The work session meeting of the Petersburg City Council was held on Tuesday, June 3, 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/344635

1. ROLL CALL:

Present:

Samuel Parham, Mayor – Ward 3
Marlow Jones, Councilor – Ward 1
Charles Cuthbert, Jr., Councilor – Ward 4
W. Howard Myers, Councilor– Ward 5
Annette Smith-Lee, Councilor - Ward 6

Absent:

Darrin Hill, Vice Mayor – Ward 2
Arnold Westbrook, Jr., Councilor – Ward 7

Present from City Administration:

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

2. PRAYER:

Council Member Smith-Lee 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

Marlo Green, 301 Rolfe Street, stated that she would like to briefly mention the rules of Council. She said that she was not aware of any explicit language prohibiting the use of visual aids, such as screen presentations, but she was notified in April that they could no longer offer visual aids during the public comment period. She expressed concern that removing this option limited the public's ability to effectively communicate important information, particularly for those watching virtually at home. This decision was a disservice to residents who rely on these meetings to stay informed and engaged.

Ms. Green said that she understood the desire for order and structure, but she suggested considering a requirement for public presentations to be given two business days prior to the City Council meeting. She respectfully requested clarification on this decision and whether any formal policy change was taking place. She emphasized that the community deserved transparency and access to the same tools used by Council and City staff to convey information.

Ms. Green stated that she would also like to discuss an incident that occurred on Pocahontas Island. She said that the gentleman she saw in the packet was at her home on May 28. The same day, he placed red tag notices on several properties on the island. His initial question after ringing her doorbell was whether she was the person who prepares the newsletter. He then asked if she knew a certain individual, which was unusual because that individual was with him the first time she had seen him. She wanted to be clear that this is not a case of checkers, but chess. She said that she will not tolerate directed intimidation by individuals targeting her.

Ms. Green said that she did not wish to imply that anyone on City Council or the City Manager was involved, but the sequence of events was unusual. Furthermore, she wanted to emphasize that they are a community, and they should not point fingers at each other. She said that she did not want City officials knocking on her door unless they have a scheduled appointment, as this was not safe and it was very unusual.

MS. Green said that furthermore, she had provided photographs of 1206 West High Street. She said that she hoped the City would get a code compliance notice, similar to the swift action taken to put red tag notices on Pocahontas Island properties. She said that the property had a collapsing roof line, a deteriorating porch, and a compromised foundation. She said that she had lived there in 2016 and had complained about it every other month, but it had never been red tagged. She said that it was alarming to see how quickly Pocahontas Island properties had been addressed, so she expected to see a red tag on this property tomorrow.

Amanda Wyatt, 224 Witten Street, said that she was one of the properties that was red-tagged on Pocahontas Island, but she had the chance to speak with some individuals who were working with her. She said that they were helpful, as she had just had a contractor visit the property the day before. She said that the property was red-tagged the same day. She said that she wanted to thank the City for working with her, but she was getting ready to do some work herself.

Barbara Rudolph, 1675 Mount Vernon Street, said that she wanted to commend Marlo Green for her comments regarding citizens providing presentation materials, and she hoped the council would take that to heart and review the policy. She said that she would like to bring up a couple of points. Firstly, she wanted to mention the ordinance that was added to the closed session agenda at the previous meeting, which was to rescind the ordinance to make the deal for Sycamore Grove and the Adams Street development.

Ms. Rudolph said that she understood from reading the recent article in the Progress Index that the City had not been willing to provide any information on the situation. She hoped the Council would reconsider and provide more transparency, as there had been many promises made over the past two and a half years. For example, Governor Youngkin's visit in 2022, when he and Mayor Parham discussed bringing a major grocer to the area, and the fact that two different chains were competing for the project. Unfortunately, it appeared they were back to square one.

Ms. Rudolph said that she believed the public deserved more attention and information on this matter. Additionally, she shared Councilor Cuthbert's concern about the compensation and class study. It had been over two years since the Request For Proposal (RFP) closed, and she thought it was essential that they had a clear understanding of the study's findings and how they would impact various City departments and positions. Specifically, she would like to know the incremental changes that would result from the study and how they would affect staffing levels, salaries, and departmental budgets.

