The regular meeting of the Petersburg City Council was held on Tuesday, February 18, 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/335117

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 Council 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. PROCLAMATIONS/RECOGNITIONS/PRESENTATION OF CEREMONIAL PROCLAMATIONS

Proclamation Honoring Chief T. C. Hairston

Mayor Parham presented the Proclamation honoring Chief T. C. Hairston.

Proclamation Honoring Harry L. Batts

Mayor Parham presented the Proclamation honoring Harry L. Batts.

FBI LEEDA Trilogy Award Presented to the Petersburg Police Department

Michael Robinson said that he was honored to present the FBI LEEDA Trilogy Award to the distinguished guests this evening. He said that this prestigious award was not given lightly, but rather to law enforcement agencies across the country that had demonstrated a commitment to leadership excellence. He said that these agencies had completed the FBI's Trilogy Courses, which aimed to positively impact the culture of law enforcement nationwide.

Mr. Robinson said that receiving the FBI Leader Trilogy Award signified that all command staff members, including the chief, had taken the Trilogy Courses: the Supervisory Leadership Command course, the Command Leadership Institute course, and the Executive Leadership Institute course. He said that the Petersburg Police Department was the second to do so this year, out of a total of eight agencies to have received the award since its inception in the state.

Mr. Robinson said that without further ado, he would like to present the FBI LEEDA Agency Trilogy Award to Chief Travis Christian and his leadership team. He said that this award was truly a testament to the exceptional work of the entire Petersburg Police Department, and he was pleased to congratulate them on this achievement.

Council Member Jones expressed his gratitude for the diligence and dedication of the Petersburg Police Department in keeping Petersburg residents safe.

6. SPECIAL REPORTS:

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

a. Minutes of Previous Meetings:
February 4, 2025, Closed Session Minutes
January 21, 2025, City Council Minutes
January 7, 2025, City Council Work Session Minutes
September 17, 2024, City Council Minutes
July 16, 2024, City Council Minutes

Council Member Jones made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Council Member Westbrook seconded the motion.

There was no discussion on the motion. The motion was approved on a roll call vote.

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

8. OFFICIAL PUBLIC HEARINGS

Public Hearing and Consideration of an Ordinance Revoking a Special Use Permit Granted to Michael and Nina Stanley for a Vehicle Rental Business, Auto Body, and Vehicle Repair Shop at 1036 West Washington Street, Parcel ID 024270001 in the B-2, General Commercial District for Failure to Comply with Conditions of Approval

Naomi Siodmok, Director of Planning, presented an aerial view of the subject property that showed some of the previous conditions of this property, noting that there was a significant number of vehicles stored on the property, as well as outside storage of materials.

Ms. Siodmok said that in 2012, City Council approved a special use permit for this property to operate a vehicle rental and auto body and vehicle repair shop at 1036 West Washington Street, subject to nine conditions. Since July, Zoning staff have been working closely with the property through communication and letters of violation to ensure compliance with the conditions of this SUP.

Ms. Siodmok explained that they had not seen significant compliance with those letters until recently; however, the owners had made a lot of progress. She said the Planning Commission had scheduled a hearing for this property on December 5, but due to time constraints, it was postponed, which was beneficial as it allowed the property owner to continue making progress on the site. She said that as of January 29, 2025, all staff's noted violations had been addressed.

Ms. Siodmok said that conditions of approval for this SUP included that the permit was not transferable, not allowing vehicles to protrude onto West Washington Street, submitting site plans and building permits, not storing inoperable vehicles on the site, following hours of operation regulations, and meeting local, state, and federal law requirements, as well as no outside storage.

Ms. Siodmok said that the conditions that were violated included storing inoperable vehicles on the site for longer than three days at a time and storing car parts, including tires, outdoors. The previous condition of the site showed outdoor storage and vehicle storage. She said that prior to the Planning Commission’s review, the site was in a state of progress, but they were not yet compliant. She noted that they were still waiting for the removal of a box truck and other debris.

Ms. Siodmok said that the current state of the site was that it had been thoroughly cleaned up, and the property's conditions had now been met, as outlined in the recommendations. She stated that the Planning Commission had recommended revoking the permit because, upon review, the violations had not been fully addressed, despite staff's efforts since July to address them. Ms. Siodmok said that staff also recommended revoking the permit, as the process aimed to determine how to bring the property up to code and meet the special use permit requirements.

Ms. Siodmok clarified that the property had been thoroughly cleaned up, and the site's conditions had been met. However, this was a past goal for staff and the Planning Commission, and it was the primary objective of this process. She said that if Council wished to approve the revocation of the special use permit, deny it, or amend it, they could do so. If they chose to deny it, they should state the reason why, and if they chose to amend the permit, they should outline those amendments.

Mayor Parham opened the public hearing.

Jeff Fleming, 1819 Chuckatuck Avenue, said that he believed in giving people second chances, provided they met their obligations. He said that the delay from July to February in addressing this issue had been excessive. He said that he thought it was reasonable to approve it, but he also recommended that any future violations result in the immediate revocation of the special use permit.

Mayor Parham closed the public hearing, and the matter rested with Council.

Council Member Jones asked how much time on average was given to properties such as this to clean things up.

Ms. Siodmok said that their standard process typically involved initial contact with the parties involved, followed by a letter of violation if the conversation was unsuccessful. She said that this letter gave them 30 days to address the violation. She said that if they agreed to work with them, they accommodated their needs. She said that the typical timeline was 30 days, plus a subsequent letter stating that they had an additional 10 days to resolve the matter, after which they would take them to court. She said that in this instance, they opted for a different approach, pursuing an SUP rescission instead.

Council Member Jones said that Ms. Siodmok had mentioned an additional 30 days and an additional 10 days and asked if staff worked with the intention of removing the permit and at what point they decided to approach Council about revoking it. He asked if there was clear communication with the owners about the permit revocation, as they had cleaned up under the assumption they could keep it.

Ms. Siodmok confirmed that the property owners were notified of the SUP rescission. She said that a letter was sent to them, and the adjacent property owners are notified, so the process is similar to an SUP application. She said that initially, they did not anticipate rescinding it. She said that at the beginning of the process, they treat it as any other violation, so if they can work with the property owners to remove the abandoned vehicle and debris from the property, they can resolve the issue.

Ms. Siodmok said they were unable to address the problem through normal channels, and they have a separate process in place for addressing violations of the established conditions, which allows them to come before Council and revoke the special use permit if necessary. She confirmed that property owners were notified of the special use permit rescission. She said a letter was sent to them, and adjacent property owners were notified, following a procedure similar to the special use permit application. She said they initially did not anticipate rescinding the permit. She said they treat it like any other violation, working to remove abandoned vehicles and debris.

Council Member Jones asked why they had not taken legal action against the property owner, as he believes that when it came to their zoning and code, they should have been actively litigating these issues as often as possible, before they became a problem. He said that he was puzzled as to why they had not taken them to court sooner, particularly after the 30-day and 10-day deadlines had passed.

Ms. Siodmok said staff was still in the process of determining the most effective court process for everyone involved, and addressing criminal issues took precedence over matters such as zoning violations. She said that staff may not be able to complete summons and other documents in a timely manner, but this was one area where the City had full control and could address it in a timely fashion.

Council Member Myers asked when they had initiated the request for the removal of these vehicles.

Ms. Siodmok responded that they began working with the property owners in July.

Council Member Myers said that Mr. Stanley had contacted him and mentioned that some vehicles he was unable to move because they lacked the necessary parts or specific parts required to remove the bus. He said that at this point, the situation had changed, as the vehicles had been cleaned up. He said that staff was now asking whether they were being asked to decide whether to allow the petitioner to maintain their permit or to deny it, given that the vehicles had been cleaned up.

Ms. Siodmok confirmed that was correct.

Council Member Myers said that the serious question was what the intended use was if they approved moving forward and whether the situation would recur. He said that perhaps the petitioner should speak with the Council if they were present.

Ms. Siodmok said that the subject property owner was not present but had been informed.

Council Member Myers said that he would like Ms. Siodmok's opinion on what the future of this property would entail.

Ms. Siodmok said that staff took the necessary steps to clean it up and address the conditions of the SUP. She said that their primary concern was ensuring the property was in a suitable state for continued operation of the vehicle rental business and auto body shop, which this process addressed.

