

The regular meeting of the Petersburg City Council was held on Tuesday, December 17, 2024, 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/322936>.

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
Arnold Westbrook, Jr., Councilor – Ward 7

Absent:

Annette Smith-Lee, Councilor - Ward 6

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 PROCLAMATION

a. Proclamation Recognizing Chair Tammy Alexander for Over a Decade of Service with the Planning Commission

Mayor Parham read a proclamation recognizing Tammy Alexander for her years of service with the Petersburg City Planning Commission. Ms. Tammy Alexander accepted the recognition.

b. Proclamation in Memory of Curtis Lyons

Mayor Parham read a proclamation in memory of Curtis Lyons. Family members accepted the proclamation.

c. Proclamation in Memory of Mr. Howard and Mrs. Patricia Fitzgerald, Sr.

Mayor Parham read a proclamation in memory of Howard and Patricia Fitzgerald. Family members accepted the proclamation.

d. Presentation of Certificate of Appreciation to the Petersburg Chapter of The Links, Inc.

City Council recognized the Petersburg Chapter of The Links, Inc. and presented a certificate of appreciation to the chapter president.

6. PRESENTATIONS

a. Presentation by Christa Donohue, Executive Director, Read to Them

Ms. Christa Donohue, Executive Director of Read to Them, gave a presentation on the organization and its 20-year history. She mentioned Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, which provides free, brand new, age-appropriate books to any child aged 0–5. She stated that the organization has been doing this program in Richmond since the previous summer, and there were 4,000 kids registered in that city. She noted that there were already 100 kids registered in Petersburg, with the program only opening Dec 1.

b. Presentation of 2024 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) by Robinson, Farmer & Cox

Mr. Altman stated that the presentation was postponed until their January meeting, as one of the auditors had a family medical emergency. He confirmed that the audit was still on track to be submitted by December 31.

7. RESPONSES TO PREVIOUS PUBLIC INFORMATION POSTED

There were none presented.

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

a. Minutes of Previous Meetings:

November 19, 2024, Closed Session

b. Adoption of the 2025 Petersburg City Council Meeting Calendar

c. Appointment of Afton Pryor to the Capital Area's Community Action Agency "CAPUP" Board of Directors

Vice Mayor Hill made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Council Member Westbrook seconded the motion.

Council Member Cuthbert stated that he would like to remove Item c from the Consent Agenda for further discussion, at Item 12.

Vice Mayor Hill made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda as amended, removing Item c. Council Member Westbrook seconded the motion.

The motion to approve the Consent Agenda as amended was approved on roll call vote.

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

9. OFFICIAL PUBLIC HEARINGS

a. Public Hearing of an Ordinance to Amend and Readopt Article 3, Definitions, Article 14, B-1 Shopping Center District Regulations, and Article 23, Supplementary Use Regulations – Special

Uses, as Set Forth in the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Petersburg Pertaining to Gathering and Event Uses, Including Nightclubs

Naomi Siodmak, Director of Planning, stated they have been working on this ordinance for some time now and have determined that clarification is needed on some definitions in the City's zoning ordinance related to events and gathering spaces. She said that this has been an ongoing discussion with the Planning Commission since May, involving multiple staff members including the City Attorney. Ms. Siodmak explained they are introducing additional definitions for gathering entertainment and events, specify when a special use permit is required for added Planning Commission and council review, and establish specific standards for nightclub uses.

She noted that some definitions remain unchanged, while others were modified. Ms. Siodmak highlighted that definition of "nightclub" remains unchanged to avoid creating nonconforming uses. She emphasized the importance of special use permit standards required for new nightclubs. Ms. Siodmak pointed out that nightclubs currently require a special use permit, which allows additional council review before approval. She stated that nightclubs are allowed in B2, B3, and M-1 districts.

Ms. Siodmak clarified that the proposed amendment specifies that alcoholic beverages cannot be served between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m. She said the dance floor maximum requirement was removed and instead, nightclub applicants must provide a management program that included staffing levels, floor plan, and total occupant load. She said the proposal requires nightclubs to have a security plan with licensed personnel for crowd control and conflict resolution. She said that the recommendation is for soundproofing measures to ensure noise within the establishment is not audible beyond the property line when doors are closed. She added that nightclub special use permits would be subject to rereview after two years.

Ms. Siodmak mentioned that event uses other than nightclubs will be allowed by right in B1, B2, B3, and industrial districts. She referenced the comprehensive plan, noting spaces for gathering and entertainment uses are important and desired in non-residential areas of the City. She stated the goal is to regulate these uses clearly.

