

MARCH 7, 2023
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
GOVT. CTR. – RM. 100 (Virtual and in-person Meeting)

PRESENT: Mayor Bo Dorough
Mayor Pro Tem: Chad Warbington
City Commissioners: Jon Howard and Jalen Johnson
Virtual Attendee: Vilnis Gaines (Commissioner Young was off/on the call)
City Manager: Steven Carter
City Attorney: C. Nathan Davis

Mayor Dorough called the meeting to order at 8:59 am and noted that the Special Called meeting was just adjourned. Following attendance roll call, Commissioner Langstaff advised that he is leaving the meeting.

AGENDA ADOPTION

Commissioner Howard moved to adopt the agenda, seconded by Commissioner Johnson, and following a roll call vote, the motion unanimously carried.

Mayor Dorough recognized the former mayor, Dr. Willie Adams, who is in attendance.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

SPEAKER APPEARANCE

1. Hugh Morris spoke on matters regarding the Old Historic Northside Neighborhood Watch/Business Coalition and showed a map of the location. He read a prepared statement asking that the City help in the cleanup process as it pertains to new construction from Phoebe, new residents coming into the neighborhood and the criminal activities that go on in the area. He noted that no one is being held accountable for criminal activities and demolition of properties, asking the City to replace the older signs. Mayor Dorough asked to have comments emailed to the City Clerk for the record.

Commissioner Howard stated that the problem is nation/worldwide and commented on properties in the area having the concerns that was expressed, adding that he has the same issues/concerns in his ward. He spoke to those with mental disabilities and the need to address these issues, especially the police department, etc.

In reply to Commissioner Johnson, it was noted that the group began meeting approximately two months ago, with Commissioner Johnson referencing the number of those showing up at the meeting today in support of the concerns expressed. He asked if Code Enforcement has been involved, with Mr. Morris stating that he interacted with the department regarding dilapidated property near his property, adding that the group wants to be part of the process to help get the area cleaned up. He asked that the information be emailed to the City Clerk for the record and commended the residents for coming forward with these concerns. Mr. Morris asked to allow citizens to help rehab the signs, with Commissioner Johnson stating that the Commission looks forward to working with the group.

Commissioner Gaines stated that he supports the City in assisting with the issues and concerns.

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Mayor Pro Tem Warbington asked that Code Enforcement receive a copy of Mr. Morris' list. Mr. Morris stated that members of the group, especially one member, drove around the area to create the list, adding that he believes the houses are in the system. Mayor Pro Tem Warbington asked for an update of the properties that are in the system. Mr. Morris asked to be included in the information sharing process so that the neighbors can continue to be involved and able to understand the process. Mayor Pro Tem Warbington briefly noted the process, which takes time to address. He advised that a vacant registration process was approved recently, which will expedite contacting owners who may live out of state, etc. He stated that the City has eminent domain power regarding blighted property and can acquire property; this has not been done in the past, however, it is an option for those who do not keep up their property, which is a public hazard and nuisance. The neighborhood being involved and identifying properties could be useful in using the tools available to the City. He mentioned the \$200,000 allocated to stabilized areas in neighborhoods which is through the Planning Department.

Mr. Morris commented on people walking/jogging in the area and asked that the neighborhood to be cleaned up.

Commissioner Young agreed with investments/changes coming to the neighborhood and the concern for residents feeling comfortable and safe.

Mayor Dorough again recognized former Mayor Adams and those in the audience in support of this matter, including the owners of the Bread House. He mentioned being on the commission years ago and the issue Mr. Morris alluded to, without actually addressing, 1) the prevalence of those with mental illness in the community, with state government now realizing how important it is to address; 2) homelessness, vagrancy, panhandling, etc., 3) challenges with staffing police department, 4) increase in blighted properties during the last 20 years for various reasons, loss of populations/businesses, etc. He mentioned workforce housing in the area via donation of property by Phoebe Putney and asked that they be patient and know that they are making every effort to assist.

2. Desmond Searcy spoke as a resident in the old Northside District and addressed the issues that he faces due to criminal activities, trespassing, trash, etc., adding that he bought the property four years ago not knowing what he was getting into. He noted improper staffing of boarding homes and various areas of concern that continues to be problematic and unsafe. He asked what can be done and noted an incident of a trespasser, APD being called, but nothing being done. Additional concerns were directed to the Rescue Mission, people being bused from other areas in the nation, drug infestations, relocating the salvation/rescue mission to another area and asked that ordinances that are in the book be addressed including eminent domain if needed. He asked to be included as partners, adding that they want to work with the city to get things done.