Ms. Rudolph said that she had discussed these questions with Mr. Cozier and Mr. Glaster, and she appreciated their efforts to provide information. However, she believed it was crucial that they had a clear and transparent understanding of the study's findings and their implications for the City's employees. She reiterated that they did not have any current information on the positions and salaries they have. She noted that this information used to be provided with the budget presentation, so she hoped it would be included in the final budget along with a distribution of the comp and class funding. Otherwise, the $3 million was an estimate that needed to be developed further. She added that the employees needed to be informed of this as well in order to maintain their morale.

Bobby Beverly, 225 Dundee Drive, stated that Mr. Cory Harris had a nonprofit organization with a virtual museum, a website, and tens of thousands of dollars in donations throughout the state of Virginia. He explained that Mr. Harris had also donated to City Hall, schools, other nonprofits, and provided thousands of dollars for Christmas items the previous year. Yet, he received no respect. He did not understand why this was the case. This was important because their residents needed help.

Mr. Beverly said that he believed Mr. Harris was due an apology, although he did not think that would happen. He said that he was not sure where to take this, but he would touch on one point - the virtual museum. He explained that Dr. Farley was supposed to be the one who came up with the idea with Mr. Harris. He said that some of the Council Members were aware of this, but he was supposed to be involved with the museum. He said that he was shocked that some of the Council Members had joined forces with people who were not qualified to speak on this subject.

Mr. Beverly said that he would like to close by addressing a video that had been circulating online. He said that it had been seen by everyone, and it was about Ms. Atkinson's claim that Petersburg was the origin of Memorial Day. He said that this was not accurate. He said that Memorial Day actually started in South Carolina, specifically in Charleston. He said that it was 13 Black women who started it, and this could be easily proven. He said that he had already put this online to debunk Ms. Atkinson's narrative. He said that he would like to thank Council for their work and hope that they would correct this situation with Mr. Harris, as he deserved to be respected, just like everyone else in this room.

Sarah Melissa Widiak, 22 Center Hill Court, stated that she was here today to request transparency. She said that the article on Sycamore Grove had raised questions about the lack of information regarding the project's cancellation. She believed the citizens deserve to know the reasons behind this decision and the motivations behind it. She thought the courthouse project also deserved greater transparency. As far as she knows, there had been no public meetings, which was concerning, especially considering its impact on two historic districts in the City.

Ms. Widiak stated that it seemed they had invested more time and resources into informing the public about minor projects, such as sandwich signs, than they were allocating to a million-dollar contract and building project that would have a significant impact on downtown for decades to come. She said that she hoped that they would prioritize community input on these major projects as much as they did for the sandwich board signs. Finally, she would like clarification on the process for community input after a motion has been seconded. She said that she missed the discussion earlier today and was wondering if someone could explain the procedure to her.

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

a. Minutes of Previous Meetings

   May 20, 2025 City Council Closed Session Minutes

b. 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 URBAN DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION for the Development of 135 Franklin Street, 116 and 120 N. Jefferson Street, Located in Petersburg, VA

c. 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 Anthony Jackson for the Development of 723 Harding Street, Located in Petersburg, VA

d. First Read and Schedule a Public Hearing for the Consideration of an Ordinance Authorizing the City Manager to Execute the Purchase Agreement Between the City of Petersburg and Barber

Construction for the Development of 201 Graham Street and 617 S. Sycamore Street, Located in Petersburg, VA

e. First Read and Schedule a Public Hearing for the Consideration of an Ordinance to Approve an Amendment to the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Petersburg Pertaining to Short-Term Rental Uses in the City of Petersburg

f. First Read and Schedule a Public Hearing for Amend and Readopt the City Ordinance Pertaining to the Planning Commission to add Language Clarifying the Ability to Compensate Planning Commission Members

g. First Read and Schedule a Public Hearing for Michael Knick to Appeal a Decision Made by the Architectural Review Board Regarding 224 E Fillmore Street in the Poplar Lawn Historic District that Determined the Windows Should be Repaired when Possible and Replaced if Necessary with Wood Clad in Aluminum – the Applicant Seeks to Replace All Windows with Wood Clad in Aluminum

h. First Read and Schedule a Public Hearing to Approve the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Funds for Program Year 2025 – 2026 and Fiscal Year 2026 as Recommended by the CDBG Advisory Board

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

Council Member Smith-Lee made a motion to adopt the consent agenda as presented. Council Member Jones seconded the motion.

