

City Council of Peachtree City
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, June 3, 2021
6:30 p.m.

The Mayor and Council of Peachtree City met in regular session on Thursday, June 3, 2021. Mayor Vanessa Fleisch called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Others attending: Terry Ernst, Mike King, Kevin Madden, and Phil Prebor.

Announcements, Awards, Special Recognition

None

Public Comment

None

Agenda Changes

None

Minutes

King moved to approve the May 20, 2021, regular meeting and the May 20, 2021, executive session minutes as written. Madden seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Consent Agenda

- 1. FY2022 Non-Profit Funding - Fayette Senior Services**
 - 2. FY2021 Budget Amendment and Intent to Finance (2) Police Vehicles**
 - 3. Waterproof Coating of Library Exterior Walls, MMR Grant Application for 50% Match and FY2021 Budget Amendment**
 - 4. Authorization of RFP and Selection of a Management Consulting Firm to Conduct an Employee Compensation and Benefits Study**
 - 5. Addition of On-Call Part-Time Recreation Leader at Kedron Fieldhouse & Aquatic Center**
- Ernst moved to approve Consent Agenda items 1-5. Madden seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Old Agenda items

None

New Agenda items

None

Council/Staff Topics

1. Building Permit Requirements for Window and Door Replacement

City Manager Jon Rorie said this was a pre-read of a change to the ordinances regarding when a permit was required. Currently, a permit was not required for repairs or improvements of \$2,500 or less. They were proposing raising that amount to \$5,000 in light of recent price increases for building materials. The current amount was adopted in 2011. This change would be on the Consent Agenda at the next City Council meeting.

2. 2021 Budget Survey Presentation

City Clerk Yasmin Julio said the budget survey was conducted April 29 to May 19, with a total of 911 responses. The survey was available through social media, which reached 5,430 individuals. Other means of distributing the survey included the City website, email blasts, text messages, and through flyers with scannable QR codes. About 88% of the respondents were property owners. Julio noted

that some people believed renters did not pay taxes, but she pointed out that they did pay sales taxes and fuel taxes. Most of the questions in the survey, however, were related to property taxes. Julio also pointed out that the survey was solely opinion-based. They had never had 900 people at a Council meeting to voice their views on City services, so the survey was an opportunity to find out their thoughts. Nearly half of the respondents, 455, were age 60 or older, which was about what they expected, Julio noted. Just seven were 29 or younger. Respondents came from all over the City, and there were several responses from people who actually lived outside the City limits. A Wordle showed that Terrane Ridge provided the most feedback.

The survey questions were based on an appraised home value of \$400,000. The survey included a chart that showed taxes on a home of that value in Peachtree City and compared them to the tax bills in unincorporated Fayette County, Tyrone, Brooks, and Fayetteville. Peachtree City homeowners paid \$5,017 in total property taxes, with \$997 going to the City. Based on these figures, 52% of the respondents said they paid the right amount of City taxes for the services provided. About 4% said taxes were too low, while 29% said they were too high. The remainder said they were not sure.

Julio noted there were 909 responses to this question. That was because they removed the answers of those who did not live in the City. Also, she pointed out, the number of respondents dropped as the survey went on because people lost interest in answering or got too busy to complete it.

The survey asked respondents to rank five service areas—Police, Fire, Public Works, Recreation, and Library—from most to least important. Police came in as most important, with 511 selections, while Fire was second, with 185. The Library was ranked lowest, with 462 selections. That was interesting, Julio remarked, because the Library got the most number of clicks on the City website, followed by Carts and Paths. She asked Assistant Police Chief Matt Myers to explain weighted averages, and he said a department could get the most number of 5s (high importance), but everyone else could rate it a 1. That made a difference in how the information was interpreted. A weighted average looked at the total numbers in a survey and how they were distributed across 1 through 5. It then assigned a number that was a fairer representation of the ranking.

Fleisch asked if they could tell if the clicks on the website came from citizens or from outside Peachtree City? Julio said there was a way to evaluate that, but they were just looking at the overall clicks when she said the Library got the most.