Anthony Williams, City Attorney, clarified that if Council decided to follow Ms. Siodmok's recommendation, they would need to deny the revocation, and if Council wished to preserve the applicant's ability to continue using the property, then they should approve it.

Council Member Smith-Lee said that she often drove by the location, and it initially looked very well-maintained but over time had deteriorated significantly and appeared to be in disrepair. She said that if they intended to keep it looking presentable, she could support the SUP. She said that they were striving to move in a different direction, particularly on that section of Washington Street, as they had experienced significant issues with the area's appearance.

Council Member Cuthbert said that they had issues with zoning compliance all over the City. He expressed concern that the Zoning Department needed to be more proactive in addressing all longstanding violations.

Vice Mayor Hill made a motion that Council deny revoking the special use permit, and in the event that the applicant violate the conditions again, staff would bring the special use permit back before Council for revocation. Council Member Myers seconded the motion.

There was no discussion on the motion. The motion was approved on a roll call vote.

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

Public Hearing and Consideration of an Ordinance to Approve a Request by Virginia Electric & Power Co. DBA Dominion Energy to Rezone with Proffers Property at 3345, 3339, and 3311 West Washington Street, Parcel IDs 027010001, 027010003, and 027010004, from the R-2 Single- Family Residence and B-2 General Commercial Districts to the M-1 Light Industrial District

Naomi Siodmok, Director of Planning, said that this request was to rezone these properties to Light Industrial to expand the existing Dominion Energy storage and maintenance facilities. She said that the properties listed were 3311, 3345, and 3339 West Washington Street, currently zoned B-2 and R-2, respectively. She said that they had 11 proffers for consideration. She said that the properties were not being utilized and that the proposed use was for expanding the Dominion Power Facility to include a gravel storage yard with security fencing. She noted that the entrances along West Washington Street would be reduced to one, with wetlands sectioned off from the development.

Ms. Siodmok presented the proposed site plan, stating that they had incorporated landscaping, decorative security fencing, and a potential location for public art. She emphasized that the pedestrian right-of-way would feature an eight-foot-wide sidewalk, landscaping, and pedestrian lighting. She said that the 30-foot buffer along West Washington Street would include a sidewalk, landscaping, signage, and lighting. She detailed the landscaping plan, indicating the placement of deciduous trees, evergreen trees, and shrubs. She mentioned that the ornamental security fence would be eight feet tall, and only one entrance would remain, reducing access concerns. She added that the property owner would dedicate a 30-foot by 40-foot easement for public art. She clarified that the site would be limited to B-2 commercial uses or general wholesale storage and distribution uses, not rezoning to M-1 for all uses.

Ms. Siodmok stated that signage would conform to the zoning ordinance and that stormwater management and maintenance were the applicant's responsibility. She highlighted that the area was recognized as a corridor commercial zone and a gateway corridor area on the future land use map (FLUM), emphasizing pedestrian experience and welcoming people into the City.

Ms. Siodmok noted the staff's initial concerns about the project's incompatibility with the comprehensive plan but said they worked with the applicant to incorporate pedestrian amenities. She reiterated that the proffers submitted were part of the applicant's guarantee for a walkability and gateway component. She concluded by stating the Planning Commission's recommendation for approval with a 6-1 vote, while staff recommended denial due to non-compliance with the comprehensive plan.

Mayor Parham opened the public hearing.

Marlo Green, 301 Rolfe Street, said that she supported Ms. Siodmok. She said that if it were a corridor that did not align with their comprehensive plan, it would not be wise to invest in it. She said that the area should be prioritized for walkability, and given the current market conditions, selling it off to Dominion as an industrial site may not be the most beneficial move from a development standpoint.

Jeff Fleming, 1819 Chuckatuck Avenue, said that he was in favor of supporting Ms. Siodmok's recommendation for this site, as a company was coming to their City to install green space, which would not only look nice but also serve as a corridor buffer. He said that their City corridors currently lacked aesthetic appeal, and this initiative would address that issue.

Leonard Davis (address not recorded) said that he wanted to clarify the impact of this project on the opposite side of the street, specifically 340 West Washington Street and 3310 West Washington Street. He said that while he could appreciate the aesthetic appeal of this project, he was more concerned with its potential impact on their business operations on the opposite side of the street.

Derek Johnson with Timmons Group, representing the applicant, said that he would like to start by expressing his gratitude to the Planning Department for their collaboration on this case and to the Planning Commission for their consideration. He said that the applicant owned this property, which consisted of four parcels, with the largest piece already zoned M-1. He said that they were seeking to rezone the remaining three parcels to M-1 to facilitate the expansion of the yard.

Mr. Johnson said that although the comprehensive plan designated this area as a gateway to the City and a corridor district for commercial use, the applicant intended to maintain a non-commercial use for this property. He said that working closely with the Planning Department, they had developed a concept for the streetscape, which spanned a significant distance across Washington Street. He said that a 30-foot buffer off the front right-of-way had been dedicated, and they planned to implement extensive landscaping with approximately 70 different plantings. He said that they would replace the existing gooseneck lights with pedestrian lighting and upgrade the sidewalk width from four feet to eight feet. He noted that they would reduce the number of entrances from five to one. He said the applicant had agreed to dedicate a 30-by-40-foot area within the 30-foot buffer for public art installations or displays.

Mr. Johnson believed that they had made a concerted effort with the applicant and the Planning Department to create a suitable solution for this site, and as the first development on this block, he was pleased with the progress made in shaping the future of Washington Street.

Mayor Parham closed the public hearing and the matter rested with Council.

Council Member Jones expressed that the buffers and landscaping commitment meant little for the area's development. He noted the limited benefits of sidewalks due to few destinations. Jones also voiced concerns about the proposal's single ingress/egress, potential traffic impact from loading/unloading rocks, and questioned the commercial tax revenue. He urged the applicant to prioritize the Washington Street corridor's aesthetics if no other options were available.

Council Member Westbrook asked if Dominion Power, the actual applicant, could provide any comments or speak on their behalf. He said that he had similar questions to Council Member Jones. He said that there was a drastic difference when crossing the boundary from Dinwiddie. He said that he was wondering why they were not receiving a request to mirror that development.

Timothy McGarvey of Dominion Power said that the primary issue was the land availability, which had been largely within the County limits rather than the City limits.

Council Member Westbrook asked if the applicant truly understood what the Council meant regarding the beautification of the Gateway. He said that he was concerned about how the applicant would make Petersburg a place to come to, rather than just a gravel storage area. He said that he liked the art idea, but he wanted to know if they were committed to making this a true beautification project, rather than just a gravel storage area.

Mr. McGarvey said that they were committed to that. He said that he did not think anyone would actually see the gravel, as there was a 30-foot landscaping barrier. He said that they were doing as much as they could. He said that if any member of the City Council had a recommendation to do more, they were open to continuing to work with them on that.

Council Member Cuthbert said that Dinwiddie received the main development, while Petersburg was left with a secondary project, and it is difficult to forgive this situation. He said that when he visited the area, he noticed a sign that read "Leaving Petersburg, Entering Dinwiddie." He said that on the Petersburg side, a gravel lot would be constructed, whereas on the Dinwiddie side, a multi-million dollar complex was built. He said that the tax revenue generated by the project is now concentrated in Dinwiddie, while Petersburg was left with only the tax revenue from a gravel lot.

Vice Mayor Hill made a motion to approve the petition by Virginia Electric Power with the stated proffers and beautification plan for the gateway entrance to the City of Petersburg. Council Member Jones seconded the motion.

There was no discussion on the motion. The motion was approved on a roll call vote.

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

<u>Public Hearing and Consideration of an Ordinance to Approve a Request by Fortune Founders LLC for a Special Use Permit with Conditions for Multiple-Family Dwellings as Authorized and Controlled by the R-5 Multiple Dwelling District Standards at 25 South Crater Road, Parcel ID 012260023, in the B-2, General Commercial District</u>

Naomi Siodmok, Director of Planning, stated that the subject property was located near East Washington Street just off of South Crater Road. To provide some background on the request, this is the former Oyo Hotel, and the applicant is seeking to convert it into a multifamily dwelling development with up to 75 units. Currently, the property is vacant and in need of repair. According to the application, the development must include a management office, laundry and vending facilities, electric vehicle charging, and 10% to 20% of the units would be furnished, as stated in the application.

Ms. Siodmok said that the public hearing was held on December 5, 2024, but action was deferred to request the applicant's presence. She stated that the typical floor plan consists of studio apartments and that the area is identified as community mixed-use on the future land use map, aligning with their vision for interconnected commerce centers.