Ms. Siodmak said that staff recommended approval of the ordinance amendment and was supported by the Planning Commission. She provided a sample motion to approve, deny, or amend the proposed text amendment. Ms. Siodmak noted some conversation about possibly addressing the noise ordinance simultaneously but emphasized the importance of regulating these uses now.

Mayor Parham opened the public hearing and asked if there were members from the public to speak on the ordinance amendment. Seeing none, the Mayor closed the public hearing.

Council Member Jones commented that there seems to be a sense of urgency with this and asked Ms. Siodmak if there had been issues and problems that required additional regulation.

Ms. Siodmak mentioned that noise has been the biggest concerns with these establishments, but the issue from a zoning perspective was lack of clarity. She said the City was seeing a greater diversity of proposed uses that were not a nightclub or a restaurant, and the primary issue is how to classify different establishments, determine their appropriate locations within the City, and ensure their compliance with zoning standards. She said this is the most significant concern from a zoning perspective, and it was important to propose standards for nightclubs to address potential issues. Ms. Siodmak further said that they want to ensure that any new nightclubs have a safety management plan and implement noise mitigation measures to accommodate concerns and address new concerns before they arise.

Council member Jones stated that when they talk about nightclubs, the main concern was noise. He said he did not know of any nightclubs in the City, but he had yet to see a quiet nightclub anywhere and did not see how that concern fits in with a nightclub because they are always noisy—whether it's people or music.

Ms. Siodmak responded that she does have a list of nightclubs and would pull that up. She said that requiring the special use permit, detailing the standards required, having a process, and clarifying additional definitions would help address noise and better identify what is and isn't a nightclub. She said there is a special use permit for the civic center to have a nightclub, and that's the only SP of which she is aware. She said there are establishments working together with other departments to keep an eye on those that may be operating close to a nightclub but were approved as a restaurant. She said that if they are violating the zoning definition of a restaurant, they will move forward with requiring a special use permit or requiring them to comply with the definition.

Council Member Jones said that regarding the civic center, they don't operate as nightclubs on a daily basis—it's only when people rent it out or things of that nature. He said that he doesn't think of that as a nightclub like Copper Mine, which was operational every weekend. He stated that the civic center doesn't operate like that every weekend and there are other places that don't operate like that every weekend, only every so often. He said that they can't label these places as nightclub special use permits. Council Member Jones said that his next question concerns the 2 a.m. to 6 a.m. timeframe for alcohol, asking where that timeframe came from.

Anthony Williams, City Attorney, stated that those are the hours at which establishments can serve alcohol. He said that he was aware of the 2 a.m. limitation in Virginia but not the 6 a.m. parameter.

Council Member Jones asked if the City had talked to any of the other business owners or so-called nightclubs to see how this would affect them.

Ms. Siodmak said they had a ward meeting recently where people potentially affected by the ordinance attended and heard a presentation on the nightclub ordinance. She said it was made clear that those operating under the old nightclub definition could continue to do so, which stated that if a restaurant had less than 250 square feet of dance floor, it was still considered a restaurant. Ms. Siodmak stated that some establishments are grandfathered in under that old definition and can continue to operate under those requirements.

Council Member Jones asked if you had to have live entertainment to be considered a nightclub.

Ms. Siodmak clarified that it is live entertainment, an establishment open past 11 p.m. that serves alcohol and has dancing—with all of those requirements needing to be met for the classification.

Vice Mayor Hill said the tricky part is when you have restaurants that stay open past 11 and sort of turn into nightclubs. He asked if the main problem was them being a nightclub, a restaurant or both.

Ms. Siodmak said the main concern is ensuring the standards are met, such as noise regulations and safety management plans, whenever they operate as a nightclub. She stated that if a restaurant operates as a nightclub after 11:00 p.m. and meets certain criteria, they should obtain a special use permit. She also noted that the City is looking into businesses that are approved as restaurants but may be operating as nightclubs.

Vice Mayor Hill asked if someone operated a restaurant that transformed into a nightclub at 11:00

whether they could charge at the door.

Ms. Siodmak responded that they have to come in for a special use permit if they're meeting the City's nightclub definition, and she confirmed that they would only have to do that one time.

Vice Mayor Hill asked for confirmation that anyone renting out a banquet facility would have to get a permit for that particular day.

