

The work session of the Petersburg City Council was held on January 6, 2026 at the Petersburg Public Library. Samuel Parham called the meeting to order at 6:18 p.m. The meeting video link is <https://petersburgva.new.swagit.com/videos/371243>.

1. ROLL CALL:

Present:

Samuel Parham, Mayor -- Ward 3
Darrin Hill, Vice Mayor -- Ward 2
Marlow Jones, Councilor -- Ward 1
Charles Cuthbert, Jr., Councilor -- Ward 4
W. Howard Myers, Councilor -- Ward 5
Annette Smith-Lee, Councilor -- Ward 6
Arnold Westbrook, Jr., Councilor -- Ward 7

Absent:

Present from City Administration:

Kenneth Miller
City Attorney Anthony C. Williams
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. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Corey Harris, 2316 Anderson Street, stated that he wanted to share something about himself with the City Manager and Council. He said that he wanted them to look at the businesses on the papers he had provided. He explained that his personal business managed the listed international organizations and companies. He said that in Petersburg, Black men continued to struggle as a demographic, and as a Black man, he wanted his fellow Black men to rise to the task of being positive role models for their City's youth. He emphasized that if they were not serving as beneficial role models, they would not achieve their goal of rebuilding the City, because they could not do so without Black men. He stated that there was a concerning amount of vitriolic, racist content constantly posted on social media, and many local Petersburg citizens were those speaking out against such hateful content. He concluded that he believed the City had wrongfully assumed things over the past eight years and he hoped they would reflect on that.

Joe Battison, 1 S. Sycamore Street, stated that he was here to speak on the possibility of getting a parking deck on Monroe Street, in the eastern side of Sycamore Street, at the rear of those buildings. He explained that the parking deck would help alleviate the parking and traffic issues currently afflicting the area between Tabb and Franklin Streets, helping the existing businesses and facilitating further investment and

rehabilitation in the area. He noted that the new courthouse would put even more pressure on the existing parking lot. He requested that Council meet with the business owners between Tabb and Franklin so they could hear what their needs were. He clarified that he did not own any properties within this span of Sycamore Street; he just wanted to see this section look as nice as the section of Franklin to Washington and Tabb to Old Street. He stated that he had also collected signatures for petitions from people on Tabb to Franklin.

Ajani Sekou, 27 S Sycamore Street, stated that he agreed with Mr. Battison that parking was needed on Sycamore Street, particularly due to the gateway to downtown Petersburg being created between Washington and Wythe. He clarified that the City was not undertaking that gateway initiative; rather, the business owners in the area were working together to make it happen. He expressed concern that even when he had notified the City of issues affecting their local businesses, such as the extreme flooding last year, he received no response nor support from City Council. He noted that it was a small City and everyone contributed to the culture, so they needed to work together and stay connected to ensure they had a strong, healthy, and supportive community. He requested Council please enhance their communications and connectivity with their City constituents.

Vernal Gannaway, 652 Old Wagner Road, said that he would like to echo the sentiments expressed so far. As a resident, he had witnessed the City's growth and development, with both agreement and disagreement among residents. He emphasized that the casino was not the solution to the City's problems. He said that they must remember the people who built this City and still lived there.

Mr. Gannaway said that people may tell the Council how great of a job they were doing, but he would not give people praise until the job was completed. He recalled the difficulty he had experienced for over 11 years just to get a single light pole replaced, and he did not appreciate the excuses given about the failure to complete such a simple task. He agreed with the previous speaker that they all must work together; this City was not and would not be built by the new casino.

Mr. Gannaway asked Council to consider the many upstanding and influential citizens who made up their City, rather than focusing solely on new, outside investments they seemed to be trying to solicit. He noted that while some people had left the City, many others had decided to stay. He stated that while some good improvements had been achieved, much still needed to be done; the job was not finished yet.

Barb Rudolph, 1675 Mount Vernon Street, stated that the previous speakers had made some great suggestions and points, and she would be speaking in the same vein as them. She stated that looking forward for 2026 and considering how they could improve on their progress, she would request that Council prioritize transparency, communication, promotion of small businesses, and respect for citizens.

