City Council of Peachtree City
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, October 7, 2021
6:30 p.m.

The Mayor and Council of Peachtree City met in regular session on Thursday, October 7, 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.

Public Comment

Paul Schultz said the all-weather running track at Riley Field was in sore need of resurfacing, adding that the City Manager had told him Council would review the track's condition and its usage. Schultz said he believed the heavy use the track got justified the expense of resurfacing.

Letiticia Biester expressed her concern that Kedron Hills was offering $5,000 for road owned by Peachtree City property owners. This was below its appraised value of $17,100 and its annual revenue stream of $6,600 in golf cart fees. Peachtree City property owners, she stated, would continue to pay for maintenance of the road while being blocked from using it. If Crabapple Lane was blocked, it would cost taxpayers about $500,000 to build a turnaround, she stated.

Michael Villarreal of Tyrone also was concerned about the possibility of Crabapple Lane being blocked. He said his family often used the road to get to shopping and other activities in Peachtree City. It formed a valuable connection between the two communities.

Agenda Changes

None

Minutes

King moved to approve the September 16, 2021, regular meeting and executive session minutes. Madden seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Consent Agenda

1. Intent to Finance Resolution - FY2022 CIP Equipment
2. FY2022 Budget Amendments
3. Trinity Hwy. 54 Stormwater Facility Maintenance Agreement
4. Appointment of CVB Board Member
5. Reclassify Staff Assistant Position (F/T) in Fire Department to Logistics Specialist (F/T) in Fire Department
6. 2022 CIP Purchase of Ambulance Equipment from Stryker

Ernst moved to approve Consent Agenda items 1-6. Prebor seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Old Agenda items

None

New Agenda items

10-21-01 Public Hearing - 707 Hwy. 54 - Variance - Front Setback Encroachment

Planning and Development Director Robin Cailloux said this request was for the Chick-fil-A in the Peachtree Point Shopping Center on SR 54. The applicant wanted a variance in the front setback requirements in order to construct canopies over the drive-thru area as well as a reduction in the number of parking spaces from the required 39 to 27 full-size spaces and seven cart spaces for a total of 36. They needed to eliminate a line of parking spaces in order to create a permanent double lane for the drive-thru. The remaining parking spaces would be straightened in order to allow for more spaces. Cailloux showed the locations of the canopies near the existing menu boards. A variance was granted for this property in 2015 in order to allow for the location of the drive-thru.

The ordinance required them to look at six criteria when considering a variance. There were no special conditions that were not applicable to other properties in the same zoning, and there were no regulations that created an unnecessary hardship. There were special circumstances for the intended development. The lot was shallow and contained what was essentially a private road that connected all the lots out to Peachtree Parkway. Another unique condition was a deed restriction that prohibited shared parking. Typically, the City would have asked them to identify three spaces nearby that they could use, but the deed restriction eliminated that option. Given the property's limitations, granting the variance would not be a special privilege, and it would not be detrimental to the community's health, safety, or welfare. The variance did not conflict with the Comprehensive Plan.

Civil engineer Casey Durden represented Chick-fil-A. He said they did have an off-site parking agreement, but it said they could not use the off-site spaces to meet code. They were asking to remove the 12 spaces in order to create more space to get vehicles off the road. The canopy was vital for the team members' safety and comfort.

Fleisch wanted confirmation that only the tops of the canopies would be visible from SR 54, and Durden said that was correct. The canopies would be nine feet high.

Fleisch opened the public hearing. No one wished to speak either in favor or opposition to the request, and she closed the hearing.

Madden said he was in favor of this as a way to protect and shelter the workers.

Ernst said parking was his concern, but that had been clarified.

King stated that installing the canopy was obviously the right thing to do.

