



COUNCIL FY2025 BUDGET RETREAT
August 22, 2024
9:00 a.m.
Summary Minutes

Mayor & City Council

Mayor Anthony S. Ford
Mayor Pro Tem Kyle Berry
Councilman Elton Alexander
Councilman Yolanda Barber
Councilwoman LaKeisha Gantt
Councilman Alphonso Thomas

Administration

Frederick Gardiner, City Manager
Vanessa Holiday, City Clerk
Lakeisha Gaines, Interim City Treasurer
Quinton Washington, City Attorney

Staff in Attendance: Decius Aaron, Ryan Anderson, William Conner, Econuel Ingram, Demeatrius Ivey, Rosalynd Rawls, Genea Stanley, Shana Thornton, Frank Trammer, Charisma Webster, and Renee Wheeler

Mission: To provide visionary leadership and superior municipal services that enhance the quality of life for citizens while creating a welcoming business atmosphere focused on sustainability and expansion of tourism and cultural events.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Ford at 9:43 a.m.

Invocation by Councilman Thomas

Pledge of Allegiance recited by all in attendance.

The Clerk was asked to proceed with the Roll Call. All the members were present except Councilmember Gantt.

Adoption of the Agenda: Motion to adopt the Agenda made by Mayor Pro Tem Berry; seconded by Councilmember Barber. The motion passed unanimously 4-0.

DAY TWO AGENDA

Day One Recap by Mr. Frederick Gardiner

Mr. Gardiner noted there were several concerns and issues around Code Enforcement, including where the department should be managed, and funding for nuisance and abatement; and reviewed the Agenda Outline for Day Two.

NEW BUSINESS

1. **Municipal Court - Proposed FY2025 Budget - Presented by: Genea Stanley**

Ms. Stanley reviewed the year to date citations, revenue and clearance rate of 79%, noting Pre-Trial Diversion cases can take up to six months to clear, and the numbers do not reflect

school zone case, which a number of citizens are protesting; reviewed the 2021, 2022, 2023 noting significant increases beginning in 2022 with the implementation of the Stockbridge Police Department; reviewed the spending trends for 2022, 2023 and 2024; noted a request for a Capital Improvement Project that previously approved and has now stalled in the Procurement Department; requests additional training, the Public Defender, Municipal Judge Training and Hospitality.

Councilmember Alexander asked what the renovations are for the court.

Ms. Stanley referenced renovations to the Courtroom to accommodate the those who appear for court cases, and also to payment window for security purposes.

Ms. Stanley referenced Personnel with the current staffing level at three (3) members with a desire to increase staff in FY2026.

Councilmember Thomas asked about the case load for Code Enforcement citations.

Ms. Stanley noted the cases have increased, however, there needs to be more clarity in this area and seeks guidance from Judge McCord.

Attorney Washington noted he has spoken with Judge McCord, and noted the City Council needs to decide with regard to the issuance of warrants by local ordinance as it relates to Code Enforcement.

Mr. Gardiner noted a Bench Warrant can be issued for Failure To Appear (FTA).

Councilmember Thomas suggested that a conversation needs to take place for the Council to act to make the city's departments more efficient and asked the City Manager to follow up with Judge McCord. Mr. Gardiner confirmed.

Councilmember Alexander noted there is no reason to delay the action, noting the City Council approved stiff residential and commercial fines.

Ms. Stanley noted there are no penalties or late fees that are being assessed, nor are there warrant fees.

Councilmember Alexander noted that it is important for the behavior of the defendant to change.

Judge McCord joined the meeting at 10:15 a.m. and noted the court has approximately 10 -15 Failure to Appear cases each month; and noted several are renters, and that the businesses are being cited, and not the business owner, who may live in a different state, and

recommends the City Attorney create a procedure that could shut down the business or place a lien on the business.

Councilmember Alexander agreed that a Lien or Business Shut Down would be appropriate to get the owners attention to act.

Mr. Gardiner stated that it was his understanding that the citation must be delivered in person and presented to someone at the business location, who would then notify the business owner.

Councilmember Thomas stated that the bottom line is to find ways to make the city more efficient and effective relating to Code Enforcement and Nuisance and Abatement, and recommends funding be placed in the budget.

Judge McCord stated in regard to homeless encampments, you can't fine individuals who have no money, and they can't do community service without an address, which makes jail the only option; and regarding the nuisance items such as failure to maintain properties, if the law is in place, the court can act and require the grass to be cut, or if cut by the city, send the resident a bill, and if the bill is not paid, they would receive a notice to appear in court and perhaps ending with a lien on the property; however, the court can only act if the law is in place, noting Municipal Court Judges are limited in their authority.

