

The work session of the Petersburg City Council was held on Wednesday, November 5, 2025, at the Petersburg Public Library. Samuel Parham called the meeting to order at 5:03 p.m. The meeting video link is <https://petersburgva.new.swagit.com/videos/360016>

1. ROLL CALL:

Present:

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

Absent:

W. Howard Myers, Councilor -- Ward 5

Present from City Administration:

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

2. DETERMINATION OF THE PRESENCE OF A QUORUM:

A quorum was present.

3. PROCLAMATIONS/RECOGNITIONS/PRESENTATION OF CEREMONIAL PROCLAMATION

- a. Proclamation Honoring Grand Basileus Ricky Lawrence Lewis, and Declaring November 15, 2025, as Grand Basileus Ricky L. Lewis Day

Mayor Parham presented the Proclamation Honoring Grand Basileus Ricky Lawrence Lewis, and Declaring November 15, 2025, as Grand Basileus Ricky L. Lewis Day.

Members of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity accepted the Proclamation.

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Marlo Green, 301 Rolfe Street, stated that she would like to inform Council and the public of a few upcoming events hosted by OCR Community Empowerment Group. She said that the first event, an African American tour, was scheduled for November 16, 2025, from 12:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. They would be utilizing the Petersburg trolley to visit Pocahontas Island and other African American locations and sites throughout the City. The event would be free and over 60% of tickets were already sold.

Ms. Green said that the second event, Stories by Candlelight, would tell the history of the Jared House. She said that this event would take place on December 4, 2025, 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the Appomattox Event Center. She said that tickets were available for early bird discounts until November 10, 2025, and VIP tickets were still available. She said that she would like to express her gratitude to Mr. Altman for his letter of support regarding the Jared House, although they were unable to secure the Black and Indigenous People of Color

(BIPOC) grant they had applied for. She said that she planned to continue writing grants to explore options for the Jared House.

Ms. Green said that she had obtained an estimate from an architectural firm, which gave a cost of approximately \$118,000 for the renovations and community engagement work. She said that she hoped the City would be able to contribute a portion of that so they could work together to get the Jared House in a usable state. She said that she was also pleased to announce that they had received a grant through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which would provide \$75,000 for capacity building and hiring additional staff. She said that this grant would also enable them to collaborate with Marquis Allen from Park and Recreation to create a master plan for the park areas on Pocahontas Island. She said that this would require community support and engagement Citywide so they planned to create something that would be utilized effectively by local residents.

Ms. Green said that she was excited to receive the award in the next week or two, as it was the first successful grant they had received for this type of work. She said that she did not want to always ask the City for funding; she wanted to bring in funding from other sources, and she appreciated the City's support as always.

Otis Hill, 6th Street, signed that he wanted to know if the City could provide a picture of a fire system provided to the deaf community for carbon monoxide safety. He asked for that picture so he could share copies with the Virginia Deaf Association, as they had expressed interest in learning more about this initiative and wanted to present it to other communities in Virginia. He signed that it was from a while ago, around April 18, 2023, and he was unsure if they could find that newspaper because he was not sure where to look.

March Altman, City Manager, suggested that Joanne Williams, Public Information Officer, may be able to coordinate and find that information for Mr. Hill.

Sharon Johnson, 619 Summit Street, said that she would like to offer a compliment and a question. Her compliment was that she recently visited the park. She said that she was impressed by the newly painted tennis courts and the large signs. It was a breath of fresh air, so she wanted to thank Council for that. She stated that two weeks prior, she visited Petersburg High School, where she noticed they were building a training center. However, upon her return a couple of days ago, she noticed how it had improved. It looked wonderful and she wanted to give thanks to Council for their hard work. She also wanted to acknowledge the hard work of the Parks and Recreation Department. She said that it was one thing to just fulfill a job description, but when people truly cared and loved the work, it showed. Sometimes, they overlooked the dedication and commitment that went beyond the job requirements and appreciated the extra effort that Parks and Rec put into their work.

