City Council of Peachtree City
Retreat Workshop Minutes
April 2, 2019

The Mayor and Council of Peachtree City met in Retreat workshop session on April 2, 2019. Mayor Vanessa Fleisch opened the workshop at 6:30 p.m. Council members attending: Terry Ernst, Mike King, Kevin Madden, and Phil Prebor. Workshop topics were facility management and departmental service capacities.

City Manager Jon Rorie reminded the group that this was the second of three planned Retreat workshops. The first, held on March 5, dealt with economic development and redevelopment, Community Improvement Districts (CIDs), traffic, and roads. The Retreat sessions were designed to break down "big picture" issues into smaller topics for discussion. This would ultimately lead to the decisions that must be made during the budget process. The topics for this workshop included examining what facilities management involved and the service capacities of three departments – Recreation, to include Buildings and Grounds, along with the Police and the Fire Departments. Those, plus Public Works, consumed most of the budget dollars.

Rorie again stated the City's mission was to supply high-quality services to the City's 35,000 residents, who each had their own opinions about what was needed. In March, they talked about safeguarding the community going forward. He said they should be trying to set the stage for the future. He repeated one of his favorite sayings – " A little well done was better than a lot just done," adding that they could not be all things to all people at all times. They must focus their attention on accomplishing the greatest good for the greatest amount of people. Safeguarding the community involved constantly balancing the means, or revenues, with the ends, or expenses. They needed to figure out how to provide these services in the most cost-effective manner, keeping in mind that sometimes those needs could not be met. Rorie went on to note that he was often asked to provide a service that was politically acceptable, but not administratively sustainable. The only way to give services was for the City to take. Every time there was an incremental decision, it provoked a downchain event.

They should be examining the opportunities and the risks that might impact the City in the future. Planning for those situations would allow for choices. Rorie said they should look at the past and try to create the future by evaluating the opportunities and risks that they knew would be coming.

Rorie presented a "wordle" that he used at the March Retreat. It used the One PTC study to show things residents liked, such as the cart paths, safety, and community. It showed that sports programs were a little less popular than the path system, which ranked high. The aquatics center was cited less often. Fireworks were listed as popular. Rorie noted that the fireworks show itself cost $26,000, but that cost did not all include the cost of all the labor that went into the July 4 activities. That one day wound up costing around $60,000. Low crime rate was also cited. Rorie said that would be discussed later.

Suggested improvements mentioned the need for a central gathering place and the lack of affordable housing, Maintenance of amenities was cited. Being over-policed was mentioned as a complaint, and that would fall under a discussion of service capacities. Well-paying jobs was also mentioned as a need. Rorie said he often heard people say they needed to recruit high-paying jobs. In the March Retreat, it was noted that about 15,000 people drove out of the City to work every day, and about 16,000 commuted to Peachtree City. Rorie asked if developing a piece of property in the industrial park could lead to those high-paying jobs. The industries would have to be targeted to ensure that they would provide good jobs that would allow people to live and work in the City. The list of needs also included maintenance of the path system.

Rorie presented a list of what residents thought would be the biggest challenges over the next decade. Traffic was near the top, but Rorie said that was only an issue at a few intersections. Surrounding development, also high on the list, was related to traffic because as development surrounded the City, it would impact traffic. Jobs and path maintenance also were listed, as was the updating of recreation facilities. About 60% of the respondents named crime as a problem.

Rorie went over the City's budget policy, which called for establishing a baseline budget that served as an agreed upon point of departure for subsequent budget discussions. Any additional services above that baseline should be fully funded at the time of the adoption of that budget and ongoing funding sources should be clearly identified. These funding sources must be new or clearly identified through expense reductions. He remarked that this was a nice way of saying that a dollar could only be spent once, and they should figure out what would give the best return on that dollar.

Rorie referred to the work of the Needs Assessment Committee of 2013. It asked respondents to rank five City departments in terms of their importance to them. Police was first, followed by Fire, then Public Works. Recreation was fourth, with the Library fifth. The gap was not great between any of these, however, Rorie pointed out, it depended on what the respondent thought was most important. Another question asked about the amount of property taxes paid in relation to the services they received. Most agreed that they paid a fair amount of taxes for the services received. Most people also agreed that the City did not spend too much on any one service. These responses begged the question of where cuts could be made if that was what Council wanted. He recalled the outcry a few years ago when they cut the Library's book budget by $25,000.

The City owned 41 buildings and 25 structures, such as the Pavilion at Drake Field and the City Hall plaza fountain. They budgeted $6,000 for annual maintenance of the fountain. That sounded like nothing until the $6,000 was multiplied by years and years. That was what was meant by facilities maintenance. The insured value of buildings and facilities was roughly $56 million, Rorie noted. The 2019 budget allocated $511,000, or about 1.4% of the total budget, for building repair and maintenance. That line in the budget also dealt with items such as pest control contracts, heating and air conditioning service, backflow, fire alarms, and so on. Those were day-to-day expenses, but $175,000 went to other maintenance needs, such as bathroom upgrades and painting.

They had invested about $330,000 over the past few years in bridges and tunnels. This year, $100,000 was set aside for safeguarding them. Rorie showed a photo of a cart path bridge that went over a stream. Water ran underneath the pipe instead of through it. He asked if it was it better to spend the money to repair it or remove it entirely. He showed the location on a map and pointed out that there were other routes if the bridge was removed. He said he did not know the answer, but that was what facilities management was about.

A photo of playground equipment showed that even "maintenance-free" concrete required some maintenance. Signs were subject to wear and tear as well. A scorekeeper's stand at the Peachtree City Athletic Center (PAC) needed painting. Other buildings there also needed work. A sinkhole at the tennis courts on Blue Smoke had needed repair. All Children's Playground had been patched, and equipment had required replacement, which Rorie said had been done under warranty. Residential toilets were installed and had to be replaced with commercial ones. Many of these problems were dealt with through a $3 million facilities bond. The 2015 bond called for replacing roofs at the Tennis Center, the Library, and the Police Department. Other items included renovations at the Amphitheater. The importance of any of these depended on an individual perspective, Rorie commented.

