

October 15, 2024

The Second Regular October meeting of the Danville City Council was held on October 15, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. in the 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 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 F. Larking, City Attorney W. Clarke Whitfield, Jr., and City Clerk Susan M. DeMasi. Deputy City Manager Earl B. Reynolds, Jr., was absent.

Mayor Jones presided.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Council Member James B. Buckner gave the Invocation followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor Jones opened the floor for a Public Hearing regarding Budget Items on the Consent Agenda. Notice of the Public Hearing was published in the *Danville Register & Bee* on October 8, 2024. No one present desired to be heard and the Public Hearing was closed.

Council Member Buckner **moved** for adoption of the following Consent Agenda items:

Minutes from the Regular Council Meeting and Work Session held on September 17, 2024. Draft copies of the minutes had been distributed prior to the meeting.

Amending the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Appropriation Ordinance for an Aviation Promotion Grant

An Ordinance entitled, Ordinance No. 2024-10.03, Amending the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Appropriation Ordinance to Provide for a State Department of Aviation Grant for the Purpose of Providing Funding to Promote Aviation Awareness at the Danville Regional Airport in the Amount of \$5,000 and for the Local Share in the Amount of \$5,000 to be Provided by the General Fund Support of Grants for a Total Appropriation of \$10,000 and Appropriating Same.

Amending the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Appropriation Ordinance to Provide Funds for the Housing Study Action Plan

An Ordinance entitled, Ordinance No. 2024-10.04, Amending the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Appropriation Ordinance to Provide Funding from Unassigned General Fund Balance for the Housing Study Action Plan in the Amount of \$2,000,000 and Appropriating Same.

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

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

APPOINTMENTS

Vice Mayor Miller **moved** for adoption of Appointment Resolutions entitled:

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Resolution No. 2024-10.05 - A Resolution Reappointing Vanessa Cain to the Danville Redevelopment and Housing Authority.

Resolution No. 2024-10.06 - A Resolution Reappointing Faye Brown to the Danville Redevelopment and Housing Authority.

Resolution No. 2024-10.07 - A Resolution Reappointing Andrew Hessler to the River District Design Commission.

Resolution No. 2024-10.08 - A Resolution Reappointing Courtney Nicholas to the River District Design Commission.

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 (0)

NEW BUSINESS

REVIEW OF THE GENERAL FUND FINANCIALS AS OF SEPTEMBER 30, 2024

Michael Adkins, Chief Financial Officer, gave a brief overview of the General Fund financials, noting this marks the end of the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2025 or 25% of the year complete; revenues were tracking very well with budget at this point. The collection of delinquent real estate and personal property taxes showed an increase of about \$392,000 over the last year, and places the City at about 35% of budget for delinquent collections. Current tax revenue will not show up in the financial report until November or December as the property tax bills will be mailed out in about three weeks. Local Consumer based taxes were slightly ahead of the increases that were budgeted for this current fiscal year. Sales tax was at \$3.5M, a little over 27% of budget, and an increase of \$435,000 over last year. Meals tax was at \$3.2M, over 28% of budget for this year and an increase of \$160,000 over last year. Lodging tax was at \$943,000, close to 27% of budget; an increase of \$88,000 over last year. Business licenses were at \$617,000, an increase of \$88,000 over last year. The number of business licenses issued during the first quarter was 222, up from last year's 173, almost 50 additional business licenses at this point for the year. Casino based revenues were very steady and comparable to last year with nearly \$5M collected for the first quarter. State and Federal revenues were tracking as anticipated, and Mr. Adkins noted he had no concerns with those revenue streams. Departmental spending was tracking at 23% of budget, running a couple points behind. The increase between this year and last year relates primarily to pay-for-performance increases that went into effect on July 1st. Nondepartmental spending, which was primarily group health insurance and debt services, were both on target with budget. The City has a very solid budgetary financial performance; the first quarter was a good start to the year.