Commissioner Howard commented on the mental health issues, other cities sending people with issues to Albany, suggesting that the problem cannot be fixed overnight. Mr. Searcy countered that property owners operating boarding houses are taking advantage of people with mental health issues (renting to them, taking their Social Security checks), not providing services renters are paying for, adding that he is compassionate to those with mental health issues, however, something has to be done. He commented on an incident whereby he called APD for assistance and was told that he could be arrested for public

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disturbance and that they could not come sooner due to other calls, etc. He asked that Commissioners contact him and discuss these issues with him.

Commissioner Johnson expressed his appreciation for the information that was brought forward and asked for follow-ups to gauge progress.

Mayor Pro Tem Warbington agreed with Mr. Searcy, adding that he looks forward to partnering with Mr. Searcy and assured him that there will be follow-ups to this matter.

Discussion continued regarding code violations for landlords operating boarding houses/community residences and not providing assistance to those renting. Commissioner Young asked to receive a copy of the ordinance being discussed with Mr. Davis advising that he can provide the information.

At this time, Lequrica Gaskins, Downtown Manager, recognized the 2023 Leadership Albany class who are present to attend the meeting this morning. After being introduced, Mayor Dorough welcomed the group to the meeting and expressed appreciation for the group taking the time to participate in the Albany Leadership program.

REPORT OF THE CITY CLERK

1. Staff Travel

- S. Carter, City Manager; Plant Vogtle Tour; Augusta, GA; May 22- 23, 2023; \$611.40

Commissioner Howard moved to approve, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Warbington and, following a roll call vote, the motion unanimously carried.

- S. Carter, City Manager; NLC Information Technology & Communications Meeting; Washington D.C.; March 25-26, 2023; \$1,930.63

Commissioner Howard moved to approve, seconded by Commissioner Johnson and following a roll call vote, the motion unanimously carried.

REPORT OF THE CITY ATTORNEY

1. New National Opioid Settlement

Mr. Davis discussed information (copy on file) regarding settlement and asked for approval.

Mayor Dorough stated that to date \$90k has been received and asked for restrictions and how the funds have been spent. Mr. Carter stated that he will provide this information.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

1. Public Safety

- Albany Police Department Co-Responder Team

Chief Persley introduced ASPIRE staff Dana Glass, Executive Director, and Lisa Oosterveen, Deputy Director. He referred to the co-responder program (“REACH”). Using a power point presentation, (copy on file) Ms. Glass and Ms. Oosterveen gave a brief overview of the program, including ASPIRE’s mission, who is served (those suffering with mental health issues and substance abuse); the co-response team members, information regarding the program (monies awarded to ASPIRE and team functions), team training, law enforcement training, co-responder program statistics, year 2 budget, etc., successes of the program, i.e., benefits for citizens.

In reply to Commissioner Howard, it was noted that this is a two-year grant with additional grant money through APD and that an extension will be requested and additional funding. Discussion continued regarding the program, employee certifications, City of Albany citizens who were served (252) with some repeat calls/encounters.

Commissioner Johnson expressed appreciation for the program, which is needed and asked if APD will be expanding to have more officers assisting with the program. Chief Persley agreed, adding that he is looking to have a dedicated officer. Commissioner Johnson asked if the program will be discontinued and was told that at this point, the intent is for it to continue and hopefully, bring in the homeless for assistance as well.

Commissioner Gaines stated that this program is needed.

Mayor Pro Tem Warbington commented on calls received and it was explained that these were direct calls that the team responded to, with information noted from June-January. Discussion continued regarding adjusting current team times on calls.

Commissioner Young expressed appreciation to the group.

2. Utilities/Public Works

- Utility Board Profile Page

Mayor Dorough noted the request from Mr. Burley (Utility Board member) to have a bio, photo, and contact information on the website, with the difference being that this is not an authority and these are commission appointments only. He recommended not doing this at this time.

Commissioner Gaines said he is in support.

Mayor Pro Tem Warbington asked if City phones are provided, with Mr. Carter stating that phones are

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provided to the members. Discussion followed on whether calls are fielded by them, with Mr. Carter addressing the role of the Utility Board to manage the utility and not being an advocate for the community; however, board members have expanded their role by taking on an advocate role. Mayor Pro Tem Warbington stated that what is done with board members is done for members of all board. Discussion continued regarding what type of information is currently on the website.

