

The Work Session meeting of the Petersburg City Council was held on Tuesday, July 1, 2025 at the Petersburg Public Library. Mayor Parham called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. The meeting video link is <https://petersburgva.new.swagit.com/videos/348732>

1. ROLL CALL:

Present:

Samuel Parham, Mayor – Ward 3
Darrin Hill, Vice Mayor – Ward 2
Marlow Jones, Councilor – Ward 1
Charles Cuthbert, Jr., Councilor – Ward 4
Annette Smith-Lee, Councilor - Ward 6
Arnold Westbrook, Jr., Councilor – Ward 7

Absent: W. Howard Myers, Councilor– Ward 5

Present from City Administration:

City Manager John “March” Altman, Jr.
City Attorney Anthony C. Williams
City Clerk Tangi R. Hill

2. PRAYER:

Vice Mayor Hill led the Council meeting in prayer.

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Mayor Parham led the Council and the citizens in the pledge of allegiance.

4. DETERMINATION OF THE PRESENCE OF A QUORUM:

A quorum was present.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Sarah Melissa Witiak, 22 Center Hill Court, stated that she was there to discuss the courthouse project. She said that this project benefited a select few judges, but it was unclear what the City's obligations were. She noted that there was a ruling requiring two courthouses, but no requirement for a judicial palace with private entrances for parking, but no plan for parking arrangements for those seeking justice. She reiterated that there was currently no plan for parking during the construction phase or afterwards. There has also been minimal information provided on the process of selecting a courthouse location and function, despite persistent efforts to obtain this information.

Dr. Witiak said that there was no public input allowed before a vendor was chosen from three bids; no posting of cost differences between building a structure that would hold two courts reasonably in the space proposed as required by the ruling, versus the current attempt to cram three courthouses and additional offices into office space that was so inappropriate that it oozed over Tabb Street and required a total height that exceeds that of the historic Hustings Courthouse and possibly Center Hill Mansion. The developers claimed to have a pedestrian plan to replace access between Adams and Sycamore, but she wanted to emphasize that this was not included in the courthouse plan, there was no dedicated funding for this pedestrian way, and it appeared to be merely a suggestion.

Dr. Witiak stated that pedestrians, residents, and businesses in Old Town had been left without parking. The City was working on a parking study, but there was no guarantee that the funds would be available

within the next two years. The historic Hustings Courthouse would be used for only one trial per year, leaving the circuit court to meet in the new judge's palace for the remaining 360 days. Citizens should be involved in developing the plan for their historic resources, not dictated to by judges. She asked if they really expected the City to dedicate the necessary funds to maintain an underused building such as the Hustings Courthouse when they could not even manage to keep the bell working.

Dr. Witiak said that the courthouse was located in the City's worst urban heat island, and the comp plan promised to strengthen tree buffers, screening, and repurpose unused buildings for community purposes, and page 198 of the comp plan mentioned solar panels on municipal buildings, but none were included in the courthouse plans. The City said that it would take steps to reduce heat island effects and maintain the tree canopy; however, the proposed buffer of five trees along Adams was pathetic and insufficient.

Dr. Witiak said that a significant buffer of large trees was needed to protect and build the tree canopy in the unhealthiest City in Virginia. She said that while the courthouse was designed to last 50 years, the true symbol of justice and wisdom was a grove of majestic oaks along Adams and around the courthouse that would outlast many times over this travesty of a building.

Nikki Harris, Owner of Cool Beanz Cafe, located on North Sycamore Street in Petersburg, Virginia, said that she had a lengthy message she wanted to share, but she had decided to keep it simple. As a business owner in the City, she knew that many of them felt unsupported, and it was a common issue. They were unable to get their buildings inspected, which was costing her an average of \$6,000 per day. She received 50 phone calls daily from people trying to purchase items from her coffee shop because they had five highway signs directing traffic to their location, but they were not actually open yet because they were waiting for Health Department inspections.