Ms. Siodmok explained that the principal land uses include adaptive reuse, multifamily housing, offices, personal services, small-scale offices, and retail. She mentioned that the goal is to offer a diverse housing stock, including missing middle housing. She said the future land use map ensures developments have amenities, green space, and pedestrian improvements.

Ms. Siodmok said that staff also included some adjoining zoning information, which shows the commercial zoning district and the R3 residential district nearby, both of which are adjacent to the property. The proposed conditions for this application include ensuring on-call management and maintenance staff, on-site security surveillance and security staff at all hours, secure laundry facilities, and at least 20% of the apartments being furnished. The existing parking area must be milled, repaved, and re-striped prior to the issuance of a certificate of occupancy, and at least one parking space must be provided, with the option to request a waiver from the Board of Zoning Appeals.

She said the existing chain link fence must be replaced with an ornamental option, and additional green space must be integrated. She stated that the projects must include at least two amenities from a list, such as public art or a fitness center, and use high-quality materials with Zoning Administrator approval.

She emphasized that improvements to street frontage are required, using native species and pedestrian-scale lighting. Ms. Siodmok warned that non-compliance could result in permit revocation by the City Council or its agent. She clarified that these site-specific conditions are backed by the comprehensive plan and need to be completed before occupancy.

Ms. Siodmok noted the Planning Commission's 4-2 vote (one abstention) recommending approval with conditions. She said staff also recommended approval. She provided a sample motion and stated that the applicant was available for questions.

Mayor Parham opened the public hearing.

Jeff Fleming, 1819 Chuckatuck Avenue, said that as he stated earlier, he believed in second chances, and many had been given for this location. He said that his remarks may upset some people, but he could only speak honestly about his community. He said that 25 South Crater Road had a very bad past. He said that he was concerned about the notion that these would be apartments; the floor plan he saw lacked a kitchen, which was a fundamental requirement for an apartment.

Mr. Fleming said that without a kitchen, residents would be forced to use hot plates and other makeshift cooking methods, posing a fire hazard. Given the change in use from a hotel to apartments, he believed it was essential to bring the property up to current codes, including fire sprinklers, alarms, and electrical systems, but he could not find any indication that this would be done. He was also puzzled by the proposal for green space, as parking requirements would take up the land outside the building.

Mr. Fleming said that he had concerns about on-call management, as it did not seem to work effectively in general. He said that if this project were approved, he believed it should be held to a high standard, meeting all applicable codes and ordinances; if it did not meet these standards, the special use permit should be revoked immediately to avoid the need for further litigation. He said that they needed to clean up the area, which affected not just this site but the surrounding community.

Gary Talley, 2323 Fort Rice Street, said that he agreed with everything Mr. Fleming said. He said they needed affordable housing to come into the City. He said that with the casino coming in, they needed smaller, temporary rental options; however, this was not the place for that. He said that there were not 75 units there now, and when they were there, one view would be looking at the Star Motel and the other side would see a Valero gas station. He said that this was not a good place for apartments.

Barbara Rudolph, 1675 Mount Vernon Street, said that she was in agreement with the previous speakers and had a hard time visualizing this concept and understanding how it would work. She said that over-development of rental space was an issue in the City, and she was concerned about the lack of recreational spaces for these studio apartments. She said that this development would not be attractive to families, and it did not improve over the failed hotel previously on the site.

Kara Stevens, 226 Rolfe Street, said that she agreed with everyone else, particularly the first speaker, and there was much more potential in that area than what they were currently trying to achieve. She said that what the applicant was trying to do would not necessarily fully achieve it but changing it would certainly help. She said that she felt it was more about pursuing financial gain than genuinely improving the area. Ms. Stevens said that if they were to reevaluate their vision and mission, perhaps they could refocus on their purpose. She said that if the goal was long-term, it should be approached in a long-term manner. She said that if the primary motivation were financial, then it was unlikely to be successful.

Cheryl Brown, 1860 Westover Avenue, said that she thought the idea was excellent, but she believed it required some creativity and strategy, particularly in small spaces within big Cities. She said that one could incorporate green space on rooftops if there were space limitations. She said that she believed the 75-unit proposal was chasing too much money; the space was too small for that number.

Ms. Brown said that to be up to code, she thought the unit count should be reduced in half, allowing for adequate kitchen space in each apartment and providing consideration for converting the building into condominiums. She said that this would enable residents to purchase units and build equity. She said that she was unsure if it was doable and was not familiar with the building, but she thought it was possible to utilize the space with some creativity and contingency planning.

Mayor Parham closed the public hearing.

Vice Mayor Hill made a motion to deny the request by Fortune Founders LLC for a Special Use Permit. Council Member Westbrook seconded the motion.

Roy Ahluwalia, applicant representing Fortune Founders LLC, said that he would like to share their vision so that everyone can see it. As a resident of Petersburg, he said that they had successfully implemented this model in the City of Chesapeake, where they had developed 30 units and 50 units in Newport News. He said that they had done it the same way in both Cities. He said that this approach had been particularly beneficial for fixed-income individuals, and he would like to highlight the results in Petersburg. Currently, there was not a single unit available for rent to fixed-income residents on Zillow.

He said they were targeting long-term residents who could afford a single bill for all utilities, making it attractive to those with fixed incomes. He said that in Newport News, their City Studios project, with 50 units, had been fully occupied for two years and served low-income individuals who could afford $1,000 per month. He said he planned to utilize vacant spaces for greenery and noted that the current site was a motel with a problematic crime history. By improving the site with on-site personnel, cameras, and lighting, he aimed to create a safe environment, with all units having kitchenettes. He said the project, costing about $3 million, could have been pursued in Newport News but was chosen for Petersburg due to a lack of available properties, with the subject property acquired through auction.

Council Member Jones said that while he understood that the estimated cost was $3 million, and the applicant had mentioned considering relocating it to Newport News, he wanted to emphasize that the Council were not easily swayed by that financial information or by this type of development. He said that they were not desperate for funding, and they were not willing to compromise their values simply because someone was offering a large sum of money.

Council Member Jones said that the applicant described the target population as low-income, financially constrained, and economically disadvantaged; however, the applicant also emphasized that the development was not for families. He said that he did not understand who they thought would be moving into this building. He said that the applicant also mentioned that residents would not have to pay for utilities, but their local Housing Authority already performed that function.

Council Member Jones said that although this new building would not be a hotel, there were still strong memories associated with it due to all the people who died there. He pointed out that this facility had been the site of multiple demolitions and repair requests over the past 15 years, but it was still standing. Unless the applicant was willing to tear it down and build a new structure with the $3 million, he could not support the idea of keeping this facility due to its past and the proposed target demographic.

Council Member Jones said that Ms. Siodmok mentioned site-specific concerns, and he agreed with Mr. Fleming. He said that the lack of a kitchen, sprinkler system, and fire alarm was a significant concern. He said that to truly transform this facility into an apartment, the applicant would need to provide these essential amenities, and he could not see that happening with the current proposal.

Council Member Jones said that he strongly disagreed with the location chosen, as Mr. Talley mentioned, as it was not suitable. He said that it was situated on the border of residential and commercial zones. In his opinion, the entire block needed to be demolished to move forward. He said that unless the applicant was willing to use the $3 million allocated for this project to knock the building down, it appeared that Chesapeake and Tidewater would be receiving $3 million for that project.

Mayor Parham called the vote on the motion to deny the SUP request for 25 South Crater Road.

The motion was approved on a roll call vote.

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

<u>A Public Hearing for Consideration of an Appropriation Ordinance to Amend the FY25 Streets Fund Budget, Increasing the Urban Highway Maintenance Funding for Street Operations</u>

Garry Cozier, Budget Manager, said that this item was to amend the City of Petersburg's Streets Fund budget. He said that the Streets Fund was one of the funds in the City's budget, aside from the General Operating Fund. He said that they typically adopted the amount they were funded for the previous fiscal year by the Commonwealth Transportation Board, as the Board's funding decisions were made in June, which was after the City's budget had been adopted. He said that therefore, this amendment would increase the budget to the funded level. He said that this increase was $64,460, bringing the total to $8,032,786.

Mayor Parham opened the public hearing.

