

JUNE 4, 2024
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
GOVERNMENT CENTER BUILDING
ROOM. 100

PRESENT: Mayor Bo Dorough
City Commissioners: Jon Howard, Vilnis Gaines, Chad Warbington
and Demetrius Young
Interim City Mgr. Derrick Brown
City Attorney: C. Nathan Davis

Mayor Dorough called the meeting to order at 8:31 a.m., followed by attendance roll call. There being no quorum, Mayor Dorough suggested hearing the speakers first.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Commissioner Warbington entered the meeting)

1. Speaker Appearance: Patrice Williams, Director of Engagement for Helping Mamas, introduced CEO Jamey Lackey and recognized Stephanie Owens. Ms. Lackey provided a power point (copy on file) and discussed their story and advised that they have been a non-profit since 2014 and are registered with the state. She reviewed the list of services they provide and discussed bridging the gap for families by addressing their needs and providing essential items for everyday life. She mentioned the type of supplies (diapers, etc., baby items), that are not provided by public assistance programs and discussed partnering with other non-profits and having community support in helping supply basic needs through grants/programs/volunteers/etc. She reported the number of essential items distributed in Albany since opening their doors in January.

(Note: Commissioner Gaines was on the call at this time 8:39)

2. Speaker Appearance: Tykivious Grier discussed utility costs, programs that are currently in place and noted the quality of life that affects residents. He asked that a total of \$7.0 million be allocated and funded through amending the Utilities budget to address programs including debt relief, senior citizen programs, weatherization for rental properties, climate control/sustaining energy and protecting the environment.

Commissioner Young thanked Mr. Grier for his comments and added that some items that are proposed are built in the budget and can assist some of the concerns.

AGENDA ADOPTION

Commissioner Howard moved to adopt the agenda as presented, seconded by Commissioner Warbington; the roll call vote unanimously carried.

PUBLIC HEARING RE: FY 2025 BUDGET

Michael Eaton, Interim CFO stated that the proposed budget is \$320,514,966.

Alexis Parker, resident of Ward 1, spoke on the budget, encouraging that \$7.0 million from reserves for programs as stated by Mr. Grier and asked that weatherization for renters be implemented.

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Kisha Sheddric commented on the hardship that she experienced as a COVID survivor and mentioned high, monthly utility bills, which she cannot afford, adding that she lives in Ward 4 in a small apartment, but knows of others living in much larger residences with significantly less utility bills. She asked to be educated on reasons utility bills are high, where to look for assistance, job leads, etc., in pointing her in the right direction to receive answers and suggestions.

Dianna Brown, resident of Ward 6 commented on senior citizens who are unable to afford high utility bills. She mentioned fair housing for low-income; however, even with that, residents must choose among paying their utilities, rent, medicine or food, adding other challenges residents face, especially when applying for government aid.

Shenika Owens also discussed high utility bills and what has been presented over the last few years to reduce them, adding that residents of Albany have invested in the community for years and have a hard time but find no relief.

Jamie Mathis also commented on high utility bills and asked about budget billing, i.e., paying more each month on her bill than the actual billed amount to create savings for the next bill. She explained that she still ended up being late and was charged \$15.00 for missing her \$45.00 payment by one day. She commented on having a tennis court as opposed to helping senior citizens.

Camilla City Councilman Corey Morgan, stated that comments today are accurate and is something that the City of Albany can do, including using MEAG rebates, which is an opportunity of resources being returned to the citizens. Regarding transportation, he said citizens are not pleased with the hours and [transportation] is not user friendly for those who work.

Mayor Dorrough closed the public hearing.

REPORT OF THE CITY CLERK

1. 3rd Quarter Expense Reports

Mayor Dorrough stated that the report is provided for information only.

REPORT OF THE CITY ATTORNEY

1. Alcohol License Denial Hearing Dates

Michael Custer, City Attorney, discussed information (copy on file) regarding the scheduling of hearings and asked if the Commission would consider holding hearings after work sessions. Discussion included not knowing how long meetings will last and a suggestion to have the hearings before the night meetings at 5:30 pm.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Planning & Engineering:

1. Commercial Driveway Installation

Traffic Engineering Manager Ken Breedlove provided information regarding the request from a developer for a waiver of the City's driveway criteria regarding spacing for urban/principal/arterial streets, with the request to provide a variance for driveway requirements. He cited the City Code authorizing the City Commission to give a variance in driveway spacing requirements and explained that Engineering cannot approve the request, however, the Commission has that ability as noted in the City ordinance.

Commissioner Warbington clarified the proximity vs ordinance requirements and the closeness to other businesses in the area with the driveway not meeting the criteria, suggesting that a variance would be the only means to develop this property.

B. Community & Economic Development

1. Construction /Loan to MP Organization re: Carroll Gardens Project

John Hawthorne, Community & Economic Development Director, discussed information (copy on file) regarding funding for the project and the four options as noted, adding that staff recommends option 2 (forgive 50% with a loan repayment of \$156,000).