Recreation and Special Events Department

Recreation and Special Events Director Quinn Bledsoe showed excerpts from the 2007-2011 Recreation Master Plan, a tool the department used to measure where it was in terms of programs and facilities at the time. The National Recreation and Park Association compiled a list of amenities and the correct level they recommended for cities. The Master Plan showed that Peachtree City was short four tot lots, which Bledsoe found interesting. She said this list was standard at the time, but the Association had since deleted these recommendations because each area had differing needs.

Objectives for the Recreation Department stated in the Master Plan included providing services firstly to the residents of Peachtree City, secondly to the residents of Fayette County, thirdly to employees of Peachtree City businesses who participated in corporate teams, and, fourthly, to individuals living outside of Peachtree City and Fayette County. Bledsoe noted that non-resident participation in youth sports should be held to 30% or less.

Another objective was to implement a three-tiered fee structure to ensure that all participants paid in line with their tax participation. Peachtree City residents who played in a youth sports association paid $15, while Fayette County residents paid $25, and players from outside the county paid $50.

The third objective set forth in the Master Plan was to assess the adequacy of maintenance staff resources to keep existing and future facilities maintained as they should be. The Plan also called for looking for other ways to provide services more economically.

The Plan said the funding for the Recreation Department would remain proportionately the same as in previous years by utilizing higher user fees and grants/sponsorships. It stated that residential property would be completely built-out by 2008, with a population of 37,500. The build-out had not occurred, but was close, as was the population estimation, Bledsoe stated.

Peachtree City Recreation programs would receive a minimum of $150,000 a year from Fayette County, plus the adjusted growth in the tax digest, Bledsoe read from the Plan. She said they were at the $150,000 now. When the recession hit, the County reduced its contribution to $114,000 and had just now gotten it back up to the promised level for 2007-2011. The funding was probably not where it needed to be, Bledsoe commented.

Rorie noted the County's portion was $150,000 in 2007, then dropped to $114,000, but now was back at the per-recession level, asking if value of that $150,000 was the same today as in 2007. The concept of pursuing the fair share of tax equity was not a fair assessment of what was going on. That was why the three-tier system of user fees was important. In 2016, a similar system was imposed on golf carts. Right now, Peachtree City residents paid $45, or $15 a year, to register their carts for a three-year period. People from outside the City paid $115 per year. That number was calculated through a formula, Rorie said, concluding that, those who used the path system, and did not pay Peachtree City taxes, should pay more. The fee system should favor the residents of Peachtree City who footed the bill.

Lastly, Bledsoe said of the Master Plan, the user fees should increase to pay for maintenance of facilities. At the time this was written, $5 was charged to everyone. The tiered system was implemented in 2012. It might be time to look at the fees again, she remarked.

Fleisch asked Bledsoe to explain how the payments worked. The City only received $5 of every $100 paid to a youth association in 2010. Now the City received more with the tiered system.

Fleisch said many people were unhappy when it changed, but it was necessary. A lot of the money went to maintenance. In 2010, that account only brought in $40,000 to cover all the baseball fields and tennis courts.

Bledsoe pointed out that the City's mission statement included a call for ensuring that residents had a safe and healthy environment in which to enjoy leisure time. Rorie noted that this meant this department was in line with the mission of the City, as were all departments. They were all aimed to providing high quality services.

There were 416 acres of public recreation facilities in Peachtree City, Bledsoe said, noting that it was not wild space, but space that had to be maintained. The City owned 15 baseball fields, seven softball fields, 10 full-size soccer fields, two lacrosse fields, two football fields, 35 tennis courts, plus playgrounds/tot lots, and concession stands. There were 226 trash cans in the parks and City facilities, and 65 along the paths. Someone had to empty those.

Recreation questions were included on the 2013 Needs Assessment. Bledsoe noted that the average homeowner contributed $57 a year towards recreation, and the assessment showed that most wanted that figure to stay about the same. In the 2013 budget, fees subsidized about 20% of some program costs. Most respondents said the fees should be increased, with more of the costs passed on to the users.

Bledsoe used a chart of her department's employees to show the new right-of-way workers who mowed grass at City facilities, medians, and other public property. The facility coordinator team emptied trash cans, cleaned buildings, and executed many construction projects. Currently, they were working on the Amphitheater. Bledsoe explained that the grounds maintenance crews mowed, weeded, aerated, and fertilized all the athletic fields, in addition to other needed duties, such as spraying for army worms. That was a lot of work for just seven people.

Rorie asked Bledsoe about the right-of-way mowers. She said there were five new positions, and they had filled two of them. They had been recruiting since July, Rorie noted.

A map of recreational facilities the City maintained showed that they were spread throughout the City.

Bledsoe detailed facts about the Peachtree City Athletic Complex (PAC), saying it consisted of 88 acres, with six multi-purpose fields, eight baseball diamonds, and was a sports tourism facility which attracted tournaments with out-of-town participants. The fields were predominantly used by the Soccer Association, which preferred the grass be kept at three-quarters of an inch to enhance ball movement. But that was not possible, with staffing limitations, so it was kept at one and one-half inches. Even that required mowing twice a week. Rorie said if it was mowed to three-fourths inch it would require more irrigation, plus an additional mowing each week, which meant more clippings to dispose of. Bledsoe noted that they would have to buy Bermuda mowers for this, and Rorie pointed out that mechanics would have to work extra to keep the blades sharp.

Bledsoe referred to an email from a resident that claimed that soccer was the fastest-growing youth sport in America and around the world. The writer asked for a soccer court, or soccer park, which could be placed on a converted tennis or basketball court.