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

7. SPECIAL REPORTS

a. LISC Petersburg – Jane Ferrara, Executive Director of LISC Virginia

Jane Ferrara, Director of Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Virginia, gave an update on some of the activities LISC Virginia was undertaking in the City of Petersburg. She explained that Local Initiatives Support Corporation is a non-profit organization that provides financial and programmatic resources to communities in need. As a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), they act as lenders and resource providers, bringing capital and expertise to communities to catalyze economic opportunities. They had been working in Petersburg for quite some time, and their vision for this City and community was hopeful. They believed that investments could catalyze lasting economic opportunities for residents throughout the city.

Ms. Ferrara stated that their work focused on aggregating financial resources, primarily in the form of loans and grants, and deploying them in neighborhoods that needed these investments. As a national organization headquartered in New York City, they had coverage in most states, including rural areas. They also had affiliate organizations that provided for-fund management and tax credit syndication, such as Broad Street, LISC Fund Management, LISC Green, and the National Equity Fund. In this region and Richmond, they focused on four of their ten core areas, which she would discuss in more detail later. Before she proceeded, she would like to announce that in 2025, LISC was celebrating 35 years of work in the Central Virginia region.

Ms. Ferrara stated that over this period, they had invested over $203 million in the Central Virginia MSA, which had been leveraged to almost $800 million of investment. This had supported the development of 6,900 affordable homes and apartments, as well as 1.1 million square feet of commercial space. As she mentioned earlier, they had four pillars of work, including affordable housing, wealth building, economic development, and lending.

Ms. Ferrara said that with wealth building, this area of work primarily took place within their financial opportunity centers. She said that in Petersburg, they had served 309 residents over the last few years. She said that they had launched a Smart Savings Program, an asset-building program that encouraged participants to establish savings accounts, which were then matched with money provided through grants. She said that they had also integrated this program with their home ownership readiness program through Wealth Opportunities Realized Through Homeownership (WORTH).

Ms. Ferrara continued to explain that they had partnered with Virginia State University (VSU) to create a Digital Inclusion program, which was launched a couple of years ago. This program trained VSU students to teach fundamental computer and internet skills, including job searches, telehealth, and access to resources. She said that they had hosted these classes on Saturday mornings at the Petersburg YMCA, and in the last two years, they had assisted 120 Petersburg residents. Those who completed the program received a free laptop as a result.

Ms. Ferrara said that on the affordable housing front, they worked in a couple of key areas. Their longest-standing program was the Partnership for Neighborhood Renewal (PNR), funded by the Cameron Foundation. They also partnered with organizations like Project Homes and Rebuilding Together Richmond, among others, including the Historic Petersburg Foundation, which had helped them with intensive investment in the Poplar Lawn Historic District. She said that they had renovated 14 homes in this neighborhood, such as the provided before-and-after pictures of a house at 120 Liberty Street. This was about 10 or 11 years of work, and the last house was sold recently.

Ms. Ferrara stated that two years ago, they had initiated a homeownership program to help aspiring homeowners achieve that dream, with a focus on those who had experienced historical barriers to achieving homeownership. She said that through the Wealth Opportunities Realized Through Homeownership Program, they had made significant progress in this area. She said that the program, funded by the Wells Fargo Foundation, had enabled them to assist aspiring homeowners with down payment assistance, housing counseling, and other services to prepare them for homeownership.

Ms. Ferrara said that their partners had also provided down payment assistance grants and housing counseling services. This program required a diverse group of partners to be successful, but they were seeing significant results in the region in terms of helping people become homeowners. In the City of Petersburg, over the past two years, they had assisted 78 families, with 68 becoming homeowners since 2023. They had also deployed 120,000 down payment assistance grants and provided housing counseling services.