Councilmember Thomas stated the quality of life is diminished when there is no action taken against those who fail to comply and maintain their properties.

Judge McCord stated he welcomes the opportunity to meet with staff and others to produce a plan to address the issues, and commended Court Administrator, Genea Stanley, on her handling of the court and the volume of cases coming through the court.

Judge McCord noted FTA (Failure to Appear) Warrant Fees must be statutorily authorized and range from \$50 - \$100.

Motion to approve an Ordinance to set the FTA (Failure to Appear) fee at \$100.00 effective September 1, 2024 was made by Councilmember Alexander; seconded by Councilmember Barber. The motion passed unanimously 4-0.

Motion to approve an Ordinance to set the Warrant Fee at \$150.00 effective September 1, 2024 was made by Councilmember Alexander; seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Berry. The motion passed unanimously 4-0.

Councilmember Gantt joined the meeting at 10:39 a.m.

Councilmember Barber stated these discussions are the reasons she has requested the Departments present quarterly reports and keep the Council updated on matters of the City, noting this dialogue has been extremely helpful.

Mr. Gardiner noted he has proposed a true Work Session format and is open to moving in that direction.

Mr. Thomas stated he has received complaints about school zone signage, and perhaps that is why there are disputes regarding those citations.

Ms. Stanley reviewed the FY2024 highlights of the department; reviewed the proposed FY2025 budget; reviewed the List of Surcharges; reviewed the features and court schedule; and the requested items to consider in the FY2025 budget for the court.

Councilmember Barber asked Ms. Stanley if additional staff is needed now, instead of waiting until FY2026.

Ms. Stanley's responded that there is a need to bring in a Clerk I at \$35,000 salary, plus benefits.

Councilmember Barber asked Mr. Gardiner to add the position of Court Clerk 1 and funding to the FY2025 Budget as requested by Ms. Stanley.

2. Governing Body - Presented by: Rosalynd Rawls

Ms. Rawls presented the Governing Body's Proposed FY2025 Budget, noting in comparison to FY2024, a request is being made for additional overtime for the Administrative Assistant; Workers Compensation has moved to the Human Resources Department Budget, Copier Rental has moved to the IT Department Budget; Miscellaneous Expenses have been reduced; Hospitality is being increased; and the Youth Council line item along with \$6000 from Civic Events is being moved to the Clerk's Department Budget, noting the Clerk's Office manages the Youth Council's In/Out expenditures and coordinates with the Youth Council Committee Chair and Treasurer directly, and manages and coordinates the annual Municipal Dinner.

Councilmember Gantt asked about the process of transferring funds within the department.

Ms. Gaines noted in some cases, sponsorships are received that offset the cost of the expenses that may not been seen on the department budget but are reflected in the total cost of the event, and that funds are also transferred to/from accounts if available.

Ms. Rawls reviewed the Civic Events to include: The NAACP Breakfast and Parade, South Metro Development Conference, Henry County Chamber Annual Dinners, ARC State of the Region Breakfast, State of Henry County Address, and Ferst Readers Luncheon.

Councilmember Barber referenced a sponsorship she provided to the Stockbridge High School band, noting she conferred with the City Manager, and former City Treasurer, John Wiggins and there was no objection.

Councilmember Alexander noted he was advised there must be a benefit to the city.

Councilmember Thomas noted the Stockbridge High School band and ROTC perform for the City at several events including Memorial Day, 911, Veterans Day programs.

Attorney Washington noted that going forward, sponsorships should come from the City and not an individual initiative.

Councilmember Gantt requested the Council approve Resolution to reactivate the Henry County Schools Partners In Education Program.

Councilmember Thomas requested a listing of the schools to be included, and a copy of the overview of the program, noting the Stockbridge Cluster included Austin Road schools, and did not include Red Oak.

Ms. Rawls confirmed she had a list of the schools that include residents of the City and would provide the information to the Council.

Ms. Holiday notified the Council that she just provided the Mayor & Council the information for Partners in Education via email for review.

Motion to approve a Resolution to reactivate the Partners in Education Program was made by Councilmember Gantt; seconded by Councilmember Barber. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

Councilmember Barber stated that only one newsletter was published and mailed out in 2023, noting the newsletter was not sent to the newly annexed residents; and stated she would be partnering with the schools again this year, noting she is preparing for a Council initiative for girls at eight elementary schools in the Stockbridge cluster.

Ms. Thornton advised the next edition is scheduled to be released in early September.