Bledsoe noted that there were about 20 undeveloped acres between Eaton Lane and the PAC. They had surveyed the land and considered what could be added and the cost. Additional parking was a consideration as well as providing more playing surfaces. They had looked at turfing the fields at the PAC, which would make them rain-proof, but drainage was a big problem for four of the fields. Last year had near-record rainfall, she reported, and two of the fields were closed many more days than they were open. She said there might be a lot of clay at Field 2 that retained moisture. Other problems were because the fields abutted a floodplain. The infields would usually dry out quickly, Bledsoe stated, but the outfielders might find themselves standing in water. Fields 3 and 4 were used by the Little League championship team, and they were troupers about working around the weather problems, Bledsoe remarked.

A turfed field could drain around 78 inches of water per hour, but was expensive. A provider gave a quote to turf soccer fields 2 and 6, baseball fields 3 and 4, and softball fields 5 and 6. Fence to fence turfing of the soccer fields would call for turf 15 feet inside the fence with a concrete barrier, then grass. Grass could not be mowed next to artificial turf. There was a reduction in price if several fields were done at one time, but Bledsoe said the costs could be about $1 million per field. The expected lifespan of a turf field would be eight to 12 years. There would never be a return on the investment. Rorie pointed out that if the field lasted 10 years, with a debt service of $1 million, it would cost an average of $110,000 per year, and at the end of the paying off period, the turf would need to be replaced again.

Planning Commission Chairman Frank Destadio asked where the cost estimate originated, and Bledsoe said a company came out and walked the area with her to arrive at the estimate. She had a written quote that she said she would send him. Destadio remarked that the company he worked for after he retired from the Air Force put in these fields for the Fulton County School System. The cost was not as much as Bledsoe stated, and the fields lasted longer. In response to a question from Prebor, Destadio said he did not remember the cost, but it was not $1 million a field, and they still were being used and he had been gone from the company for 10 or 15 years.

Rorie told him they had two or three quotes, and another was expected. Bledsoe said the average cost had been about $8 a square foot, but the other company said they could get it down by at least $1 a square foot. When about 159,000 square feet was involved, that was a lot of money.

One of the biggest costs, Destadio noted, was the huge drainage system underneath. Fleisch stated that would be a one-time only cost. There were two kinds of pellets that could be used as well, Destadio noted.

Pam Kemp asked if they were looking to expand into the floodplain. Bledsoe said it was not; most of the area under consideration was close to the road. Most of the land they had looked at was not shown on the slide.

Prebor asked how much as spent on maintenance per field, and Bledsoe told him they would be getting to that.

At this point, numbers did not matter, Rorie commented. This was about conception and how they were looking at the issue. At least they were having the discussion, even if they did nothing.

Bledsoe went over figures used at last year's Retreat from a study done by Georgia Power regarding the cost of upgrading to LED lighting at the soccer fields, which would be either $488,000 or $648,000, depending on the options chosen. With the more expensive choice, it would take 44 years for the City to recoup this money through energy savings, and 29.5 years if they reduced the scope of the project. Rorie joked that it was simple -- you needed to play on the dirt and in the dark. Bledsoe added that recouping the costs for LED lighting at the baseball fields would take about 25 years.

The Meade Complex, just down the road from the PAC, housed lacrosse, girls softball, and adult softball. The adult softball fields needed serious lighting upgrades, but they could not find a company that would install LED lights on wooden poles. The poles were aging, Bledsoe said. Adult softball was the only sport the City ran. She recalled that the Master Plan called for keeping out-of-county players at 30% or less. In spring, they were at 35% and 63% in summer. Prebor asked why the out-of-county numbers were so high. A softball league participant attending the meeting noted that most of the teams were sponsored by specific companies and the players, who worked at those industries, usually lived in other counties. He also said he did not believe the three-tier fee structure applied to adult softball players. Rorie said that was correct.

Bledsoe noted that the girls softball fields had worse drainage than the baseball fields. Rorie attested to that, saying his shoes got stuck in the mud.

Bledsoe presented another email. This one claimed that lacrosse was the fastest growing sport in the country, and Peachtree City was becoming the lacrosse hub on the southside. Bledsoe said they were looking at a plan to relocate and re-purpose some fields. A drawing showed how this could be configured by replacing tennis courts and removing two fields. Another field that used to be a baseball field was now open, and could be a rectangular field for multiple uses. It required that one corner be built up so it could be level, and they were doing that.

The splash pad at the Glenloch Recreation Center was well underway. Bledsoe reported that Glenloch was becoming a more regional recreation area, with tennis and basketball courts, a skate park, soccer fields, a swimming pool and splash pad, and a recreation center. It was the City's most comprehensive center, she noted.

Riley Field, off Wisdom Road, was 20 acres with a field for youth football and a practice field, plus a concession area. There was a track that was in poor condition. Bledsoe said the track association had asked the City to re-do it at a cost of about $150,000. They had not seriously looked at this because the track program had only 32 people. Some people liked to walk on the track, but the City had about 100 miles of paths that were fine for walking.

The Kedron Fieldhouse/Aquatic Center was on 20 acres with a large pool, small pool, indoor basketball arena, hockey rink, three classrooms, and a playground. They re-opened the pool on April 1 after removing the bubble used during the winter. The building and pool was built in 1995, and the bubble was replaced in 2011/12, giving it a 16-year lifespan. Replacing the bubble was expensive, Bledsoe noted; the material alone cost $500,000. They hoped to get 15 years of service from it, meaning it was about halfway through its lifespan. The last bubble replacement was a big investment that was not planned for. They needed to decide soon if they wanted to continue to replace the bubble or erect a permanent cover. Going to a seasonal operation was another option. The contract with United Pools of America was $221,000, which Bledsoe termed as money well spent. They did all the hiring and training of lifeguards, and it was very difficult to fill lifeguard positions.