Ms. Harris said that she had also noticed that her neighbor to the left, 149 Wine Board, was facing the same issue with waiting for inspections to be completed. She said that she was unable to get inspected and was not contributing to the tax value base in Petersburg. This was not why she started her business; she did not open it to be a mere storefront. She felt deeply unsupported as a business owner in this City. She said that she had trusted the people, and she had given up her building to the Cordish Company last year, expecting some form of assistance. Unfortunately, she had received nothing. They had been delayed a year and everyone was still putting all their faith in the Cordish Company and Live casinos, which she believed would be great, but that was not the only thing going on in Petersburg.

Ms. Harris said that they needed help, support, and action. They did not need empty promises or lip service. They needed elected officials to take notice and be part of the solution. She urged the Council to come down and meet with their local business owners, to talk to them, and to understand their concerns. As a representative of this City, she expected more from them. She expected them to be a part of the solution, not just a spectator. This City had the potential to be amazing, with its proximity to major highways and its rich history. She emphasized that it was time for them to act like they were worth something.

Ms. Harris stated that she was tired of hearing about the negative aspects of their City. She had chosen to believe the local government was not corrupt; she had trusted that they would partner with her, but this was what many business owners in Petersburg were saying. However, nobody wanted to speak out because they were afraid of repercussions. They were afraid of what would happen to their business.

Ms. Harris stated that she was not from Petersburg, but she was proud to call it her home. She had lived there for 15 years, and she would not have invested her life into North Sycamore. Every month, her rent for that space was \$3,800, but she was unable to open her doors. She had been receiving calls from people who wanted to help, but there was nothing she could do. She said that she had tried using a trailer, but there was no ordinance that outlined what they needed to do. As a result, she had had to relocate four times, and one of those times the City sent a cop car down Commerce Street to close her

down.

Ms. Harris stated that she was selling coffee and hot dogs, with high school students from Petersburg High School working at her trailer that day, and they were excited about the opportunity. It was extremely alarming that the City felt that was a situation that warranted police sirens and a forced shutdown of her business. She asked Council how they thought that looked to their local businesspeople. She had trusted to be partners in their vision for business in Petersburg; she had given up her building for a year and supported Cordish's endeavor with everything she had.

Ms. Harris reiterated that she had \$3,800 to pay tomorrow, and she had received numerous phone calls today. She said that she was willing to share her phone registry, emails, and voicemails with them so Council could understand the situation. She said that she had five highway signs installed, with one of them set to go up on I-95 near Exit 52. She said that unfortunately, these signs would be directing traffic to a closed business. She asked if that sounded like a viable way to contribute to the tax base. She said that two people quit today because she could not guarantee them a job.

John Altman, City Manager, stated that he would follow up with Ms. Harris to get more information and look into how to resolve this issue.

Council Member Jones clarified that the City had done their inspections; the Health Department was a state agency and the City had no control over that. He agreed that it was inexcusable that their local food establishments were not being given timely inspections and Council would try to contact the Health Department about the issue. He stated that Council would resolve this issue.

Tim Thompson, 15 West Old Street, stated that he had lived in the City for a couple of years now. He had moved in with his son, Nick, and was initially thrilled about living in Old Town. He said that he wanted to discuss some ordinances that had no enforcement. He had noticed loud motorcycles and music from cars at night, as well as Andrade's down the street. He explained that because he lived in a 200-year old building, there were rules that prohibited him from replacing the windows or making other modifications to his house to dampen the noise.

Mr. Thompson said that as a result, he was experiencing sleep deprivation, and he had developed skin lesions. His doctors had advised him to take action and move. His neighbor downstairs had a young daughter, and he was concerned about the impact of the noise on her well-being. He was also worried about the impact on his own health, as he often went to work on only three to four hours of sleep. He noted that Andrade's closed down swiftly at 2:00 a.m. per the ABC license rule, but they did not adhere to the noise ordinance of the City.