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

a. Minutes of Previous Meetings:

- Closed Session Minutes of the December 9, 2025 Meeting
- City Council Minutes of the December 9, 2025 Meeting

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

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

- d. First Read and Schedule a Public Hearing for Consideration of an Ordinance to Authorize the Execution of a Deed of Easement at 3101 Johnson Road
- e. First Read and Schedule a Public hearing for Consideration of a Resolution Authorizing the Intention of the Petersburg City Council to Authorize the Issuance of Not to Exceed \$21,462,462 Principal Amount of General Obligation Water and Sewer Revenue Bonds for the Purpose of Financing Improvements to the City's Public Sewer Systems Facilities

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

7. SPECIAL REPORTS

- a. Presentation by Department of Rail and Public Transportation

Darius Mason, Director of Petersburg Area Transit (PAT), introduced the item. He stated that he was joined by representatives of the Department of Rail and Public Transportation and the Kimley-Horn Group to provide an overview of some of the ongoing projects at PAT. Before they presented that information, he would like to have Lester Stevenson, Operations Manager, come forward to highlight some of the notable projects accomplished by Petersburg Area Transit in 2025.

Lester Stevenson, Operations Manager of PAT, provided Council with an overview of PAT's accomplishments over the last year. These included implementation of Motive, a fleet monitoring and reporting system, and Busware, which allowed riders to see the live location of buses. They also had begun evening service hours, which had been well-received and highly utilized so far.

Mr. Stevenson reviewed additional achievements and improvements, including provision of route maps throughout the City, extending service for more complete existing routes, and a near-complete memorandum of understanding (MOU) to provide PAT service to Colonial Heights.

Mr. Mason introduced Sam Sink of the Kimley-Horn Group and Katie Miller from the Department of Rail and Public Transportation, who would give the rest of the presentation.

Sam Sink, Transit Project Manager with Kimley-Horn, gave an update on the Modernization Study, transit fleet update, and new operations and maintenance facility at 800 Arlington Street. She stated that the two completed components of the Modernization Study were the comprehensive operational analysis for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-compliant paratransit service, as well as the accessibility gap assessment for both the fixed route buses, the regular buses, and the ADA paratransit service.

Ms. Sink explained that in 2025, they began working on the alternative fuel feasibility study, examining low-emission vehicles and zero-emission vehicles, and exploring what that would entail if these were implemented. She then reviewed the main recommendations from the operations analysis and gap assessment: enhance existing services and infrastructure to increase access; improve public familiarity with PAT services; and optimize existing operations.

Katie Miller, Department of Rail and Public Transportation, provided an update on the fleet. She explained that one of Petersburg Area Transit's ongoing challenges was their aging fleet and ensuring they had

sufficient vehicles to operate their service at their desired rates. Across both large buses and paratransit vehicles, they had 28 vehicles that are past their useful life, meaning the large buses were approximately 10 to 12 years old.

Ms. Miller explained that to address this, they had ordered seven new buses in an effort to keep their fleet up to date, as well as collaborating with Greater Richmond Transit Company (GRTC) to acquire donated buses to temporarily fill the gaps, given the production lead time of 18 to 21 months for the new vehicles. The new buses that have been ordered should arrive in 2027 or early 2028.

Ms. Miller stated that with their fleet, PAT was eligible for the DRPT Merit Capital Program, which they planned to apply for in the Fiscal Year 27 cycle under the state of good repair program. This program prioritizes replacing vehicles beyond their useful life, and with this eligibility, PAT would be eligible for a state match rate of up to 68%.

Ms. Sink then provided an update on the new maintenance and operations facility. She stated that a feasibility study was completed in 2024, examining multiple City-owned sites to eliminate the need to acquire new property. The selected site was the City-owned property at 800 Arlington Street. They had continued to advance this project; the environmental clearance work was ongoing, and they began the 30% design in late 2025. This represented approximately \$1 million invested so far in the new facility.

Ms. Sink said that looking ahead, PAT would be applying for merit funding through the Department of Rail and Public Transportation to fund the final design, and if successful, the funding would be available starting July 1 of this year. This would require a match to access the funding from the City. If those steps were successful, it would put them in line to begin construction in 2028 or 2029. She provided a rendering of the general appearance of what the new facility would look like, including new administrative, maintenance, and operations facilities and bus wash, fueling, and parking facilities.

Council Member Cuthbert asked how many miles of route were within the City of Petersburg, according to the map provided in the presentation, as well as the miles they served outside of the City.

Mr. Mason said that he would estimate it was about 150 miles of routes within the City and 70 miles outside of the City.

Council Member Cuthbert expressed concern that the buses would wear out more quickly if they continued to serve those additional routes outside of the City limits.

Mr. Mason stated that he did not agree; the buses would be prone to wear and tear regardless of the routes.

Council Member Cuthbert asked how much of the PAT budget was funded by City taxpayers.

Mr. Mason said that he did not have that information with him but could follow up with that.

Council Member Cuthbert said that he would appreciate it if Council could receive that information in terms of actual dollars and a percentage of the general budget as well as the capital budget.