Ms. Siodmak said that they were creating an entirely different definition for event facilities and banquet halls, so they're not blurred with what a nightclub is. She said they were clarifying that they shouldn't be rented out for like a day party and should be private events, weddings, banquets, and so forth. She emphasized that this is what an event facility was, and if you meet that definition, you're allowed that use by-right in certain districts.

Vice Mayor Hill said that many organizations rent out facilities to raise money to give back to the community. He stated that fraternities and sororities often hold parties and sell tickets or accept donations, with the proceeds returned to the community, as they do not have staff to pay. He said they needed to be careful with the wording so these groups can continue to hold special events, and he asked about the dance space, and whether it is being considered a restaurant.

Ms. Siodmak stated that the previous definition of nightclub had an exception for establishments with dance floors smaller than a certain square footage, which allowed them to be classified as restaurants. She said that the current definition of nightclub addresses this issue. Ms. Siodmak stated that the proposed standards ensure that nightclubs are better neighbors in the community.

Vice Mayor Hill asked if everything needed to shut down by 2:00 a.m.

Ms. Siodmak clarified that alcohol cannot be served past 2:00 a.m., so the impression is that things would be winding down at that time.

Vice Mayor Hill asked about a possible admissions tax and whether the Commissioner of Revenue could speak about that.

Mr. Williams clarified for Council Member Jones that the provision mentioned earlier for 2–6 a.m. alcohol sales align with Virginia Administrative Code Section 3-VAC5-50-30, so what's reflected here is what the state allows.

Commissioner of Revenue Brittany Flowers explained that any event selling tickets in advance or at the door pays an admissions tax of 5% for each event.

Vice Mayor Hill asked how that would work with restaurants.

Ms. Flowers responded that they would still pay admission taxes and confirmed that this was also the case with the civic center.

Council Member Cuthbert asked how this should be handled procedurally.

Mr. Altman responded that there were certainly some remaining questions out there, including a further look at fundraisers as posed by the Vice Mayor. He said that as Ms. Siodmak mentioned earlier, there was concern raised during the ward meeting about the noise aspect and how to address it, including a conversation about tying the noise ordinance to the uses. He said Council

had previously tabled the noise ordinance discussion in November or October to allow for the ward meeting. He said many concerns center around businesses in downtown, so there may be an opportunity to tie these together. He stated that citizens are looking at it as one issue, though planning staff are viewing it from both a use and noise perspective, and it may be helpful for these two matters to be discussed simultaneously.

Council Member Cuthbert made a motion to table this item until Council held a public hearing on the noise ordinance that is currently working through the Planning Commission before coming to Council, so they could vote on both the nightclub ordinance and noise ordinance at the same time.

Council Member Myers seconded the motion.

Council Member Westbrook asked how this might apply to motorcycle clubs and how they were labeled, as they rent out warehouse space and have music as well as serving alcohol.

Ms. Siodmak responded that anytime you meet the criteria of open past 11 p.m., dance floor, music, and alcohol, you meet the definition of nightclub.

Council Member Westbrook said that he travels a lot and sees how thriving localities are using available warehouse space, as well as having one in his district on West Washington and another off of South Street.

Ms. Siodmak stated that they would be required to come before the Commission and Board for a special use permit. She also clarified that the noise ordinance had gone to Planning Commission, which had made a recommendation. She noted that the ordinance was still disliked, so they could go back to the Commission since there are a few new members—but she didn't want to run this in the same circle, and there was an earlier suggestion to hold community meetings.

Mayor Parham stated that in light of the new casino and entertainment district coming online in 2025, they should be mindful of how this overlay with that. He also stated that they need to be clear on how enforcement will be in that district and whether there would be flexibility there.

Vice Mayor Hill stated that they did not want to arbitrarily allow activities in one area but not another, and they also didn't need to be running things at 4 a.m. He said that it was fine to have entertainment establishments that bring in revenue, but they also needed to be mindful that there are apartments and residences nearby.

Council Member Cuthbert asked when the noise ordinance would be coming before Council and how the two ordinances can be coordinated to come before them simultaneously. He also asked if they needed to have another public hearing before they could vote on the noise ordinance.

Mr. Altman responded that Council could make changes and adopt it without sending it back, but if they send it back to the Commission and they make changes, there will need to be another public hearing. He said that the best approach would probably be to send them both back and bring them back to Council at the same time.

Mr. Williams suggested that they put them both on the second meeting agenda for January. He said that Council could send them both back, adopt them, or revise them from the floor without further input from the Planning Commission—but they would both come before them at the same time.

