

The work session of the Petersburg City Council was held on March 3, 2026 at Petersburg Public Library. Samuel Parham called the meeting to order at 5:04 p.m. The meeting video link is <https://petersburgva.new.swagit.com/videos/376903>

1. ROLL CALL:

Present:

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

Absent:

Present from City Administration:

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

Cyndi Perkins, 1918 Dodson Road, stated that she was a resident of Ward 7 and a registered nurse (RN) with over 40 years of experience. She said that she understood the City was going all-in on this data center, but she asked them to please listen to the concerns of the residents they represented. She was speaking out tonight to address health concerns related to data centers being located near residential areas. She recognized the City's goal of economic growth, but she wished to put on record her firm opposition to the 125-foot setback currently proposed. She said the Warrenton Group had no tenant and could not verify that the residents' concerns would be mitigated. She asked if a health impact assessment had been completed by the Warrenton Group; this needed to happen before any construction permit was awarded.

Ms. Perkins said that a 125-foot setback was insufficient to protect the health and wellbeing of residents, per industry standards and research. She said that M-1 Light Industrial Zoning District uses must not be injurious to the use and enjoyment of neighboring property, per the City Zoning Ordinance. She stated that the 125 foot buffer was woefully inadequate in terms of auditory and respiratory protection of the neighboring families. She respectfully requests that City Council require the developer to implement a minimum of a 300-foot

setback for mechanical equipment and buildings, and require a binding proffer for sound-dampening walls, not just landscaping, to ensure noise levels did not exceed 45 decibels at the residential property line.

Ajani Sekou, 27 South Sycamore Street, said that he was asking the City Council for help this evening. He said that he could not tolerate the way that Habitat for Humanity was currently being operated in the City. He said that he had personally dedicated 2,000 hours of volunteer service to Habitat when he first came to Petersburg because his family had been an ardent supporter of the organization for many years. He said that he knew that their local Habitat organization had not built a house in over five years; yet, they received \$125,000 from the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding from the City. He said that he knew they were receiving materials and goods from Walmart and Lowe's, but they never reached the showroom floor. He expressed deep concern that people were being under-served and their building was in a degraded, dangerous condition. He requested that Council help and look into this major issue that affected their local residents.

Anna Cordic, 139 Monroe Street, said that she was an attorney at Mr. Hardenbergh's law firm. She stated that she was here to discuss their current parking situation. She said that they were excited for the new courthouse being built across the street; however, they had been paying the City for parking in that lot up until this week. She said that they were asking Council for permission to transfer their parking permits from the previous parking lot and put up private parking signs for their eight spots across the street, where there were currently three-hour parking spots. She said that parking was otherwise difficult to find near their office, so she would appreciate it if the City could work with them to find a solution.

Dr. Rosezelia Weaver-Roy, 2942 Homestead Drive, expressed her gratitude for the uplifting economic enhancement in the City of Petersburg. She saw progress and job availability, construction, large-scale capital investment, and housing, although many of them could not afford it. She stated that regarding the data center, it was intended to provide substantial tax revenue and contribute to the local economy. However, she must express her concern regarding the data center campus being housed in Petersburg, especially in residential and school areas.

Dr. Weaver-Roy stated that Petersburg had a well-known history of being the unhealthiest City in the state of Virginia, and this raised serious questions about whether it was appropriate to have a potentially harmful development such as a data center in an area already struggling with their health outcomes. She requested the Board to please look further into this issue and ensure there were no risks.

Wendy Austin, 544 High Street, said that she was a resident of Ward 5, and she was there this evening to follow up on a couple of emails she had sent. First, she wanted to congratulate the City on the opening and operation of Southside Depot. She also wanted to congratulate them on the bond refinancing, which was an excellent, timely fiscal decision. She said that regarding her follow-ups, she did not want to lose track of the plastic bag tax; she thought it was a great idea and hoped it would return for further consideration. She said that she had sent in some comments about the draft Zoning Ordinance that the Council would be reviewing soon. She said that it was a great document and the consultants had done a wonderful job.

Ms. Austin had particularly noted the data center, which was a speculative industry that was making swift progress in general. She emphasized that zoning was a way to create guardrails for that use as they learned more about it. She said that the developer agreement with the Warrenton Group (TWG) looked solid in her opinion, so they were moving in the right direction. She reiterated that shoring up the Zoning Ordinance to provide the best protection to the community was the best way forward in terms of balancing quality of life with economic development.

Linda Muhammad, Spiritual Advisor and Muslim Chaplain at Virginia State University, introduced herself and said that some of her students would be speaking to Council.