Ms. Johnson said that her question was regarding a project that was scheduled to be presented before Council, with over 300 pages of information. She was surprised by the complexity of the issue. She said that as a constituent of Petersburg, she had noticed that the City Council's responsibilities had increased significantly over the past couple of years. She said that with the excitement and growth in the City, she expected this trend to continue. While it was easy to get elected and sit on this stage, the real work was in making it look easy. She would like to know what she could do to support the Council in getting a raise.

Ms. Johnson said that many items had been included on their agendas, but she had not heard anything about Council getting a raise. She said that the Council had demonstrated dedication, commitment, and love for the City, she believed their income should increase along with the increase in responsibility. If necessary, she would be willing to gather signatures to advocate for a raise. She said that she was not aware of the current compensation structure, but she knew for certain that they needed to be paid more.

Cheryl Brown said that she would like to address the comments she had heard from the public regarding the "knee-jerk reaction" of Petersburg's cleanup efforts in relation to the casino. She said that she would like to

set the record straight, as this was not necessarily true. When she made a request to clean up Exit 52 coming into the City, she was pleased to see that Petersburg took immediate action and addressed the issue. In fact, it had been a pleasure driving into the City since then. She also said that she wants to commend the City's efforts to beautify downtown, which was not solely due to the casino. She appreciated the hard work of the municipal and City workers, and she asked Council to thank them on her behalf. She said that she knew it was not easy work, but it was also not a knee-jerk reaction on the part of the City. They had been very expeditious and methodical about improving the City.

Ms. Brown said that she noticed that there were book nooks near Virginia State University (VSU), and there was a food bin on Henton Street that she had stumbled upon by accident. She said that as a result, she decided to fill the bin, but it quickly emptied. She said that if the City would like to point out the locations of other bins, her organization and she would be happy to help fill them. She said that they could make a difference, especially during times when benefits were being cut. They could not do everything, but each person could do something, so she would like to offer her service in that capacity.

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

a. Minutes of Previous Meetings:

- August 9-11, 2025, Council Advance
- September 16, 2025, Closed Session
- October 7, 2025, Closed Session
- October 7, 2025, Work Session
- October 21, 2025, Closed Session
- October 21, 2025, City Council Meeting

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

c. First Read and Schedule a Public Hearing for Consideration of an Amendment to the FY26 Petersburg City Public Schools Budget

d. First Read and Schedule a Public Hearing for Consideration of an Ordinance to Amend and Re-Adopt Chapter 106 of the City Code to Include Article XIII – Local Disposable Plastic Bag Tax

e. First Read and a Public Hearing for Consideration of an Amendment to Ordinance Sections 106-8 and 106-10 Personal Property Tax to Change Due Dates, and Section 110-115 Change the Due Date for Vehicle License Fee

f. First Read and Schedule a Public Hearing to Vacate an Alley Between 223 and 227 Kentucky Avenue

g. First Read and Schedule a Public Hearing for Carol Williams to Appeal a Decision Made by the Architectural Review Board that an Unapproved Shed in the Front Yard of 214 South Adams Street in the Poplar Lawn Historic District Should be Removed Until Its Permanent Location is Reviewed and Approved

- h. First Read and Schedule a Public Hearing for Carol Williams to Appeal a Decision Made by the Architectural Review Board to Deny the Construction of Stairs and a Walkway for a Subterranean Entrance at 214 South Adams Street in the Poplar Lawn Historic District

Council Member Westbrook made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Council Member Smith-Lee 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: Parham, Hill, Jones, Cuthbert, Smith-Lee, and Westbrook; no: N/A; absent: Myers.

6. SPECIAL REPORTS

There were no items under this portion of the agenda.

7. MONTHLY REPORTS

There were no items under this portion of the agenda.

8. FINANCE AND BUDGET REPORT

There were no items under this portion of the agenda.

9. CAPITAL PROJECTS UPDATE

There were no items under this portion of the agenda.

10. UTILITIES

There were no items under this portion of the agenda.

11. STREETS

There were no items under this portion of the agenda.

