

April 18, 2023

A Regular Work Session of the Danville City Council convened on April 18, 2023 at 8:27 p.m. in Council Chambers located on the Fourth Floor of the Municipal Building. The following Council Members were present: James B. Buckner, L.G. "Larry" Campbell Jr., Bryant Hood, Mayor Alonzo L. Jones, Barry 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 F. Larking, Deputy City Manager Earl B. Reynolds Jr., City Attorney W. Clarke Whitfield, Jr., and City Clerk Susan M. DeMasi.

Mayor Jones presided.

MEETING MINUTES

Upon **Motion** by Council Member Vogler and **second** by Council Member Mayo, Minutes of the Regular Work Session held on March 21, 2023, were approved as presented. Draft copies were distributed to Council Members prior to the Meeting.

WORK SESSION ITEMS

PRESENTATION FROM EDDY ALEXANDER ON TOURISM UPDATE

Director of Tourism, Lisa Meriweather noted Council would hear a very brief presentation from Jennifer Eddy, Chief Strategist with Eddy Alexander, Danville's Tourism consultant group. Ms. Eddy noted Eddy Alexander was a marketing and growth strategy consulting firm, and have been working with the City of Danville and Pittsylvania County on a Tourism Master Plan as well as a tourism brand. Their research has involved a number of different initiatives. Tonight she wanted to speak about some cell phone data; it was the largest sample size and most accurate way they have of measuring visitation. They did a study from September of 2021 through August of 2022, looked at all the visitation into the region and were able to determine some very strong baseline metrics which the City will be able to measure over the next few years.

Ms. Eddy reviewed her Power Point presentation, (a copy of which has been retained in the City Clerk's folder on Laserfiche) noting tonight she was going to discuss how the cell phone data was sourced. When a cell phone pings, it hits cell towers, and if it hits three or more towers, it can triangulate a location. They were not looking at any one individual's location, but were looking at aggregate of visitors to the region; people whose cell phone devices don't live or work in the region, or were not here on a regular basis. From that they looked to see people who have come into town and stayed at least four hours. They wanted people that came and did things, spent money, stayed in the community, enjoyed the businesses, restaurants and lodging establishments. From that data they were able to determine a number of things; first they looked age of visitors to the region. In the City of Danville, most of the visitors were under 18 years of age; there was pretty equal distribution looking across the other ten year age segments. The largest distribution was sixty-five plus, which was more than ten years, but it was pretty even across the board. The median household income of people visiting the community was \$57,370 for Danville; the median home value was \$186,195. The way they will use this metric, was over time, they hope to attract more people with more disposable income so they can come into the community, stay longer, spend more and support more of the businesses.

Ms. Eddy reviewed the breakdown of income brackets noting there were people who were more affluent and those less so coming into the city. With Ethnicity, there were more white travelers than other ethnic backgrounds, but also a good amount of travel from a variety of different ethnic

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groups including African American, Asian and Hispanic. Under educational background, high school was prominent, some college with a two year degree was most popular, along with some people with advanced degrees and some with no high school at all. That will shift with new assets coming into the City attracting different kinds of travelers. They can identify from the cell phone data where that cell phone lives; they assume the average daytime location for a cell phone was where they work and the average nighttime location was where they live. They have visitors from all the way from California and Washington, up and down the eastern seaboard, from the Midwest and Texas as well. For the east coast, they saw a large compilation of people coming from a three to four hour drive market radius. This was what they would expect for this size destination with the airport and train transportation routes currently established. Virginia and North Carolina were where the majority of the traffic came from, and starts to show some hotspots; that maps closely to where the road traffic was and there were a lot of drive market visitors in the community. Ms. Eddy reviewed where visitors were coming from into the region, the top feeder markets, and how the City could buy its advertising in the media market. They looked further at daytime traffic versus nighttime traffic; if someone was staying overnight, they were staying for more meals, spending more time in the community, and spending more money.

Daytrip visitors show very similar traffic patterns for daytime and nighttime for the community; Greensboro, Roanoke, Raleigh, Charlotte and Richmond. With overnight visitors, Roanoke and Lynchburg were number one, Greensboro-High Point-Winston Salem were number two, Raleigh Durham-Fayetteville were three and Charlotte, Richmond-Petersburg followed. Ms. Eddy noted they then looked at the zip code markets, to see exactly where people were coming from; it was a much more powerful way to buy media because instead of competing against everyone else who was interested in getting in front of Richmond or Raleigh. They can choose which particular community with a twenty mile radius around it, and by doing that, they were competing against fewer people for those placements, spending less per dollar but getting in front of the people they want, more often, with more frequency. If they were going to buy media around this, they would buy in the top thirty zip codes, plus a certain radius of space as well; that way they were not competing for the most expensive metros, they were competing in the places that will have the most leverage on the media buy.