Bledsoe presented information on usage. In October through March, when the bubble was up, 6,210 people used the pool. Of those, 3,500 lived in Peachtree City, while almost 1,400 lived in the County. There were 584 out-of-county users, and the remainder did not list their residence. In total, about 21,000 people paid to use the pool. Swim teams also used the pool, including those from the all the County's high schools. Their numbers were small, but this was the only pool available to them right now.

Madden clarified that this was the only indoor pool for public use in Fayette County. He asked how much Peachtree City received from the Fayette County Board of Education from this use. Bledsoe said they paid $32 a month per swimmer. The season lasted about three months. King said it was basically about $100 per person per season.

Rorie and Prebor both noted these were user fees, paid for the by swimmers or their parents, because all school sports were self-funded. Prebor asked what members of the public paid to swim, and Bledsoe replied that it was $5 for ages 11 and older, $3 for seniors, $4 for children age 3 to 11, and younger children could swim for free. This was per visit; passes were available that offered small discounts.

Fleisch wanted to know if there was a tiered system based on residence like there was in the sports leagues, and Bledsoe responded there was not. Bledsoe said now was the time to look at the fee structure for pools, maybe when they set fees for the splash pad, which would soon open. The out-of-county fees for recreation programs were usually 25% more than what Peachtree City residents paid, Bledsoe remarked.

The Mayor asked when they would be discussing this again, noting that the lead time would be important to the schools, which would have to find new venues for swimming if they decided not to replace the bubble.

Rorie told her the capital improvement plan (CIP) was set for only a five-year pocket. They were talking about seven more years until the bubble needed to be replaced, so it would not show up for another two years. However, Rorie stated, they did not have to wait to have this conversation. These kinds of issues were what they needed to talk about when planning for facility maintenance. Should they continue to do what they had always done or look at how to restructure these items in the future, he asked.

Rorie said he had no problem as a Peachtree City resident and taxpayer paying for the pool or the athletic fields, but he did feel the users should bear the costs associated with the use of that facility in terms of programming. Rorie noted that he did not go to Kedron and swim, yet he paid the cost of the pool. A lot of people made that same choice, and he felt more of the cost should be borne by those who did use the pool. However, Rorie said he also understood that cost could drive demand, and you did not want to price users out. There was a sweet spot to aim for. He suggested they look at the Building Department. When a resident wanted to build something, they went to the Building Department, paid a fee, and got a permit. Even though they collected fees, the City still subsidized the Building Department to the tune of 7 – 10% a year. There was not enough permit revenue to fully fund the department. Rorie said that made sense to him. The permits allowed for a house to be built, and that house would be driving the tax base. Each department had its own sweet spot, and there was no one right answer. Rorie said he did not think it was possible to fund the entire operation of the pool through user fees.

Bledsoe added that the Southern Crescent Aquatic Team (SCAT) was a year-round swim team that averaged between 300-400 kids a quarter and was a strong program.

Problems with the Kedron gym floor were an immediate concern, Bledsoe reported. She showed photos of how the gym floor was separating from its underlayment. You could tap along the seams and hear a hollow sound, indicating that adhesion was being lost between the floor and the subsurface. The floor was installed in 1995 and was Granwood, which was no longer manufactured. It was a combination of sawdust and concrete and was extremely hard. Usually it was used outdoors, they had learned. Bledsoe said this was not a budgeted expense or on her five-year plan model. She hoped they could nurse it along until the end of the fiscal year. A moisture meter read 24.9, and 5 was an acceptable level. They were looking at options to replace it. Wood was out of the question for both installation and maintenance costs. Other options would cost between $175,000 and $200,000, depending on the material chosen and the installation requirements. She said there would be about three or four weeks of downtime during installation.

Prebor asked if the flooring laid on top of concrete, and Bledsoe said they thought so. Fleisch recalled that they had a similar problem when there were electrical problems at the pool because they did not have the "as-builts."' She called it the "building of many mysteries." Bledsoe said they refinished and resealed the floor every November, and noted the floors were unharmed during the fire. Fleisch pointed out that the source of the moisture was the big issue and hoped it was not from an underground stream.

Rorie took over to talk about the maintenance demands at the Tennis Center. He said there were 14 acres of property there, containing one recreational building, with a total of 24 tennis courts, six of which were covered. Twelve were hard courts, basically asphalt, which required resurfacing, and six were clay. There were 512 members and 355 memberships. The Adult Tennis League had 2,662 participants, and 1,209 were Peachtree City residents. That was a pretty standard breakdown, and Peachtree City was a border town that attracted people from other areas, Rorie pointed out.

Players paid through member fees or on a per use basis. There were 1,807 Peachtree City residents per year using the Tennis Center, playing an average of twice a week to total nearly 188,000 visits per year.

Rorie gave some statistics on economic impact events held at the Tennis Center. These events brought in 624 players who spent 1,405 hotel nights at $100 per night. That was $140,000 of hotel room rents. The hotel/motel tax generated $8 per room. Roughly $3.50 came to the City's General Fund, while another portion went to the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), and about $1.50 went to Tourism Product Development (TPD). The TPD money went into maintenance of the facilities, including the PAC, the Tennis Center, the Amphitheater, and the BMX track. It cost $30,000 per year to refinish the courts at the Tennis Center. It would take 3,750 room nights to get enough money just to resurface the courts. The $30,000 resurfaced four courts a year. There was a value to economic impact, but it only went so far.

One "dream" item for the Tennis Center in order to retain current events was to upgrade to LED lighting, which Rorie said they already knew the cost of from the PAC. They also wanted a three-year rotation of court resurfacing, and to install electronic scoreboards for collegiate and national events.