Discussion included upgrading exterior/interior with the developer deciding whether or not to accept the upgrades. Mr. Hawthorne stated that the Commission requested upgrades, however, financial support is requested and the developer saying that he would rather go with the original recommendation. Discussion continued regarding increased rent for those not occupying rent-controlled units and adding an option 5 to repay in full. Mr. Hawthorne stated that CED has money to ensure affordable rent is available, adding that additional costs present a challenge to the developer to service the debt and pricing out of market rate. Commissioner Warbington asked if this is in the budget with Mr. Brown stating that the funds can be transferred in this budget year and would come from the City's fund balance.

Commissioner Young asked for assurance from the developer that the rent will be controlled, with Mr. Hawthorne explaining that the 13 HOME-ARC units are the only ones in which the rent can be controlled; the market rental rate units will not have that provision. Discussion continued regarding a potential increase and if the developer wanted to do this or are they responding to the request from the Commission. Mr. Hawthorne said the design was presented and the City asked for upgrades with appliances and flooring being upgraded.

Mayor Dorough suggested that the payment on option 2 is less than a \$1000.00 per month increase over the construction loan, and upgrades will benefit owners/occupants and that upgraded appliances will help with lowering utility bills.

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2. FY 2024-2025 Annual Action plan (Year 4)

Kimberly Brooks, EDCD Development Planner used a power point (copy on file) and discussed CDBG Funds, eligibility, HOME funds, HUD updates, CDBG and HOME proposed activities.

Mr. Hawthorne stated that the presentation is based on the previous year and process, adding that they have not received this year's awarded allocations.

Commissioner Young asked for a benefit analysis of what the developer is proposing as addressed earlier re: Carroll Gardens Projects.

Mayor Dorough mentioned the Farkas Village, which has subsurface issues and asked how this will be moved forward with the funding. Mr. Hawthorne explained that the RFP was submitted (two times) to build four homes, but bids came in well over \$300,000, which is not affordable, with information forthcoming regarding a recommendation to move forward, i.e., modular homes.

C. Public Administration/Finance

1. Energy Efficiency & Conservation Block Grant Program

Asst. to the City Manager Angela Calhoun, discussed information (copy on file) regarding two options as noted with a recommendation of option 2.

Discussion followed regarding property already owned by the City, with a study commissioned by the utility board to include cost to construct, etc., under the Infrastructure Act with a grant of up to 30% of the cost. Mr. Brown stated that a presentation will be provided at the next Utility Board meeting.

Commissioner Warbington clarified costs, energy audit, approx., 44 buildings, for \$66,000 per year and determining what needs to be worked on for each building. He expressed confusion about accepting \$131,000, with the possibility of having to spend \$1.0 million more on EV's over the next four years. Discussion continued regarding electric vehicles chargers, option 1 cost savings, etc.

Mayor Dorough mentioned resistance for electric vehicles with statistics showing the public is not purchasing these type vehicles, adding that in Albany, the argument is to not install charging stations due to having no electric vehicles. He suggested that opportunities have been missed to get federal funding, asking if the School Board could opt in for electric buses, as there are programs paying over 50% for school systems buses. Referring to option 1, he said that even if EV charges are installed, it should not be put on the shelf and needs to be looked at and recommended having the Utility Board hear the information.

Commissioner Young asked if other locations for the EV chargers had been considered, such as APD and the bus station, in the event the City changes to electric buses, with discussion continuing regarding school/city buses, the October 31 extension deadline and having to decide on this matter.

2. Budget Discussion

Mr. Eaton stated that a response was given to questions from Mayor Dorough. Mayor Dorough commented on filling vacant positions and having information for the actual number of positions with Mr. Eaton stating that employee hiring is trending higher at this time. Discussion included pay raises, allocation for weatherization (up from \$150,000 to \$2.0 million), Mayor Dorough stating that this is too ambitious and proposing \$550K, the \$5.0 million set aside for Vogtle reserve and using the funds for capital improvement and funding available for downtown revitalization. He said he appreciates the responses and will submit another letter. Regarding the 207 Pine Building's remediation which was completed, he said he never saw a certificate. Paul Forgey, Planning Director, advised that 207 Pine has been finalized with EPA remediation work being approved. Mayor Dorough asked to see the paperwork and then mentioned spending \$1.0 million to replace the greens at the golf course. Mr. Eaton explained that it is in the recommendation for the coming fiscal year and Mayor Dorough requesting revenue/expenses/capital expenditures of the golf course for the last ten years. Discussion continued with Mayor Dorough discussing ESG getting paid for sewer concerns and stormwater concerns, monitoring for the manufacturing gas plant with Asst. City Bruce Maples providing a brief update regarding mitigation. The proposed pay increase/COLA, alternative proposal for all employees, i.e., proposing 3.5% (grades 1-7); 2% (grades 8-11); and 1% for those on the top end of the scale, the Pension contribution in FY2023 totaled \$6.4 million, and the additional \$5.0 million to keep the Plan solvent; this year it will be \$8.6 million was also discussed. Commissioner Warbington mentioned the information from Mayor Dorough, stating that the \$8.6 million is the normal Pension payroll and is not additional funding. Commissioner Warbington asked for specific things to vote on re: tiered pay raise and mentioned the pay study and if it was incorrectly administered, suggesting that if the tiered system is changed, we will be right back where we started (certain positions not comparable to the market rate) and, without additional information, he said he would be somewhat opposed to that notion. Mr. Brown asked if this is palpable, or would they prefer this separation, or maintain what we have. He mentioned Mayor Dorough's concern about demolition and suggested \$1.0 million more than budgeted. Weatherization was discussed, including using spray foam to make homes efficient, limit on weatherization (currently \$6,500 maximum grant), however energy conservation was increased, but not weatherization. Discussion continued regarding the grant being made to homeowners with circumstances for landlords to receive grants. Commissioner Warbington noted that many of the weatherization items (LED lighting, etc.) are purchased by the tenant, not the landlord and should be considered.