Ms. Ferrara added that this year, they would be launching additional homebuyers clubs in rental communities and faith-based organizations to provide homeownership education. She said that they were also conducting a housing developer training institute to prepare small contractors and businesspeople who wanted to become housing developers. Furthermore, they would be standing up an Heirs' Property Services program, also known as Tangled Title, to address the issue of unclear property titles. She said that Heirs' Property, or Tangled Title, occurred when a property's legal title did not accurately reflect the current ownership or occupancy of a dwelling.

Ms. Ferrara said that this could happen when a property was passed down through generations without proper documentation or legal transfers. As a result of an unclear title, individuals may not be able to qualify for home repair programs, grants, and resources. In disaster situations, unclear title could also make it difficult to access disaster relief funding through FEMA and other sources. To address this issue, they had created the Heirs' Property Network, a free and charitable network of legal providers aimed at helping individuals qualify for full legal rights as homeowners. By clearing these titles, homeowners could access their equity and use it to their advantage. The Richmond Heirs' Property Network could fund cases up to $7,500 per case to clear these services.

Ms. Ferrara stated that additionally, they had been working in the economic development space in the Petersburg area for at least five years. They had provided low-cost capital to small business entrepreneurs through a zero percent business loan program. This program was paired with technical assistance through the small business development program. To date, in the City of Petersburg, they had provided $415,000 in zero percent interest loans to businesses across the City.

Ms. Ferrara said that as a Community Development Financial Institution and a lender, lending was at the core of LISC's mission. It involved bringing capital and making it accessible to projects and businesses that might not otherwise qualify for traditional forms of financing or other lending products. They primarily financed affordable housing, economic development, and community facilities. They also invested in other ways through her affiliate organizations, such as new market tax credits and low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC) syndications. In fact, this very building they were in today was assisted by a LISC new market tax credit investment.

Ms. Ferrara said that they were proud to be a contributor to the establishment of such a lovely facility and an anchor in the community. They were delighted to help with the Petersburg Hotel project, restoring the building to its original grandeur. She noted that LISC did not do what it did in a vacuum or by itself. They relied on strong, like-minded partners to achieve everything they did and create the impacts they did in the communities they served.

Ms. Ferrara summarized that LISC believed in a collective impact approach to comprehensive development, where diverse groups worked together towards common goals. They were pleased to do this work in the City of Petersburg. She said that they were currently wrapping up her new three-year strategic plan, which placed a prominent role in the City of Petersburg. She said that they were making deeper commitments in this City and were proud to do so.

b. Presentation of the Recommended Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Fund Subrecipients for Program Year 2025 – 2026 and Fiscal Year 2026

Naomi Siodmok, Director of Planning and Community Development, introduced Kofi Adih, who would be leading the presentation, as well as the draft recommendations. She said that the action meeting on this item was scheduled for next month.

Kofi Adih, Chairman of the CDBG Advisory Board, stated that he would be presenting information on CDBG Program Year 2025. He explained that the CDBG Advisory Board administered the program under the guidance of Ms. Siodmok, the Director of Planning and Community Development, and Jennifer Murphy, their administrator for CDBG. This marked his fourth year as Chairman of the Board, and he could say it had been an interesting and rewarding journey as they helped numerous non-profit and government agencies use CDBG funds effectively.

Mr. Adih stated that in terms of their Board's structure, they had one member per ward and five at-large members, totaling 12. He said that currently, they had six active members on the Board. He noted that they currently had multiple vacancies on the Board, so he implored Council Members Westbrook and Jones to encourage their constituents to apply for the ward positions, as well as for the at-large positions.

Mr. Adih explained that the CDBG funding program was divided based on population. For areas with a population of 50,000 or more, the program was administered directly by Housing and Urban Development (HUD). For areas with a population of 50,000 or less, the program was administered by the state. He noted that Petersburg was a special case, as they did have a smaller population but did report directly to HUD. He said that examples of projects included Parks and Recreation, City demolitions, and numerous non-profit organizations providing community services.