Mr. Thompson said that in the spirit of Independence Day, which was approaching, and considering the colonists' complaint against the king, who refused to assent to or enforce the laws that were deemed good, he would like to review two of the City's specific prohibitions. The City aimed to protect its citizens from excessive noise, which was detrimental to life, health, and the enjoyment of property. Specifically, it was unlawful for any person to use, operate, or play musical instruments or devices between 11:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. inside a residential dwelling.

Mr. Thompson stated that additionally, it was unlawful for any person to operate, install, have, or permit loudspeakers or other sound-producing devices on the outside of any business establishment, which could emit music, noise, or voice in a manner that was heard on public sidewalks or streets. He said that this issue extended beyond music, as it also involved yelling and other loud disturbances, which went on for four hours a night, four nights a week, and later escalated to people yelling in the street, was particularly concerning. He had brought this to the attention of the Code Office, who had referred him to the Police, and the Police told him to speak with City Council. He would appreciate Council's assistance in resolving this matter.

Barb Rudolph, 1675 Mount Vernon Street, agreed with Ms. Harris that she was speaking for a lot of

people who felt they could not speak up for fear of repercussions. She asked that Council bear that in mind; it was a deeper problem than just what she had experienced, although what she had gone through sounded unforgivable. She added that it was not only the Health Department's responsibility. She stated that the City's process of addressing problems seemed to be that they prioritized whatever issue rose to the forefront, such as if a citizen came in person and complained to Council about it. She noticed that it seemed that Council was going to jump to remedy Ms. Harris's issue as soon as they learned of it, and although the problem certainly needed to be resolved, it did not address the bigger picture of how they would ensure the City was operating smoothly in the future.

Ms. Rudolph said that this related to the meeting last night about the new courthouse. She believed Dr. Witiak had expressed some important concerns about the project. She noted that there were many different components to this project, and it seemed like every study was being done by a different consultant and she was wondering who was responsible for coordinating all of it. She requested Council hold more public meetings so the public could discuss the many different things happening in the City. She believed the public was starved for information and it was difficult to see how all of this was connected.

6. APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA (TO INCLUDE MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS)

a. Minutes of Previous Meetings

- June 3, 2025 Special Meeting Minutes
- June 3, 2025 Closed Session Minutes
- June 17, 2025 Closed Session Minutes
- June 26, 2025 Special Meeting Closed Session Minutes

b. First Read and Schedule a Public Hearing for Consideration of an Ordinance to Approve an Amendment to the Subdivision Ordinance of the City of Petersburg for the Purpose of Updating the City's Subdivision Regulations and Bringing the Ordinance into Compliance with the Code of Virginia

c. First Read and Schedule a Public Hearing for Consideration of an Amendment to the FY26 Grants Fund

d. First Read and Schedule a Public Hearing for Consideration of an Amendment to the FY26 General Fund

e. First Read and Schedule a Public Hearing for Antwan Harris to Appeal a Decision Made by the Architectural Review Board Regarding 605 West Washington Street in the Folly Castle Historic District. The Architectural Review Board Determined that the Vinyl Windows and Vinyl Siding Installed Without an Approved Certificate of Appropriateness Should be Removed and that the Decorative Corbels Removed Without an Approved Certificate of Appropriateness Should be Restored; the Applicant is Requesting the Decision be Overturned in its Entirety

f. First Read and Schedule a Public Hearing for Consideration of an Ordinance Authorizing the City Manager to Execute the Purchase Agreement Between the City of Petersburg and ACUNA PROPERTIES LLC for the Development of 436 Byrne Street, Located in Petersburg, VA

g. First Read and Schedule a Public Hearing for Consideration of an Ordinance Authorizing the City Manager to Execute the Purchase Agreement Between the City of Petersburg and SQUARE ACRE PROPERTY for the Development of 201 Virginia Ave, Located in Petersburg, VA