Jeff Fleming, 1819 Chuckatuck Avenue, said that he was supportive of helping departments. He said that he had a question regarding the $64,460 allocation. He asked if staff could provide information on how this funding would be used for street paving or pothole repair. He said that the streets were in dire need of attention, and a comprehensive pothole repair effort was long overdue. He said that he was particularly concerned about the recent paving job on Crater Road, particularly the section where a pipeline was installed. He said that whoever was responsible for that project should re-examine their work. He said that the current result was subpar, and he would like to know how much of the $64,460 would be dedicated to paving.

John Altman, City Manager, said that $64,000 would not cover a significant amount of paving, but it would help alleviate potholes. He said that to clarify, the work currently being done on Crater was not the final pavement, but rather a patch that would be completed at the end of the project. He said that currently, the asphalt plants were closed due to the temperature.

Mayor Parham closed the public hearing, and the matter rested with Council.

Vice Mayor Hill made a motion to approve the Ordinance to amend the FY25 Streets Fund budget, increasing the urban highway maintenance funding for streets operation. Council Member Westbrook seconded the motion.

There was no discussion on the motion. The motion was approved on a roll call vote.

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

<u>A Public Hearing Amending the FY25 Grants Fund Budget, to Accept and Appropriate Ordinances for Several Grants</u>

Garry Cozier, Budget Manager, said that to provide some background for the public, each time staff submitted a grant request to the Council, it typically involved amending the Grant Fund budget. He said that in this case, they consolidated several grants into a single item. He said that this funding came from various sources, including the Virginia Department of Forestry Urban and Community Forestry Grant, through their Planning Department.

Mr. Cozier said that they also had grants from the DEQ ARPA program for the Poor Creek area, administered through their Public Works Department, as well as the DEQ Litter grant, also through Public Works. He said that additionally, they had a grant from the Virginia Department of Health Office of Emergency Medical Services Rescue Squad Assistance Fund, supporting their Fire Department. He said that the total amount of these grants, when added to the budget, totaled $5,181,319.31.

Mayor Parham opened the public hearing. Seeing no speakers, he closed the public hearing, and the matter rested with Council.

Vice Mayor Hill made a motion to amend the FY25 Grants Fund Budget to accept and appropriate ordinances for the grants as outlined by staff. Council Member Westbrook seconded the motion.

There was no discussion on the motion. The motion was approved on a roll call vote.

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

A Public Hearing for the Consideration of an Ordinance Authorizing the City Manager to Execute a Purchase Agreement Between the City of Petersburg and PBURG ROE PROPERTIES LLC Towards the Sale of City-Owned Property at 125 West Tabb Street (Parcel 011230037)

Brian Moore, Director of Economic Development, said that they had a proposal for consideration tonight, which involved the sale of the lot at 125 West Tabb Street. He said that staff had attached the necessary documentation, including the deed and the purchase agreement itself. He said that this was a purchase agreement, not a development agreement. He said that the property owner did not intend to build on the parcel.

Barry Roebuck, the applicant, said that he was attempting to acquire a piece of property on West Tabb Street for a development project that he was collaborating on with Corey and Lori Bullock. He said that they required dedicated and owned parking in close proximity to the shared development.

Mr. Roebuck said that he currently owned properties on North Market Street and invested in other projects. He said that the historic Seaboard building, which he purchased five to seven years ago, had been redeveloped and beautified. He said that Napa Auto Parts on North Market and West Tabb Street was another building he owned, rented back to Napa, with a bit of time left on the lease. He said that the Petersburg Artillery building, built in 1843, was notable and housed his company, Artfullclutch. He said that the building had undergone significant upgrades, including water and sewer systems, windows, and exterior improvements.

Mr. Roebuck said that Corey and Lori Bullock had acquired the Buckley Lock and Key building on Tabb Street, and he was an investor with them. He said that Alter Ice Cream, with an interior nearly complete, would be a beautiful space. He mentioned their effort, including reusing the original tin and gutting the front to the floorboards, aiming for a spring 2025 completion. He said that parking would be necessary for Alter Ice Cream and the Euterra project, a high-end restaurant and wine bar upstairs.

Mr. Roebuck presented a historic photograph of the gun house from 1865. He said that the building plans included a downstairs tasting room and a walking path for hotel guests to visit nearby restaurants and shops, requiring parking. He said that the Napa Auto Parts building had potential for development and envisioned it as a fresh foods market. He mentioned a "Market on Market" concept with 4,500 square feet, possibly a live music venue.

Mr. Roebuck stressed the need to secure ownership of the parking area, which is distinct from other parking lots. He said that the lot had been unused, with weeds and damaged vehicles, and they planned to fix, seal, clean, reseal, repave, and coat it. He said that they were committed to contributing to Petersburg's growth and greatness and hoped Council would allow the purchase.

Mayor Parham opened the public hearing.

Jeff Fleming, 1819 Chuckatuck Avenue, said that he was familiar with the company's work in other projects and had grown up in an area that inspired the Sopranos. Mr. Fleming said that this culture taught him a lot and made him believe this proposal did not pass the smell test. He said that what concerned him was the $20,000 purchase price when the assessed value was $70,400. He noticed something today while walking through the area, observing that parking was scarce, even in the lot they were trying to buy, because of an event at the Petersburg Hotel. He wondered what was going on there. He said that he did not understand the proposed price of $20,000 and asked why the City should sell it for so little. Mr. Fleming reiterated that it did not pass the smell test.

Paula Chester, 1013 Oakmont Drive, said that she was not convinced that the proposed plan was accurate either. She said that what was concerning her was that Halifax Street was not being included as a historical site, where people could potentially build and revitalize the area. She said that she had been informed when they first began this project that Halifax Street was part of Petersburg's rich history, but it seemed that the focus had shifted to Sycamore Street. She said that she was concerned that they were not pushing to extend and preserve the existing buildings that may be demolished, and instead, they should be promoting growth to include Halifax Street.

Barb Rudolph, 1675 Mount Vernon Street, said that every time there was a lowball offer to buy City property, they had talked about the 50% minimum, 50% of assessed value, on multiple occasions. She said that this offer did not meet the required amount, and she was puzzled about selling the $70,400 assessed value property for $20,000 instead of at least $35,200. She emphasized that a 50% minimum should be the standard and wondered if the Hotel Petersburg had been given an option to purchase the property for $20,000. She strongly opposed selling the property for such a low price.

Gary Talley, 2323 Fort Rice Street, said that he concurred with the previous speakers. He said that with a sale price of 28.4% assessed value, while they were keeping real estate taxes as high as they are, it meant that they needed to strike a better balance.

Marlo Green, 301 Rolfe Street, said that she agreed with her counterparts that the parking lot could be repurposed for the hotel or another use, and she appreciated the efforts being made in this area. She said that she had been following Alter's development because she planned to visit their ice cream shop. She said that she thought it would not make sense to sell the lot for less than 50% of its assessed value. She said that the City could consider holding onto the lot and potentially implementing metered parking in the future as an additional revenue source. She said that the City could work with the Hotel Petersburg to explore the possibility of purchasing the lot at the correct price, which would be 50%.

Denise Tipton, 212 East Bank Street, said that she supported the sale of this lot to fellow business owners, as parking was essential to the success of businesses in the Old Town area. She said that as many buildings were being converted into apartments, public parking would become even more challenging. She said that those involved in this project had invested significant resources, and the fact that the hotel did not own the lot was irrelevant, as they had not proposed acquiring it. She said it was important to find good, high-end businesses that would attract customers, including hotel guests.

Andrea Matthews, 250 North Sycamore, said that she was in favor of these multiple business owners putting their hearts and souls into historic Petersburg. She said that she had known all of them for several decades now, and she could confidently say that none of them had done anything less than achieve complete success, 100% committed to making it work, regardless of how it may shake out.

Kara Stevens, 226 Rolfe Street, said that she was wondering if parking would be restricted to only the owners' businesses. She said that this was relevant because there would almost certainly be more businesses as the area continued to grow, and they would need parking too. She said that she also would like to know if they would change it from free to paid parking due to potential demand. She said that she would like to know what conditions there would be for keeping it free and unrestricted.

Mayor Parham closed the public hearing.

Vice Mayor Hill said this issue stemmed from past negotiations, specifically the 50% agreement. He noted that when Council Member Jones joined, he emphasized negotiating at a higher rate. He recommended the City Manager secure a fair and equitable cost. Vice Mayor Hill believed the hotel parking was unrelated to this item. He advocated for competitive fairness, urging the City Manager to negotiate a fair cost rather than the $20,000 based on recent property purchases.