Mr. Adih stated that they were governed by 24 CFR 570, which required all projects and subrecipients to meet one of the three national objectives. He stated that 15% of a municipality's CDBG allocation was allowed to support public services and a capped 20% for administrative fees, so no more than 20% of their yearly application could be allocated to CDBG administrative costs. He continued to explain that some of the City's census tracts were not eligible to receive CDBG funding as they once did.

Mr. Adih emphasized that they must ensure the program was administered properly, including having a target population for the funding. This was true for any City. He said that Petersburg, unfortunately, was once considered as a whole to be a low to moderate income area, but as the economy improved, some areas may not be directly eligible. However, the City as a whole could still utilize CDBG funding in certain pockets. This did not change their current program.

Mr. Adih said that next, he would like to present their progress over the past four years. One of their goals was to fill their vacant Board seats. They also aimed to strengthen their connections with community stakeholders. In March and April, he met with their subrecipients to provide them with a platform to share their programs and community initiatives. They also conducted a public hearing on community needs, gathering insight from the community. They strove to take their own recommendations and incorporate community input, resulting in a viable consensus.

Mr. Adih said that furthermore, they would continue to update their operating procedures. He recalled when Mayor Parham first appointed him, he received a binder dated 1992. They aimed to keep their processes updated to avoid similar issues in the future. Now, he would discuss some of their accomplishments. In November 2024, the HUD field office from Richmond recognized their efforts in administering the CDBG program. He said that he would like to extend his gratitude to Ms. Siodmok and Ms. Murphy, as well as all the other parties involved, for their contributions. He said that he hoped HUD would continue to acknowledge Petersburg's progress in CDBG administration.

Mr. Adih said that he had provided a letter from HUD regarding the current year's potential allocation. It discussed the current year's potential allocation and HUD's recommendations for their funding uses. He said that key points included that they had been awarded or were potentially awarded $585,812, and they were eligible for the Section 108 program. One important note was that since they had met their timeliness goals and were compliant, they were eligible to borrow against their future awards, resulting in a potential allocation of $2,929,060.

Mr. Adih said that this amount was contingent on their timeliness and progress as a Board. He said that recommended uses, as outlined in the letter, included funding opportunity zones, gap financing for large-scale community projects, and addressing local housing shortages. He said that as they were aware, housing remained an issue in the City of Petersburg, as it was nationwide. However, the planning deadline was August 16, when they must have an annual action plan and all necessary details wrapped up for this program year.

Mr. Adih said that moving forward, he would present the applicants. As they would see, they would review the metrics and statistics on subsequent slides. He said that a total of $1,385,355 was requested from the Advisory Board, whereas their budget was approximately $585,000.

Unfortunately, they had more need than they had funding, a trend that occurred every year. Next, they would review the breakdown of statistics, which showed that public services continued to be the largest request for CDBG funding. Furthermore, there was a breakdown of which requests met each of the three national objectives from HUD.

Mr. Adih said that the majority of applicants were non-profit and charitable organizations, a trend that had persisted for the past four years. They had been awarded $585,812, which for public services was capped at $87,871, and an administrative cap of $117,162. Due to the timing of the letter, there were some minor adjustments to allocations to subrecipients, so the total amount recommended for funding was $582,436. The Board's goal was to make a decision on June 17, after City Council had had a chance to consider the applications. To facilitate this, they would be meeting individually or in pairs with City Council members to provide insight into the applications and answer any questions to ensure the Council's decisions on June 17 were well-informed.

8. MONTHLY REPORTS

There was no report.

9. FINANCE AND BUDGET REPORT

There was no report.

10. CAPITAL PROJECTS UPDATE

There was no update.

11. UTILITIES

a. June Presentation

Jerry Byerly, Director of Public Works & Utilities, presented the monthly Utilities report. He stated that they had 29 water utility work orders, 44 wastewater work orders, and 54 water meter work orders. Utility billing reported a total of 246 transactions, with 63 terminations and 186 new services. From the Street Operations division, they began inspecting street lights in the City last night. He explained that this process was expected to take four to six weeks to complete and would be done annually. They had four employees working overnight, and they were logging any street lights that were theirs and sending notifications to Dominion Virginia Energy for them to repair.