Council Member Cuthbert suggested that they get input from the Planning Commission as to how to

proceed with both items, reflecting the comments made at Council tonight and setting a public hearing for the revised ordinances.

Council Member Cuthbert restated his motion to table this decision until the Council has held a hearing on a noise ordinance and that both ordinances come before Council at their business session on January 21 for Council to consider sending them both back to the Planning Commission, with the clarification that the noise ordinance is the current version the Commission had considered. Council Member Myers seconded the motion.

The motion was approved on roll call vote.

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

- b. Public Hearing of an Ordinance to Amend and Readopt the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Petersburg Pertaining to the Regulation of Alternative Financial Institution/Short-Term Loan Establishment and Small Box Discount Store Uses Within the City

Ms. Siodmak reported that Council had tasked Planning staff with examining short-term loan establishments, which had already been addressed in 2021 but with no provisions adopted in their entirety. She stated that an ordinance was passed requiring a special use permit for these establishments and small-box discount stores, but it was not codified properly. She noted that they aimed to clarify special use permit requirements for both short-term loan establishments and small-box discount stores.

Ms. Siodmak explained that short-term loan establishments emphasize small-dollar, short-term, high-interest loans rather than traditional financial institutions. She said this included check-cashing establishments, payday loans, money transmissions, and vehicle loans, while financial institutions like banks and credit unions were excluded. She noted that the definition of financial institutions should be clarified to exclude pawnshops and short-term loan establishments, and a new definition for pawnshops should be added.

She said that small-box discount stores are retail establishments with a floor area of less than 12,000 square feet, offering goods for less than \$10 per item, and these stores often concentrate in areas with low-income and minority populations. Ms. Siodmak stated that new discount stores should be located at least two miles from the existing ones and should dedicate 10% of their floor area to fresh food.

Ms. Siodmak stated that the proposal calls for short-term loan establishments to be limited to B2 commercial and M1 industrial districts, and be located at least 2,000 feet from adult entertainment, residential uses, schools, parks, religious assembly, and other short-term loan establishments. She noted that negative effects of these lending practices impact the City's fair housing, workforce development, and community wealth goals. She said the proposed amendment aims to reduce predatory lending practices and ensure healthy food access in discount stores.

Ms. Siodmak said that staff recommended approval, supported by the Planning Commission, and she presented a sample motion to approve, deny, or amend the ordinance.

Mayor Parham opened the public hearing and asked if there were members of the public to speak on this item.

Julian Green, 1625 Blair Road, said that the current ordinance wording is not clear to the citizens and those who use the services, stating that it is important to explain how regulations will affect the residents of Petersburg. He expressed concern about the noise ordinance, operating hours, and alcohol regulations, particularly regarding Virginia State University's annual homecoming event, which attracts visitors from across the country. He noted that people come from different states with various expectations and that restrictions may impact their experience.

Mr. Green urged the council to consider younger residents who frequent stores like \$5 and below, which he learned from his granddaughter. He applauded Council for tabling previous concerns and requested that they do the same for the current proposal until it can be clearly communicated to the public. He emphasized the importance of allowing citizens to understand and see the benefits of the regulations. Mr. Green concluded by thanking the Council for their efforts.

There being no further speakers, the Mayor closed the public hearing.

Council Member Jones said that Council's goal is to protect the people from prolonged indebtedness. He stated that he grew up in a community where renting from places like Rent-A-Center was common and that some families are still in debt to these businesses, even though they have long gone out of business. He said that this ordinance is in place to protect the citizens. Council Member Jones stated that the loan sharks are coming because they see Petersburg on the rise and are targeting those with lower incomes. He said that although people say Petersburg is poor, businesses still want to set up shop there, indicating that there is money to be made. He stated that the Council will keep trying their best to protect the citizens and if this ordinance does not work, they will come back to the drawing board. He said that the goal is to protect the interests of the citizens, who may not be aware of what is happening. He stated that it is the Council's job to educate the public, sometimes by implementing measures like this ordinance.

Vice Mayor Hill stated that the item was one they wholeheartedly supported. He said that many people ask why the City doesn't have certain amenities seen in other neighborhoods and why there are so many discount stores. He stated that while such stores have been good for the community, there comes a time when the City needs to aim for better options. He said that some financial institutions were akin to loan sharks, causing people to lose their cars due to predatory practices. He stated that Council members are protecting the community from these entities, which care nothing for them.