Commissioner Young commented on the role of the board members and what they are endeavoring to do, agreeing that the profile of Utility Board members should be raised due to more engagement and responsibility than other boards with monies coming from utilities to the general fund, engaging the community regarding rates, etc. He stated that he supports expanding their role through engagement with the community.

Mayor Dorough stated that his concern is that some board members act as ombudsmen for customers, with discussion on spending ARPA funds and suggested that there be a clear delineation of what the board is responsible for regarding customer issues, etc.

- AMI Pilot Project Update

Jimmy Norman, Director of Utility Construction, provided information (copy on file), regarding lessons learned, challenges and moving forward. A video showed some of the challenges and temporary repairs. In closing he advised that full deployment has been scheduled for the week of March 20.

Commissioner Howard asked which cycle his house is on with Mr. Norman stating that he will provide that information, adding that it is anticipated to take 24 months to implement.

Mayor Pro Tem Warbington questioned billing cycles and asked for a graph of locations. Mr. Norman stated that he will get with GIS to see if this can be populated as it is currently in list format. Discussion followed regarding customer communication via email if they are signed in, having elected officials being converted first before customers to be able to assist constituents when they are converted, customers having to pay electricians for parts and/or replacements if the meter does not fit, issues with those who were in the pilot program and outcomes, and, not having funds to assist customers.

Commissioner Young commented on removing the old and installing new meters/equipment and challenges should the new equipment be incompatible with existing wires, etc., creating a situation whereby customers may not be able to afford repair costs. Mr. Norman agreed and explained the process and challenges/issues with rental properties and older houses. Commissioner Young asked if a video can be on the website regarding the upcoming changes with meters so that the public is aware to include possibly having costs if the new meters do not fit. Mr. Norman stated that information is on the brochure that will be mailed out for those signed up to ‘milestones’ app. Commissioner Young asked to promote AMI so that citizens can be informed prior to installation. Mr. Carter stated that information can be put on the website and social media, etc.

Mayor Dorough asked to move Driskill Park up on the agenda due to him having an appointment this morning.

1. Public Administration and Finance

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Rickey Gladney, Buyer I, and Steve Belk, Recreation Director, were available to discuss the following (copy on file):

- Driskell Park Renovation: LRA Construction, Inc of Albany, Georgia Total Exp. \$6,978,521.00

Mayor Pro Tem Warbington asked for additional information at the next work session to include photos, fencing, etc. Mr. Carter stated that renderings can be looked at. Mayor Pro Tem Warbington commented on using SPLOST VIII collections, with discussion continuing regarding structure, staffing, etc.

Mayor Dorrough stated that he would like to vote on this item this month, with pavilion and community gardening being added later and also suggested having additional information at the next meeting. He asked if there is a middle ground to keep costs in line, but to also have a quality product and asked for another presentation at the next work session.

Mayor Pro Tem Warbington noted additional funding sources that could be considered. Discussion continued regarding the pool, locker room,

Mayor Dorrough stated that the Housing Update will be next due to scheduling conflicts:

2. Community & Economic Development

- Affordable Housing Development Update

John Hawthorne, Director Community & Economic Development, stated that he provided an update at the retreat this past weekend and that Dr. William Myles will share Albany Housing information first.

Dr. Myles provided comments regarding what the Housing Authority is doing to address the housing issue (5 in 5 i.e., construction of 500 new units within the next five years). He expressed appreciation in working with Community Economic Development and discussed upcoming opportunities for purchasing housing, PCJ financial backing, having a model home, etc., to assist with developing and building the communities. He commented on rehabbing various units (approximately six months ago) and projects that are on the table, adding that programs are being established to assist youths and adults via a grant that he is applying for and discussed units for seniors. He stated that he will bring additional information back as projects progress, asking that Commissioners engage themselves.

Commissioner Howard commented on the \$33 million project and, looking at new areas to build new houses; Dr. Myles stated again that they would like to build 500 new units.

Commissioner Young asked about the occupancy at CME with Dr. Myles stating between 90-95% occupancy.