Commissioner Young commented on rehabilitation, i.e., weatherization, etc., and whether staff has manpower, with DCED having the capacity to do this type of work (weatherization, upgrading appliances, etc.), and looking at options suggested from the community as discussed earlier. He recommended knowing who is administering funding and putting monies in the proper place to fund programs and questioned budgeting for raises/personnel and if this is requirement by statute. Mr. Eaton explained the process of the City adhering to state law/audit reports requirements, has flexibility by not being over budget, putting a larger attrition rate in place if there is a need, etc. Commissioner Young mentioned public safety, and vacancy numbers vs what is proposed, with it noted that headcounts are budgeted, not dollars and commented on issues within the community and having the intent of money

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being expanded vs what is being proposed as noted today and having a comprehensive plan, to include DCED assisting customers, which is investing more into the community.

Commissioner Howard mentioned monies collected from Plant Vogtle and asked if a department has funds left over, the funds go back into the general fund; Mr. Brown agreed. Commissioner Howard asked for: a history of the creation of MEAG, number of cities that are members, the number of utility companies in Albany/Dougherty County, inserting rate comparison fliers in the bills of utility payers, and if \$5.0 million is going to MEAG (Mr. Brown advised that there was an increase of \$4.7 million annually).

Mayor Dorough explained that the two off-takers of the City of Albany's share of energy generated at Plant Vogtle is being purchased by the two utilities, with the City's 20-year obligation beginning when the loan was taken out. Mr. Brown explained utility rates (same throughout the city for everyone), with Albany being the 9th lowest in the state out of 99 cities.

Commissioner Gaines agreed with Commissioner Young and helping citizens with their utility bill.

Commissioner Warbington mentioned Red Speed funds and how they play into the budget, i.e., supplies/tools. Mr. Brown advised that \$2.8 million has been identified as eligible expenses for which the funds can be used for in the current budget; these are collected amounts and are not yet spent. Municipal Court was discussed and whether Red Speed funds can be used with APD Chief Persley explaining state law which defines what funds can be used for, i.e., public safety initiatives, with this being a broad issue, adding that additional discussion is forthcoming from state legislation. He provided additional areas that are tied to public safety initiatives and how the money can be used, adding that expenditures for Municipal Court is not included.

Commissioner Young mentioned the Call Before You Rent program being utilized. Discussion continued regarding the rent program and there being only four inquiries this past month and two the months before last. It was noted that information provided is the last 12 months of actual utility cost (electric, water, gas) with the suggestion to get the information out regarding the program.

MEMBER COMMENTS/ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDA

Commissioner Howard asked for 1) an update of Juneteenth at the Civic Center, 2) Code to do a site visit to the Regent Club in E. Albany (the property owners are out of state and Code needs to be involved), and 3) mentioned the Town Hall Meeting regarding poverty at the Civic Center at 10 am.

Commissioner Gaines said he has had complaints regarding the Leadership class and public safety officers having to attend class on their days off. Mayor Dorough stated that Mr. Brown will provide information and clarification.

Commissioner Young stated that this week is Gun Violence Awareness Week and provided information regarding events.

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Mayor Dorough mentioned a transfer of \$5.0 million to Carver Gym, Ritz Theater and Calman Malone, with a recommendation to have a discussion at the work session.

CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS/UPDATES

Mr. Brown's comments included:

- Recognizing the Downtown Manager, who was voted in and appointed to the GA Downtown Assn.
- Commission approval for the 401 Pine Ave., HVAC upgrades that will displace staff on the 2nd-3rd floor for approximately six months
- First floor renovations disrupting payments, which could be by appointments only, with information forthcoming
- Ms. Calhoun's presentation regarding EV Chargers and partnering with Marquises
- Advised that the City has met with ASU several times and a proposed MOU is being drafted with additional information forthcoming
- Coordinating with Congressman Bishop's for the FBO ribbon-cutting, which is tentatively scheduled June 17th at 11 am.
- Request for a Special Call meeting in two weeks re: four-year grant for Municipal Court (\$90k) with the deadline of June 24th
- The Humane Society had a parvo outbreak, is under quarantine for two weeks with the City currently in a contract on an emergency basis with Bush Animal Clinic.
- Security plan for the Government Building, which is not in the budget (\$200K) with more information forthcoming.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:47 a.m.

SONJA TOLBERT
CITY CLERK