Vice Mayor Hill said that there are too many small discount stores and that the City has become a food desert, making it difficult to attract grocery stores. He stated that the Council was aware of the issues, and that the general public sometimes brings them up. He said they want change to start in Petersburg, noting that many people are trying to set up shop in the City for various reasons. He stated that although homes and blighted properties are being reconstructed, not all intentions are good, and policies and procedures were being set up to address these concerns.

Vice Mayor Hill stated that there was a mechanism for obtaining a special use permit for events, allowing people to have a good time and then return home. He said that this process needed to be followed to ensure proper governance.

Vice Mayor Hill made a motion to adopt the ordinance to amend and readopt the zoning ordinance of the City of Petersburg pertaining to the regulation of alternative financial institution/short-term loan establishment and small box discount store uses within the City. Council Member Jones seconded the motion.

Council Member Cuthbert mentioned census tract data that indicates 33.8% of the population is in poverty, referencing Page 114 of the agenda packet.

The motion was approved on roll call vote.

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

c. Public Hearing to Amend and Readopt the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Petersburg Pertaining to the Regulation of Tire Sale and Service Uses Within the City

Ms. Siodmak said that the council directed them to examine tire establishments in the City and its commercial and industrial areas, particularly concerning the storage and esthetic impacts of tires. She said that tire sales and services, including vulcanizing, are currently allowed by right in commercial districts B2 and B3, and in industrial districts M1 and M2. She stated that operations involving shredding, cutting, processing, and sales of discarded tires are allowed in industrial districts, and a special use permit is required for establishments storing over 200 tires.

Ms. Siodmak said that they focused on regulating used tires more than new tires. She stated that sales and services of new tires would be allowed in B2 and B3 districts, excluding vulcanizing, while sales and services of used tires would be limited to industrial districts, with a special use permit required regardless of the number of tires stored.

Ms. Siodmak said the comprehensive plan emphasizes visually appealing streetscapes and that automotive uses are less appropriate as primary uses in community mixed-use and corridor commercial areas. She stated that their comprehensive plan should mitigate negative esthetics where possible. Ms. Siodmak said they are updating the zoning ordinance to emphasize form and design of establishments, but currently, there are no codes in place for tire establishments regarding enclosure, street proximity, and landscaping. She stated that special use permits help mitigate negative impacts when other codes are not in place.

Ms. Siodmak said the proposed language allows oversight of used tire establishments while permitting new tire sales and services by right in commercial districts. She stated this oversight is intended to avoid unintended consequences related to larger retail establishments that include tire sale and service as accessory uses. She said that staff recommended approval, and the Planning Commission also recommended approval.

Mayor Parham opened the public hearing and asked if there were members from the public to speak on the ordinance. Seeing none, the Mayor closed the public hearing.

Council Member Jones said that the usage, changes, and vulcanization had been discussed, but disposal of tires was not mentioned. He stated that there were no guidelines on tire storage under the new fire code, which include storage limits, location requirements, separation distances, fire department access, fire suppression, and maintenance of tire facilities. He said these existing codes should be included in the new regulations and praised the fire marshals for their enforcement efforts. He concluded by stating that they could move forward because these codes already exist.

Vice Mayor Hill made a motion to amend and readopt the zoning ordinance of the City of Petersburg pertaining to the regulation of tire sale and service uses within the City. Council Member Smith-Lee seconded the motion.

The motion was approved on roll call vote.

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

- d. Public Hearing for the Consideration of an Ordinance to Amend and Reenact Section 86-31, Limitation on the Number of Pawn Shops, Article II - Pawnbrokers, and of Chapter 8, Secondhand Goods, of the Petersburg City Code

Mr. Altman stated that this was an item that Council Member Jones had asked staff to look into, so they prepared this amendment. He said that currently, Chapter 86, Secondhand Goods, of the Petersburg City code allows for five pawnshops, and this amendment reduces that number to two.

Mayor Parham opened the public hearing.

Roland Stokes Jr., 6100 Dawes Drive, North Chesterfield, confirmed with the Mayor that you must be a resident to speak at a public hearing. Mr. Williams suggested that he pose a question to the City Manager to relay it to Council.

There being no further public comment, the Mayor closed the public hearing.

Council Member Jones said there was a time in Petersburg when riding down any street, particularly Crater Road and Washington Street, one would see numerous pawnshops. He stated that as a child, people used these places to sell sentimental items. This motion aims to protect the citizens because the City has good and bad things coming its way. Council Member Jones said the loan sharks are coming, and more pawnshops would increase crime by providing criminals an avenue to sell stolen items. He emphasized that the ordinance would help protect the community, especially with the upcoming casino—which would bring both benefits and bad actors—and allowing 5–10 pawnshops would make it difficult to track stolen goods.