Rorie commented that, even though 52% ranked the Library as least important, none of the other departments had 250,000 people walk through their doors annually. Foot traffic was another way to measure importance, and these survey responses were opinions and based on the respondents' experiences. He went on to say that the earlier question could have asked "were taxes too high for the services they currently used?" and the answers might have been different. Julio noted that most of the respondents were older and did not use the Library or the Recreation Department or have children who did.

The next question looked at whether respondents thought the City spent too much on particular services. It broke down the \$997 into spending by departments. Police got \$189; Fire, \$219; Library, \$30; Public Works, \$109; Recreation/Special Events, \$50. Nearly 55% felt the amounts were correct. Rorie asked if Council remembered the outcry from the public when they reduced the Library's budget by \$25,000?

Then they asked if respondents felt the City spent too little on these departments? About 42% said the amounts were just right.

The survey stated that the City employed 65 sworn Police officers, each with an annual salary and benefits cost of \$88,000. Should they hire an additional four officers for a total annual cost of \$352,000? The question did not specify a reason why they might hire these officers. Nearly 25% said they should hire all four, while about 30% said they should hire some. So, more than 50% thought the hiring would be a good idea. However, 37% said they should not hire any additional officers, and nearly 8% thought the number of officers should be reduced.

Rorie said it was interesting to think about why 50% thought they needed additional officers. Crimes were low and not trending up. If they hired more officers, they would have to look at how to best utilize them. It was a nuanced question.

Fleisch reflected on an email she had received asking for more officers to patrol Drake Field and look for people from outside the county who were using it. It was an interesting view, but that would be a difficult thing to police, she noted, and Council agreed.

They asked the same question about firefighters. They currently had 22 per shift at an average annual cost of \$83,000. Should they hire four more at a total of \$332,000? Again, about 50% said the City should hire all four or some additional firefighters. About 45% felt they should not hire any additional firefighters, while 3% thought they should reduce the number of current personnel.

Julio pointed out that 847 people responded to this question, down from the 911 who started the survey.

The next question looked at funding the rebuilding of 18 courts at the Tennis Center, estimated at \$1 million. This cost exceeded the budgeted amount. Almost 87% responded that user fees should be increased to do this. Julio said Finance Director Paul Salvatore would be quick to point out there was no way user fees could sustain the program.

Another facility in need of maintenance or upgrades was the Kedron pool bubble, which could be replaced for about \$700,000 or covered with a permanent structure at a cost of about \$3 million. Again, this exceeded the amount allotted in the 2021 budget.

The survey asked for opinions on what should be done. About 65% felt that user fees should increase to sustain the program. About 12% thought property taxes should be increased to pay for a permanent structure, while 8% thought taxes should be increased to pay for another bubble. On this question, respondents were asked what they thought could be cut from another department to pay for the repairs, and 57 provided suggestions ranging from cutting Police, Public Works and Fire budgets, to reducing salaries, and funding it through Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST). Other suggestions included taking the money from the City Manager and Planning Department, paying for it with revenues from Police tickets, and not replacing the covering at all. Rorie said it was good to see all these opinions, noting there was no single right answer, but that they had a responsibility to maintain the City's assets.

The survey included the 2020 Multi-Use Path Master Plan, noting that completing it would cost about \$8 million. How much in additional property taxes would respondents be willing to pay to complete these projects? If they raised taxes by \$30, the projects could be completed in 30 years, and almost 9% agreed with that. Raising taxes by \$35 meant it could be done in 20 years, which was acceptable to almost 17% of respondents. About 46% would be okay with a \$60 per year tax hike, which would

enable the Master Plan to be completed in 10 years. Around 28% were not agreeable with any tax increase to fund these projects.

About 36% of the respondents said they would be willing to accept a property tax increase of up to \$50 to improve City services; another 41% would accept a \$100 increase. The remainder wanted taxes cut, with the understanding that it would come with a reduction in services.

Rorie said if they increased the millage rate by half a mill, it would increase the taxes on a \$400,000 home by about \$70 a year. More than 77% of the respondents said that was acceptable if services were increased.