King moved to approve New Agenda item 10-21-01, 707 Hwy. 54 variance - front setback encroachment and parking. Prebor seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

10-21-02 Public Hearing for Annexation and Zoning of Approximately 75 Acres on Genevieve Court and Longboat Subdivision to OI and R-43

Cailloux presented a map of the property, pointing out the existing city boundaries and SR 54, noting that this area was designated for potential annexation in the Growth Boundary Study done in 2014. She showed how surrounding properties had been annexed and said annexing Longboat would "clean up" the eastern border, and this would probably be the final parcel to be annexed on the east side. She showed other areas that had been annexed into the city after the Growth Boundary Study. In 2014, they considered many factors including Public Safety and utilities, as well as property ownership and potential development. The Study was available on the City website, Cailloux noted.

The subdivision approached the City about annexation and presented a petition signed by the owners of 63% of the property as well as 90% of the registered voters, exceeding the State's 60% methodology requirements. No zoning changes were requested; the property would remain zoned virtually the same as it was in the County. Longboat was zoned R-40 by the County, which required one-acre lots; it would be zoned R-43 in Peachtree City, which had the same requirement. The office property would remain Office-Institutional (OI). The County Commission voted not to object to the annexation at its September 9 meeting, and the Peachtree City Planning Commission had held a public workshop on the annexation request.

The State required a report showing how the City would extend public services to the annexed area, and there was a staff report posted on the City website. Cailloux explained that water would continue to be provided by the County water department. There was no sewer on the site, only septic. The Longboat residents expressed no interested into tying into sewer, but the office property might. However, Peachtree City Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) was a separate authority and was responsible for reviewing annexations under its current policies. Stormwater was owned by the homeowners' association (HOA), which was responsible for maintaining them. That included curbs, stormwater inlets, pipes, ponds and the dam. The dam was not big enough to require State management, but the HOA regularly had it inspected, and had submitted a report from the most recent inspection, in the summer of 2021.

Public Safety would become Peachtree City's responsibility. The Fire Department already had a mutual aid agreement and were the second responders if all County units were busy. If Longboat was annexed, Peachtree City would be the first responders for Fire, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), and Police. Cailloux reported that she had talked with the Fire Chief about this, and, considering they already were serving the property across SR 54, he said adding Longboat would not impact their ability to provide high-quality services.

Garbage service was private, so there would be no change. One mile of public street would be added to the City. The City Engineer said the County's paving requirements exceeded Peachtree City's. The path system was a unique public service, and Cailloux noted they would be able to connect to the network through a 50-acre residential development to the south that was in pre-development stages. She indicated on the map where those developers would be required to build a path, and it could connect to an existing "rogue" path in Longboat.

Next, Cailloux looked at if the request was in compliance with the Comprehensive Plan, particularly the policies regarding the village concept and step-down in density toward city boundaries. She indicated how a village center was forming around the Publix and the zoned commercial property across SR 54 at Sumner Road. Then there was step-down from commercial to office, then a higher-density residential development, which stepped down to a lower density development with Longboat. The adjacent properties in the County could be termed "rural residential." Therefore, Cailloux concluded, it did meet the village concept and the step-down standard.

Longboat HOA president Sam Hong said he had lived in Fayette County for 30 years, 10 of those in Peachtree City. He noted that they already enjoyed the amenities Peachtree City had to offer and were excited at the opportunity to be annexed in and contribute to the community.

Fleisch opened the public hearing.

The first person to speak in support of the annexation was a Longboat resident who noted that they already had a Peachtree City address and used a lot of the City's resources. It would make sense for them to be paying taxes to the City. He said he could not envision them ever wanting sewer. Many people in Longboat had gotten fiber installed in the neighborhood. The rogue path was well-planned.

The Rev. Michael Fry of All Saint's Anglican Church near Longboat said they chose their site because of the possibility of being annexed into Peachtree City. If this land was annexed, he said his church's property might apply next.

Another Longboat resident stated they already thought of themselves as Peachtree City residents, so it was time to make it official. They wanted annexation even though they understood it meant a tax increase.