Council Member Jones made a motion to amend and reenact Section 86-31, Limitation on the Number of Pawn Shops, Article II – Pawnbrokers; and of Chapter 8, Secondhand Goods, of the Petersburg City Code, reducing the number from five to two. Vice Mayor Hill seconded the motion.

The motion was approved on roll call vote.

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

- e. Public Hearing for the Consideration of an Ordinance to Amend the City Charter to Add Section 2-1.2 to Provide for Non-Partisan Elections of Members of Council

Mr. Williams reported that Council had requested consideration of this item. He said that many localities like Petersburg have wards that are comparatively small compared to statewide elections. He stated that dividing the wards into partisan groups, either Republican or Democrat, is often not conducive to the operation of local government, and the issues dealt with at the local level are concentrated and specific to the population served. He stated that this ordinance simply offers the opportunity to present a request to the General Assembly to amend the charter, removing any partisan requirements from future Council elections.

Mayor Parham opened the public hearing.

Barb Rudolph, 1675 Mount Vernon Street, said she saw this covered in the Progress Index recently, and she supported the comments that Mayor Parham and Council Member Jones had

made. She stated that partisan elections were not positive and ended up with the voters actually having fewer choices. She urged Council to send this forward as a charter change.

Kenneth Lewis, 503 Mistletoe Street, stated that he served on the School Board for more than eight years, does not want partisan politics, and fully supports this ordinance.

Mr. Julian Green, 1625 Blair Road, stated that the reason things became partisan is so that people could have equal representation on Council, and he supported the ward system.

There being no further public comment, the Mayor closed the public hearing.

Vice Mayor Hill stated that since he has been on Council, this is the first time they ran as a Democrat, Republican, or Independent—but when voters go to the polls, that is not indicated next to candidates' names. He mentioned former Delegate Donald McEachin, who encouraged the City to work collaboratively with the state and not get into partisan politics.

Mayor Parham also recalled Delegate McEachin as an inspiration for their work and said that Petersburg was on the rise, but it would not get there by working in opposition.

Council Member Jones stated that Petersburg is on the rise, and if they worked together, they would all join in success together at all levels.

Vice Mayor Hill made a motion to approve the ordinance to amend the City's charter to amend the City Charter to add Section 2-1.2 to provide for non-partisan elections of members of Council. Council Member Jones seconded the motion.

The motion was approved on roll call vote.

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

f. Public Hearing for the Consideration of an Ordinance to Amend Chapter 3-16 of the City Charter Concerning the Powers and Duties of the Collector of Taxes

Mr. Williams reported that this ordinance enables the City Charter to be amended to enable him to conduct bank reconciliations. He said in June, City Council authorized the City Manager to execute an MOU with the treasurer; at that time, the manager had presented to Council that they've been spending \$300,000 a year to supplement staff of the treasurer to enable to assist in getting bank reconciliations done that enable the City to get its CAFR in on time along with similar required processes. He said that the manager proposed if they were going to pay that much money, they should do it in house and save money. He stated that they hoped this ordinance would enable current and future treasurers to perform that work to ensure their financials were properly reconciled annually for the first time.

Mayor Parham opened the public hearing.

Barb Rudolph, 1675 Mount Rudolph Street, said the intent behind this is to improve financial management performance and get the reconciliations done in a timely manner, which was commendable. She said that Mr. Williams oversimplified the pluses and minuses of the costs involved, but the point is that they would save by bringing this in house.

Vice Mayor Hill made a motion to approve the ordinance to amend Chapter 3-16 of the City Charter

concerning the powers and duties of the collector of taxes. Council Member Westbrook seconded the motion.

The motion was approved on roll call vote.

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

- g. Public Hearing for Consideration of an Appropriation/Grant from the VA Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)/Main Street Program

Joanne Williams, Director of Communications, stated that this item was for Council to accept a \$435,000 grant from DHCD for the Main Street Program, as well as a resolution for the project, which would include a citywide wayfinding plan, façade assessments, and landscaping.

Mayor Parham opened the public hearing.

There being no speakers, the Mayor closed the public hearing.

Vice Mayor Hill made a motion to accept the appropriation from DHCD for the Main Street Program. Council Member Westbrook seconded the motion.

The motion was approved on roll call vote.