Vice Mayor Hill highlighted the need for more parking due to new hotels, restaurants, and businesses and suggested exploring options such as a parking deck in Old Town. He expressed concern over the cost, noting that the parking lot was underutilized and poorly maintained. He said he supported selling the lot if it could generate tax revenue but opposed the $20,000 cost. He said that citizens preferred not to give away properties and reiterated support for the City Manager negotiating an equitable cost.

Council Member Jones said that he appreciated the applicant's presentation. He said that this property not widely discussed until someone expressed interest in purchasing it. He said that he was not trying to disparage Hotel Petersburg, but if they wanted the property, they should have made an offer. Council Member Jones said that the 28.4% asking price was due to some piece of information that stated it was the minimum that the City would accept. He said that they had previously discussed this, and he had been advocating for a 50% increase. He said that he was willing to sell, but he would like to ask the applicant directly if he could afford an asking price of the 100% assessed value or 175%.

Mr. Roebuck said that he had been through a similar process before and at that time was informed that the City Hall building was being sold, and this lot was potentially being sold along with it. He said that the matter was brought before Council and was concluded. He said that the hotel had recently opened, and a certain number of public parking spaces in the tiered parking lot had been allocated to the hotel.

Mr. Roebuck said that the status of these parking spaces as either a lease or a purchase remained unclear. He said that in essence, to secure parking for his individual investments, they needed to establish a parking solution. He said that they had indeed demonstrated the need for parking, and the $20,000 figure was based on a 50% allowance for properties being sold. However, he said that this allowance had varied between 75% and zero, with the 20% figure being an offer that could be made.

City Manager Altman said that they had started at 50%. He said that there was a discussion about increasing it to 75%, and ultimately, Council eliminated the percent requirement altogether. He said that since then, they had not revisited the issue, so they were now at whatever the current offer was, effectively eliminating the 50% policy.

Mr. Roebuck said that he wanted to ensure Council he was not trying to take advantage of the situation; he contributed a large amount of tax revenue to the City for the properties he currently owned.

Council Member Jones asked if the City had considered leasing the facility to them for a period of seven years at a cost of $10,000 per year, with the understanding that it would be paid for by the end of that period. He said that this would provide the applicant with ownership and the City would be reimbursed for the whole of the assessed value.

Mr. Roebuck said that they certainly could negotiate the terms, but in terms of leasing and not having dedicated and owned facilities, he was uncertain about the long-term stability of the arrangement. He said this purchase agreement was based on a development plan for the area, which allocated parking.

Mr. Roebuck said he believed there may have been a misunderstanding about the parking arrangement. He said that the parking for the event was located in the tiered level parking area, and he did not believe any of it was allocated to this parking space. He said that the occasional one or two cars present may be employees of NAPA who simply wanted to park their vehicle in the rear.

Council Member Jones said that this situation was the City's fault, and they had discussed this when he first joined the Council. He said that they must be fair across the board, people. He said that he would be much more supportive of a sale at the 50% assessed value; this was the lowest he had seen, and they had to remedy their mistakes to prevent issues from recurring. He said that it was unfair for an applicant to be hopeful that their offer was high enough because they did not have a set standard.

Mayor Parham said that this was not just about one individual, but also about the overall impact on the area. He said that since this parking lot was not intended for construction, it would contribute to a vital component of the tax revenue that benefited the community. He said that therefore, it was essential that they provide parking for Mr. Roebuck and ensure that other businesses in the area had a guarantee of parking, whether it was City-owned, private, or managed by the parking authority. He said that this was crucial, as it would be an issue in the future. He said that as they had seen today, with the sellout event at Hotel Petersburg, the parking situation was a significant concern.

Mr. Roebuck said that he was open to exploring the potential of working with whoever was interested in utilizing the lot. He said that the only other properties nearby were the house being renovated next door and The Pittman's Law Office, which occasionally hosted events at Strawberry Hill. He said that the vacant permits and planning building may also be developed in the future. In general, he did not foresee towing services being necessary, as the main concern was finding a suitable location for events like Euterra's pop-ups, which could accommodate up to 24 people. He said that the lot had only 36 parking spaces, which was a relatively small area.

Council Member Myers said that he understood the sentiments surrounding this parking lot. He said that if one reviewed the photograph, they would see that it had not been properly repaired or maintained by the City of Petersburg. He said that they did not repair and maintain it as they should. He said that they were trying to make money from something that was worth less than what the City considered it to be. He said that if the City was going to lease this property, it would need to pay to have it repaved. He said that the cost would be in the range of $30,000 to $40,000. He would like to propose that the applicant purchase the property for $25,000, which was a more reasonable price.

Council Member Myers made a motion to approve the Ordinance authorizing the City Manager to execute a purchase agreement between the City of Petersburg and PBURG ROE PROPERTIES LLC towards the sale of City-owned property at 125 West Tabb Street (Parcel 011230037), for $25,000. Vice Mayor Hill seconded the motion.

There was no discussion on the motion. The motion was approved on a roll call vote.

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

Council Member Jones said that while he agreed the Hotel Petersburg was a significant business downtown, they should not make it out to be the sole driving force behind the area's revitalization—as there had been other businesses before that hotel. He said he did not agree with the price, but he believed the project would have a positive impact. Council Member Jones said that it would improve parking, make it more attractive, and encourage people to walk, park, and explore the area. He expressed concern about the $25,000 cost but was confident that it would benefit the area.

9. PUBLIC INFORMATION PERIOD

Paula Chester, 1013 Oakmont Drive, said that she was returning to Council with the same concern she had last year regarding the bridge on Oak Hill Road. She said that City Manager Altman had stated that he may have more information by January or February, and she was hoping he had a specific target date for when they could begin this project. She said that her next concern was the condition of University Boulevard, particularly the triangle surrounding Grove Avenue. She said that it was in a state of disrepair and, quite frankly, embarrassing. She said that she had brought this to their attention last year, and she believed it was essential that they address this issue, as it was a priority for the City.

Bill Hartstock, 239 High Street, said that the City of Petersburg residents were eagerly anticipating the supermarket grocery store, and other planned developments, but several months had passed since the groundbreaking on October 30, 2024, for the Sycamore Grove development at 801 South Adams Street. He said that the issue was that the property had not been transferred to the developer and development corporation, preventing work from commencing.

Mr. Hartstock said that as of two hours prior to this meeting, the property still belonged to the City of Petersburg. He said that he was asking why this transfer had not occurred, and why the project had not been put forward for development. He said that the Governor's Office was likely concerned, given the significance of this project as part of his Partnership for Petersburg program. He said that they were waiting to see what the future held, but it could not move forward until the property was transferred to the development corporation. He said that he left it in Council's hands, as they eagerly awaited the grocery store and other developments that were currently stalled.

Kara Stevens, 226 Rolfe Street, said that on February 6, she and a few of her neighbors were surprised to find that there were "No parking" signs at 226 Rolfe Street when they returned home and were confused and frustrated to find that they could not park at their own homes without any notice. She said that they called the Police Department but did not receive a response, and even the next day, the officer was unavailable. She expressed frustration over the lack of communication and inconvenience, particularly for neighbors with mobility issues. She said that one neighbor, who was wheelchair-bound, had children who could not park at their home. Ms. Stevens added that another elderly neighbor relied solely on street parking. She said that the sudden change without explanation was concerning. Ms. Stevens hoped the City would address this issue. She also brought up a clogged storm drain causing flooding on her street, stating that the flooding on February 6 and 7 was a serious concern.

Marlo Green, 301 Rolfe Street, said she was the founder and president of OCR Community Empowerment Group, a nonprofit dedicated to revitalizing marginalized communities through economic development, beautification, and expanded recreational opportunities. She said that their board consists of a diverse group of experts, including auditors, certified public accountants (CPAS), historians, mental health professionals, and fundraisers. She commended Sheriff Vanessa Crawford for her Pocahontas Island event and encouraged similar initiatives. Ms. Green said that on January 21, City Council rescinded the Pocahontas Island extension and discussed a 2020 proposal, which is part of a bid set dated 2022. She said City Manager Altman will report to City Council in March and urged thorough investigation of road relocation, suggesting consultations with Hazen and Sawyer. She said she appreciated Mr. Arnold Westbrook for emphasizing knowledge. She highlighted two programs for Petersburg residents: Xfinity Essentials Affordable Internet, accessible at 1-855-8INTERNET for those with SSI, TANF, or disabilities, and the Virginia Housing Grant, offering up to $8,000 for barrier-free home modifications, with more info available from Marcia at 804-353-6503. She said further details are in the newsletter, available by email or QR code, and she can be reached at agreen@ocrceg.org. She stated that any revenue generated through these programs supports the Pocahontas Island Historic District.

