

The work session meeting of the Petersburg City Council was held on Tuesday, May 6, 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/341897>

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
W. Howard Myers, Councilor – Ward 5
Annette Smith-Lee, Councilor – Ward 6
Arnold Westbrook, Jr., Councilor – Ward 7

Absent:

Present from City Administration:

City Manager John “March” Altman, Jr.
City Attorney Anthony C. Williams

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. PROCLAMATIONS/RECOGNITIONS/PRESENTATION OF CEREMONIAL PROCLAMATION

a. National Police Week Proclamation

Mayor Parham presented the proclamation to proclaim May 11-17, 2025, as National Police Week and May 15, 2025, as Peace Officers’ Memorial Day.

Travis Christian, Chief of Police, accepted the proclamation.

b. The Petersburg Garden Club Proclamation celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Petersburg Garden Club.

Mayor Parham presented the proclamation.

The membership of the Petersburg Garden Club accepted the proclamation.

c. Petersburg Learning Collaborative Healthy Hearts Initiative Proclamation

Mayor Parham presented the proclamation proclaiming Petersburg as a Healthy Hearts City.

Victoria Sanders, Cardiovascular Coordinator for the Virginia Department of Health, along with other executive leadership of the Petersburg Healthy Hearts Initiative Learning Collaborative

accepted the proclamation.

6. PRESENTATIONS

a. Crater Area Coalition Homelessness (CACH) Continuum of Care

Dawn Scott, Homeless Systems Navigator for Flagler with St. Joseph's Villa, and she collaborated with Ms. Shaskia Weathers, Director of CACH, and Ms. Katie Chlan, Senior Director of Flagler. She explained that they would provide an overview of CACH and the services they offered. She stated that Flagler serves as the lead agency for the CACH region, which comprises 10 localities: Colonial Heights, Dinwiddie, Emporia, Hopewell, Petersburg, Prince George, Surrey, Sussex, Wakefield, and Waverly.

Ms. Scott stated that their objective is to prevent, reduce, and eliminate homelessness through coordinated community-wide efforts and services. CACH is comprised of multiple agencies and organizations that provide rapid rehousing, youth and non-youth outreach, prevention and intervention, mental health skill-building, Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) vouchers specifically for veterans, emergency and cold-weather shelters, and domestic and intimate partner violence shelters.

Ms. Scott stated that these agencies work together to create a customized plan for individuals to end homelessness through their own actions. Utilizing the Housing First approach, their goal is to house individuals regardless of their life circumstances. This means that families are offered housing as a fundamental human right.

Shaskia Weathers, Director of the Crater Area Coalition on Homelessness, stated that CACH is one of the 12 local planning groups in the Virginia Balance of State Continuum of Care. CACH covers nine localities, as shared by Ms. Scott, the homeless service system navigator. She explained that the sole mission of CACH is to fulfill the responsibilities of a local planning group, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. This includes establishing and operating a centralized or coordinated assessment system that provides an initial comprehensive assessment of individuals and families for housing services.

Ms. Weathers stated that additional responsibilities include establishment and consistent following of fair, equitable, written standards for screening, evaluating eligibility, and administering assistance for individuals and families at risk of or experiencing homelessness across the geographic area, to designate a homeless management system, known as the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), to coordinate and implement a system to meet the needs of at-risk populations and subpopulations within the area.

Ms. Weathers explained that membership in CACH will be composed of individuals and agencies concerned with the development and coordination of homeless assistance programs. This membership includes, but is not limited to, individuals with lived experience of homelessness, housing developers, property owners, landlords, neighborhood groups, nonprofit organizations, representatives of businesses and financial institutions, representatives of private foundations and funding organizations, social service providers, federal, state, and local government agencies, and school systems.

Katie Chlan, Senior Director of Flagler House, stated that she will present the data, which is also included on the third page of the Council's handout. First, she would explain what these numbers represent and how they are collected. The programs that operate under CACH and this data are mandated by HUD, their primary funder, to follow HUD guidelines. One of those guidelines includes the specific definition of homelessness that they must use.