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

10. PUBLIC INFORMATION PERIOD

Leonard Curry, 2014 Woodland Road, said the issue he wanted to raise was related to the data center. He said the City Council has set a January date to consider legislation to allow a data center to set up operations on a 74-acre site at 2255 Jamestown Drive. Mr. Curry thanked Council Member Myers for his motion to defer the issue until January at the last meeting. He said he had done research on data centers and found that they generate high revenue. He stated that Northern Virginia Community College and MIT have studies showing that data centers generate lots of money for state and local government, delivering between \$13 and \$21 in taxes for every \$1 in services.

Mr. Curry said the average family contributes \$1 in taxes and takes \$2 in benefits, indicating the City would profit from the data center. He stated data centers generate lots of sound, equivalent to a jet plane taking off, and operate 24/7/365, and the City has no noise ordinance to stop their sound. Mr. Curry stated the MIT study found data centers consume as much water as a City of 30,000 people, raising concerns about doubling the City's water supply. He said the MIT study also found that data centers demand wastewater treatment, doubling the City's capacity for wastewater treatment. He stated Prince William County and Fairfax County have adopted regulations dealing with data centers, suggesting the City consult with them.

Barb Rudolph, 1675 Mount Rudolph Street, said she would be present in the spirit of Christmas. She recognized librarian Wayne Crocker for his outstanding demeanor and work ethic, and School Board Chair Ken Pritchett, who helped schools create and decorate trees for the holidays, which she hoped would become a tradition.

Paula Chester, 1013 Oakmont Drive, stated that she was requesting consideration for power washing of the building façades along North Sycamore Street, adding that the sidewalks there are also broken in

some places and the replanting promised several years ago still hasn't happened, leaving empty squares of soil.

Mr. Bobby Beverly, 2305 Dundee Drive, claimed that an incident occurred with the Mayor on November 19, 2024, here at the public library. He also claimed that the Mayor entices people to attack them so he can then become the victim. Mr. Beverly touted his own education and credentials, further stating that the Mayor should be removed from his position.

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

Council Member Cuthbert reported that he had held a Ward 4 meeting on December 4th to discuss the nightclub ordinance. He said that Mr. Altman, Ms. Siodmak, Mr. Marks, and Mr. Cruz had attended, and their contributions helped to dispel public misunderstandings. He stated the meeting was constructive and led to a non-controversial public hearing on the ordinance. He thanked the City Manager and administration for the street sweeper he had seen on the streets, noting that he had seen it earlier that day and at a different location within the last week. He said it had been decades since he had seen a street sweeper in Petersburg, and it improves morale and helps residents feel proud of their City. He thanked the City Manager and staff for their efforts to keep the streets clean.

Council Member Jones reported that there would be a Ward 1 community meeting the following day from 5 to 8 p.m., and everyone was invited. Council Member Jones said that refreshments would be provided, and the event would be an opportunity to share visions for a better Ward 1 and Petersburg. He emphasized the need to protect Petersburg at all costs and said that the City is on the rise. Council Member Jones stated that outside influences should not dictate how residents live, adding that outsiders would start moving in and buying property. He encouraged members of the public to contact the Clerk or City Manager, noting that there are many properties for sale.

Council Member Westbrook recognized the Helping Hands nonprofit, stating that they did their toy drive this past Saturday, providing toys to more than 550 children. He also stated that the VSU graduation was also held Saturday and had over 300 graduates. He recognized Terry Smith from the Petersburg school system, stating that her recent speech and debate tournament featured 303 students from 30 schools—from Northern Virginia down to the Norfolk area. He stated that Taylor Thomas placed first in prose and Kiani Donahue placed first in poetry; they are both Petersburg High School students. He also thanked Marquis Allen for the holiday parade and illumination and noted that the PHS alumni holiday party was this upcoming Saturday, 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. at the civic center.

Council Member Myers thanked City Administration for everything they do, with a special recognition to Richard Harris in the Public Works Department. He wished everyone a happy holiday season.

Council Member Smith-Lee recognized Scott Fisher for feeding the homeless at Hope Center on Thanksgiving Day. She said they also took about 80 meals to the hotel on Crater Road and another on Route 460. She reported that Ward 6 would be holding a ward meeting on January 29 at Cool Spring Elementary School at 6 p.m. Council Member Smith-Lee asked public service workers to stand and be recognized, specifically fire and law enforcement officials.