Mr. Hawthorne briefly discussed information that was shared at the retreat, i.e., River Road Subdivision, Ragsdale Subdivision, partnerships to assist with financials, construction in Ward 6, villas at Broadway (senior complex), evictions and how the City is addressing this with Rental Assistance and affordable housing. He stated that the two homes in Farkas Estates are out for bid, 20+ units on Gillionville/Broad,

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plans for 32 multi-family units between Farkas Estates and Jefferson Place. He mentioned the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing Team (CICH), which has developed a housing work plan that will increase affordable housing throughout the city. He briefly reviewed proposed housing plans for Mary Young Cummings Park, designs for the build-out shared with the River Road Neighborhood Association, Broadway duplex units, property at Campbell/Carroll Street with proposed eight units, allocation plan submitted to HUD and the issues with the supply chain.

Commissioner Howard asked for an update on HUD, Section 8 and to have a definition of the acronyms that are used and information on flooded, vacant lots that are still being maintained. Mr. Hawthorne stated that he can provide this information. Discussion continued regarding working with code enforcement to assist with cleanups and upcoming meetings with the landlords to discuss rental assistance. Mr. Hawthorne advised that all of their parcels are vacant with no structures on them.

Commissioner Young questioned community planning in neighborhoods, i.e., no alleys in some areas, with trash cans having to be put in front of the property and trash blowing throughout the neighborhood. Mr. Hawthorne explained the moving beyond the developments he just outlined, which are ‘smart’ designed to ensure the neighborhoods are inviting.. Commissioner Young suggested working together re: paving roadways, with Mr. Hawthorne advising that this will be discussed with developers (roadways/sidewalks).

Mayor Pro Tem Warbington commented on interest in investors and plans for housing and discussed having quality housing to entice people to return to Albany. Mr. Hawthorne discussed plans on how to incentivize development and eliminating low-income communities by building smart to attract high income buyers.

Commissioner Young mentioned the new development for HOME-ARPA funds and the area being challenged, asking if it is the best location, Mr. Hawthorne advised that the location offers the best opportunity regarding designing/building.

3. Planning/Engineering

Robert Griffin, Interim Director of Engineering, and Mr. Davis were available to discuss the following (copy on file):

- Albany to Sasser Rails to Trails Agreement

In reply to Commissioner Howard, Mr. Griffin discussed the signature process (digital as GDOT has gone paperless) which requires nine signatures including the Mayor and Board of Commissioners, meeting benchmarks, etc., regarding the next step. In reply to Commissioner Howard, Mr. Carter stated that the court case is still pending, with Mr. Davis advising that it was refiled and started over, with talks ongoing.

Mayor Pro Tem Warbington asked if the City agrees to the \$300,000 match as noted, which comes from TSPLOST with Mr. Carter agreeing. It was also discussed that Rails to Trails is not part of this with the item being between the City and GDOT with Mr. Carter and Griffin agreeing.

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MEMBER COMMENTS

Commissioner Howard asked to recognize Deerfield Windsor (State basketball championship) and, Westover HS for its regional win via proclamation at the night meeting. Discussion followed on recognizing regional champs vs. final four winners.

Commissioner Johnson asked to have a follow-up regarding the Old Northside Neighborhood concerns.

Commissioner Young expressed concern regarding S. Washington and trash pickup whether in the front or back of the property due to ongoing construction. He mentioned the end of the alcohol license moratorium with progress made by the committee (Mayor Dorough, Commissioner Howard and himself including City staff, Code Enforcement and City Attorney) and bringing back a recommendation at the next work session.

Mayor Pro Tem Warbington reminded all that Driskell Park will be on the next agenda for additional discussion and mentioned the recent alcohol license that was given to the Mexican restaurant and the 1,000-foot issue. He thanked Ms. Tolbert and City staff for putting the retreat together.

CITY MANAGER COMMENTS

Mr. Carter stated that Mayor Dorough wanted to ask about congressional spending, with requests made previously for the Ritz Theatre, CB King law office, Central Commons (the park connection to 207 Pine) with info being presented to Ms. Fields and wanting to make sure the Commission is onboard for this year's request for earmarks. In reply to Mayor Pro Tem Warbington, he stated that the deadline to submit is this week. Mayor Pro Tem Warbington mentioned the letter/email Mayor Dorough sent regarding funding, etc. Mr. Carter also thanked staff for putting the retreat together; mentioned Gov. 101 last night with all new participants being engaged and noted information on the Transportation Center ribbon cutting that is forthcoming.

There being no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 12:12 pm.

SONJA TOLBERT, CMC
CITY CLERK