No one else wished to speak in support of the annexation, and Fleisch asked if anyone wished to speak against it.

Suzanne Brown said she was afraid they would keep annexing all the way to Fayetteville. Another concern was the possible failure of the dam. She had been concerned that the HOA might dissolve after annexation, but had learned that an HOA could not dissolve if it owned property. She cautioned Council not to buy if the Longboat HOA tried to sell their holdings to the City. Could the HOA pay for future sidewalk, curb, street repairs? The City would be responsible, she said, if they could not pay for the repairs. She wondered why the business property owners from Genevieve Court were not present? Brown also said home values would go up in Longboat because of the annexation, creating a windfall for homeowners. She urged council to slow down and do some more research.

No one else wished to speak in opposition, and Fleisch.closed the public hearing.

Ernst asked Fire Chief Joe O'Conor and Police Chief Janet Moon if they were comfortable with their ability to cover this additional territory, and they said they were. O'Conor noted it was not far from where they had already committed to cover, and a potential new station had been penciled in for the area. Ernst clarified that there was a mutual aid agreement with Fayette County and, after the annexation, the roles would be reversed.

Ernst asked City Manager Jon Rorie if the dam or the stormwater area failed, and the HOA could not repair it, would Peachtree City be liable? Rorie said the City would not. The dam had never been dedicated to the County; therefore, they were not annexing it.

Prebor asked about the break-even point for ad valorem taxes. The average home value in Longboat was in the $700s, Cailloux stated, with the lowest at $560,000. There were many homes valued in the $800s. The break-even mark was about $400,000. Cailloux said that was when the fair market value of a home provided an amount in property taxes equal to the cost of services consumed.

It was important for Peachtree City to have control along its borders in terms of what was built there. Rorie said there was a saying: "it it was urban, it should be municipal." As development intensified along the borders of a City, it should be municipal. Tax collection was an important part of that, but also was the ability to control zoning.

Madden said he liked the idea of one-acre lots and had no objections to the annexation.

It was commendable that the Longboat residents were willing to raise their own taxes in order to be part of the City, King remarked. He had been concerned about the stormwater issue, but said Rorie had reassured him that it would not be their responsibility.

City Attorney Ted Meeker said neither the sidewalks nor the stormwater facilities were dedicated to the County, nor the ponds. There could be no argument that annexation would make them the City's liability. Even if they had been dedicated, there were cases that said there was no liability. Unless Peachtree City actually accepted liability, there was none.

Fleisch pointed out that property appraisers appraised all homes with Peachtree City addresses as if they were actually in the City. The idea that there would be a sudden spike in property values was not valid.

The HOA took care of the neighborhood's sign, its stormwater, and detention pond, Fleisch noted, while there were many other neighborhoods that relied on the City for those duties.

She asked Rorie to explain why they conducted the 2014 Growth Boundary Study, and he said they did not want the City to grow beyond its capacity to provide services, such as Public Safety and road maintenance. Fleisch mused that it was expensive to build and operate a fire station. If they went much outside those growth boundaries, they would have to build another fire station.

As a final point, she asked Cailloux who assigned addresses to homes? The Post Office, Cailloux replied.

King moved to approve New Agenda item 10-21-02, Annexation and Zoning of Approximately 75 Acres on Genevieve Court and Longboat Subdivision to OI and R-43. Madden seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

10-21-03 2022 CIP Purchase of Ambulance
Assistant Fire Chief Kevin Baggett said this was budgeted in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for 2022. They replaced ambulances every 10 years. The purchase would be through a buying cooperative in Galveston, Texas, and would come in under budget. Baggett noted the Council had earlier approved the purchase of equipment for the ambulance in the Consent Agenda.

Fleisch asked about a delivery date, and Baggett told her it would be about 14 months out due to supply issues caused by COVID.