Rorie laughingly pointed out that they had been told pickleball was the fastest growing sport in America. Somes programs, such as baseball and football, were in decline. If there were 35,000 residents in Peachtree City, and 350 participated in pickleball, that would be a 1% participation rate. There was a demand for those courts that probably exceeded the demand for some of the City's 35 tennis courts. Should some of those tennis or basketball courts be converted to other uses? The Soccer Association wanted a soccer park; a tennis court also could be converted to a pickleball court. There could be a dual-use court with striping for four pickleball courts and also one tennis court. He said the courts at the Tennis Center were used by people paying membership or user fees. The remaining public courts were not subject to user fees. The City spent money maintaining them, then competing with the Tennis Center where there were fees. The City also spent money maintaining the Tennis Center's courts.

Rorie explained a soccer court as an urban-type soccer field. You were building a small-scale lacrosse or soccer field for two-on-two or three-on-three play. There were ways the City could facilitate use of the tennis courts. He also pointed to the PAC. Was it better to turf a field that was underwater or rebuild it at Braelinn? What was the second right answer? That was how he wanted to focus on the Tennis Center. It was a nice facility, but it was a costly facility. The question was how to make the best use of that facility for 35,000 Peachtree City residents, not the 50% of users who came across the Coweta line. If they converted some courts to covered soccer courts or pickleball courts, they could maximize the use of one location and not have facilities strung all over the City.

Madden asked about the 355 memberships. He wondered what the cost was, and Rorie said Club Corp set the price. It was in their contract that they managed it and set prices. Rorie said the City got $24,000 a year, plus profit sharing. It amounted to about $30,000 total a year. The roof the City installed cost $240,000, Rorie pointed out. He asked again where the City wanted to be in 50 years? Did they want to continue with the methods?

Madden noted that it would be $85 more per membership for them to give the City the $30,000 it cost annually to resurface the tennis courts. Fleisch pointed out that there was a contract. No one knew exactly how long the contract had been in place, but it was more than eight years. Destadio asked if they were aware that Club Corp was planning to convert some courts at Flat Creek Club to pickleball courts. Destadio said they were looking atdoing that at another club as well. They would be offering the pickleball players a reduced social membership fee, he added. Rorie said he had factored it into his thought process, but he had 35,000 people, not just 350.

There were 12 tot lots and 11 playgrounds in the City. He showed a photo of the Braelinn tot lot, saying they did not own the land, but had an agreement to use it. The tot lot at Braelinn was dated. He showed a photo of the playground at Glenloch with $45,000 worth of new equipment. Ten of those would be $450,000, and 20 would be $900,000. Prebor asked if they had to be replaced with the one like at Glenloch. Rorie said they didn't, but the question was, did they have to be replaced at all? Were they needed?

Bledsoe pointed out on a map that many tot lots were in close proximity to each other, such at Braelinn Green, Three Ponds, and Rockspray. The All Children's Playground was due for an update, and it might need to be relocated.

Rorie said there were 23 tot lots and playgrounds, but just four fire stations. Prebor added there was just one City Hall.

The 2020 capital projects list included a replacement for equipment at All Children's Playground. Some of it had deteriorated, even though it was not dangerous. They had talked about moving the playgroundto a shaded area near the Presbyterian Church. Bledsoe said she was asked all the time about providing shade at the playground. They had $300,000 to spend on the playground, and it would cost $75,000 to construct a shade structure. Would it be more cost-efficient to move to an area that was already shaded? When you did that, there were consequences. Leaves and pine needles would have to be removed. Mold grew on structures in shade and required pressure washing.

Bledsoe said the City spend $2.3 million on recreation and special events and $3.6 million on buildings and grounds.

Rorie said he asked Bledsoe and Finance Director Paul Salvatore to figure out the cost associated with maintenance at City recreation facilities. Bledsoe said it cost $22.47 a month to empty a trash can; trash bags were $.41 each. He showed a listing of all the trash cans in the City. There were five at the Skate Park, where there was a lot of litter.

Bledsoe showed the summary page that showed what the City spent at each facility. She said it was a fair representation. She also showed the utility costs, which included restrooms and water and sewerage. Lighting was the main concern. Soccer officials had a key and could turn the lights on, but citizens did not, so they had to play in the daylight hours.

Prebor asked if these costs could be divided by the number of Peachtree City participants. He said he wanted to know how much they paid per participant, and Bledsoe remarked that it was hard to compare because some sports just cost more than others. Prebor asked how they would arrive at costs if somebody wanted a tiddly-wink group that would require 10 square feet, when another said they wanted an equestrian center.

Rorie said it would be a challenge. He noted that hockey cost $34,000, and there were but 100 players. Some sports had more players and higher costs. Maybe you were overpaying for them. It was a tough equity question. Prebor said he knew it was tough. Soccer was important to people in Peachtree City. Rorie said all sports were important.

King noted that you probably paid around $1,500 a year for your child to participate in a sports league. Club Corp was looking to privatize pickleball, and he felt that, sooner or later, all these associations would get to the point where it was profitable, and an entrepreneur would take over. That's what MOBA had done, Prebor interjected. Once that happened, the City could just lease them the property.

Fleisch said she was thankful to have these numbers. The 2011 facilities bond stopped the hemorrhaging of everything looking so bad. It took care of maintenance that should have been in the normal budget. They were now able to put money aside to keep up with needed repairs. For many years, she remarked, they had no numbers. They had come a long way.

Rorie showed photos of upgrades at the BMX track, along with the new Skate Park. There would still be graffiti and litter. Another photo showed the old Glenloch and the new features. None of this was cheap.

He mentioned the change in the fee structures that happened in May 2012, noting that many people were not happy. However, nothing was free, and things had to keep moving forward. Did they want to look at increasing the facility user fees at the Tennis Center? What about electrical costs to users? He said he had no problem with mowing the grass, but he did resent paying for electricity when he couldn't cut it on himself. He said he often could see the lights on at the Glenloch tennis courts and not a soul around.

There was a 10-minute break before the Retreat resumed.

Fire - Rescue Department

Fire Chief Joe O'Conor began by presenting figures showing the demand for services. The department's focus was on providing quality services through education, prevention, and effective emergency response. They tried to make sure they took advantage of every opportunity to prevent fire through the Fire Marshal's office and also through education programs.