- h. First Read and Schedule a Public Hearing for Consideration of an Ordinance Authorizing the City Manager to Execute the Purchase Agreements Between the City of Petersburg and NUWAVE for the Development of 215 S. Jones Street, 1420 Ferndale Ave, 1150 Rome Street, 1162 Hinton Street, 201 Terrace Avenue, 417 S. Jefferson Street, 921 Priam Street, 851 East Bank Street, Located in Petersburg, VA
- i. First Read and to Schedule a Public Hearing for Consideration of an Ordinance Authorizing the City Manager to Execute the Purchase Agreements Between the City of Petersburg and STEPPING STONES PROPERTIES, LLC for the Development of 10. N. Foley Street and 340 Mistletoe Street, Located in Petersburg, VA
- j. First Reading and schedule a Public Hearing for Consideration of an Ordinance Authorizing the City Manager to Execute a Deed of Easement Between the City of Petersburg and Virginia Electric and Power Company to Install a Transformer and Associated Underground Conduits and Cables for the Poor Creek Pumping Station Project on City Property Located at 960 Winfield Road

Vice Mayor Hill made a motion to adopt the consent agenda as presented. Council Member Westbrook seconded the motion.

On a roll call vote, voting Yes: Cuthbert, Jones, Westbrook, Smith-Lee, Hill, and Parham; No: N/A; Abstain: N/A; Absent: Myers.

7. SPECIAL REPORTS

There was no report.

8. MONTHLY REPORTS

There was no report.

9. FINANCE AND BUDGET REPORT

There was no report.

10. CAPITAL PROJECTS UPDATE

There was no report.

11. UTILITIES

a. July 2025 Presentation

City Manager Altman stated that July 2025 Utilities Presentation was included in the Board's packet. He explained that Mr. Byerly was on vacation and Mr. Copple was unavailable, so he would ask that if Council had any questions to please send them to him and he would answer them.

Council Member Jones stated that he was disappointed that neither Mr. Byerly nor Mr. Copple had delegated this presentation to one of their staff members. It was important for there to be an established chain of command for all their staff and to provide opportunities for leadership.

Vice Mayor Hill requested the City Manager organize a meeting between their local business owners and their department staff responsible for inspections and permits.

Mayor Parham stated that it was inexcusable for the Health Department's slow pace of performing inspections to result in businesses being unable to open, which ultimately led to the business owners and City losing money.

Council Member Jones stated that he would be contacting state officials to try and speed up the inspection process. He expressed deep concern that so many businesses in Petersburg were affected by this specific issue that the City did not control.

Council Member Smith-Lee expressed concern that inspections by the Health Department were the stalling point for all of these businesses. She did not understand why the Health Department would not let the City know if there was an issue.

12. STREETS

There was no report.

13. FACILITIES

There was no report.

14. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

There was no report.

15. CITY MANAGER'S AGENDA

John Altman, City Manager, thanked the citizens who attended the courthouse meeting last night. He stated that he would be going to the Architectural Review Board (ARB) meeting for the architectural design of the courthouse. He hoped to see everyone on Thursday night at their fireworks show. He wished everyone a happy and safe Fourth of July Holiday.

16. BUSINESS OR REPORTS FROM THE CLERK

Tangi Hill, City Clerk, wished everyone a safe and happy Fourth of July.

17. BUSINESS OR REPORTS FROM THE CITY ATTORNEY

Anthony Williams, City Attorney, stated that he had nothing to report this evening.

18. ADJOURNMENT

Vice Mayor Hill made a motion to adjourn. All members of the Council present voted in the affirmative. Meeting adjourned.

The City Council adjourned at 5:54 p.m.

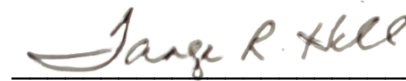
Adopted: 07/15/2025

APPROVED:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Pearson", written over a horizontal line.

Mayor

ATTEST:

A handwritten signature in brown ink, appearing to read "Jange R. Hill", written over a horizontal line.

City Clerk