

JOINT GASTONIA CITY COUNCIL / BOC SPECIAL MEETING
MARCH 21, 2022 – 6:00 P.M.
GSM PREMIUM LEVEL AT CAROMONT HEALTH PARK – GASTONIA, NC

Mayor Walker E. Reid, III, called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. on Monday, March 21, 2022, at the CaroMont Health Park, Gastonia, North Carolina.

PRESENT: Mayor: Walker E. Reid, III
Mayor Pro Tem: David R. Kirlin
Council Members: Robert Kellogg
Jim Gallagher
Charles Odom
Jennifer M. Stepp
Donyel Barber
City Manager: Michael C. Peoples
City Attorney: L. Ashley Smith

ABSENT: None

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS (BOC) PRESENT:

Vice-Chairman: Bob Hovis
Commissioners: Kim Johnson
Tom Keigher
Ronnie Worley
County Manager: Dr. Kim S. Eagle
County Attorney: William T. Stetzer

ABSENT: Commissioners Chad Brown, Chairman, Allen Fraley and Tracy Philbeck

Also in attendance were: Candice G. Owenby, Deputy City Clerk and Donna S. Buff, Clerk to the Board.

Members of the public attending: Kathy Cloninger, Gaston Gazette Reporter Kara Fohner, Representative Donnie Loftis, and Don Roper.

WELCOME

Mayor Reid welcomed everyone and recognized Commissioner Bob Hovis, Vice-Chairman, Gaston County Board of Commissioners.

OPENING COMMENTS

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Commissioner Hovis introduced himself and asked everyone to go around the room and introduce themselves including an interesting fact about yourself.

MESSAGE FROM THE HONEY HUNTERS

Ms. Veronica Jeon, Chief Marketing Officer with the Gastonia Honey Hunters welcomed everyone and gave a brief update on upcoming events at the park.

APPRECIATION OF SUCCESSFUL COUNTY/CITY COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

Dr. Eagle and Mr. Peoples gave a brief presentation on some of the collaborative successes between the City of Gastonia and Gaston County and fielded various questions.

(Reference as contained in Exhibit Book 5 to Minute Book 111 at Page 41)

Mayor Reid commended both Managers for working together along with support staff and all that goes in to making these successes happen. He also thanked the State and Federal Officials for their support to help as well.

Mayor Pro Tem Kirlin stated there is concern about the homeless situation and asked Dr. Eagle where we are in this process.

Dr. Eagle said that an Intergovernmental and Interagency Task Force is bringing key stakeholders together to discuss the status of homelessness and how to better work together to have an impact. A sub-committee structure has been created to work on four main areas which include immediate needs, regulation and zoning, a possible warming station/opportunity for wrap around services, and non-profit capacity. There is an opportunity to build capacity and do better communicating, have better alignment, and a clarity around roles. We all want to make a positive difference but how do we align better to have a greater impact.

Dr. Eagle also said there is another conversation about an Affordable Housing Trust Fund or what affordable housing might look like.

Representative Donny Loftis asked what the next big project will be.

Mr. Peoples said the ARPA funding from the Federal Government and a generous budget from the State will be utilized for multiple projects that have moved up on the list of things planned to do.

Councilwoman Stepp said she hopes the State will also help with the Performing Arts Center. She also asked about the development of infrastructure for schools, which is a concern as we continue to grow.

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Dr. Eagle said she talks with Dr. Booker often about facility planning, which includes City of Gastonia staff as well. The next issuance will be for Grier Middle School.

Commissioner Hovis said the Gaston County School population has stayed static over the last six years, which is around 31,000 - 32,000. County wide there are about 6,000 – 7,000 housing units on the books to be built, which will bring the school population up. The Board of Education and the School Administration are doing an area study that goes back five years to try to prepare for the next spike and where. The Building Inspections department is working to provide better numbers to the school system. He stated that the Charter School development in Gaston County was positive because it created classrooms and gave parents another choice as well as the Academy based system to allow more choices. He said seats in the classroom is definitely going to be the next 10-year challenge. He said we are fortunate that we did not have to use the quarter cent sales tax from the State. When the latest bond referendum came out for \$250,000,000 of Capital Funding it did not take any General Fund revenue dollars from property tax.

Councilman Gallagher asked which schools were replaced under the \$250,000,000 and how much money is leftover?

Dr. Eagle said Pleasant Ridge Elementary, Stanley Middle, Belmont Middle and Grier Middle were completed with \$60,000,000 to \$80,000,000 still available.

Councilman Odom asked what the measurement of diversity is in our schools right now.

Dr. Eagle said she would need to confirm that information with Dr. Booker.

Commissioner Hovis stated that currently the population in each school has a makeup, which has not shifted more than three percent in either direction over the last six years.

Councilman Kellogg asked how we are continuing to cooperate between the City and the County to lure Light Rail to connect not only to Belmont and Gastonia but all the way to the Casino to connect the Western Hub to Charlotte. Also are there any other transportation collaborative issues that are being worked on right now?

Mr. Peoples said Connect Beyond Centralina is working on regional transportation and many meetings have been held to discuss how this moves forward, what that looks like and how will it be paid for which is our primary concern.

Mayor Reid said this is also a major subject with the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), which the bottom line is how will it be paid for.

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Dr. Eagle said from a County wide perspective, there is a lot of discussion about the different modes of transportation, not just about the train, but also make it appealing and of interest to the folks on the Western side of Gaston County and the impact on them. Once the funding mechanism is established strategy will also be important.

Councilman Gallagher asked if there were any updates on the Catawba Crossings bridge.

Mr. Peoples said it is being studied and the next step will be to request DOT establish a route number, which is not in a STIP. The STIP is over programmed and again, where will the money come from.

Councilwoman Barber asked if there was anything we can do collectively to advocate for help as it relates to what is happening in Gaston County on Interstate 85.

Mr. Peoples said that is a great question. He said we are waiting on funding and looking at all the different modes of transportation and how we can do that. We continue to let people know all the time how important it is.

Representative Loftis said he is learning how to break the code on transportation and they are focusing on how to build a grassroots effort through the MPO. The MPO must have everyone from every angle supporting it so it will go up as a solid project from the MPO and help get a high score. The Chief Engineer in Shelby can help get a high score. We are trying to figure out what the requirements are to put in front of the MPO and up the chain to the DOT to make sure we get it scored quickly. The MPO is the most critical step.

Councilwoman Stepp said she is on the MPO and they have talked to NCDOT in Shelby to get the rating and asked Representative Loftis to let the MPO know what the requirements are to get the higher rating.

Councilman Gallagher said they have talked to the Charlotte MPO and Mayor Lyles who also voted in favor of the bridge. This road needs to be designated as soon as possible so it can be added to the STIP.

Representative Lofts said the DOT Division Engineer said it does not require a route number in order for it to move forward. It does require the MPO and Chief Engineer pushing it to get a higher rating.

Further discussion ensued.

Mr. Peoples said there have been a lot of positive feedback and thanked everyone for attending.

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Commissioner Hovis suggested the Council and Board of Commissioners do a march at the DOT’s office in Raleigh to get some answers.

OTHER MATTERS

No other matters were discussed.

Mayor Reid thanked everyone for attending and asked for feedback on future meetings.

It was suggested that this group meet quarterly and also invite State representatives and the School Board to participate in the next meeting.

Dr. Eagle also thanked everyone for taking the time to attend.

MEETING ADJOURNED

Mayor Reid adjourned the meeting at 7:43 p.m.

Mayor Walker E. Reid, III

L. Ashley Smith, City Attorney

Candice G. Owenby, Deputy City Clerk

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