An organizational chart showed how the department was staffed on a day-in-day-out basis under the direction of a battalion chief, who worked a 24-hour shift with their personnel. Under the battalion chief's supervision were five stations, the newest being Station 85, a quick response station on the south end of town. The four fire stations were Station 81 on Paschal Road, Station Fire 82, the headquarters on Peachtree Parkway and SR 54, Station 83 on the south end of Peachtree Parkway, and Station 84 was on Crabapple. Each station operated an engine and an ambulance, each staffed with two people. The shift commander staffed their own vehicle.

The department operated with a staffing of 19-20 every day. They were authorized for 20 full-time positions per shift. The chart showed all the full-time positions who worked 24-hour shifts every third day, which equaled 2,800 hours per year instead of the 2,280 hours a typical employee worked. Historically, O'Conor reported, they utilized a core group of part-time emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and paramedics to backfill employees who were taking time off for holidays and vacations. Many of this loyal group had served more than 10 years, he noted. O'Conor stated that recruiting for these part-time positions had become more difficult since the economy had picked up. They were approaching full staffing, but had just received a retirement notice from another full-time employee. It was a constant battle to maintain that full-time staffing, he remarked. They operated a volunteer firefighter program, but were experiencing staffing issues in this area as well.

The 2013 survey of residents showed that the average homeowner paid $155 a year to run the Fire Department, and about 70% felt that was the right amount. About 60% said they did not think that amount should be increased to add additional staffing. The respondents were asked if they would be willing to pay $45 a year in additional taxes for five years to fund a new station in the West Village. About 70% said the City should build no new fire stations.

O'Conor noted that rebranding as the EMS and Fire Department might be in order, based on the increasing number of medical calls to which they responded. Most of the demand was for medical services. In 2018, they answered a few false alarms, good intent calls, which were for things like unexplained steam or smoke, and service calls for assistance, such as helping an invalid who had fallen. They also aided people who needed help with a variety of issues. Most calls, however, were for rescue and emergencies. Fires represented only 62 of the 4,118 calls that year.

There were 957 service calls, which could be anything from a downed tree to a fully-involved house fire, of which there were a few in 2018. There were 2,880 medical calls, representing 70% of all calls. These could be anything from minor injuries to full cardiac arrest. They evaluated almost 3,000 people and transported around 1,800 of those. They billed the insurance companies of the patients they transported. The system was not set up to bill for the assessment of a patient. In 2018, they billed for $1.1 million. O'Conor noted that 7% of their calls were to assist invalids without medical complaint. They ran these calls every day, and they were for someone who had fallen, was not injured, but needed help to get back on their feet. Added to the medical patients, this totaled about 77% of all calls.

Of the 62 fire calls, 12 were vehicle fires; 13 were brush and grass fires, and 17 were fires in buildings. There were no fire fatalities. Fires represented 15 out of every 1,000 calls they received, or 1.5% of all responses. Working structure fires represented 1.5 incidents per 1,000, or .15%, O'Conor pointed out. This year could be much worse, though; it was an unknown. Therefore, they maintained staffing to provide a high level of service.

O'Conor provided information on the patients they transported. Their average age was 60.5 years. He showed the City's population by age groups and the number of EMS patients for each group.

The trend went upward as age increased. Even though people age 80 and older comprised just 3% of the population, they represented 31% of the medical patients transported.

Most calls occurred at people's homes; there were few to businesses and industries. Peachtree City was an active community, so calls to outside areas were not unusual. Calls to assisted living facilities and nursing homes represented about 14% of their medical calls. O'Conor looked at the five assisted living facilities and one nursing home and listed the number of residents, the number of EMS total calls to the facility, the number of patients seen, the number of patients transported, and the estimate of how much EMS revenue was generated from these six buildings. These buildings represented 657 residency units but they went to them 697 times in 2018, saw almost 600 patients and transported almost 500 of them, generating about $250,000. Of the $1.1 million in revenue, nearly 25% was raised from those six facilities. He noted that these patients were covered by Medicare, and as long as EMS generated a bill in a reasonable amount of time, Medicare would pay it, so these were patients they were typically compensated for in transporting to the hospital. He highlighted Somerby on Rockaway Road as an example of what he was saying, noting that they saw 62 patients there and transported 55, generating more than $29,000 in revenue.

They pulled out location data and created a map showing where most calls were. The nursing home and assisting living facilities showed the most calls, along with the area on Shakerag Hill where many doctors' offices were. They frequently transported patients to hospitals in Atlanta from those offices, he noted. O'Conor showed a "hot spot" for calls in the northwestern part of the City that he said was new. It was Cresswind. That community would increasingly demand service.

He ran the numbers to see which stations had the heaviest loads. Station 85, which opened in the fall, had just 2% of the total calls in 2018. However, the Chief reported, when he looked at January, 2019, Station 85 had 12% of the calls. Station 84, traditionally one of the slower stations, had 13% of the calls, while the other stations each had about 25% of the load. Fleisch asked which station covered Cresswind, and O'Conor said it was Station 84, if they were home. He went on to explain that everything was contingent on the stations being at home. There was a primary station, a secondary station, a tertiary station, and so on. As stations were out on call, they would go down the list to the next closest. So Station 84 was the primary station for Cresswind, but it was not the only station that could answer a call there.

When did calls occur? Most were when people were up and about, from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. If they wanted to load up their staff for when demand was greatest, that's when it would be. But he said he wanted to highlight a couple of times. The calls at 4 a.m. were never good; something bad had happened, the Chief remarked. There must be a standing force ready, and there was.

There were almost 1,000 times in 2018 when there were two calls at the same time; there were 400 times when there were three calls at once; 120 times saw four calls. The highest number O'Conor said he found was eight simultaneous calls. They used every unit they had, and the County helped with some. That's how the system was built, he noted.