Manadu Saidykhan said that she was a junior computer science major at Virginia State University, and she was also the president of the Muslim Students Association. She said that her colleagues and she would be discussing the issue of busing for jummah prayer, which was a Friday prayer that was particularly important for Muslim men to participate in together at the masjid. She said that the issue they faced was that their school had busing, but the buses did not connect, and the number of connections needed ultimately led people to be late or miss the important prayer time. She said that college students could not always afford to pay for Ubers or coordinate other transportation methods, so they were seeking a solution to this issue.

Jordan Deville said that she was a junior majoring in criminal justice from Prince George County, Maryland, and she was proud to be a third-generation Trojan. She said that her mother and grandmother attended. She said that as a Muslim woman, jummah prayer was an important space for her to connect with other Muslims and engage in fellowship. She said that last year was her first year at VSU, and she soon discovered that commuting to the masjid was extremely costly, with a 15-minute Uber ride costing nearly \$30 each way. She said that this prayer was required for Muslim men, so this became a financial burden. She said that they did have jummah at their school, but that left them disconnected from other Muslims in the greater community. She said that this was an important issue for them.

Isaiah said that as a recent revert, he had been unable to attend jummah services with the community due to the bus structure and because he did not drive. He said that his jummahs had been at school, which were beneficial, but he, as a Muslim man, needed to perform jummah in a community setting with other men of the same faith to experience the full aspects of the faith. He said that this included interacting with individuals from diverse backgrounds and ways of life, which was essential in their religion; it was a mandate. He said that he believed it would be beneficial if they could establish another route, extend the existing route, or find an alternative solution to make jummah accessible to Muslims, especially Muslim men on campus. He said that this would enable them to practice their faith to the fullest extent.

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

a. Minutes of Previous Meetings:

- February 17, 2026 Closed Session Meeting
- February 17, 2026 City Council Meeting

b. First Read and Schedule a Public Hearing for Consideration of an Ordinance to Approve a Request by Ibrahim Al Tamimy, on behalf of 601 E Wyth St LLC, for a Special use Permit to Operate a Stand-Alone Vehicle Repair Shop/Automobile Service Station at 601 East Wythe Street, Parcel ID 012270012, in the B-2, General Commercial Zoning District

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

d. First Read and Schedule a Public Hearing for Consideration of an Amendment to the FY26 Utilities Fund Budget & FY26 Streets Fund Budget

e. First Read and Schedule a Public Hearing for Consideration of an Amendment to the Code of Ordinance, Section 106-109, Real Estate Tax, to Change Elderly and Disabled Gross Amount; and Section 106-112, Change the Amount of the Exemption

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

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

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

7. SPECIAL REPORTS

- a. Tax Relief for Elderly and Disabled Presentation - Brittany Flowers, Master Commissioner of the Revenue

Brittany Flowers, Master Commissioner of the Revenue, provided a brief presentation on the item. She explained that she was present to discuss and improve the increase of the gross income and assets from current City Codes §106-109 and §106-112. She provided the City Code section language for reference. She noted that the application process had not changed. She explained that in 2024, she requested Council to provide an increase to the income limits for the program, and she thanked Council for completing that. She explained that in 2024, they mailed 566 applications and 27 of those were denied due to exceeding the established income amount; in 2025, they mailed 327 applications and denied 29 of those. She noted the sharp decrease in applications between those two years, which may be attributed to the detailed information requested in the applications. She said that people may not want to divulge that much information in order to qualify for the program. She said that as of today, they had 150 new applications to send out in addition to the 298 already, for a total of 448. She said that the applications would be mailed on March 18 and due by May 1.

Ms. Flowers provided data comparing the current program limits in Petersburg and other localities, noting the changes in some localities' programs. She stated that based off of feedback from taxpayers and the information she had received in her office, she was requesting Council to increase the income limit from \$45,000 to \$50,000. Additionally, she requested that for each person in the household, the first \$4,000 to the first \$6,000 of income to be exempted, and in §106-112 for the income of \$0 to the first \$30,000 to have a maximum tax relief of \$1,700. Then, those that could receive 50% relief would be from \$35,001 to \$50,000, still with a maximum tax relief of \$1,700.

Mayor Parham said that he would be interested in seeing the City of Richmond's program numbers.

Ms. Flowers replied yes, she could do that, although they had a much higher population.

Council Member Westbrook asked for information about Bristol, Danville, Portsmouth, and Norfolk, considering they had casinos in their towns.

Ms. Flowers replied that she would find out. She said that she would provide that to Council at their next meeting.

March Altman, City Manager, asked if Ms. Flowers could look into Fredericksburg, as well.

