APPROVED:

s/Alonzo L. Jones
MAYOR

ATTEST:

s/Susan M. DeMasi, CMC
CITY CLERK