Jeff Fleming, 1819 Chuckatuck Avenue, said that he wanted to ensure everyone knew to stay indoors during the state of emergency, which had been declared due to severe weather. He said that it was essential to be safe with heating devices, keeping them at least 36 inches away from anything flammable, including bed sheets, curtains, and other combustible materials. He said that according to the information, it was expected to be a severe storm, with snowfall not seen in a long time. He said that to minimize risks, it was recommended to avoid traveling unless absolutely necessary. He said that many cities had crews that cleared roads, but it was still crucial to exercise caution.

10. BUSINESS OR REPORTS FROM THE MAYOR OR OTHER MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

Council Member Cuthbert said that he would like to bring up two points related to data centers. He said that he was hosting a Ward 4 meeting on February 27 at 5:30 p.m. to discuss data centers, and he encouraged everyone interested in the topic to attend. He said that the potential for data centers to generate municipal revenue was truly remarkable. He said that earlier this year, Mr. Rizer from Loudoun County, who was the Director of Economic Development, presented some impressive numbers to the Council.

Council Member Cuthbert said that he showed them a ratio of municipal revenue to municipal cost for data centers in Loudoun County, which was 26 to 1. This was a staggering difference. He said that the real estate tax rate in Loudoun County decreased from $1.28 per $100 in 2012 to $0.086 per $100, largely due to the revenue generated by the data centers. This was a significant advantage.

Council Member Cuthbert said that in contrast, residential development typically generated less revenue compared to the municipal cost. He said that a 26-to-1 ratio was a game-changer. He said that he would like to emphasize the importance of protecting their neighborhoods and resources. He said that this ratio highlighted why data centers were attracting municipalities' attention. He said that he would like to mention that Chesterfield County was hosting community meetings to discuss data centers. He said that he had prepared a list of the meeting dates, times, and locations, which he had available for anyone in the audience.

Council Member Cuthbert said that if anyone was interested, he encouraged them to grab a sheet and attend these events. He said that he planned to attend because he had a lot to learn about data centers, and this seemed like a great opportunity to gain knowledge. He said that the first meeting was tomorrow night at Cosby High School, and the next one was next Monday at Midlothian High School, both starting at 6:30 p.m. He said that representatives from the City would be present at his Ward 4 meeting tomorrow night, including the Planning Director and the Director of Economic Development, who would be available to share their expertise and contribute to the conversation.

Council Member Jones said that February is Black History Month, and he wanted to speak to the Black community, and the white community as well. He said that he wanted to make it clear that there were no living individuals in this room who owned a physical slave. He said that while some of the audience members may have ancestors who owned slaves, it was essential to recognize that no white person in this room today owned a slave. Council Member Jones said that with that being acknowledged, there still existed mental slavery. He said that these mental slaves were Black people who were afraid of white people. He said that there were not only slaves used for labor on plantations, but people enslaved as electricians, carpenters, and horse grooms.

Council Member Jones said that his message to the Black man was that they feared the white man, but still had so much hatred, jealousy, and envy towards the Black man, woman, child, and business. This was why they struggled to progress as a community. He said that they gave unprompted sycophancy to white people, while showing contempt to fellow Black people.

Council Member Jones said that they had been taught to blame the white man for their struggles, but it was time to take ownership of their own empowerment. He said that he wanted to address a point that had been on his mind, particularly during Black History Month. He said that many white individuals had played a significant role in freeing enslaved people, and in contrast, many Black individuals had been instrumental in catching runaway slaves and sustaining injustice. This same mentality was still present today. Looking around the room, he was struck by the majority of white faces.

Council Member Jones said that as a Black man, he had worked tirelessly to provide for his community, and he had been fortunate to have the support of City Council, the City Manager, and other officials who had listened to his visions. He said that he was disheartened to see that his own community often chose to support businesses in neighboring areas, such as Chesterfield, rather than investing in their own community.

Council Member Jones said that just today, a man was threatening to hit him, even though he had done nothing to him. He said that they chose to destroy each other every day. He said that he was simply saying that they needed to treat their brothers with better love, respect, and consideration. He said that their kids were being fed death because they had nowhere else to eat from. They learned what they were taught, and what he saw many Black people teaching was the slave mindset, which only promised death. He said that 20 murders a year in their City was too much. The blood that they spilled, and the families they sent into mourning each year, would catch up with them. The City was growing, and regardless of racial lines, all Petersburg citizens must face these difficult conversations.

Council Member Jones said that they needed to work together to create a more positive and supportive environment, one that allowed their children to thrive and grow in a safe and nurturing space. He expressed hope that he was not causing discomfort, but it was necessary. He said it was crucial that they acknowledged this. He was not one of those who feared people based on their skin color. However, he did fear for his future and his children's future, especially if they fell victim to violence to hands that looked like his or anyone else’s.

Council Member Westbrook said that he would like to share seven key points, as he always does. He said that he would like to revisit the discussion about trees that has been ongoing in the City over the past six months. He said that specifically, he would like to focus on Ward 7, particularly the Wilcox Lake Conservancy area.

Council Member Westbrook said that he believed it was essential to examine the trees in this area, as evidenced by the recent incident where a tree fell across the road just two days ago, narrowly missing cars. He said that unfortunately, many of the trees in this area were dying, and he thought it was crucial that they address this issue, not only for the health of the Wilcox Lake Conservancy but also for the overall well-being of the City. He said that the trees were leaning, and old pine trees needed to be removed. He said that he hoped they could consider this as they developed their approach to tree management in the City.

Council Member Westbrook said that second, he would like to revisit a topic he mentioned last month. He said that he had been researching other states and had noticed that many cities had implemented a plastic bag ban. He said that he had brought this to the City Manager's attention, and he had an update. He said that he would like the City manager to elaborate on this issue further. He said that additionally, he would like to request that they consider discussing this at the April meeting. He said that he knew there was a lot going on, but he believed it was essential that they have a clear understanding of how this policy was working in other states before they made a decision.

City Manager Altman said that there was a bill currently being considered by the General Assembly that would aim to ban plastic bags. He said that as a result, they were waiting to see how this bill progressed before taking any further action. He said that session was scheduled to end in March, and by then, they would know whether the bill passed or not. He said that once that was determined, staff would be able to prepare a proposal to bring back to the work session in April.

Council Member Westbrook said that he appreciated the update. He said that he wanted it to be on the record because, as he had mentioned earlier, this was why he had recommended April for this item. He said that the reason behind it was that a $0.10 tax typically generated about $0.02 to $0.04 for area projects and $0.06 for businesses that sold those bags. He said that he thought it would be beneficial as they continued to build their tax base and revenue in the City. He said that he planned to discuss this further with the Commissioner of Revenue and Treasurer.

Council Member Westbrook said that third, he would like to mention that following the casino retreat, he was not sure if it was properly advertised, but the casino was now accepting applications for careers, not just jobs. He said that he had asked Ms. Joanne Williams if they could post the link provided by her on their Facebook page or social media pages, so that their residents could stay informed.

Council Member Westbrook said that many people had expressed concern about where the jobs were for Petersburg residents. He said that if they did not apply now, they risked missing the opportunity to be considered for these careers before the casino was completed. He hoped they could be at the forefront of this process. He said that the information would be in the newsletter and on their social media pages soon.

Council Member Westbrook said that fourth, it was Black History Month, and he would like to encourage their support for the Parks and Recreation Department's efforts to bring community events, including a gospel concert at the end of the month and other activities. He said that everyone should visit their website to learn more about the remaining events as they approach the end of the month.

Council Member Westbrook said that as they moved into March Madness, he would also like to recognize the Petersburg speech and debate team. He said that Coach Terry Smith would like to bring to their attention that one of his students, Kayani, was already qualified for nationals as an alternate in Iowa this June. He said that she still had opportunities to qualify other team members. He encouraged the community to support them as well.

Council Member Westbrook said that as a shameless plug, he was the coach of the VSU speech and debate team. He said that recently, they had participated in the social justice debates in Atlanta, focusing on the resolution to achieve housing justice. He said that the United States should prioritize addressing the root causes of homelessness rather than providing immediate, permanent housing and supportive services.