3. Office of the City Clerk - Presented by: Vanessa Holiday

Ms. Holiday gave an overview of the Clerk's Office noting the role and overall duties and responsibilities of the department with the Deputy beginning the Municipal Clerk certification process in September; noted no changes to the staffing levels for FY2025, and reviewed the various software applications utilized by the department; referenced the current boards and

committees, noting the increased meetings and activity with two additional boards to be activated, pending the hiring of the Economic Development Director; presented the proposed FY2025 Department Budget, noting an increase in Elections and Committee Expenses, a decrease in computer software expenditures; and referenced the Civic Events and Youth Council line items that were moved from the Governing Body Budget to the Clerk's Office Budget as referenced in the previous presentation.

Councilmember Alexander asked about the publication of the upcoming SPLOST Referendum. Ms. Holiday noted that she has been in contact with the Henry County Elections Office and will notify the city's Public Information Officer once the notice is published to add to the city's social media platform, and the newsletter if received prior to distribution.

4. Human Resources - Presented by: Renee Wheeler

Ms. Wheeler introduced Mr. John Leggett with MSI Benefits who gave an overview of the proposed FY2025 Medical Benefits and Insurance Plans; noting this is the 2nd full year with United Health Care who is expected to hold the rates, noting the renewal is due in early September; noted pharmacy accounts for 25% of the claims for the city, however, based on the claims experience for the past year, a decrease of the plan's premium is expected; noted the average cost per employee is \$21,000 annually.

Mr. Leggett recommended the city move to the Veracity RX Pharmacy Benefits Program where prescriptions can be mailed to members' homes, noting the city's current avg. RX cost is \$160 and with Veracity, the cost would avg. \$80; and recommended the city move its EAP which offers three visits, and the new vendor offer unlimited visits.

Ms. Wheeler noted they will also market the Disability Plan for a better product; noting the Benefits Renewal Package will be presented to the Council for approval at the October 14th meeting.

Ms. Wheeler noted there have been a number of challenges in the Human Resources Department over the last year, citing the current statistics for the last 5 years: As of 8/20/2024 there are 185 active employees and 25 terminated, As of 8/20/2023 there were 155 active employees and 38 terminated; As of 8/20/2022 there were 146 active employees and 21 terminated; As of 8/20/2021 there were 78 active employees and 11 terminated; and as of 8/20/20 there were 79 active employees and 4 terminated.

Ms. Wheeler noted the workloads of various departments have increased tremendously since 2020, and the following department personnel requests have been submitted for FY2025, noting all job descriptions will be included in the Budget Book.

Finance – the addition of an Accounting Specialist and Accountant 2 position, and to reclassification for the Senior Accountant to an Accounting Manager position.

Procurement – Reclassification of the Procurement Clerk to Procurement Coordinator and Procurement Specialist to Contract Specialist.

Human Resources – Addition of a Human Resources Generalist position.

Economic Development – Reclassification of the Administrative Assistant to Executive Assistant.

Community Development – Addition of a Building Inspector position.

Events – Addition of a Conference Center Coordinator position.

Police – Addition of an Accountant 1 position.

Public Works – Addition of (3) three Stormwater Technicians and the reclassification of the Stormwater Technician to AMI Meter Technician, and reclassification of the Executive Assistant to Administration Analyst.

Ms. Wheeler referenced the Code Enforcement Department, noting the current challenges with finding a good Supervisor to lead the department.

Councilmember Alexander recommends a Director with the power and authority to act.

Councilmember Thomas agreed, noting the need for results; and noted it the department appears to rely on SeeClickFix, and that a 3-member department should be sufficient with no need for a Code Enforcement Officer in each district; and noted the Code Enforcement deficiency needs to be resolved before the budget is adopted; and noted the request for a Public Works Assistant Director with an Engineering background was intentionally approved by the Council and is not sure why the title needs to be changed when the person can do the same duties as outlined for the Project Manager.

Mr. Gardiner noted that the number of Code Enforcement Officers is not based on the size of the city, but rather the condition of the city, and recommends (4) four GAPE Certified, and one of the four being a highly trained working supervisor.

Chief Trammer noted the Police Department inherited Code Enforcement in 2023, and during that time, there have been a number of personnel changes.

Councilmember Barber noted there needs to be more focus on recruitment and interns for departments outside of city hall, and this may be an area where the city could try to use Stockbridge residents, and interns, and some type of apprenticeship, and asked Ms. Wheeler when and where internships.

Ms. Wheeler noted the department makes the request for interns, and the positions are advertised on the city's website.