Ms. Chlan explained that she will review today the numbers that represent individuals who meet this definition, which includes those living on the streets, in a shelter, or in a place not meant for human habitation. She asked that they please note that these numbers do not include individuals who are unstably housed, couch surfing, or living in hotels if they are paying for the hotel. She acknowledged that these numbers are low and do not provide a full picture of homelessness in their community.

Ms. Chlan stated that additionally, these numbers only represent individuals who received services from a HUD-funded provider during the specified time frame. It is essential to recognize that their system and numbers are not comprehensive, as other agencies in the community are doing valuable work, but their data is not mandated to be included in their system. The numbers provided are specific to Petersburg City during the last fiscal year.

Ms. Chlan stated that they were able to exclude data from other sources, so these numbers only reflect services provided within the City limits. She would like to highlight that St. Joseph's Villa, their agency, and Commonwealth Catholic Charities, which provides outreach, are included in these numbers. Furthermore, veteran-specific services are not included in these numbers, as they have their own separate services and data.

Ms. Chlan said that despite these exclusions from other sources of data, last year, they served 330 households, including a total of 555 people. Of those, 215 were children under the age of 18. This year, as of April 25, 2025, they have served 123 households with minor children, 489 people, including 276 adults, 213 children, and 118 households with minor children. She emphasized that these numbers only reflect those who have been able to access services.

Ms. Chlan explained that the chronic homeless data point captures individuals who have been homeless for an extended period, also with a diagnosed disability related to physical health, mental health, substance use, or a combination of these. She said that this data is one way they track chronic homelessness. The other method is through a point-in-time count, mandated by HUD, involves an actual, real-time count of individuals on a specific night, usually the third Wednesday night in January. This year, in Petersburg, the temperature was 19 degrees, with a wind chill of 9 degrees, and they found six individuals living and sleeping outside on that night.

Ms. Chlan noted that although six may seem like a low number, it is essential to consider the extreme weather conditions. Because HUD allows them to conduct a summer point-in-time count, they will pilot that initiative in Petersburg this summer. This will provide them with a number and help them understand what the situation looks like in the summer. They are expecting it to be significantly different from what it looked like in the winter, which will allow them to track trends between data points. They can begin by conducting an actual count, where they go out and about on the streets to gather data.

Ms. Chlan stated that they will be partnering with community organizations, focusing on the faith community and individuals experiencing homelessness, to ensure the most accurate count possible. This will also serve as a lead in ways to get involved. If anyone is interested in volunteering for the point-in-time count, she would request that they email Ms. Weathers, whose email included in the handout. Everyone in attendance is invited to become a member of CACH.

Ms. Chlan said that although their website is currently under design, it will be available soon. She urged all members of Council and the public to advocate on a federal level for housing and homeless services. There are proposed changes that will greatly impact their work, and the numbers they see will likely be different next year. For those interested in following federal-level advocacy, a website is available for them to utilize. She would like to take this opportunity to thank the Council for their partnership. Their office is located just down the street, and they were grateful to be here in Petersburg, working together to address this human rights issue.

Council Member Myers emphasized that all members of Council are dedicated to helping their homeless population find housing in the City. He expressed his appreciation to Ms. Scott, Ms. Weathers, and Ms. Chlan for being part of a sustainable entity in the community and for continuing to do this great work in service to the people of Petersburg.

Council Member Jones noted that there have been a lot of requests from caring people in the community who want to see a homeless shelter in the City. He emphasized that it should not be only Petersburg's responsibility to provide such a facility because their taxpayers are limited in what they can pay for, especially considering homelessness extends beyond the boundaries of the City. He explained that because CACH served nine different localities, he sees that as an opportunity for a regional coordination to provide a community homeless shelter for all of CACH's partner localities to utilize. He stated that he sees a lot of potential through CACH's organization to ensure everyone can find stable housing, which he agrees is a basic human right. He expressed his gratitude to CACH for their dedication to this very important work.