Council Member Westbrook said that if they did not catch the details, he would be happy to explain further. He said that he was impressed that both the affirmative team and his team won the novice championship. He said that in essence, the judges agreed that they needed to focus on the root causes of homelessness, rather than just providing houses and shelters. He said that they needed to examine the root causes of homelessness more thoroughly.

Council Member Westbrook said that he recently visited Pleasants Lane Elementary School, where they honored students at the end of each month. He said that his daughter, Elisa Westbrook, was named student of the month for He said that he would like to remind everyone to be safe during the snowstorm. He said that they should govern themselves over the next few days, but also enjoy the snow. He said that he looked forward to burning off some of the germs in the air, and he was confident that Public Works would do a great job clearing the streets by Monday.

Council Member Myers said that he would like to take this opportunity to express his gratitude to the Works Department, particularly Steve Stinson, for their assistance in resolving the recent water main break on West Washington Street. He said that they had done an excellent job in addressing the issue. He said that he also wanted to thank Richard Harris and the Gilfield Baptist Church for their efforts in repairing and rebuilding the dilapidated sidewalks around the church.

Council Member Myers said that their dedication to improving the City's infrastructure was truly appreciated. He said that he would like to extend his thanks to the Works Department for all that they did, not just this specific project, but for their ongoing efforts to maintain and improve the City's infrastructure. He said that he would also like to thank the City Manager for his support. He said that during their recent visit to Virginia Beach, they had the opportunity to engage in productive discussions about broadband, and they were hopeful that a proposal would be forthcoming to address the needs of the community.

Vice Mayor Hill said that he wanted to take a moment to express his condolences to their Clerk, who recently lost her sister, Tina Hill-Foyce. He said that she would be returning home this weekend to attend her sister's funeral. He said that he kindly requested that everyone keep her in their prayers. He said that he wanted to revisit a topic that was previously discussed, which unfortunately took a misstep. He said that during their first meeting, held on the first Tuesday of each month, he believed it was essential that they incorporate a community engagement component.

Vice Mayor Hill said that it would involve individuals coming forward to share their concerns and ideas during their meeting and having a designated process in place for them to connect with their Councilperson. He said that this would enable them to provide more effective support and answer questions in real-time. He said that they did not want to silence the community's voices, so this would serve as a more efficient way to serve them.

Vice Mayor Hill said that while it may not be feasible this year, he proposed that they consider implementing a community engagement piece during their first work session meeting, allowing them to streamline their process and better address the needs of their constituents. He said that he wanted to engage with the community, and he thought they needed to take a closer look at the process. For example, at Ward meetings, individuals had to wait for their Council member to speak with them, which could be a lengthy process.

Vice Mayor Hill said that he looked forward to the upcoming pothole repair efforts, as they had some potholes due to the weather. He had mentioned this before, but he believed it was essential that they pick up the signs in the right-of-way. Specifically, on Crater Road, between exit 54 and Graham Road, there were numerous signs that had been present for weeks. During their campaigns, they had made a concerted effort to pick up signs, but now they were scattered throughout the neighborhoods and on public property. He urged everyone to remove these signs.

Vice Mayor Hill said that he wanted to thank the citizens who were staying engaged with the City. The Council valued their participation and appreciated their engagement, whether they agreed or disagreed. He said that he wanted to thank the City employees, directors, and other staff members who worked diligently every day. He thanked everyone for attending today's meeting.

Mayor Parham thanked everyone for coming out to today's meeting. He asked everyone please prepare for the snow that was coming. He said that he would like to extend his gratitude to Dr. Eric Edwards and Phlow Corporation for hosting him at their annual event at Hotel Petersburg.

Mayor Parham said that it was a fantastic event, providing insight into the future of pharmaceutical manufacturing. He said that exciting news and developments are on the horizon for Petersburg, with notable companies like Novo Nordisk already making their presence known. He said that they were exploring future expansions, including those proposed by Phlow. He said that it's an exciting time for the City.

Mayor Parham said that he would also like to take a moment to acknowledge Black History Month. He said that their Black History Month program was scheduled for this Friday, featuring an excellent program by Marquis. He said that he encouraged everyone to arrive early, as the event was expected to be well-attended. He said that additionally, Bon Secours was hosting their Black History Month program on February 26 at 3:00 p.m., with Senator Dance and himself in attendance.

Mayor Parham said that next, he would like to highlight the Trailways bus station, now known as Griffin Cigars and Lounge, a restaurant located there. He said that he highly recommended checking it out, as it was a fantastic addition to the City. They would be cutting the ribbon on February 27 at 10:00 a.m. He said that he would also like to remind everyone to stay safe and avoid traveling tomorrow due to the snow. He asked if City Manager Altman could address Ms. Chester's question about the Oak Hill Bridge.

City Manager Altman said that they were currently updating cost estimates, which would then be presented to the Council for consideration, allowing them to move forward with the project. He said that staff would be providing that information to Council next month.

11. ITEMS REMOVED FROM CONSENT AGENDA

There were no items under this portion of the agenda.

12. FINANCE AND BUDGET REPORT

Department of Finance Monthly Update

Garry Cozier, Budget Manager, said that tonight, they would be discussing budget to actuals, the earned interest update, and project updates, as well as their budget timeline. Reviewing their budget to actuals, they were currently at 56% of the year spent and 58% of the year gone. This was in line with their expectations. The same was true for their other funds, which were tracking closely to their projections or under. Their earned interest update showed that for their LGIP account, January interest was $164,000, and for the Atlantic Union bank account, January interest was $31,000. This brought their total earned interest year-to-date to $1.4 million.

Mr. Cozier said that staff also had some project updates to share. The Banking Services Request for Proposal (RFP) was currently underway, with the Treasurer's Office and the RFP Committee working together to move the project forward. The Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) System project was also in progress, and he would provide regular updates as they continued to evaluate and select an ERP system that met the needs of all City departments.

Mr. Cozier said that the Real Property Delinquent Taxpayer Targeted Collection Project, led by the Customer Care and Collections Division, had identified 500 properties that had not paid taxes since 2020 through 2024. These properties had been separated into Priority Collection Groups, and the Office of the City Attorney and Finance was managing the process.

Mr. Cozier said that they were also making progress on their Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR), which was scheduled to be completed by October 31, 2025, which was well before the deadline. Finally, he will be discussing their FY26 Operating Budget, which would provide an update on their main timelines and milestones for budget development. In January, they had processed any new requests, reviewed all those requests, reviewed the revenue, and developed the first requested budget. In February, which was the current month, they were conducting revenue meetings. He said that they would also be holding department budget meetings and meetings with the City Manager of Finance.

Mr. Cozier said that in March, they would make funding decisions and meet with Council. They planned to present the first proposed budget to Council by April 1. In April, they would also hold further community budget meetings. He said that assuming all went well, the proposed budget would be subject to a public hearing on April 15. He said that in May, Council could propose any amendments to the budget, and they anticipated adoption by May 20.

13. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There were no items under this portion of the agenda.

14. NEW BUSINESS

Appointments to the Social Services Advisory Board

Council Member Myers made a motion to appoint five members to the Social Services Advisory Board, which included Vondele Parham, Ja'scotta Jefferson, Raymond Bessix, Mary Kate Gerschick, and Kameko Coleman. Vice Mayor Hill seconded the motion.

There was no discussion on the motion. The motion was approved on a roll call vote.

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

Appointments to the Economic Development Authority

Council Member Myers made a motion to appoint seven members to the Economic Development Authority, which included Ahkinyala Abdullah, Winston Sanders, Joel Erb, Kofi Adih, Kofi Annan, Samuel Rhue, and Benjamin Jarvela. Vice Mayor Hill seconded the motion.

Council Member Cuthbert made a substitute motion to table the item. Mayor Parham seconded the motion.

There was no discussion on the motion. The motion failed on a roll call vote.

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

Mayor Parham called the vote on the original motion to appoint the seven members to the Economic Development Authority.

There was no discussion on the motion. The motion was approved on a roll call vote.

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

Resolution to Extend Personal Property Tax Due Date

John Altman, City Manager, said that they had a request this evening to extend the due date to March 7, 2025, due to the delays experienced with the billing process. He said that they aimed to minimize any adverse impact on their residents and were requesting an extension.

Vice Mayor Hill made a motion to approve the extension of the personal property tax due date to March 7, 2025. Council Member Myers seconded the motion.