12. FACILITIES

There were no items under this portion of the agenda.

13. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

There were no items under this portion of the agenda.

14. CITY MANAGER'S AGENDA

- a. Increasing the Water and Sewer Fund Accounts Collection Rate
- b. Increasing the Water and Sewer Fund Rates
- c. Transferring the Stormwater Fees to the Real Estate Tax Bills

March Altman, City Manager, stated that he must apologize to Council, as he had committed to bringing the first three items on the City Manager's Agenda back to Council with schedules and suggestions for

implementation. Unfortunately, he did not take into account the fact that the City's audit was being finalized by staff so it could be submitted on time in December, and that took precedence. He said that he apologized to Council for the delay, but staff would be prepared to present information on these items at their work session in January 2026.

Council Member Cuthbert said that he was glad to hear that the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) would be filed on time. He said that this was important, as it affected their bond rating and demonstrated their commitment to meeting deadlines. He thanked the City Manager again and would be glad to hear when it was done. He asked City Manager Altman when they could expect the ribbon-cutting for the South Side Depot to take place.

City Manager Altman said that they were aiming for December 12, 2025, as the official opening date for South Side Depot.

d. Downtown Improvements

Jamie Fagan provided an update to Council, reporting on a number of improvements and ongoing projects in their downtown area. He stated that this work had been guided by three core principles: providing a safe experience for their citizens and visitors, providing the best visual appearance for their visitors and citizens, and providing a friendly and easy-to-use experience for their citizens and guests. Although some of the work they had done may not have been immediately visible, there were many subsurface, foundational issues that needed to be addressed first. He provided updates on improvements and fixes made to lighting, electrical systems, landscaping and weed control, power washing the brick sidewalks, streetscaping, road and parking lot resurfacing, signage, and holiday decorations.

City Manager Altman added that there would be a Christmas tree in front of the historic courthouse this year, which was a change from its usual location at the train station.

Mayor Parham thanked Mr. Fagan and Ms. Williams for all their hard work on these initiatives to make their City look great.

Vice Mayor Hill thanked staff for making all these improvements possible. He said that he would be working with the City Clerk and Ms. Williams to schedule a business roundtable meeting to discuss other potential improvements they could make to assist their local businesses. He noted that although trash and littering had seen marked improvements, he noticed some people still were clearly choosing to litter even with trash cans nearby. He asked his fellow community leaders and citizens to please do better and hold each other accountable. He emphasized that keeping the streets clean was an important facet of their community's respect for their environment and overall wellbeing. He thanked the public for all the efforts so far in this regard.

Vice Mayor Hill asked City Manager Altman if there was some way they could address an organization on Sycamore Street that left food outside. He said that he understood that it was done with the intent of feeding people in need, but they did not secure the food, and it was often subject to bad weather conditions and may be more hazardous than helpful.

Council Member Westbrook said that he had a concern about vegetation management around the City. He asked if staff had a schedule for removing the dead weeds after they sprayed them in order to ensure they cleaned up the debris.

Mr. Fagan replied that yes, they did that for the properties they were in charge of. He said that he was trying to establish a collaborative effort with the other properties they could not control. He completely agreed with Council Member Westbrook's concern, but it was difficult to do it comprehensively.

Council Member Smith-Lee thanked staff for all of the work they had been doing. She said that the improvements were very noticeable now, even from a distance. She looked forward to seeing the rest of the projects completed.

Council Member Jones asked for more information about the art show they would be hosting at the South Side Depot.

Ms. Williams said that this would be a new initiative, and she was attempting to collaborate with Petersburg Area Art League (PAAL) to create a gallery space in two rooms that would be available for rotating art shows. The first show would feature an artist from Richmond, who had never exhibited in Petersburg before. She had reached out to him because PAAL planned to bring large groups of visitors from Richmond, and she wanted to showcase their visitor center and encourage them to spend money in Petersburg. From then on, she planned to promote Petersburg artists, as well as artists from the region, to participate in the gallery space.

