

February 1, 2022

A Regular Work Session of the Danville City Council convened on February 1, 2022, at 8:48 p.m. in Council Chambers 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.

MINUTES

Upon **Motion** by Council Member Buckner and **second** by Council Member Vogler, Minutes of the Regular Work Session held on January 4, 2022 were approved as presented. Draft copies were distributed to Council Members prior to the Meeting.

WORK SESSION ITEMS

REVIEW OF THE 2022 SUMMER WORK EXPERIENCE AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM FOR YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

Mayor Jones noted Council discussed this program that was so successful last year, and asked if they were in support of adding additional funding to support this program for the upcoming year.

City Manager Ken Larking explained Deputy City Manager Earl Reynolds has been the point person on this project. They had a very successful program organized by Dr. Brown and her team; it has been a true partnership with multiple organizations coming together and working hard for a more robust internship program to give experience to young people and exposure to the work environment. At the next Council meeting, staff will be bringing forward a recommendation which will include funding for the program so they can start within the current fiscal year. Mr. Larking noted it will be in the recommended budget next year.

Dr. Julie Brown explained ExperienceWorks was a system framework to support young people through multiple experiences and help lead them to gainful employment in the City. Dr. Brown thanked Mr. Reynolds and Mr. Larking for their leadership and encouragement, and introduced some of their partners including Robert David from Project Imagine, Dr. Hairston and Joyce Culley with Danville Public Schools, Tyler Freeland and Kiesha Averett with the West Piedmont Workforce Development Board, Jessie Vernon and Dana Wilson from the Institute, and Ernesto Muse from Goodwill of the Valleys. Dr. Brown noted this program will, based on best practices, connect young people to opportunity in a very robust way. Their vision was that 100% of the graduates of Danville City Schools will have had a high quality, hands on, work-based learning experience by the time they graduate. They were leveraging Go Virginia, Tobacco Commission and Institutional dollars, as well as City dollars.

In response to Council Member Campbell, Dr. Brown noted they served twenty-seven individuals; they had budgeted for twenty-five in the summer internship program. That did not include what Goodwill of the Valleys did; they were going to serve twenty, they ended up with twenty-five and had a waiting list. Their projection for this year was going from twenty-seven to seventy on internships, and Goodwill will do an additional thirty-five internships with fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds, for one hundred and five individuals. They were asking Council to support the

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ExperienceWorks system which includes seven initiatives. Council Members thanked Dr. Brown and her team for the work they were doing and the success they were having.

PROGRAM UPDATES

City Manager Ken Larking noted they occasionally receive requests for help putting on events throughout the City; the City doesn't have a framework for that. Mr. Larking noted he believed they can replicate what was being done in other communities with an Arts Council. It would be a City Council appointed body that would be charged with overseeing arts, either music, fine arts, performances or other types of art. With the visitors the City will be getting, the fact there was more and more emphasis on art, and more requests for these things in the community, he believed it was a good time for Council to consider adding an Arts Council to its list of Boards and Commissions. The group would be appointed to oversee the activities, eventually have a budget and be able to provide support to various arts initiatives throughout the community.

Council noted their approval of adding an Arts Council to the City.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATES

Director of Economic Development Corrie Bobe explained at the last Council meeting, Council Member Vogler asked for an update on to the Commercial Corridor Study. (Ms. Bobe distributed a handout – *City of Danville, Virginia Corridor Study – 2021*). Ms. Bobe noted there had been a request to evaluate all the commercial corridors throughout the City and determine how to best serve and enhance those corridors. There were nine corridors in total, and what they found was that most commercial corridors range between 60- 65% occupied, which was a surprise to staff. Given the population decline within the community over the past fifteen to twenty years, and retail trends going away from shopping centers back down to more urban centers, this was not as bad as staff had anticipated. With growth happening in the market, and some attention to these areas, they can be improved and increase occupancy rates.

One concern was that all but one of the corridors evaluated had at least half of the building inventory classified as being in poor condition. One corridor in particular had 77% of their parcels considered in poor condition. After looking at this data, staff has determined they need to move forward with a targeted approach to help activate the space and bring neglected buildings back to life. Staff will need to put thought, effort and strategy behind each of the corridors. All have their own purposes and uses, they all have their own unique community surrounding them, so they will focus on specific corridors at one time, to make sure they were maximizing impact and their expenditures of public funds. They also want to make sure they were engaging the community as part of this process.

Many of these corridors were the gateways into the community and most of them do not look great; based on the information provided, there were several corridors that had the highest percentage of poorly conditioned properties. One of the areas was from the North Carolina-Virginia line to the Schoolfield site. The City was in the midst of evaluating that corridor through the Schoolfield Master Plan. The Master Plan was targeted to be completed in August of this year and they will move directly into implementation. Staff was evaluating public improvements and engaging their state or federal partners for some of these improvements.

One of the more negatively impacted areas with higher property in poor condition was the North Main Corridor. Staff was about to begin the process of Master Planning North Main, from River

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Street up to the North Theatre; they will also include from Bubba's to the intersection of where 41 connects, understanding there was new interest and new investment within that area.

Ms. Bobe noted there were seven additional corridors identified, and she wanted to make Council aware of programs that were available for existing property owners or entrepreneurs. The IDA has two loan programs that individuals can make use of if they want to make improvements to their properties, enhancements to their interior or exterior, or add a new product line to their existing business. Each year Council approves a budget where the City supports the Longwood Small Business Development Center and through this support, entrepreneurs were able to receive technical assistance free of charge. Also, as part of Council's approved budget, the City provides funding each year to the River District Association and the Chamber for their Dream Launch and Rev Up programs. Their bootcamp started recently and at the end of the bootcamp there were grant funds available for these entrepreneurs to start a business and hopefully fill some of these vacancies throughout the commercial areas of the community.

Ms. Bobe noted staff did receive RFPs yesterday for their tourism strategic plan and branding process; they will review those, interview the firms in the upcoming weeks and plan to get that process started quickly. Council Member Campbell noted the City's Tourism partnered with the County; were the City and County both putting in funds and Ms. Bobe noted it was funded through the City, and through the recent hospitality tax increase in Pittsylvania County. They were required by the state to allocate 2% of that increase over to tourism assets. The County has decided that 50% of the 2% will go to ODAC and then the remainder will be split between the Tourism Program and the History Trail. Mr. Larking noted it was important to add that a regional tourism effort will be more successful than just a City only effort.

COMMUNICATIONS

Vice Mayor Miller noted the City needed to have pamphlets for the Welcome Center highlighting Danville.

Mr. Vogler suggested Council have a conversation about bonuses or COLAs for retirees. Mr. Larking noted the recommended budget they were working on now includes a bonus for retirees.

CLOSED MEETING

At 9:23 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 mixed use projects looking to locate in the City; and an Economic Development discussion and update concerning a 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 consultation with the legal counsel employed or retained by a public body regarding specific legal matters requiring the provision of legal advice to such counsel as permitted by Subsection (A)(8) of Section 2.2-3711 of the Code

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of Virginia, 1950 as amended, more specifically to consider a discussion about recent Council action as well as advice regarding the Conflict of Interest Act.

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 10:18 p.m., Council reconvened in open session and Vice Mayor Miller **moved** for adoption of the following Resolution:

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 Vogler and carried by the following vote:

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

MEETING ADJOURNED AT 10:18 P.M.

APPROVED:

s/Alonzo L. Jones
MAYOR

ATTEST:

s/Susan M. DeMasi, CMC
CITY CLERK