Council Member Cuthbert asked if the City Manager could elaborate on the reason behind the request.

City Manager Altman said that upon receiving the file back from the printers, they noticed a charge that typically appeared on second-half billings but unexpectedly appeared on the first-half billing. He said that as a result, they had to rerun the process to ensure accuracy.

Council Member Cuthbert asked who was responsible for that mistake.

City Manager Altman said that staff were currently in the process of identifying who that was.

Council Member Cuthbert asked when the mistake took place.

City Manager Altman said that when they received the printed files back from the company, they sent them out, they noticed the charge for the second half was on the first half instead, so they had to correct that and send them out for reprinting. He said that he was unsure of the exact date the mistake occurred, but it delayed the initial issuance of the bills, which was the reason for this extension request.

Mayor Parham opened the floor to public comment on this resolution.

Jeff Fleming, 1819 Chuckatuck Avenue, said that he approved of this resolution to extend the personal property due date. He said that it was an error that had been made. He said that he did not know who was responsible, but that was not the issue. He said that the concern was to avoid any adverse impact on the taxpayer. He said that this was the City's mistake, and the City must accept responsibility for it. He said that he approved of extending the personal property tax due date to March.

Barb Rudolph, 1675 Mount Vernon Street, said that she strongly believed they should have the extension, and she had no problem with that. She said that, on Council Member Cuthbert's comments, she thought there were concerns with the personal property tax that extending the deadline by a week may not adequately address.

Ms. Rudolph said that it was not a simple matter. She said that for example, she had noticed a discrepancy between her online bill for her two vehicles and the paper bills she received. She said that the paper bills were accurate, but she preferred to pay online, which meant she either had to visit the office to pay for her paper bill or mail it in. She said that she was not suggesting this was an insurmountable problem, but rather that there were underlying issues that persisted for years, affecting not just her, but possibly Council Members and their constituents as well.

Marlo Green said that as an accountant, in her previous role at Virginia State, she was responsible for overseeing 1098Ts for student tuition forms. She said that she believed the problem lay not only in identifying who was accountable, but also in examining the internal processes that governed the review of data and implementing quality control measures. She said that she had implemented similar procedures in her own office, which had helped them avoid errors.

Ms. Green said that if accountants were preparing the data, it was essential to have a third layer of review, such as quality assurance, to ensure accuracy. She said that she supported extending the deadline, but it was crucial to address the underlying issue of cash flow. She said that rather than solely focusing on assigning blame, they should conduct a business process improvement analysis to identify where the problem occurred and implement changes to prevent similar issues in the future.

Brittany Flowers, Commissioner of the Revenue, said that this had happened far too many times. She said that she had completed the assessments on Friday, January 17. It was baffling to her why they were here again. They knew who was responsible and what had happened with the false information being shared with the public, and she did not appreciate it. Therefore, they must be transparent and take accountability to rectify the situation. The bill still went out incorrectly due to quality control issues. She needed to know how the City would fix it, as they could not continue to repeat this mistake.

Ms. Flowers said that she had been with the City for 12 years. During her time in the Treasurer's Office, this did not occur. In fact, when the Council had voted to split the billing into half, it was fine. She said that they had less people and less money, but more efficiency. She said that she had been with the Commissioner of Revenue since January 2018. If they had the proper people in place with the proper education, who were willing to listen to those who had been there for a long period of time, then everything would be fine.

Ms. Flowers said that they could not keep doing this. Assessments had been completed on January 17. She had received numerous emails regarding the personal property bills, and they still went out incorrectly. Multiple people had received the same bill in the same envelope at the same address. Personal property was tied to the Social Security number, which was not public record. This had been explained to them when it occurred with real estate, where real estate taxes were tied to the property, not the person. In contrast, personal property was tied to people's Social Security numbers.

Ms. Flowers said that she kept hearing people talk about quality control, but it was clear that there was no quality control in place. Something needed to be done, and someone must take responsibility because the citizens did not deserve it. She said that she was passionate about her job and the work she did, but Council was not at her office helping answer the phones. She said that she believed accountability, transparency, and genuine care for the work being done would go a long way in addressing these issues.

Mayor Parham called the vote on the resolution to extend the personal property tax due date.

There was no discussion on the motion. The motion was approved on a roll call vote.

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

15. <u>CITY MANAGER'S REPORT AND SPECIAL REPORTS</u>

John Altman, City Manager, said that Mr. Fleming had mentioned that they had given a public service announcement about snow. He said that as a heads up, they were expecting the storm to start snowing around 8:00 a.m. and intensify during the day. He said that they were still on the six to eight inch forecast line, although current forecasts suggested an increase in moisture, which may push the total to more than expected.

City Manager Altman said that the next forecast update would be released at 9:00 p.m. tonight. He said that he would like to remind everyone to stay off the streets when it snows and let Public Works handle their responsibilities. He said that if they did not have the Dominion Power app, please download it, as it would be available, and one could use their app to report any power outages. He said that he was just echoing Mr. Fleming's message to ensure clarity. He said that he would like to thank Public Works for their hard work in addressing waterline breaks and maintaining their citizens' water supply, especially considering the recent cold weather.

Council Member Cuthbert said that he had a couple of questions to ask the City Manager, if he may. He said that he was reviewing the minutes from the September 17 Council meeting, which could be found on page 54 of the agenda packet. He said that according to the minutes, Mr. Rose of Davenport had stated on September 17 that sometime in January, he would present a comprehensive investment plan for the City. He said that it was now February, and they had yet to receive that comprehensive investment plan. He said that he would like to know if City Manager Altman could please receive an updated timetable for presenting this plan to them.

City Manager Altman said that they were finishing up that plan right now. He said that they had incorporated comments and discussed the casino revenue with Cordish to ensure the accuracy of that number. He said that as a result, they were finishing up that work now, and he expected them to have that information available for their discussion in March.

Council Member Cuthbert said that in the same minutes, September 17, page 2, they had discussed a $30 million loan to the City, and a grant covering 30% of the cost of a new elementary school. He said that it was clear that in Washington, one could not rely on anything until it was a done deal. He asked if there was any progress being made on building a new elementary school. He said that the initiative did need to originate from the School Board, but it would be greatly appreciated by the community at large.

City Manager Altman said that the schools were moving forward with their discussions on the new elementary school. He said that they had revisited the site that they previously discussed, which was the land behind Walnut Hill and some additional property. He said that to alleviate concerns, the grant money received by the City and the schools was state funding, not federal funding, and it was not at risk of being lost.

City Manager Altman said that the Governor's Office had assured them that these dollars were available, and the funding they secured through the literary loan program would be made available when needed. He said that they were already in a position to provide funding, and it was now a matter of working with the schools, the new Superintendent, and the School Board members to move forward with the project. He said that he had attended a meeting about a month ago, where they were discussing the school and its progress, and it was clear that they were moving forward with the discussions.

Council Member Cuthbert said that he was concerned about the availability of all funding due to the volatility of the federal government.

City Manager Altman said that the good news was that these state-level programs were not federally tied.

16. <u>BUSINESS OR REPORTS FROM THE CLERK</u>

Tangi Hill, City Clerk, said that she had no report this evening.

17. <u>BUSINESS OR REPORTS FROM THE CITY ATTORNEY</u>

Anthony Williams, City Attorney, said that he had no report this evening.

18. CLOSED SESSION

At 8:31 p.m., Mayor Parham made a motion to hold a closed session to discuss performance, assignment, and appointment of specific public employees of the City of Petersburg, as outlined in Section 202.2-3711A1 of the Code of Virginia. He said that this discussion would pertain to the performance, assignment, and appointment of specific public employees, including the discussion of a specific public office in the City of Petersburg. Vice Mayor Hill seconded the motion.

There was no discussion on the motion. The motion was approved on a roll call vote.

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

19. CERTIFY CLOSED SESSION

At 8:43 p.m., Vice Mayor Hill made a motion to conclude the closed session and certify, in accordance with Section 2.237.12 of the Code of Virginia, that only matters for which the closed session was called were discussed. He said that any member who believed there was a departure from the foregoing should state so for the record, identifying the substance of the departure they believed had occurred. Council Member Westbrook seconded the motion.

There was no discussion on the motion. The motion was approved on a roll call vote.

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

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 8:45 p.m.

Adopted: March 18, 2025

APPROVED:

Samuel Parham
Mayor

ATTEST:

Tange R. Hill