Council Member Jones asked how closely staff was working with their new City Arborist to ensure all of their work was following the appropriate best practices for tree care and maintenance.

Mr. Fagan confirmed that yes, the City Arborist was working with them on their tree installations and care.

Council Member Jones thanked staff for the excellent signage they had installed downtown; it was noticeable and impressive. He noted that while downtown was seeing some visible improvements, he would like the trees, grass, and lighting improved in the area along Wagner Road and Berkley Manor, between the casino and downtown.

City Manager Altman explained that this effort was focused on the corridor from Wagner Road to Route 460, extending to Crater, Sycamore, and into the downtown area. He said that he brought up Route 460 because they anticipated people arriving from Interstate 295, so they needed to address the entire corridor. He said that this was part of their long-term plan, which was currently concentrated on downtown before expanding to rest of the City. He noted that they would be getting a new street sweeper to assist with maintenance as well. He said that there were some long-term plans that had not yet been fully realized, such as streetscaping designs for the downtown area and the corridor he previously mentioned.

Council Member Jones said that he understood there were some long-term aspects of this work, but he could attest that the Wagner Road and Berkley Manor area was feeling neglected and needed some basic care. He added that the traffic control and speed bumps were very well-received, so he wanted to thank staff for that.

City Manager Altman agreed that they needed to improve the maintenance and upkeep of that area. He asked Council Member Jones to please let his constituents know that they were not forgotten; the work was on their list and they were working their way down the corridor.

Mr. Fagan added that he spoke with his superintendent this morning and he could confirm there would be crews on Crater Road by next week at the latest for maintenance.

Council Member Cuthbert thanked staff for all the improvements shared in Mr. Fagan's presentation this evening. He said that it was very exciting to see, as it was a symbol of all of staff's hard work and a symbol of the City turning a corner. It raised their collective self-esteem, which was crucial in so many areas of society and life. He emphasized that there was a positive consequence to improving their environment, and Council thanked staff for all they had done. He agreed with Council Member Jones that this was just the beginning, and everyone was energized by this good work.

Mayor Parham said that he was looking forward to the South Side Depot opening on December 12.

- e. Governor's State of Emergency and Virginia Emergency Nutrition Assistance (VENA) Initiative and Potential Fiscal Impacts of a Prolonged Federal Shutdown

William D'Aiuto, Director of Social Services, provided a brief update on the prolonged federal government shutdown, which had now become the longest in the nation's history, and the impacts it had on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), as well as potential financial impacts on reimbursements the City relied on for funding daily operations. He said that regarding the SNAP program, on October 28, 2025, Governor Youngkin declared a state of emergency to leverage state general revenue and ensure that Virginia SNAP recipients would receive food assistance in November, as the federal shutdown did not fund SNAP for November.

Mr. D'Aiuto said that October's funding was already available, so there was no impact to the October issuance, nor to the City's reimbursements for daily operations in October. The Governor's declaration created the Virginia Emergency Nutritional Assistance (VENA) Program to provide a weekly benefit to current SNAP recipients as of October. The benefit would be delivered on a weekly basis. The purpose of the weekly issuance was to protect state general revenue, as the federal government would not reimburse the state of Virginia for VENA program assistance.

Mr. D'Aiuto said that this gave the state flexibility, as seen with the recent court ruling and the president's announcement that U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) would use \$5.2 billion to cover November benefits, but only enough to cover 50% of the November issuance. USDA notified the states yesterday of that fact. He clarified that he did not have details on the timing of when the benefits would be issued. The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) was working behind the scenes to transfer funds from the federal government to the state, and then to the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) vendor conduit to manage card issuance and balances. This process involved many moving parts, and things were changing by the day.

Mr. D'Aiuto explained that for Virginia SNAP recipients, the VENA program's first payments were issued on Monday, and those were for the first third of recipients who normally received their SNAP benefits on the 1st of the month. There was a two-day delay in this issuance. Today, the second third was issued to SNAP recipients who received their benefits normally on the 4th. And on Friday, the last third of Virginia SNAP recipients would receive the first week of their 25% monthly allotment. For example, if a recipient's allotment was \$400, they would receive \$100 on their card this week. A flyer was available, which he thanked the City Clerk for providing, and it was also posted on the City website.