Vice Mayor Hill thanked CACH for their inspiring service to the community. He noted that it is important not to assume anything about anyone's situation, so it is important to provide a spectrum of services to meet community members' housing needs as they see fit for themselves. He acknowledged that Petersburg is eager to partner with CACH, but the other localities, as well as the state government, must be willing to equally share the responsibility for them to be the most effective in providing wrap-around services.

Council Member Smith-Lee thanked CACH for their service. She recalled that last year, she and Mayor Parham's wife had provided assistance to a homeless individual in the City, and she was so grateful to be part of a caring community such as theirs. She acknowledged there are many people in their community who fall victim to circumstances, and it is essential they all understand the importance of helping the needy.

Council Member Jones gave encouragement to Ms. Scott, Ms. Weathers, and Ms. Chlan to prevail in their work, partner with concerned community members, and ask the City of Petersburg to do their part in ending homelessness in the City.

b. Crater PDC Community Identity and Assets: Foundations for Future Branding and Economic Development

Mayor Parham noted that this item was moved to be addressed at another meeting.

c. Planning Commission Compensation Presentation and Discussion

Naomi Siodmok, Planning Director, said the Planning Commission was interested in considering compensation for their time and efforts. She said that many of them had been pursuing additional training and reviewing documentation related to the items that would come before the Council. She said that as a result, they could expect to see short-term rentals, data center language, and other topics on the agenda soon.

Ms. Siodmok had also gathered information with her team about neighboring localities and their compensation practices. For example, she mentioned that Hopewell paid its planning commissioners \$50 every two weeks, although most of them had declined this payment. Colonial Heights did not pay its planning commission, Chesterfield County paid its planning commissioners \$25,000 annually, Dinwiddie County paid \$150 per month after taxes, and Prince George County paid \$200 per meeting, based on attendance.

Ms. Siodmok said the budget for the planning department included funding for potentially paying planning commissioners at a rate of \$75 per meeting, which was based on attendance. This amount

was intended to serve as a cushion in case there was interest in moving forward with compensation. She said that staff was seeking feedback from the Council on whether they were interested in compensating the planning commissioners. She said that she had also shared information about other localities' compensation practices.

Ms. Siodmok said if there was interest in moving forward, they would propose a text amendment to ensure that planning commissioners were eligible for compensation, as per state code. She would also like to introduce the Chair of the Planning Commission, Marshall Ford, who was present and available to answer any questions the Council may have.

Council Member Hill said he did not have a problem with compensation for the Planning Commission.

Council Member Jones expressed concerns about where the funding for compensation would come from. He noted that commissioners took the role knowing it was not compensated. He did not support the request because people should not be taking the position for the money.

Mayor Parham asked if attendance was a problem with the Planning Commission due to work or transportation constraints.

Ms. Siodmok said that to her knowledge, they had generally been successful in achieving a quorum. She said that at the most recent meeting, they struggled to get a quorum, and they were on the verge of calling the meeting.

Mayor Parham asked how long the average Planning Commission meeting was.

Ms. Siodmok said that typically, the Planning Commission's meetings lasted two and a half hours, and they were held once a month. They had also begun to engage with the zoning ordinance updates, which would take place over the next five months, adding an additional meeting.

Mayor Parham said he did not have an issue with compensation if the funds were available in the budget. He asked what the next steps would be.

Mr. Altman said that their goal was to achieve consensus among Council. If the Council agreed, the ordinance would be sent back to the Planning Commission, they would hold a public hearing to amend the code, and then it would come back to the Council for a decision. Assuming it was scheduled for the June Planning Commission meeting, it would be presented to Council in July.

d. Petersburg Area Transit Disadvantaged Business Enterprise “DBE” Program

Queenie Byrd, Transit Program Manager/DBE Liaison, stated she would address the Petersburg Area Transit's updated Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Program (DBE). She explained that the DBE program was designed for small, for-profit businesses that were at least 51% owned and controlled by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals. As a recipient of federal funds, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) required that they update their program every three years. She said that the program had been last updated in 2022.