Ms. Wheeler reviewed the opportunities for city to include: Staff Training and Development; Compensation Tools; Employee Well-Being; and Semi-Annual Training; reviewed the city's eleven (11) Departments: Executive, Information Technology, Municipal Court, Finance, Economic Development, Community Development, Clerk's Office, Public Works, Police and Governing Body; and noted the goals for 2025: Succession Planning, Ongoing EEOC, ADA, FLSA Compliance Training; Leadership Training; Additional Staff Support and the Implementation of a Compensation Software Tool.

5. Events/Conference Center - Presented by: Charisma Webster & Econuel Ingram

Ms. Webster noted the Merle Manders Conference Center has booked 264 events to date, 13 citywide events, and an extensive advertising campaign with social media, flyers, radio promotions, billboards and digital banners; and noted the Events Department is seeking a 50% Budget Increase for FY2025 in the amount of \$808,750 for city events, noting the increase is needed to promote exciting events for the citizens who live and work in Stockbridge, and to appeal to, reach and draw attendees from outside of Stockbridge; referenced the City Events FY2024 and FY2025 Budgets noting the increases in performer's fees, fireworks costs, , supplies, entertainment equipment, décor and catering costs, specifically when events are held at the amphitheater, with holiday events where vendors charge for overtime or double time fees, and concert events require additional trailers used as dressing rooms and additional parking attendants; increased EMT staff due to the heat, and additional police officers (paid at overtime rate) for crowd control; and noted staff will continue to seek sponsorships.

Mayor Ford noted the budget costs appear to be too much, noting he would like to see the continuation of all proposed city events, but to cut back on the expenses.

Councilmember Gantt agreed, noting the events need to be streamlined, specifically July 4th, and Juneteenth, and referenced the Market Night Food Truck Themed events.

Staff noted there are currently two stage events during Food Truck Tuesdays where vendors pay \$80/each week for 15 weeks.

Councilmember Barber noted the city has imposed a city tax on its residents year over year; and the cost has increased the proposed budget for free entertainment for residents and non-residents, and therefore cannot support this budget, noting there is too much being spent.

Councilmember Thomas noted the bottom line is \$808,000 is too much, and suggest the city can do a great job, as has been done in the past for BridgeFest, July 4th and Juneteenth with less funds, noting there is great local talent and does not need the big named groups for city events, leaving that to the paid Amphitheater Concert Series.

Councilmember Gantt agreed the costs needs to be reduced and more use of local acts.

Councilmember Alexander noted the events bring people into the downtown; noted the concerts have a later start time and the concerts have three to four artists; and noted the biggest issue is the city is failing on the sponsorship side, noting the Council has been kind to fund in perpetuity, however, it was only supposed to be seed money to grow the event, and that the major focus needs to be sponsorship; and supports mirroring the FY2024 budget. Councilmember Thomas suggested one headliner and local artists.

Councilmember Gantt suggested hosting BridgeFest on the lawn across from city hall, and not the Amphitheater, with more diverse artists; and to enhance the Food Truck events; noted the Volunteer Gala began following the 2018 Eagles Landing Referendum in 2018; and asked if the Council wants to bring in a skating rink.

Mayor Ford noted the 9/11 City Event was not included on the Events List for FY2025.

Mr. Ingram noted the event will take place, there is no budget.

By consensus of the Council, all events for FY2025 need to be streamlined and reduce the costs; and the following events will have performers as follows: One artist (Headliner) at Level 1, One artist at Level 3 (High Local) and One artist at Level 5 (Local).

Councilmember Barber reiterated that all events must be reduced.

Councilmember Thomas recommended putting the savings toward other needed services, such as Nuisance and Abatement.

Ms. Holiday noted, based on the Decoration Committee's recommendation, the Holiday Decoration Line Item was increased to add holiday décor in the newly annexed areas of the city.

Councilmember Gantt exited the meeting at 3:15 p.m.

6. Finance - Presented by: Lakeisha Gaines

Ms. Gaines reviewed the department's Mission; reviewed the department's Organizational Chart noting the request for additional positions and reclassification of positions within the department, noting if approved, the need for personnel services would be eliminated; reviewed the FY2025 Proposed Budget, noting the largest increase is in additional staffing; and reviewed the department highlights with successful reporting and receiving the Certificate of Achievement for Financial Reporting from GFOA, and noted the FY2023 Audit has been submitted timely, and will be presented at the September 9, 2024 Council Meeting; noted the City is now a member of the American Purchasing Society and the Procurement Team will be

obtaining certifications related to their specific positions; and noted as the city continues to grow, staffing may need to increase to keep up with the needs of the city to insure accuracy, integrity and checks and balance; and noted the city will pay off the Series 2 Bonds in August 2025; and requests the city transfer to P-cards.