Mr. D'Aiuto said that they had not heard of any problems so far with the issuance. They had anticipated a large increase in client flow, but foot traffic had not actually increased. They were receiving phone calls from current recipients with questions, and their team was fielding those as they came in. Tomorrow, all local directors will be briefed by VDSS at a statewide meeting, where they expect to receive some details on the SNAP issuance for November. They hoped to get an estimated timeline for when this would occur. If it was a week or several weeks out, thankfully, they had the VENA program.

Mr. D'Aiuto stated that those weekly allotments would continue to be dispersed to current recipients as of October and would stop once federal SNAP benefits began to be issued again. As he mentioned earlier, the November issuance would be 50% of what recipients normally receive. However, for Virginia residents, the situation was different. The federal funding for SNAP benefits typically came into play on the third week of the month. By that time, recipients would have already received two weeks of their normal allotment. As a result, Virginia SNAP recipients should remain whole in terms of what they would have received. Their benefits would remain on their EBT cards and would not be pulled back from the state.

Mr. D'Aiuto stated that next, he would like to discuss the potential fiscal impacts of a prolonged shutdown. Their City budget was fully funded by the City, and they relied on federal and state reimbursement every month for their operating expenses and services provided to child welfare and adult protection clients. Their budget was approximately \$12 million. The City's reimbursement match rate was 15.5 percent for all operational costs and administrative costs. On average, the combined reimbursements from the federal government and the state of Virginia for the first three months of this fiscal year were around \$843,000. 50 percent of that came from the federal government, and 34.5 percent came from the state of Virginia.

Mr. D'Aiuto stated that they were informed by the state of Virginia Department of Social Services Commissioner a few weeks ago that because they had to make whole all of the local departments for their expenditures in October, the state would cover the full 84.5 percent reimbursement. However, if the shutdown continued through November, the Department was at risk of not receiving reimbursement for their November expenditures, or at least until the government reopened.

Mr. D'Aiuto stated that in previous federal shutdowns, Congress would approve retroactive reimbursements to states that received federal revenue, but they did not know, in this current administration and state of affairs, whether there would be a retroactive reimbursement. This was why the state had put all local departments and municipalities on notice that they may lose some revenue reimbursement, depending on how long the government shutdown continued. He added that last week, City Manager Altman had emailed the Governor's Office to request that the state fund the full reimbursement for the month of November to mitigate the impact on local government, as part of the emergency declaration the Governor had issued. The Governor's Office had forwarded this request to the Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Social Services, who had acknowledged it. However, as of today, they had not received a response.

Mr. D'Aiuto stated that they were currently operating as normal, delivering all their services. He said that the only impacts were related to the SNAP program, which he had previously outlined. He said that one program they were unable to implement was the Crisis Assistance program, a 100% federally funded initiative that provided assistance with heating service deposits, repairs, or new equipment. He said that last year, they had served 106 individuals through this program, so the impact was relatively small. He said that they were still accepting applications, which began on November 1. He said that unfortunately, they could not process them until the federal government reopened. He concluded that otherwise, they were operating as usual.

Mayor Parham thanked Mr. D'Aiuto for all that he did. He knew that they were working out ways to manage this situation and were working on providing further assistance to their local food pantries. He asked anyone interested in working with their food pantries to please contact City Clerk Hill to coordinate that.

Council Member Jones said that he definitely wanted to assist with donating food as well as cooking hot meals with their local food pantries. He asked how many people relied on assistance in the City.

Mr. D'Aiuto said that as of the end of September, the City had approximately 6,298 households and 11,089 individuals participating in SNAP, which accounted for roughly 34 percent of the City's residents.

Council Member Jones asked for clarification regarding whether VENA would only partially fund SNAP benefits.