Mr. Byerly stated that the Citywide pothole blitz concluded on May 2, with over 3,200 potholes repaired using City crews and contractors. Residents could report any remaining potholes or new ones that had appeared since May 2 by contacting the Street Operations division or submitting a service request through the City's website. The Citywide cleanup event took place on May 10, with Streets arranging for dumpsters at various locations. The cleanup accepted items such as trash, furniture, appliances, carpet, food waste, grass, leaves, and brush.

Mr. Byerly stated that ongoing weekly litter control, street operations, and maintenance activities continued in all seven wards. Special attention was given to the City's gateways, major roadways, and downtown areas, with weekly debris and illegal dumping control. The Street Operations division was also addressing illegally dumped items in the right of way and removing illegal signs. They had seen a decrease in these issues since they began aggressively addressing them over the past two months. Physical management was also being addressed, with a contractor assessing the roof and providing a quote for repairs.

Mr. Byerly stated that Frasier Electric had provided a quote for overhead signs, which would begin work next week. Additionally, a hole at the base of one of the columns at the train station was repaired after an engineer took a piece of wood out to conduct a study. The P.O. had been approved for a new HVAC system at 309 Fairgrounds, and Grounds staff were performing their routine grass-cutting as well as handling the illegal dumping on Prince George Avenue, Albert Jones field, North Union Street, playgrounds, Pocahontas Island, and 801 South Adams Street.

Mr. Byerly said that in the Stormwater Division, the Citywide Drainage Study data collection and inventory phase was complete, and the modeling phase had begun. Multiple construction projects were underway, with North Whitehill now complete and Fleets Branch nearing completion. The pre-construction and notice to proceed phases for these projects had been successfully completed.

Mr. Byerly said that regarding the sinkhole on Bank Street, the approval process had been re-established, and an external consultant, Timmons, had been retained as the certified floodplain manager for another year. He said that the CFPF Round 4 applications were being considered for award by the DCR, with three of the five applications being awarded. The EPA dispute had been settled in the City's favor, and the latest candidate was interviewed for floodplain administrator, who began working on May 19 and was doing well so far. He said that 95% of all stormwater reviews had been completed on time, and the three stormwater site plans had been reviewed, with 16 stormwater and soil erosion building permit reviews also completed.

12. STREETS

There was no report.

13. FACILITIES

There was no report.

14. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

There was no report.

15. CITY MANAGER'S AGENDA

a. Discussion on Amending the City of Petersburg Zoning Ordinance to Remove the Requirement for a Special Use Permit for Public or Government Buildings and to Allow Animal Pounds in A, Agricultural District Regulations

Naomi Siodmok, Director of Planning & Community Development, stated that she would discuss a potential text amendment to their City Ordinance and seek Council's direction. Currently, they were moving forward with improvements to City facilities, including the animal shelter and courthouse. Staff would like to gauge the Council's interest in amending their code. At present, their code required a special use permit for any government building and did not currently permit animal shelters in agricultural districts.

Ms. Siodmok explained that they had already received direction from Council regarding the courthouse and animal shelter, so staff would like to ask if there was interest in removing the requirement for a special use permit for projects that Council was already in support of. Specifically, they were considering removing this requirement for public and government buildings and allowing animal shelters in agricultural zoning districts. She said that she would appreciate any questions, comments, or direction Council may have on this matter.

Council Member Jones said that he was supportive of the amendments, but he would like to hear Ms. Siodmok's professional opinion on the matter.

Ms. Siodmok replied that staff had been working with Council throughout this entire process. They had worked with the Council to help government buildings move forward, so the need for a special use permit on City-owned property for a government structure that they were working on collaboratively seemed a bit redundant. She stated that for animal shelters in the agricultural district, staff could review any stipulations or standards that should be in place, including acre size, noise, or other factors, to establish a standard for other agricultural zones. With that in mind, they believed that this type of use could be accommodated on a large property, including an agricultural property.