Councilmember Barber noted there is a \$2 million dollar budget approved by the Council for the Amphitheater Consultant and expenditures, and asked who is responsible for reconciling the Amphitheater reports; and stated that budget amendments should be presented to the Council.

Ms. Gaines noted the Amphitheater reports are being reconciled monthly, and are up to date, and have been distributed.

Councilmember Thomas noted as a matter of policy, all Budget Amendments are to be presented to the City Council for approval.

Mr. Gardiner stated two Budget Amendments will be presented to the Council at the next meeting: PD Budget Amendment, and Amphitheater Budget Amendment.

Councilmember Alexander noted the city needs to be more active with applying for grants to take the stress of the city's budget; and asked Ms. Gaines what would have been her ask for the city's millage rate.

Ms. Gaines responded 3.77 is not enough to provide services for a city of this size, noting taxes generate revenue to help fund services; noted the city is not a for profit entity; and noted the police department is the largest and most costly department of the budget.

Ms. Gaines noted there are processes that need to be put in place and utilizing the current ERP system to its full capabilities; noted there needs to be a backup for Payroll and Accounts Payable along with a separation of duties to account for better checks and balances.

Councilmember Alexander noted that once she gains access to FreshTix that she submit reports to the Governing Body and recommended the City Clerk also have access for recordkeeping; and referenced the McDonalds event.

There was discussion of the McDonalds event, ticket sales, payments, and reporting.

Councilmember Barber requested the Governing Body receive reporting following each event/concert and asked if the Finance department has a person in place to begin processing tax payments following the passing of the referendum in November.

Ms. Gaines asked the Council to consider this to be her official ask for the new Accounting position in 2024 to be in place when the 2025 year begins.

Councilmember Barber made a request of Mayor Ford to reactivate the Finance Committee; and stated that she would like to be appointed as Chair of the Finance Committee and noted she is the only member of Council currently not serving as a Council Liaison or on a Board or Committee in any capacity.

Mayor Ford noted he would take the appointment into consideration.

Ms. Holiday noted the city's Charter states the Mayor has the sole authority to appoint the Chair of each Committee, noting the Council Liaisons are not appointed to the Mayor's committees.

7. Information Technology: Presented By: Demeatrius Ivey

Mr. Ivey gave an overview of the proposed FY2025 IT Department budget noting an increase with a number of line items being removed from department budgets to the IT Department Budget; noted there are no requested personnel changes for 2025, but need to be considered for 2026 due to the city's growth; noted challenges with the department have been vendor coordination and backorders that have caused delays with the completion of projects; and better communication with internal and external clients; noted the opportunities include exploring grants to aid with financial support for technology upgrades, being able to implement new technology and remaining competitive and forward thinking; and presented new projects with include contract restructuring, consolidation of programs throughout the city and equipment upgrades.

Councilmember Gantt re-joined the meeting at 4:39 p.m.

Councilmember Alexander inquired about upgrading phones and laptops/tablets in 2024 if possible; positioning cameras in the Chamber to broadcast members as they speak, improving the ability to display documents for the public to view, and the installation of a voting system; and the capabilities to stream off site townhall meetings, and establish a channel for the city.

Mr. Ivey noted the current system allows two platforms to stream at the same time, and the city is streaming to Civic and Facebook.

Councilmember Thomas asked how often the city surpluses items no longer serviceable to the city.

Mr. Ivey noted a list of items are being compiled to be submitted to the City Council for approval.

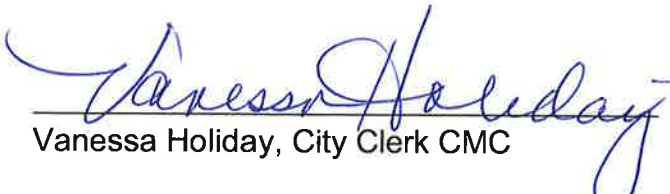
Councilmember Barber asked for the status of OpenGov.

Mr. Gardiner noted the platform is currently being worked on by staff with a Go Live date in October or November 2024; and noted staff will come back with a new model for Events with hard cost associated with events that take place at the Amphitheater.

Adjourn

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 4:59 p.m. was made by Councilmember Barber; seconded by Councilmember Thomas. The motion passed 4-0. (Councilmember Gantt was not present for the vote).

Respectfully submitted by:



Vanessa Holiday, City Clerk CMC



Anthony S. Ford, Mayor