Ms. Eddy stated they looked at the data to look for different kinds of trends. There were certain behaviors that certain kinds of visitors tend to exhibit, such as people who spend a lot of time in fast food restaurants, maybe living busy lifestyles, people who have pets may spend a lot of time going to the pet food store, or traveling with their pet, things like that. In this particular community, the most common category was people who spend time eating fast food; there were a lot of casual diners as well. There was nothing so statistically significant that it was going to change any of the stories they were telling about Danville, but it was something they check for. They looked at length of stay; in terms of day trip duration, people were staying on average six or seven hours. What was interesting was, that was consistent year round which wasn't usually seen; they usually see heavy spikes in the summer, maybe into the fall in Virginia and then it drops off in the winter months. Danville has pretty solid year round visitation. Overnight visitations were people coming in for more than 24 hours. The average overnight trip was 3.26 days which was quite long for this size community, the median was 1.43 days which was still strong but a little more reasonable and what they would expect. Danville had a lot of people who were staying here twenty days or more; they see this in communities that have big hospital systems with a lot of traveling nurses, or military establishments nearby. They think the programs that were aligned with the Institute where they have people coming in for short periods of time, maybe a month or two, to train and study, were affecting the averages. Moving forward, they should look at the median rather than the average to see if they were driving up the kinds of visitation that tourism was directly aligned to.

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When they looked at where people come into the community, Danville was number one, but they were surprised to see more people came into Gretna than Chatham, followed by Hurt, Ridgeway, Penhook, Keeling and Axton. They looked at specific, known, tourist destinations in each community and measured how many people were going to each one, each year. Not everyone who goes into a community has their location services on. Mr. Vogler noted, when Ms. Eddy mentioned Gretna versus Chatham, Gretna's proximity to Smith Mountain Lake might have something to do with it. Ms. Eddy noted it was also closer to the Blue Ridge Parkway, and they may be following that traffic pattern as well.

Ms. Eddy noted she would be back in a few weeks to talk about strategy and recommendations as they relate to the master plan. The big takeaway she hoped Council will have, that they think about where people were coming from when they were staying overnight, when they think about a three to four hour drive market which was where they anticipated they would get their feeder markets, those markets directly overlap with the markets of Roanoke, Asheville, Greensboro and Winston Salem, that whole market, and Raleigh, Coastal Virginia and Richmond. The City will start advertising their region and will be about to compete against some well established markets who were advertising effectively, and have already developed very strong tourism marketing programs. Being very strategic will help the City be more cost effective, knowing they were going in competing against larger markets that were well funded, and when thinking about budgeting in the coming years as well, will be very important. Ms. Eddy stated she will also talk in more detail about how they see this translating into specific recommendations for the master plan. Ms. Meriweather noted they would be back on May 2, 2023 for another presentation that will include the strategy moving forward for the program. Council will also be receiving an invitation soon for the official brand launch for the regional tourism program which will be on May 10th. Mr. Larking thanked Ms. Eddy, Ms. Meriweather and Ms. Bobe for the presentation. There was great data included that they can benchmark what tourism was now, versus what it will be like in a couple months once the casino opens, and the years beyond.

PROGRAM UPDATES

Mr. Larking noted he had five council members signed up for meetings related to the pay plan and implementation strategy; there were four that he needed to sign up and he will call them to set those up.

CLOSED MEETING

At 8:53 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 or interview of prospective candidates for employment, assignment, appointment, promotion, performance, salaries, disciplining of specific public employees or appointees as permitted by Subsection (A)(1) of Section 2.2-3711 of the Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended and more specifically to consider: Performance and salaries of the City Manager, City Attorney and City Clerk; 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 to consider a discussion regarding the sale and/or potential purchase of specific parcels of property for use by prospective industrial, commercial, and mixed use projects looking to locate in the City.

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

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

Upon unanimous vote at 10:30 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 10:32 P.M.

APPROVED:

s/Alonzo L. Jones
MAYOR

ATTEST:

s/Susan M. DeMasi, CMC
CITY CLERK