CONSIDERATION OF ELECTRIC EASEMENT VACATIONS AT THE SOUTHERN VIRGINIA MEGASITE AT BERRY HILL

Mayor Jones opened the floor for a Public Hearing regarding Easements at Berry Hill. Notice of the Public Hearing was published in the *Danville Register & Bee* on October 8, 2024. No one present desired to be heard and the Public Hearing was closed.

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Council Member Vogler **moved** for adoption of a Resolution entitled:

RESOLUTION NO. 2024-10.09

A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE ABANDONMENT OF THREE CITY EASEMENTS ACROSS PROPERTY LOCATED IN PITTSYLVANIA COUNTY.

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

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

COMMUNICATIONS FROM VISITORS

Mayor Jones recognized Krista Henry, 93 Glen Oak Drive, Danville, who addressed Council about Best Friends Animal Society and how their policies have negatively impacted many communities that they have inserted themselves into including crowded shelters and animal abandonment.

Mayor Jones recognized Sue Ellen Walton who addressed Council on behalf of Michelle Barker, 323 Summit Road, Eden, NC (who was uncomfortable addressing Council) about two of their animals that they rehomed due to hard times. She contacted DAHS and they told her they worked with many shelters and would be rehomed together. Several days later she noticed that the puppies were not posted for adoption and when she contacted someone at the shelter, she was told that they were euthanized for showing aggression; they were not aggressive in any way.

Mayor Jones recognized Cherri Tamson, 528 S. Woodberry Avenue, Danville, who addressed Council about a FOIA request she submitted to DAHS for animal records.

Mayor Jones recognized George Williams, 1646 Buckhorn Drive, Danville, who addressed Council about Danville taking on a six-month program to manage community cat issues as an alternative to the current methods.

Mayor Jones recognized David Wesolowski, 626 N. 29th Street, Richmond, VA, who addressed Council noting that Danville Deserves Better will be opening an office and pet resource center at 523 Lynn Street Suite 104.

Mayor Jones recognized Tanya Martin, 150 Cambridge Circle, Danville, VA who addressed Council about DAHS and their high euthanasia rates. All shelter records were FOIA'd, and 1,494 violations were found. These violations have been emailed to Council and all major news and television stations.

COMMUNICATIONS

There were no communications from the Deputy City Manager or City Clerk.

City Manager Ken Larking discussed the Danville Globe in Council Chambers, brought in by Rick Barker, Vantage Arts Flat, and the artist that created the globe. More details are listed on the card accompanying the globe and there was a book available for purchase on Amazon.

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City Attorney Clarke Whitfield reminded everyone that due to Election Day, the next City Council meeting will be held on Thursday, November 7 at 7:00 pm.

Council Member Mayo spoke about the opportunity he had to attend the Health Collaborative and the information from different resources and agencies. On November 14, DCC will host the 3rd annual Job and Resource Fair at the Community Market from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm.

Vice Mayor Miller discussed Gordon Ramsey announcing his new restaurant at Caesar's Danville casino. Dr. Miller noted Danville's name was heard everywhere at the VML conference. The Crop Walk raised several thousand dollars for God's Storehouse, and Dr. Miller encouraged early voting before Election Day.

Council Member Saunders noted Danville was growing by leaps and bounds; that has always been the goal of any council, and this growth must continue. Mr. Saunders discussed candidates running for Council and School Board, talked about his first voting experience and how he has never missed voting. Mr. Saunders encouraged early voting, the importance of voting and caring about the city and country.

Council Member Vogler commented on the health collaborative and candidate forums that have given Council the opportunity to engage with the community. Mr. Vogler noted the living conditions at Woodside were unacceptable and deplorable, and stated to citizens, Council has heard about this, and staff was doing everything they could to address what they can on their end. There was a lot to learn at the VML conference and it was amazing to see the transformation over the years. The sessions were very informative, and the connections made were invaluable. The success that Danville was having was being noticed throughout the state and parts of the country.