Vice Mayor Hill congratulated Mr. Mason and PAT staff on a job well done. He was impressed with the improvements they had made recently and thought they had come a long way to make their public transit services more accessible and straightforward. He thought it was refreshing to see how far they had come over the years, especially when he recalled his own childhood memories of riding the bus throughout the City.

Council Member Smith-Lee thanked Mr. Mason for his outstanding work. She knew that Petersburg residents appreciated being able to ride their public buses and she hoped they could continue to improve their services.

Mr. Mason thanked his team for making all of this progress possible and continuing to move them forward. He additionally thanked Council, DRPT, and Kimley-Horn for supporting them with all of these projects.

b. FY27 Real Estate Reassessment

Mary Williams, City Assessor, provided a brief overview of the reassessment process and the notices property owners would receive in the coming weeks. She explained that their reassessment notices would include the new value for the upcoming fiscal year, as well as the last two years' figures, as mandated by State Code. These notices would inform property owners of the appeal deadlines and provide access to appeal applications and their contact information. Approximately 14,000 reassessment notices will be mailed on January 21.

Ms. Williams noted that based on the new figures, they were currently seeing a 14% increase from the previous assessment; however, staff would have the final figures available by next week. This year, they were introducing an FAQ page on the back of the reassessment notices, which could be accessed quickly or on their website. The Assessor's Office was responsible for providing accurate and statutory-compliant real estate information. She said that the Citywide general reassessment occurs every two years on even-numbered years, with the appeal deadline set for April 1. State Code mandated localities to assess fair market value to reflect the current real estate market. For residential parcels, values are determined using the sales approach for properties similar in condition, size, age, and condition. For commercial properties, the income approach was used to determine fair market value based on the income generated by the property.

Ms. Williams stated that one common question was about improvements, which referred to any permanent addition or enhancement to the land. She clarified that this does not mean that renovations had taken place, but rather an adjustment to the building to reflect the current market. If a property owner disagreed with the assessed value, they could file an appeal at no cost, and the Assessor's Office could provide assistance with the appeal paperwork. She said that Citywide reassessments are conducted biannually, and the tax rate was established every year. She said that they also recommended that property owners contact their mortgage providers to update their escrow accounts. Furthermore, they provided information regarding tax relief.

Ms. Williams said that in addition to the reassessment notices, staff was launching a new geographic information system (GIS), an online public portal that combines assessment data, sales records, and mapping onto one platform. This eliminated the need to check multiple sources and was a helpful tool for property owners during the appeal process. The old GIS would be available until July of this year, allowing users time to adjust to the new version.

Ms. Williams then listed some important dates to remember: January 21, when assessment notices will be mailed, and the informal review period from January 21 to March 1. If someone was unhappy with the decision from the Office review or had missed the deadline, they can appeal to the Board of Equalization (BOE). If all deadlines were missed, they can then appeal to the Circuit Court. She reminded the public that the Assessor's Office was located on the third floor of City Hall and encouraged anyone to reach out to her office if they needed help with any aspect of the reassessments this year.

Mayor Parham thanked Ms. Williams for the report. He noted that the assessments were anticipated to increase by 14% this year, and in terms of the tax rate, he believed Council would be considering lowering the tax rate by at least \$0.05, from \$1.27 to \$1.22.

Council Member Cuthbert said that he would like for at least half of the increase in assessments, or 7%, should be returned to the citizens of Petersburg. He noted that property owners paid real estate taxes or those who were landlords passed them onto their tenants in the form of their rent payments. He would like for Council to consider collecting 7% of the 14% increase for the City, and return the other 7% to the citizens.

Mayor Parham clarified that his point was that the tax rate should be kept the same while they determined the final numbers. He said that the City Manager would need to return to Council with more information about what that 14% number looked like.

Ms. Williams said that at this point, the increase in assessed values were still subject to change.

Council Member Cuthbert said that he would like to know the total increase as a dollar amount, as well as what the new real estate tax rate would be if they allocated 7% to the City and 7% back to the citizens.

Anthony Williams, City Attorney, added that he believed there was going to be a presentation from the Finance Department in the near future, during which they would present more refined numbers that would help Council determine the appropriate tax rates for this year.

8. MONTHLY REPORTS

There were no items under this portion of the agenda.

9. FINANCE AND BUDGET REPORT

a. Department of Finance Monthly Update

Garry Cozier, Budget Manager, noted that they would have two updates this month since Council only had one meeting in December. He provided the budget-to-actuals through November 30, 2025. By November 30, they had completed 41% of the fiscal year, with 37% spent in the General Fund and tracking well in their other funds.