John Dufresne commented from the audience that these questions sounded like those on the Needs Assessment Survey, and Rorie said that was indeed where some came from.

The survey asked which service area they would reduce the budget of, if they had to? About 34% chose Recreation; 37% said the Library. Police was the choice of 12%; Fire and Public Works both got around 8%. Respondents were allowed to choose up to three departments if they had to spend additional money, and the Police and Public Works were the choice of about 55%.

A one mill increase in property taxes would provide an additional \$2.8 million in revenue. The survey asked if the City should consider an increase? Of the 760 respondents at this point in the survey, around 37% said there should be a tax increase, while 43% said "no." However, 20% said the City should consider other forms of revenue and asked for suggestions, which included user fees (mentioned by 54 respondents) and SPLOST (29 mentions). Other ideas included asset monetization, higher fees for infractions, and bond issues. Julio said there were 153 responses, more than she could fit in her presentation. Rorie pointed out that someone suggested a car wash.

Another question asked "if you were given \$100 to spend on services provided by the City, how would you allocate the funds?" The responses averaged out to giving the Police \$32, followed by \$27 to Fire/EMS, \$26 to Public Works, \$21 to Recreation/Special Events, and \$12 to the Library. These were averages, Julio emphasized; some people could have given the entire \$100 to one department.

It would cost about \$60 million to build an underpass or an overpass at the SR 54/74 intersection, the next question explained. Peachtree City would probably pay about 20% (\$12 million) of that; the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) would cover the rest. They asked citizens if they thought the City should acquire a \$12 million bond debt to be paid off in a 10-year time frame or would they be willing to pay a lump sum one year in order not to take on the bond debt? Another option said the intersection improvement should not be the City's responsibility at all, and that was what 62% of the respondents said. About 32% said they would be willing to pay an additional \$50 in property taxes over 10 years to pay off the bond, and around 5% stated they would pay \$685 as a lump sum to avoid debt.

City Hall constantly got calls about adding street lights, so the survey included a question about paying for them. Currently, the City paid \$424,000 annually to power 3,400 street lights, which came to about \$124 per street light. That didn't mean they paid for every street light in the City; some were funded by the subdivisions. About 15% of respondents said they would be willing to pay an extra 70 cents of property taxes each year to power an additional 100 street lights, and 9% agreed they would add \$1.40 to their taxes to fund 200 lights. It would take an additional \$2.10 to pay for 300 more lights, which 4% agreed to, and around 20% said they would be willing to pay an extra \$2.80 in property taxes to pay for 400 more street lights. However, about 50% said they didn't support raising taxes to pay for more street lights. Even though the numbers might add up to 50% in favor of more lights, Julio said she did not consider it an affirmation that 50% of the residents wanted to pay for more street lights. If they

added the 400 lights, it not only would make the 50% who did not want any new taxes for lights unhappy, it would displease the people who were willing to pay only 70 cents.

Julio noted they were down to 763 respondents by this final question in the survey. She again noted that it was all opinion-based. There were 19 questions, which was a long survey, but all were important. They had never had opinions from 900 people before.

Rorie stated that they did citizen satisfaction surveys about every two years, but this was the first time he could remember that they had narrowed it down to focus on the dollars. It showed the complexity and nuances of the issues staff dealt with during the budget process. What if, instead of increasing the millage rate to hire four Police officers at \$88,000 each, they cut out 2,800 street lights? It required a different thought process to weigh things that way.

They had held fast to the ad valorem tax with goals of building up the cash reserves and financing more projects with cash. That put them in the position that they were likely to recommend some level of rollback in the millage rate. They had a responsibility to maintain City assets and look at millage rate stabilization. These surveys were valuable, even if they provided no conclusive answers, Rorie went on. There had never been 900 people in the room to talk about the budget.

King moved to convene in executive session at 7:16 p.m. to discuss the acquisition or sale of real estate. Prebor seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

King moved to reconvene in regular session at 7:23 p.m. Madden seconded. Motion carried unanimously. There being no further business, Madden moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:24 p.m. Ernst seconded. Motion carried unanimously.


Martha Barksdale, Recording Secretary
Vanessa Fleisch, Mayor