He went on to say that they did physicals on their volunteers at a cost of $500, along with background checks, and provided uniforms and equipment for about $3,000. The volunteers got a nominal stipend of $10 per four hours spent in the fire station. In total, this was about $100,000 a year. There was a time, O'Conor stated, when all the volunteers were Firefighter 2, which was a higher level of firefighter qualification, and all were qualified as hazardous materials operators. Right now, of the 19 volunteers, just nine were full-qualified interior structure firefighters. A few years ago, they started a support program for people who wanted to volunteer, but did not wish to go inside burning buildings. There were currently five of these exterior only firefighters, and five more in training.

One of the areas where they were feeling the pinch was that the volunteer force had always been their field team for recruits. Many of their full-time employees were hired from the volunteer ranks, but that was becoming more difficult. In 2018, volunteers contributed 7,735 hours to the department, about 322 24-hour days donated. By comparison, in 2013, volunteer firefighters donated 21,000 hours, equaling 875 days.

Fleisch asked if the new career hires were fully-trained. O'Conor replied that they tried to only hire fully-trained personnel, but in the last round of hiring, they did, for the first time, have to hire less than fully-trained people. The department was paying for training to bring them up to minimum standards. That, they foresaw, would continue, as well as struggles for the volunteer program. This wasn't just a local issue, the Chief noted, it was nationwide. They were watching this issue. There was no reserve capacity in their full-time ranks; they had always counted on part-time to backfill. O'Conor, responding to a question from Ernst, said they had been relying on the part-time force more heavily recently, due to some long-term absences in the full-time ranks. As of two weeks ago, they had filled every spot at every station, attaining the optimum 20 firefighters a day. Then, they received notice of a retirement and a resignation. There were peaks and valleys, and they would continue.

Structure fires created the greatest demand for the most people at the same time, O'Conor noted, presenting a list of the 15 positions that had to be filled at a fire involving a 2,000 square foot house. Larger structures would require more resources. Many of the jobs at the fire scene needed to happen at the same time; that's why so many personnel were needed. As mentioned, thet ran concurrent calls, so personnel who were on one call were not available for another. That's why they often had to borrow personnel.

Ernst noted that transporting patients to a hospital wasn't just a matter of dropping them off and coming home. O'Conor explained what was meant by "wall time." Wall time was the time spent with patients at the hospital for a bed to open up, and they could be moved from the ambulance stretcher to the bed in the emergency room. Sometimes during busy times, they had to go from one hospital to another if there was no room.

Destadio asked about mutual aid agreements, and O'Conor said they had them with neighboring jurisdictions. However, Fayette County's resources were stretched so thin that Peachtree City went to help them five times as often as the County helped Peachtree City. They had calls from Coweta, also. O'Conor said they often responded to calls at The Pavilion in Fayetteville. Peachtree City seemed more often to be givers, which was a blessing and a curse, because that was two or four fewer folks to answer calls in the City. Destadio reflected that he was familiar with the issues O'Conor described because he supervised fire departments in the Air Force. Medical calls then far outnumbered fire and crash calls. The number of fire calls was low because they did so many education programs and handed out smoke detectors, as Peachtree City had done. Destadio said it might be time to look at how the Fire Department was structured and see if they needed to focus more on the medical side.

Peachtree City had always been very progressive in its EMS program. The first paramedics in Fayette County were in Peachtree City, the Chief noted. They had some phenomenally qualified people.

The Fire Department represented about 22% of the City budget, O'Conor reported, with the vast majority of expenses in personnel costs. He cited what it would cost to add two firefighter/EMTs per shift. All of the City's firefighters were fully qualified as either EMTs, advanced or intermediate, or paramedics, which required about a year and a half of school beyond the EMT certification, which took about a year as well. The list covered starting salary and benefits, physicals, and background checks for a total of about $436,000. He emphasized that this was with the starting salary, and they had personnel with a broad range of experience.

Police Department

Police Chief Janet Moon began with the department's mission statement: *Safeguarding the quality of life in our community through professional services and community partnerships.* The organizational chart showed they were authorized for 65 sworn officers, but there was one unfunded position, so they had 64 sworn officers. There were five non-sworn officers, for a total head count of 69. In the 2013 Needs Assessment, code enforcement and other things were in the Fire Department so the number went up to 72 or 74. They also had part-time school crossing guards and two court bailiffs, another position that was difficult to keep staffed. There were people in field training and administrative positions. The rubber met the road, she remarked, in the Patrol Division, with Community Response and Field Investigation. Community Response included school resource officers, the auxiliary officers, and the chaplains. She pointed out Marianne Dias in the audience as one of the auxiliary officers.

The Needs Survey said the average homeowner paid $165 a year to the Police Department in 2013. Most people felt this was adequate. Increasing the head count would cost $6 a year, and most said not to increase it.

There were more than 60,000 calls for service in 2018. Moon described calls for service as either dispatched or self-initiated or self-directed. Dispatched calls came from citizens who called 911. Self-initiated or self-directed could be from officers to address an immediate situation or scheduled in advance to address a community issue. A lot of time there was as directed patrol calendar. If you filled out a form online saying people were running the stop sign in your neighborhood, and in a few days you saw an officer sitting there, that was a directed patrol activity. They counted all calls for service where a police officer as dispatched or self-initiated. Like the Fire Department, they also answered calls outside the City for mutual aid. Ernst asked if the calls for service figures included traffic stops, and Moon said it did, as self-initiated activity.

After midnight, the number of calls went down, and the officers were busiest during the days. The records vendor did not differentiate between response times for emergency and non-emergency calls. The average response time was five minutes and 18 seconds. They did not rush on non-emergency calls for safety reasons. In the past, many officers had been killed in traffic accidents because they were pushing to get the response times down. They were trying to back away from speed on non-emergency calls.