Ms. Byrd stated that over the past six years, Petersburg Area Transit had not had any major projects, which allowed them to submit a questionnaire explaining the federal funds they received. In the new program, they had set a goal of 5% using race-conscious measures. She said that these measures often included contract goals that required a certain percentage of DBE participation on projects. She noted the projects they had coming up, including the design, and engineering of the

maintenance facility and the actual construction of the maintenance facility, would be cited in the new program.

Ms. Byrd stated that Council had reviewed the program, and staff requested approval to submit it to the Federal Transit Administration and have it posted on the City's website.

Council Member Jones asked for clarification about the DBE program.

Ms. Byrd explained that the DBE program was designed by the FTA to support disadvantaged individuals who own businesses. When they considered projects, they set aside 5% of federal funding for DBE participation. This process did not typically occur in transit, as their standard practice was to award contracts to the lowest bidder. Instead, contractors often subcontracted with DBE businesses, who were then eligible for the 5%. This required additional paperwork, as the subcontractor had to submit hours worked, time sheets, and other documentation to the FTA.

7. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Patty Griffiths, 1152 Oak Ridge Road, said last year, she developed an outdoor music program that was free to the public, running all summer. She said the Declaration of Independence reminded them that they had a right to pursue happiness, and that summer, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., the residents of Petersburg got to pursue happiness.

Ms. Griffiths said that she had the whole town dancing in front of the stage. She said that it showed her that Petersburg wanted to create a safe, central location where residents could gather, share common ground, and have fun with local music. This could include DJs, dancing, and the support of local merchants and restaurateurs.

Ms. Griffiths said that tonight, she wanted to let Council know that the energy was building. A team had formed, and with the help of Ajani Sekou, who ran the arteXchange on Old Street, he had taken over the ironworks for Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays from June to September from 5 to 9 p.m. She said that she was bringing her program, a free live music event, to the Ironworks on Friday nights.

Ms. Griffiths said she had gathered a team of people who wanted to support this initiative. Last year, her musicians played for free, and they were thrilled to return this year. She said that if she offered each musician who played last year \$100, it would have cost \$2,500. She asked how much money had been spent on events that had provided a similar experience, addressed the needs of constituents and bringing fun to the City.

Ms. Griffiths said she could tell them that Petersburg was hungry for this kind of space, and it had received such support that Corey Branch was there tonight, and the Branch brothers were the driving force behind this initiative. She said that Plunky was planning to come to the City over the summer.

Corey Harris, 2316 Anderson Street, said that one year ago, he had spoken to a woman who was friends with Dr. Farley and was from Roanoke, Virginia. He said that Dr. Farley's greatest desire was to focus on African American history in the City. He said that there was so much about their history that they did not know. He said that for example, they celebrated the former president of Liberia. He said that the Jarrett family also went to Liberia and became mayors of cities. Numerous presidents of different countries resided in the City. He said that during the late 1800s, African Americans were quite wealthy.

Mr. Harris said that the problem he had was that the City did not prioritize technology. He said that this was the only way they could build generational wealth in this City. He said that the poverty rate had been over 20% for decades, with jobs constantly coming and going, yet the poverty rate remained stagnant. He said that the issue was that they did not embrace technology. He said that his nonprofit

had helped approximately 500 young people start their own businesses online, and they saw remarkable results. He said that one-third of those young people are now making over \$50,000 a year. It took him roughly six months to achieve this.