Vice Mayor Hill asked if it would be advantageous for Mr. Cozier to work with Ms. Williams during their budgeting process.

Mr. Cozier confirmed that his staff began with the Assessor's Office with their work; they could not do any planning without their information. He said that they frequently collaborated.

Vice Mayor Hill stated that Council wanted to lower the tax rate as much as possible without impacting their levels of service and ongoing infrastructure improvements.

10. CAPITAL PROJECTS UPDATE

a. Poor Creek Update

Ben Anderson provided an update on the Petersburg Water and Wastewater Improvement Program on behalf of the Department of Utilities. These included the water line extension and pump station off of South Crater and Poor Creek, and the 2-million-gallon drinking water storage tank off of Frontage Road, both of which were substantially complete and permitted by Virginia Department of Health (VDH) prior to the holidays.

He stated that the Poor Creek force main project construction was ongoing, projected to be completed in summer 2026. The pump station project was also ongoing, projected to be completed in fall 2026. The

Locks water main project was ongoing and projected to wrap up construction on time in March 2026. He stated that the lead service line inventory and replacement project was closing in on funding for the replacement phase, and preliminary planning paperwork had just been submitted to VDH for a \$3.4 million grant. They were expecting a status update from VDH for additional funding to make future replacements. This project would begin within the next couple of months and go through winter 2029 at the latest.

He then reviewed other ongoing projects that were anticipated to begin construction in 2026 included the Mount Vernon water tank replacement, Mount Vernon booster station, Wagner Road water main station, Prince George interconnect, the water and sewer extension for the new animal shelter, South Crater Road interceptor, and Poor Creek accelerated sewer rehabilitation. He then outlined future projects they would be undertaking, including The Locks water main replacement phases 2 and 3 and Locks booster station, both of which were in the study phases and identifying funding for design and construction. He summarized that they were actively working with Utilities to make progress on necessary annual and Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects, as well.

Mayor Parham noted the numerous infrastructure projects currently underway, and he appreciated the efforts to keep them on budget and on time. These were vital improvements to accommodate the growth in the City.

Council Member Jones asked what parts of Wagner Road would be affected by the construction of the water main station next year. He asked how the construction would affect residents, businesses in the area, and the daily traffic on that road.

Ben Anderson replied that one project would be on the west side of Wagner Road, closer to South Crater and on the same side as the casino. He explained that this project would be phased so there would not be active construction on both sides, and there was potential opportunity for nighttime construction work to lessen traffic impacts.

11. UTILITIES

There were no items under this portion of the agenda.

12. STREETS

There were no items under this portion of the agenda.

13. FACILITIES

There were no items under this portion of the agenda.

14. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

There were no items under this portion of the agenda.

15. CITY MANAGER'S AGENDA

Kenneth Miller stated that although there were no items under Utilities, Streets, or Facilities, he wanted to note that under the direction of Mr. Richard Harris, there had been a remarkable turnaround in their Public Works Department.

Council Member Jones requested that staff look into the issue brought up by a citizen during public comment regarding a streetlight that needed replaced. He agreed with Mr. Miller about Mr. Harris.

Council Member Cuthbert agreed with Council Member Jones; he found that Mr. Harris had been phenomenally dedicated, energetic, effective, and he hoped that the City Manager would recognize his talents in a meaningful way.

16. BUSINESS OR REPORTS FROM THE CLERK

Tangi Hill, City Clerk informed the public about two upcoming Ward meetings. She said that on January 8, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., Council Member Cuthbert will be hosting a Ward 4 meeting here at the library. She said that on January 13 at 5:00 p.m., Council Members Westbrook and Smith-Lee will be hosting a joint meeting for Ward 6 and 7, also held at the library.

Ms. Hill announced that additionally, the City of Petersburg will be hosting a food distribution event. She said that if the public missed the January 21 event, which was highly successful, serving over 400 families, the next distribution will take place on January 21 at 5:00 p.m. and February 18 at 5:00 p.m. at the Union Train Station. She emphasized they were in need of volunteers to make this event a success, and she encouraged everyone to spread the word to organizations, City employees, and the public. She said that the staff would like to extend their gratitude to Council for their support.

Mayor Parham added that on January 19, they had two events: the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Parade, which would take place on Pocahontas Island and proceed down Washington Street, and the Day of Service event, hosted by Community Transformers at Tabernacle Baptist Church.

17. BUSINESS OR REPORTS FROM THE CITY ATTORNEY

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

18. 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 7:23 p.m.

Adopted: 01/20/2026



Mayor, Samuel Parham

ATTEST:



City Clerk, Tangi R. Hill