Council Member Whittle asked the Mayor to put a **Motion** on the floor to reduce real estate taxes by \$0.10 per \$100. Mr. Vogler **seconded** the Motion.

Council Member Saunders stated he can appreciate Council Member Whittle and Vogler looking out for the citizens, some were not doing as well as others. The City was growing because of the careful financial plan that it has, that the City Manager gives Council every year to discuss and look at. There were many things that needed attention like students, housing, schools, infrastructure, and citizens that need help. As the City receives this revenue, it needed to be frugal in expenditures and not just spend money because they have it. Council Member Campbell thanked Council Member Whittle and asked the City Manager to comment on the impact of this motion on the budget; Mr. Whittle noted it was \$2.5M. Mr. Larking stated that the adopted budget was presented in March and adopted in June; the change of a midyear adjustment to the budget would have to be calculated, and midstream, the ability to cut that amount equally in expenditures. Council Member Campbell suggested a study because to just vote on something like this would be irrational at this time. Mayor Jones noted his agreement with Council Member Campbell. Vice Mayor Miller stated that Danville has the second lowest tax rate in the state, and half of the people in Danville rent and would receive no benefit from this. Cutting services will not benefit the majority of those in Danville. This will only benefit landlords and property owners; if a person was renting, they will not receive any benefit from this; this was not a wise policy. It was a tremendous amount that will drastically, negatively impact services; the City cannot afford this and this was not the time to do it. Council Member Vogler stated that he seconded the motion so that Council Member Whittle would have an opportunity to speak on the issue. Mr. Vogler noted he felt strongly about tax relief and it was appropriate through the budget process. During the last budget process, Council lowered the personal property tax rate and the real estate tax rate. At the time the City lowered taxes, the tax assessments had not come through; those assessments came in extremely

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high for a lot of people. Mr. Vogler asked Mr. Adkins what the tax rate would need to be in order for Danville to be revenue neutral, and Mr. Adkins stated that the rate would have to be between \$0.75 and \$0.76.

Council Member Campbell asked to have this discussion continued at a future work session. Mayor Jones stated that Council was always looking for ways to have a positive impact on the citizens. Rev Campbell asked how they could have a vote to say whether they were going to reduce taxes or not without having a better understanding.

Council Member Campbell noted he would like to make a **Motion**, before they vote on the tax decrease, that Council have a study on this. The Motion was **seconded** by Council Member Saunders.

Mr. Whitfield noted Council Member Campbell's motion was a substitute motion, that would be voted on first. Mr. Whittle noted they would vote on the \$0.10 on the hundred and Mr. Whitfield explained, they vote on the substitute motion first, and if that passes, that eliminates the need to have the vote for the ten-cent reduction.

The **Substitute Motion** passed with the following vote:

VOTE: 7-2
AYE: Buckner, Campbell, Hood, Jones, Mayo, Miller,
Saunders (7)
NAY: Vogler and Whittle (2)

Mayor Jones noted they do not have to, but he was calling for the vote on **Mr. Whittle's Motion**. The Motion **FAILED** by the following vote:

VOTE: 3-5-1
AYE: Hood, Vogler and Whittle (3)
NAY: Buckner, Jones, Mayo, Miller,
Saunders (5)
ABSTAIN: Campbell (1)

Council Member Whittle put a **Motion** on the floor to take casino money and put it into the Utilities Department instead of bonding it out, take revenues and place them into the utility fund and help that to drive all the power bills down. The Motion was **seconded** by Council Member Vogler.