Mr. Harris said that he was here to announce that he would no longer be a resident of the City of Petersburg. He said that the reason for this decision was the excessive chaos and negativity in the City. He had witnessed the criticism of a young man and his family, and he saw how they were often judgmental without understanding the struggles they faced. He said that there were numerous issues in this City that required attention.

Mr. Harris said that before he concluded, he would like to express two things. He said that he intended to assist someone in the City, Bobby Beverly. He wanted to thank Council Member Cuthbert, who may not be aware that over the past couple of years, he had faced significant challenges, particularly following the loss of his father. He said that his mother had struggled to cope with the situation for years. However, when his father passed away, Council Member Cuthbert had sent him a card, which was a surprise to him. He said that Council Member Cuthbert also took a chance on her talents, and he appreciated that. However, he could no longer remain in a city that ignored the suffering of its residents, which had been ongoing for decades. They could not continue to ignore the fact that corporate America was not prioritizing them.

Barb Rudolph Barb Rudolph, 1675 Mount Vernon Street, said she was there to discuss the budget. She said that she hoped that, despite the lack of an agenda item, they might learn more about the budget process tonight. It was the beginning of May, and the Council had to pass a budget by the end of June. With only a few more meetings left, she had yet to hear any information about community meetings or other relevant discussions. She believed those on Council had individual meetings with the City Manager and finance staff, which was a good start. However, this did not provide the citizens with insight into their priorities and interests.

Ms. Rudolph said that as of today, May 6, they did not have a clear understanding of the Council's overarching vision for the budget, particularly when considering the upcoming fiscal year and the potential revenue from the casino deal. The City was expected to receive money from the casino deal starting July 1, including incentive payments and possibly revenue if the casino opened in October or November. She wanted to suggest the establishment of a citizen commission to oversee the allocation of casino funds, which Danville had done.

Ms. Rudolph agreed with Council Member Jones' comments regarding compensation for the Planning Commission. She said that she believed the desire for public service existed in many of their citizens and could be found. She said that another consideration was the precedent of this set. They had numerous boards and commissions in the City, and it was only fair that they be compensated, just as the Planning Commission would be.

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

a. Minutes of Previous Meetings

- April 15, 2025, City Council Closed Session
- April 15, 2025, City Council Meeting
- April 17, 2025, City Council Special Closed Session Meeting
- April 23, 2025, City Council Special Joint Meeting with the Petersburg City Schools Board

- b. FY25 PCPS Budget Amendment Complete Ordinance
- c. First Read & Schedule a Public Hearing for Consideration of an Amendment to the FY25 Grants Fund
- d. First Read & Schedule a Public Hearing for Consideration of a Request to Use the Budget Stabilization Fund
- e. First Read & Schedule a Public Hearing for Consideration of Approval of the Proposed FY26 Petersburg City Schools Budget
- f. First Read & Schedule A Public Hearing for Consideration of the FY26 Operating Budget
- g. First Read & Schedule a Public Hearing for Consideration of an Ordinance Authorizing the City Manager to Execute the Purchase Option Agreement Between the City of Petersburg and SUBSTRATE LLC for the Development of 130 N. Union Street and 122-124 West Tabb Street Located in Petersburg, VA
- h. First Read & Schedule a Public Hearing for Consideration of an Ordinance Adopting the FY26 Tax Rate

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

Council Member Cuthbert asked for staff to provide clarification on Item 8G via the inclusion of a map, plat, or other visual of the property footprint when it was presented at the next meeting.

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

Council Member Westbrook made a motion to amend the consent agenda with the addition of Item I, authorizing appropriation of \$300,000 towards the Stadium Enhancement Committee. Council Member Smith-Lee seconded the motion.

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

Council Member Myers made a motion to adopt the consent agenda as amended. Council Member Westbrook seconded the motion.

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

9. SPECIAL REPORTS

There was no report.

10. MONTHLY REPORTS

There was no report.