Madden moved to approve New Agenda item 10-21-03, 2022 CIP Purchase of Ambulance. King seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

10-21-04 Law Enforcement and First Responder State Pay Supplement (CSFRF) and Budget Amendment
Police Chief Janet Moon explained that the Governor announced on September 27 that he would be using funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to offer a pay supplement to all law enforcement officers and first responders. The Law Enforcement and First Responder Supplement established a grant program to provide a one-time $1,000 pay supplement to all full-time Public Safety officers and first responders to include law enforcement officers, emergency medical technicians, firefighters, etc. She was asking Council for permission to apply for and accept this grant on behalf of qualified employees.

Ernst moved to approve New Agenda item 10-21-04, Law Enforcement and First Responder State Pay Supplement (CSFRF) and Budget Amendment. Madden seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

10-21-05 ARPA Acknowledgment Program and Budget Amendment
Rorie said this program was classified at the federal level as premium pay. The pandemic, he continued, led to a system of defining businesses as essential or non-essential. In city government, all employees were considered essential for maintenance of government services. This program allowed them to use ARPA funds to provide premium pay for all employees that worked between March 16

and June 16 of 2020. They decided to award 58 hours at $13 an hour for all employees for a total of about $250,000 or $750 per employee. That would include Police and Fire to be added to the $1,000 previously approved.

Ernst moved to approve New Agenda item 10-21-05, ARPA Acknowledgment Program and Budget Amendment. King seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

10-21-06 Public Safety - Salary and Compensation and Budget Amendment
Rorie said Staff had worked on this for several months regarding general classified employees and Public Safety employees and had implemented education incentives and sign-on bonuses that had been successful. This was a follow-up.

Director of Human Resources and Risk Management Ellece Brown said she would share compensation strategies. She noted that 57.2% of the $42 million budget went to personnel costs. While classified as an expense, these employees were not liabilities; they were assets who provided the high-quality services expected by the citizens. The City currently had 16 vacant positions. The sign-on bonuses had made a difference, and there were four positions that had pending offers. In the last six to eight weeks, Brown remarked, they had gone from 22 openings to 16, and four of those had offers pending.

O'Conor said his employees had passed the word of the incentives to their friends in other agencies, and five paramedic/firefighters applied. They were now in the process of hiring all five. Moon said she had eight vacancies when the sign-on bonus was instituted. They had just put three new hires in the police academy and had hired four certified officers from other jurisdictions.

Brown presented a study from Robert Half Talent Solutions that showed ways employers were trying to attract and retain employees in a competitive marketplace. It showed that 48% of employers, like Peachtree City, had implemented sign-on bonuses. Many had been working remotely, so 46% were offering cash incentives for returning to the office. More paid time off was provided by 43%, and 40% offered job title upgrades. Rorie added Peachtree City was trying to advance the remote work option in different departments. Job flexibility was an important incentive.

The study went on to note the shortage of skilled professionals, which increased the competition for talent and drove up salaries. Skilled candidates received multiple job offers. Many employers were reinstating raises and offering improved benefits and perks to aid in retention. Brown said everyone was being impacted by this, and they knew they would have to make changes to recruit and retain employees.

Employers who failed to enhance their compensation strategies risked losing top employees, Brown commented. About 49% of employees, the study showed, felt they were not adequately compensated, and 46% intended to ask for a raise, while 31% said they would consider quitting if they did not get a raise. Around 66% said they were confident they could find a new job quickly, and 87% said their skills were marketable.

Brown reviewed what the City had done over the years regarding compensation. From 2004 to 2008, they were providing 2% cost of living adjustments (COLA) and up to 4.5% merit increases. During the Great Recession, from 2009-11, there were no increases. In the two years from 2011-13, there was a 2% bonus in lieu of an increase, while in 2013-14, there was a 2% COLA. The City commissioned a pay and classification market study in 2014, she continued, which reviewed the classification and pay of all employees. There had not been a compensation study done in the previous 20 years. The company conducting the study reviewed and revised the classification system, going from a step system to a salary range, which stated a beginning, mid-point, and maximum salary for each grade. Jobs were placed in grades based on 10 factors. A recommended pay plan was presented at that time, also.