Council Member Jones noted that this may provide some benefit to their new animal shelter.

Ms. Siodmok stated that staff would work with the Planning Commission to move this forward, and then would come back to Council with an update.

b. COPS and SAFER Grant Presentations

John Altman, City Manager, stated that Council had previously discussed these two grants at their annual retreat meeting. At the time, they were aware that the programs were more substantial than initially thought. However, there had been changes since then. He would like to discuss these changes with Council and determine if there was still interest in pursuing both programs, which would support the addition of additional police officers and firefighters.

Travis Christian, Chief of Police, stated that this year, there had been changes to the grant offered through the Federal Government Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. In previous years, this grant had been funded annually. This year, the grant had undergone slight modifications. It provided up to 75% funding for entry-level officers, salaries, and fringe benefits over a three-year period. There was a one-time, one-officer payment of $125,000, which was not per year.

Chief Christian said that the grant also required a 25% local match, which was required by the City, and its purpose was to enhance community policing capacity and public safety overall. The requirements were that they must hire a new officer, additional full-time sworn officers, and these officers must be above the current budgeted officer's level. He said that the City's current full-strength complement was 88 sworn officers. They could not use these grant funds to supplant existing positions or replace retirees. The grant cycle was five years, which included one year of recruitment, three years of actual funding of the officer, and then one year of retention obligation required by the City.

Chief Christian said that the DOJ capped the request at 20% of the actual strength, and at that 20% of the actual strength, they were able to apply for up to 17 officers based on their complemented strength of 88 officers. For example, the NYPD had approximately 33,000 officers, Chicago had approximately 13,000, and Cincinnati had approximately 1,000. However, these agencies had received about 50 officers as opposed to their requests. They would be discussing with the City Manager exactly what their department would be requesting, but if they were to request a full complement of 17 additional officers, they would have a match, and the actuality of it was that they would probably get about three to seven officers based on previous years and other agencies' requests.

Chief Christian noted that it was a possibility that they would not get any based on the cut by DOJ. He said that this grant was competitive nationwide, and there were only 250 grant opportunities that would be awarded. Therefore, staff was asking if the City would be willing to put forth a 25% match if they were able to move forward with this grant opportunity.

Council Member Jones asked how their current authorized strength compared to what they had 10 years ago.

Chief Christian said that looking back about 10 years ago, they had approximately 126 authorized sworn officers, and today, they had 88.

Council Member Jones said that he believed they should move forward with both grants, but he had concerns that these grants may not be sufficient for their needs, particularly what they required to stay ahead of the curve. He asked how fluctuations in crime affected their local police department.

Chief Christian explained that currently, their department received approximately 70,000 to 100,000 calls for service annually. This past year, they reported around 98,000 calls for service. As the number of calls for service continued to rise, it put an immense strain on their department. They faced numerous demands, including traffic enforcement, investigations, and other tasks that required significant manpower. Right now, they were stretched very thin. With the anticipated growth of their community and the expected influx of new residents and visitors, it was clear that they would need to work very hard to regain the level of service they had 10 years ago.

Council Member Jones stated that he believed it was essential to provide not only an adequate number of officers, but more than what was required, so that their streets were protected. He added that they could receive more local revenues from drivers speeding through their locality if they had enough officers to patrol their major travel corridors.

Chief Christian confirmed that they had observed an increase in traffic flow in the City, particularly in the major corridors, mostly due to rerouted traffic from interstate construction. A significant portion of this traffic passed through the City via Adams Street, entering from Colonial Heights and being redirected onto the interstate. He noted that one crucial aspect was that the police officers were required to enforce traffic, but due to the high demands on their calls for service, they were unable to effectively utilize stationary or mobile radar equipment. Instead, they conducted traffic enforcement between calls, albeit briefly. He believed that a dedicated team needed to be engaged to address this issue.