11. FINANCE AND BUDGET REPORT

Garry Cozier, Budget Manager, reported that the first community meeting for the budget was scheduled for Thursday at 5:00 p.m., and it would be held virtually on Zoom. He said that the Zoom link would be posted on the City website. He said that the following Thursday, May 15, at 4:00 p.m., they would hold an in-person budget meeting in the Transit Conference Room. He said that there would also be an official public hearing related to the budget on May 20. He said that these updates were available on the City website.

12. CAPITAL PROJECTS UPDATE

Brian Copple, City Engineer, stated that he would provide a brief update on the public works report, which will be expanded upon in subsequent meetings. He reported that one of the key initiatives they were working on was the tank raising for the two million gallon tank, which was scheduled for next month and would be well publicized, including a potential appearance by the governor. He said that he would also like to highlight the public utilities and wastewater projects, which had received approximately \$49 million in grant funding through the public works department.

Mr. Copple said that this amount was in addition to other capital projects, such as the Oak Hill Bridge kickoff meeting, which was set to begin next week. He said that the courthouse project was nearing the final schematic design, and they had also scheduled a kickoff meeting for the animal shelter, with a planned groundbreaking ceremony at a later date. These updates would be added to the report to inform the Council of the progress and administration of the funding and grants they received.

Mayor Parham asked about the status of the Farmer Street police station project.

Mr. Copple said that the Farmer Street Police Station project was nearing completion. He said that they were currently finalizing the space needs and programming requirements, and the next step was for the contractor to provide them with a final estimate of the cost. He said that they expected to receive this estimate this week, which would allow them to move forward with entering into a contract.

Council Member Jones said he did not see the mention of traffic signals on Old Wagner Road at the new section of Berkley Manor where flooding was occurring.

Mr. Altman said that the section was located down from the new entrance which ran along Route 895. He said that he believed that was correct. They were aware that the subdivision had a lighting request in that section. He said that if he recalled correctly, the section that was developed did not have a Council requirement for lighting, but future sections were required to provide lighting within the neighborhood. He said that as a result, lighting was installed in the area that was cleared. He said that there was an issue with Dominion Power restoring the light on Old Wagner Road when approaching the railroad tracks.

Council Member Jones said that they were aware that one of the existing lights was not yet restored to service. He said that the pole was removed, and the light was not replaced. He said that this issue had been a concern for constituents since he had been on Council. He said that the lighting in the Berkley Manor division was also in need of attention. He said that with increased traffic in the City, this dark road was a prime target for burglaries.

Council Member Jones said that without adequate lighting, it was easy for perpetrators to enter and exit without being seen. He said that he appreciated their efforts to address the drainage issue. However, he would like to bring up the retention pond located nearby. He said that this was a relatively new feature, constructed when the subdivision was built, and he had never seen the road flood until now.

13. UTILITIES

There was no report.

14. STREETS

There was no report.

15. FACILITIES

There was no report.

16. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

There was no report.

17. CITY MANAGER'S AGENDA

March Altman, City Manager, stated that he would like to extend an apology to the community. He said that unfortunately, they experienced an error in their customer care and collections process, resulting in the incorrect use of an updated file when sending out real estate bills. Approximately 500 bills were affected, and they would be reissuing those bills to the community. He said that if a resident received a bill for a property they no longer owned, they did not need to pay it. If there was a change of address, they would work to correct those issues. He said that they would issue a press release and post the information on their website, and if a resident has any questions, please contact the Customer Care Division. They would reissue the bills within the next week or two. He wanted to assure the community that they took full responsibility for the mistake and were working to rectify the issue from a process and procedure perspective, with the goal of preventing similar errors in the future.

18. BUSINESS OR REPORTS FROM THE CLERK

Tangi Hill, City Clerk, was absent from the meeting.

19. BUSINESS OR REPORTS FROM THE CITY ATTORNEY

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

20. 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 6:57 p.m.

Adopted: May 20, 2025

APPROVED:



Mayor

ATTEST:



City Clerk