Council Member Whittle stated that casino monies should be invested in the utility department and drive the utility bills down; it was coming out of the casino, it was not on the taxpayer's back, it was the taxpayer's money and it should be dropped right there and push the utility rates down. That takes care of everybody. Council Member Vogler stated that Council could not just vote on taking casino money without a stated amount. Mr. Whittle said that Council should take 40% of casino money and invest it into the utility department and use that money to help drive the power bills down. Mr. Vogler noted he believed it needed to be discussed; he wanted to lower citizens' utility bills and wanted to have those conversations. Mr. Vogler questioned what investing into the utilities means, did it mean lowering rates, or expanding programs to help people be more energy efficient; to him, Council's goal should be to get to the root cause of why people's bills were high. There were ARPA funds used on a program that took some homes that were very energy inefficient, helped them to become efficient and brought their bills down by about 40%. Mr. Vogler noted he would like to have discussions about expanding that program to more people,

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they should use casino funds on that. Mr. Whittle's motion sounds too vague to vote on. Vice Mayor Miller stated that half of the utility funding comes from Pittsylvania County, so the City would be subsidizing the County citizens with casino money; the same county whose leaders opposed a casino coming here. Vice Mayor Miller noted his agreement with Mr. Vogler, if Council just gives money to pay utilities, that disincentivizes people to be conservative, to not practice energy conservation. Dr. Miller noted they needed to get those programs that take houses that are not well insulated and help people so the utility bills will go down; that was where they should spend the money. Council Member Campbell noted his agreement with Vice Mayor Miller about programs like winterizing homes, that would make a difference. Council Member Saunders asked if the motion was on the floor and properly seconded; Mr. Whitfield confirmed that it was. Council Member Saunders Called for the Question.

VOTE: 1-8
AYE: Whittle (1)
NAY: Buckner, Campbell, Hood, Jones, Mayo, Miller,
Saunders, Vogler, and Whittle, (8)

Council Member Whittle put a **motion** on the floor to lower the meals tax to 4%. The Motion **FAILED** due to lack of a second.

Council Member Buckner noted the VML conference was wonderful and commented on the excellent work that Susan McCullough did to represent the City of Danville, leading a workshop along with a representative from Marion, VA. The work the City was doing for the citizens to address housing issues, and the model Danville has set was being used all over the state. It was tremendous to see where Danville was, and where they were going. A lot of people were taking notice of what was happening in Danville. Making quick, snappy decisions was not how Danville got to the position they were in. Council needs to make informed decisions, work with departments to come up with solutions and continue to move forward.

Council Member Campbell noted his agreement on the comments made about the VML conference; Danville was the most talked about city in the conference. Council was proud of its citizens, the Council, and the staff. Rev Campbell asked the City Manager about retirees receiving a bonus, and Mr. Larking stated that a bonus was received several years ago, because of the policy that was in place, and had since been amended slightly; it was not currently budgeted or under consideration. A report was being prepared on requests being made by retirees, how much that would cost, and when that was ready it will be presented to Council. Council Member Campbell reminded everyone to get out and vote.

Council Member Hood gave special thanks to the organizers of this year's Crop Walk to combat hunger and to assist God's Storehouse. This Saturday from 8:00 am to 9:30 am, Big Brothers and Big Sisters will hold their annual Bridging the Gap charity walk; it will start at the fountain, across one bridge and come back to the fountain. Mr. Hood noted he was confident in saying that everyone on Council holds their positions in the highest regard, with the focus being on the citizens and City. Council hears their citizens, like those here speaking tonight.

Mayor Jones noted to the citizens, this was the last time they will hear Council asking them to get out and vote; Council's next meeting will be on Thursday, November 7. To all those running for offices, Mayor Jones thanked them for how they have been running, it has been very peaceful, and encouraged everyone to get out and vote, it's their right and responsibility. This past weekend, the homecoming game at George Washington High School that Council attended was

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phenomenal. To everyone here tonight and to those who spoke tonight, Mayor Jones thanked them for coming; their passion and emotion was felt in chambers.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:28 pm.

APPROVED:

s/Alonzo L. Jones
MAYOR

ATTEST:

s/Susan M. DeMasi, CMC
CITY CLERK