Council Member Jones expressed concern that a much greater investment was necessary for their police department to do their work effectively and keep their community safe. He noted that the SAFER and COPS grants were not guaranteed, and they must consider how to maintain and improve their emergency services regardless of the outcome of the grant applications. He recalled that Petersburg once did have adequate staffing to handle multiple emergencies simultaneously, and he would like to know what was necessary to be proactive from their current position.

City Manager Altman stated that when they first discussed the grant program, they were under the impression that it would be for three years, and 100% of salary would be covered, which would have allowed them to make those requests on both the Police and Fire Departments, get people in, and then utilize the permanent casino revenues during that timeframe to plan for and fall back on to handle the increased costs. However, due to the changes in the program, they would not have that full advantage, so they would have to take it on a bit earlier.

City Manager Altman explained that what he recommended was to apply for the grant, and he believed they could afford the five-year match. They would review upcoming budgets to see if they could reapply, and also look towards the casino revenues starting next year to add additional officers. Currently, they did not have the capacity, but moving forward, they would. They needed to be financially secure and do it in a sound manner. They were committed to building both departments up to strength, but they had been dealt a curveball with the new administration's changes to the program.

City Manager Altman stated that they were confident in their previous plan, but the rules changed, and now it was essentially a one-year program. If they took the 25% match and divided it by three, their salaries were more than the match, so they would be investing their own dollars into this more than the 25% match. Staff wanted to be transparent about this before moving forward. He noted that on the Fire side, their program was slightly different, with three years of $125,000 each year, making it easier for them than for Chief Christian's side. Staff just wanted to ensure Council was aware of the changes and whether they were comfortable with staff moving forward.

Council Member Jones stated that he would like to know staff's confidence level regarding how prepared they were for the anticipated changes coming to the City this fall. He asked if they were at least prepared for an increase in traffic, and if not, what they needed to do to be responsive.

City Manager Altman replied that he believed they needed to bolster their personnel in both their Police and Fire Departments. Ultimately, staff recognized that they would need another station on the City's southern end. He said that he thought both chiefs would agree that they would be able to handle whatever challenges arose, as they had no choice but to do so. They would begin by reviewing the possibility of adding positions, and as revenue increased, they would have the opportunity to revisit the Council and request funding for additional police or fire personnel in the third or fourth quarters of the fiscal year.

City Manager Altman said that as revenues came in, they could propose budgeting and appropriating funds to support the hiring of new officers before the next Police and Fire training academies. They would be in a position to make adjustments and address additional positions beyond what was currently possible with the grants they had. He asked Council if there was support for staff to move forward with pursuing the SAFER and COPS grants with this updated information.

Mayor Parham confirmed there was consensus that supported staff continuing to pursue the COPS and SAFER grant opportunities.

c. Multi-Year Strategic Plan Finance Update – Davenport & Company, LLC

Mr. Altman stated that their friends at Davenport had requested to move this presentation to June 17. He explained that they had been unexpectedly occupied with another client this evening, and they would be short on time. If it was acceptable to Council, they would table this item for the next meeting, when they would present.

Mr. Altman added that if that was okay with Council, he would like to briefly mention an additional item that staff would be bringing forward. They planned to propose adding the stormwater fee to the real estate tax bill in order to increase collections on their stormwater fee. Staff would be working to bring this proposal to City Council for consideration. If everything went as planned, and the council was supportive, they hoped to have it in place by the time of the first billing, which would be sent out in August for the first quarter, with a due date in September.

Mayor Parham asked City Manager Altman if Council or staff should discuss the item provided by Chief Hoover.

City Manager Altman clarified that it was simply an overview of the SAFER grant. If Council was supportive, staff would move forward with both grant opportunities and report back to Council with the results.

16. BUSINESS OR REPORTS FROM THE CLERK

Tangi Hill, City Clerk, expressed her excitement for completing one year of work with the City.

17. BUSINESS OR REPORTS FROM THE CITY ATTORNEY

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

18. ADJOURNMENT

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

The City Council adjourned at 6:16 p.m.

Adopted: 07/01/2025

APPROVED:

Saml Parham

Mayor

ATTEST:

Tange R. Hill

City Clerk