Ms. Flowers said that yes, she would do that. She said that they would have that information at the next Council meeting.

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, provided the Department of Finance Monthly Update. He stated that they had budget to actuals, as well as a Council-requested FY25 Collection Analysis and a FY25 audit finding remediation. He said that as of the end of January, 58% of the year had passed, and they were at 56% of spend. He affirmed that everything was looking good. He said that the same was true for the rest of the funds, which were all tracking well. He explained that they would be amending the Dogwood Fund to correct the discrepancy and account for the revenue on the other side.

Mr. Cozier stated that he would next discuss the FY25 Collection Analysis. He explained that the Budget Manager and Chief Financial Officer review past performance and future projects to estimate the proposed budget amount, then the City Manager approves the budget to be submitted to City Council. He said that it was important to note that these projections are based on their best knowledge at the time. He stated that at the beginning of FY25, they had assessed a value of \$33,712,833 in the budget. They had adopted a rate of \$28,882,796, which was lower than the assessed value due to their historical collection rate. Historically, they had not collected all of the property tax they assessed, but in FY25, they had actually collected \$31,971,395, representing a 94.8% collection rate; this was a very positive outcome.

Mr. Cozier explained that this resulted in a positive variance of \$3,088,599, which was a significant factor in the increase in their Unassigned Fund balance. He said that the remaining significant categories in the budget included personal property tax, machinery and tools tax, local sales and use tax, consumer utility taxes, business license tax, lodging tax, and meals tax. He noted that there were some significant discrepancies in some of the collection percentages, both positive and negative. He stated that moving on to the FY25 Audit findings and remediation, it was worth noting that they had consistently had 11 unresolved audit findings in recent years. In Fiscal Year 25, the Finance Department addressed seven of these findings, leaving four remaining. The FY25 audit noted these four findings, and it was important to note that each finding had a draft policy and procedure in progress that they were working to finalize.

Mr. Cozier reviewed the four findings, and the steps staff was taking to resolve them. The first material weakness in which the City failed to perform monthly reconciliations between the Utility Billing Subsidiary System and the General Ledger. To address this first finding, Customer Care & Collections was coordinating with the CFO's Office to establish a formal monthly reconciliation process; policy and procedures were nearing completion. The second material weakness was that during prior fiscal years, the City was not reconciling the property tax delinquent lists to the taxes receivable accounts as reported in the general ledger monthly or at year-end. To address this second finding, Customer Care & Collections was establishing a formal monthly reconciliation process in conjunction with the Treasurer's Office and implementation of a reconciliation framework to enhance accuracy, minimize year-end adjustments, and strengthen financial controls within the BAI system and across both departments.

Mr. Cozier continued to report that the third material weakness was that the auditor required significant adjustments to the financial statements for compliance with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP). These adjustments affected various accounts, including receivables, capital assets, debt, revenue, and expenditures. To address this third finding, Accounting staff will record year-end GAAP adjustments and strengthen business processes. The City also hired qualified personnel to enhance internal controls. The Finance Department will assess training needs, implement internal reviews of reconciliations, and aid the Treasurer's Office and Customer Care with revenue and receivables in order to improve financial statement accuracy and minimize future audit adjustments.

Mr. Cozier stated that the fourth material weakness was that the City had not matched the cash amounts reported for each fund with the total cash shown in Fund 999 for several years. To address this fourth finding, the Treasury Department, with assistance from Finance, will introduce an official monthly reconciliation process. This includes completing necessary administrative steps such as preparing a

reconciliation worksheet to display any resolved variances. He reiterated that they had policies and draft status for each of these four findings, working to remove them in time for the FY26 audit.

Vice Mayor Hill asked the City Manager if they were at a point where they could look at lowering the real estate tax rate, or if they needed more numbers to come in first.

City Manager Altman said that they would need to consider the real estate reassessments and the impact those would have on achieving an equalized tax rate. He stated that they would have a public hearing on March 25, and at that time he would present the proposed budget and tax rates, potentially lowering the rate due to the increased assessments. He stated that Ms. Flowers would also present information on the Tax Relief for the Elderly and Disabled, which would further assist that segment of their population.

Council Member Cuthbert said that pages 111 and 114 of the agenda packet referred to their major income streams. He asked for more information regarding the total amount of accounts receivable attributable to past due real estate taxes.

City Manager Altman stated that staff was currently working on compiling that data in addition to the items on page 114 with regard to how much that number was and what the age was. He said that they were preparing that for Council.

Council Member Cuthbert asked if staff could provide that at Council's March 17 meeting.