Part I crimes were the "Big Eight": larceny, theft, motor vehicle theft, arson, aggravated assault, robbery, forcible rape, and criminal homicide. Larceny and theft posted Peachtree City's biggest numbers. Peachtree City had 503 Part I crimes in 2018. Newnan had 1,257; Lagrange, 1,633, and Dalton, 1,172. These were Class B cities like Peachtree City. The Fayette County Sheriff's Department recorded 531 Part I crimes in 2018, while Fayetteville had 520, and Tyrone, 111. As a county, Fayette did pretty well.

There were 162 thefts in Peachtree City, along with 148 incidences of shoplifting reported in 2018. Entering autos was 101. Police chiefs were antsy about Part I crimes because the offender drove them. In one weekend, for instance, there could be an outbreak of entering autos that would skew the numbers. That was the case this year; crime numbers were up due to an increase in entering autos.

Moon said she wondered when she first came to Peachtree City why the motor vehicle theft numbers seemed high, then saw if was due to golf cart theft.

Part II crimes were not considered as serious as Part I. There were 1,264 in 2018. They included drug offenses, frauds, and driving under the influence. She noted that traffic enforcement directly correlated with lower crime rates. However, Moon pointed out that not everyone got a ticket. They wrote 6,755 tickets in 2018, but gave 9,303 warnings. They taught officers to look beyond the ticket for other evidence of crime on a traffic stop.

There were 53 golf cart accidents in 2018; 26 with injuries. Drivers 16 and younger were involved in 25 of the collisions, and 141 golf cart citations were issues, along with 333 warnings.

She said they paid no stipend to the Auxiliary Police Force. They logged 1,664 hours in 2018; 647 were related to community relations events. The Auxiliary officers helped at 64 events. They were trained in traffic direction and control. There were 17 members. A few did administrative tasks, and others helped in the field. It cost about $500 to outfit them with a uniform, badge, and flashlight. This program had been in operation for 30 years.

She said they knew it was expensive to hire police officers. Peachtree City officers rode solo. What skewed the number on the cost of hiring was the take-home vehicle. All officers had the opportunity to take their vehicle home. Each fully-outfitted vehicle cost $59,000. If they asked to increase the head count, it would cost about $157,000 per officer, much of that in the cost of the car. Radios were expensive. Mobile radios cost about $5,000.

Ernst asked if officers paid a stipend for the take-home cars? Moon said if they lived within 10 miles, they did not pay, but beyond that, they paid a stipend in order to take the car home. Rorie said it could be considered a user fee.

General Fund expenditures on the Police in the 2019 budget was a little more than $7 million, Moon pointed out.

Summary

In 2014, the City did a classification and compensation study. That data was now five years old, and they were looking to budget a new one this year through the use of the cash reserves. They asked for estimates and learned a full study would cost about $45,000. Rorie said he decided not to follow through. Everyone knew the market was strong, and vacancies were hard to fill. The largest drop in job applications between 2013 and 2017 nationwide was in law enforcement, which showed a 63% decline. Applications for firefighter/EMTs went down 38% and for maintenance workers, 33%. Chief administrative officers asked about this said workers stated that the government couldn't offer salaries that were competitive with the private sector. Some said there was a negative public perception about working with the government. Others stated that they lacked effective recruitment tools.

In December, the City did a survey of salaries and benefits for police officers in nearby cities. At the time, the starting salary for an officer in Peachtree City was $38,652. After the cost of living adjustment, the starting salary went to $39,619. They looked at all related costs, such as health insurance, to get a total annual compensation. Too often, Rorie remarked, people looked only at the starting salary without considering the value of a defined benefit (DB) program over a defined contribution (DC) program or the differences in health insurance.

In December, one of the things they looked at was recruitment for the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI). The GBI required a four-year degree. A special agent started at $48,952. Peachtree City's starting salary, for an officer who was not required to have a degree, was $39,619. In Fayetteville, an Officer II, meaning someone who was certified, started at $40,425.

The Fayette County Sheriff's Department lost 25 sworn deputies in 2018; 11 went to other agencies. Peachtree City lost a couple of officers to the Coweta County Sheriff's Office; a couple went to the GBI; some went to the Department of Revenue and others went to the Secret Service. He said there was similar movement in the Fire Department.

They looked at nearby Class B cities in their market area. The starting salary for firefighters and police officers in Peachtree City was $39,619; paramedics started at $43,732. Fayette County started paramedics at $44,735. When you looked at the total compensation, Peachtree City looked more competitive.

Moon said there would be five vacancies in the Police Department as of the next day. Wednesday. Battalion Chiefs with the Fire Department noted that they were competing with hospitals for recruits. Paramedics basically brought the emergency room to the scene. They needed to come up with a better recruitment and salary package. They needed to ensure parity and maintain it across the range of experience. That's why another classification and compensation study was needed. The findings shouldn't present any big issues because they had been doing cost of living raises along the way to keep them pretty close in the market. They knew for a fact they would have to tweak the Public Safety side of the house, Rorie concluded.

Finally, Rorie showed a dollar, using it as an example of the answer to various questions about funding, such as how to fund economic development and re-development, the initiatives of the Fayette County Development Authority, medical insurance for employees, salaries for employees, how to buy a firetruck, fix a park, mow the grass. At the end of the day, it came down to the fact that they could tell you what it cost to put a light on the flagpole at the Amphitheater. He held the dollar aloft, noting you could only spend it once. They would have to decide how to spend it, but it would only be spent once. It could be divided only so many ways. That was the purpose of looking at economic development in Retreat session one, facilities management in Retreat session two, along with service capacities, which implied there was a capacity to what they did. They couldn't be all things to all people at all times, and they needed to remember that when they looked at where they were going for the next 10, 15, or 20 years, regardless of what had been done in the past.

The workshop concluded at 9:35 p.m.

Martha Barksdale, Recording Secretary　　　　Vanessa Fleisch, Mayor