Mr. D'Aiuto clarified that VENA would fully cover SNAP benefit amounts for recipients but would be distributed on a weekly basis rather than a monthly one. Therefore, if a recipient's monthly SNAP benefit was \$400, VENA would disburse \$100 per week to the recipient.

Council Member Jones expressed concern that working through this situation was not only a stressor on the recipients of these benefits but also on their Social Services staff, who likely would be working overtime to handle all of these new issues.

Mr. D'Aiuto said that they were continuing to work overtime, as discussed during their meeting with City Manager Altman. He said that one of the ways they aimed to reduce their exposure to potential lack of federal and state reimbursement was by reducing overtime. However, this could have unintended consequences, such as a reduced ability to respond to situations as effectively as they could.

Council Member Jones said that it was concerning to him that they had to rely on reimbursements from the federal or state governments that seemed to be unreliable. He asked if the City could consider establishing programs in the future to provide self-sufficiency. He suggested that they could look into fast-tracking employment opportunities for those on government assistance so they could depend on steady income for their needs. He stated that it was dangerous to rely on programs that could be taken away in this way. He would greatly appreciate if the City could find a way to provide for its own citizens and encourage them to be self-sufficient so they did not have to look to the state or federal governments for help.

City Manager Altman stated that when they met last week to prepare for this Council presentation, one of the conversations they had was about developing opportunities for workforce development. They discussed how individuals who were currently receiving SNAP benefits would soon be required to start working, which could potentially create a built-in workforce for the City. He said that this benefit requirement could be met through employment, volunteer hours, and other means.

City Manager Altman said that they began this conversation with Mr. D'Aiuto last week regarding how they might be able to implement this to foster self-sufficiency. He said that given the 34-percent figure, which represented a third of the City, they recognized the need to get a significant portion of the population up and running. He confirmed that they were committed to working towards this goal and clearly heard Council Member Jones' concern.

Council Member Jones asked if a team would be assembled to work through this crisis. He emphasized that they could take care of themselves if they put their minds to it.

Mr. D'Aiuto replied that they could start to put together some preliminary plans for what that would look like as a collaboration within the City to encourage and incentivize SNAP recipients who were required to work to volunteer or connect them with paid employment opportunities. He said that it would probably take about a month to put together a brief proposal.

Council Member Jones suggested that the Housing Authority should be involved in this work as well.

City Manager Altman said that regarding the \$800,000 reimbursement, they should expect to receive their November payment soon. He said that if they continued into a federal shutdown in December, they would have a certain period of time to continue operating without interruption. He said that when they reached a breaking point, they would reassess. However, they would continue to provide updates at Council work sessions to keep everyone informed of their progress. It was essential for the Council to be aware of the situation from a policymaking perspective. He said that Mr. D'Aiuto would be attending the statewide conference and should return tomorrow with some more detailed information. Furthermore, they would post confirmed information to the City website for their citizens' awareness.

Council Member Jones asked if, in the worst-case scenario, they would be able to make it through until the new year.

City Manager Altman replied that if the shutdown ended in December, they would likely be fine as the new year came around. However, if the shutdown continued into the third or fourth quarters of the fiscal year, they would need to reevaluate some things. He noted that per Council's policies, they had a Budget Stabilization Fund and an Emergency Fund that could be used to address any situations that arise. However, he hoped that since elections were over this year, they would see some movement on policy development.

15. BUSINESS OR REPORTS FROM THE CLERK

Tangi Hill, City Clerk, stated that she had nothing to report this evening.

16. BUSINESS OR REPORTS FROM THE CITY ATTORNEY

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

Mayor Parham stated that before they adjourned, he wanted to congratulate Paul Mullen, their Treasurer, who was elected last night. He further congratulated Commissioner of Revenue Brittany Flowers, Tiffany Buckner, their Commonwealth Attorney, and Sheriff Crawford. He also welcomed their new Delegate, Kimberly Pope Adams.

17. ADJOURNMENT

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

The City Council adjourned at 6:29 p.m.

Adopted: 11/18/2025



Mayor, Samuel Parham

ATTEST:



City Clerk, Tangi R. Hill