City Manager Altman replied that they could certainly try.

Council Member Cuthbert emphasized how important it was to collect those past due amounts in order to lessen the burden on the rest of the taxpayers and pay for municipal services.

10. CAPITAL PROJECTS UPDATE

There were no items under this portion of the agenda.

11. UTILITIES

a. Department of Public Works and Utilities

Randall Williams, Assistant Director of Public Works and Utilities, provided an update to Council. He began with their Utilities Report for January and February. He reported that the City staff successfully completed 88% of the water main breaks, with 21 out of 24 incidents, and the report provided the exact locations and numbers of leaks for both months. Unfortunately, one incident in the industrial tank area and swamp area was not completed due to a major waterline break that affected multiple tanks and levels. He said that Southern Construction completed the repair, collaborating with their neighbors to utilize their drone to assess the damage, and their staff would be using the drone tomorrow to continue this work.

Mr. Williams provided Poor Creek Project updates, including the Elevated Water Tank, Water Main and Booster Station, Poor Creek Force Main, and Poor Creek Pump Station. He provided additional project updates, including the Locks Water Main Replacement Phase I, Wagner Road Water Main Extension, and the Lead Service Line Replacement. He reported that the Oak Hill Road Temporary Bridge was delivered on February 25, 2026 and had a tentative reopening date of March 27, 2026. He also reported on their work with downtown beautification, parking lot improvements, sidewalk safety improvements, and Facilities Management and Grounds Division activities.

Mayor Parham thanked Mr. Williams and his team for their work addressing the many water main breaks they experienced due to the cold temperatures. He said that they did a great job keeping the water flowing. He asked him to work with Mr. Sekou to provide his block with trash can receptacles, as he had requested.

Council Member Cuthbert asked if there was going to be work happening across the street from Wabi-Sabi.

Mr. Williams answered yes; across the street from there would be approximately 75 additional parking spaces. He said that once the weather improved and the temperatures became more suitable, they would begin that work.

Council Member Cuthbert asked whether City Administration had considered electric car charging stations in this context. He said that a logical place to put them would be in front of the Information Center.

City Manager Altman confirmed that yes, they had been thinking about them. He said that he knew they needed to get some installed downtown, and he agreed that Southside Depot may be a good place to start. He said that there were some other parking lots where they should not install any stations due to ongoing construction and repair projects. He said that they were also looking into potential repurpose of a previously purchased but unused charging station and were working with Dominion to identify potential locations for charging stations downtown. He said that staff was aware of the need for residents as well as tourists and visitors in the City.

Mayor Parham asked the City Manager about improving the parking situation for the courthouse while construction was ongoing.

Mr. Williams said that he could speak to that. He said that he had met with the Court Clerks a few days ago and learned that they had found parking between the Sheriff's parking spaces and the Police parking spaces. The Circuit Court could access the parking lot he had previously mentioned in his presentation and there was lighting to be improved along the back street near the jail. He said that he had worked with the Courts staff to ensure they had adequate parking space.

City Manager Altman said that additionally, they would be posting information on the City's website and social media to inform the public of other available parking areas downtown. He said that they were coordinating with their departments to move spaces around and make sure everyone was accounted for.

Vice Mayor Hill asked if City Manager Altman could bring information back to Council on potential opportunities to beautify the triangle area on the avenue, such as a small park.

City Manager Altman replied yes, absolutely.

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

City Manager Altman stated that individuals may receive a real estate tax bill that should have been sent to their mortgage company. He said that they had experienced an issue with their third-party biller, resulting in some bills being sent to the wrong parties. In this instance, sometimes bad situations can lead to good outcomes. He explained that what they had found was that this issue had prompted individuals to double-check with their mortgage companies to ensure they were remitting payment. He confirmed the City had sent out a public notice today to let everyone know of the issue and that it was being addressed.

Council Member Jones asked if Mr. Stoke could please introduce himself for the public record.

Jeff Stoke, Deputy City Manager, stated that he welcomed everyone to come visit him at his office at 135 North Union Street, 2nd Floor, in the City Manager's Suite. He said that he was in the midst of getting to know the City and would be touring Ward 1 soon. He said that he had the honor of driving around and learning about the City with the Mayor and Vice Mayor the other day.

16. BUSINESS OR REPORTS FROM THE CLERK

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

17. BUSINESS OF REPORTS FROM THE CITY ATTORNEY

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

18. ADJOURNMENT

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

The City Council adjourned at 6:02 p.m.

Adopted: 03/17/2026



Mayor, Samuel Parham

ATTEST:



Clerk of Council, Tangi R. Hill