Vice Mayor Hill thanked the fire department for their response to a fire across the street from him the previous Thursday, which turned out to be a grease fire that started in the kitchen. He also asked Mr. Altman to begin looking into contract workers to help public works pick up trash, as it is an issue all around the City. He recognized Marquis Allen for the Christmas event and all he was doing. He also recognized Council Member Jones for putting 804 Skate in Ward 2 and encouraged residents to go out and support that business. He thanked Corey Harris for operating a nonprofit that gives to area seniors.

Mayor Parham recognized City staff for everything they do and wished all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

12. ITEMS REMOVED FROM CONSENT AGENDA

- c. Appointment of Afton Pryor to the Capital Area's Community Action Agency "CAPUP" Board of Directors

Council Member Cuthbert stated that his reason for removing this item from the Consent Agenda was his concern that this nonprofit would be in competition with other organizations for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding, but he has learned that is not the case.

Council Member Cuthbert moved to approve the appointment of Afton Pryor to the CAPUP Board of Directors. Council Member Myers seconded the motion.

The motion was approved on roll call vote.

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

13. FINANCE AND BUDGET REPORT

- a. Department of Finance Monthly Update

Garry Cozier, Budget Manager, stated that the City was tracking pretty much where it should be. He noted one highlighted interest, which has yielded a total of \$1,025,381 in interest since July.

14. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- a. Consideration of an Ordinance to Amend and Re-Adopt the FY25 Petersburg City Public Schools Budget to Allocate Additional Funds for Food Service Upgrades, to Include Capital & Operational Improvements

Mr. Altman reported that at their October meeting, Council conducted a public hearing to amend the budget and provide the schools with an additional allocation of \$1.5 million from the unspent funds from their previous fiscal years, which were returned to the City to help the schools address some of capital needs in the cafeterias throughout their system.

Mr. Cozier also noted that the schools were also amending their own budget, the food service budget, in the amount of \$2 million, for a total amendment of \$3.5 million.

Mayor Parham opened the public hearing. There being no speakers, he closed the public hearing.

Vice Mayor Hill made a motion to amend and re-adopt the FY25 Petersburg City Public Schools budget to allocate additional funds for food service upgrades, to include capital & operational improvements. Council Member Westbrook seconded the motion.

The motion was approved on roll call vote.

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

15. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Resolution Accepting the Donation of Trees from Virginia State University for Farmer Street Park.

Ms. Siodmak reported that Virginia State University wanted to donate \$15,000 worth of trees and tree protection for a planting in Farmer Street Park. She attributed the start of this initiative to Craig and Nicole, who began the connection with VSU and helped form a wider collaboration with the Green Infrastructure Center and the City. She noted that the trees would be significant, ranging from one and a half to three inches in size, which would result in a nice planting from the outset. She said they planned to begin planting as early as Thursday, pending the removal of some dead trees in the park.

Council Member Smith-Lee made a motion to accept the donation of trees from Virginia State University for Farmer Street Park. Vice Mayor Hill seconded the motion.

The motion was approved on roll call vote.

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

16. CITY MANAGER'S REPORT AND SPECIAL REPORTS

Mr. Altman thanked Riverside Regional Jail and their staff for volunteering and feeding the homeless and hungry in the City. He thanked staff at Parks and Recreation, Public Works, and the Police Department for their hard work and success with the parade. Mr. Altman reported that the City's bond rating had increased from A-plus to AA-minus, which was a big step forward for the community's financial stability. He said there was potential for further increases from Moody's and Fitch, hoping that this upward trend would continue into the spring or summer of the next year. He said the bond sale for the second half of the courthouse, police station, and animal shelter was completed on the 12th, with the funds now gaining interest in a SNAP account, as required by state regulations. Mr. Altman thanked his team and all City employees for their hard work throughout the year and for the improvements made to help the City. He said the City was on the right path, and things were only going to get better.

Council Member Myers made a motion to give City employees the days of December 23, 24, and 25 off as holidays. Vice Mayor Hill seconded the motion.

The motion was approved on roll call vote.

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

17. BUSINESS OR REPORTS FROM THE CLERK

Tangi Hill, City Clerk, wished everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

18. BUSINESS OR REPORTS FROM THE CITY ATTORNEY

Mr. Williams said he had no report.

19. ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Parham made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Council Member Jones seconded the motion.

All members of the Council present voted in the affirmative. Meeting adjourned.

The City Council adjourned at 7:48 p.m.

Adopted: May 20, 2025

APPROVED:

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

Mayor

ATTEST:

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

City Clerk