Brown showed the participants in the 2014 salary survey. There were many local employers, including College Park, Newnan, Fayette County, and Griffin, along with other that were more distant, such as Kennesaw. The management firm presented Peachtree City with three choices, and they chose to implement salary scale B, which was in between the highest and the lowest salary scales presented by 10% in each range. Peachtree City did not want to pay the most in the area, but it also did not want to pay the least. The salary scale was adopted in October 2014, resulting in a cost of about $900,000.

Brown noted that on her slide showing the salary grades and their salaries, the arrow pointed to Grade 14, which was where entry-level Public Safety employees were. When this was adopted, the minimum pay for Public Safety employees was about $38,300; the midpoint was $47,800, and the maximum was $54,000.

She showed salary Grade 9, which was the lowest-paid jobs. It included maintenance tech I, library assistant, and sign technician. The minimum salary for Grade 9 became $29,900 in 2014. The practice was to bring in new employees at the minimum of the range, but that was not always possible. Some employees had too much experience to agree to start at the minimum. The City Manager had to approve the hiring of someone at higher than the minimum salary.

What had they done since the 2014 compensation study? There was no increase for employees for the next two years, but in 2017 there was a $300 performance bonus in lieu of an increase. In 2018-19, a 3.5% COLA was given, but the salary scale was only adjusted by 2.5%. That was done to create space between a new employee and a more senior employee. Merit increases were re-instituted with the stipulation that the employee had to truly perform at a meritorious level. The award was $1,200, and no more than 25% of employees could earn it. Brown said she collected documentation from managers, then the directors and chiefs met to go over the requests. Final approval came from the City Manager.

In fiscal year 2019-20, all Public Safety employees received a market adjustment of $2,500. They also created Grades 13PS through 25 PS, with the PS standing for Public Safety. All City employees got a 1.8% COLA, and the salary scale was adjusted by 1.8%. Merit increases were awarded to 54 employees, fewer than the previous year. Brown noted that they had never reached the 25% maximum for merit increases. Career Development Plans (CDP) were implemented for Public Safety to move employees through the pay ranges. It was not the City's goal to move an employee from the minimum all the way to the maximum salary, Brown stated, noting that if someone was a high performer, they would likely be promoted to another position.

All full-and part-time employees received a 1.5% COLA last year, and the salary scale was increased by 1.5%. The COLA was determined by looking at the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and the Consumer Price Index (CPI). It kept salaries current with how prices were changing in the market. A $1,300 merit incentive was awarded to 61 employees. They implemented educational adjustments of $1,000 to $2,000 for employees whose educational level went beyond their job description. The CDP was increased to 3% steps, and sign-on bonuses were implemented.

Calling the $2,500 awarded to Public Safety employees in 2019-20 a "market adjustment" was not entirely accurate, Rorie remarked, because they also increased the number of hours those employees worked. They looked at the Fair Labor Standards Act, which had its own chapters for police and fire departments. They took this opportunity to clean up the pay in terms of overtime. It was not just a flat $2,500 adjustment.

Rorie said he had instituted CDPs in three other places where he had worked. It was the duty of every supervisor to encourage the growth and development of their employees. The CDP allowed them to pay attention to that growth and development. They bumped it up to the 3% steps based on prescribed training programs. That had been implemented on the Public Safety side, Rorie continued, and this year, they were moving towards implementing it citywide. In addition, they were looking at certifications earned by employees and how that added value to the organization. That was behind the whole concept of merit. You did not want to give merit increases to under-performers.

Fleisch also noted that the CDP helped with developing succession plans in each department.

Brown showed how salaries had changed over the past seven years. Salary Grade 9 had gone from $29,900 to $34,500 for minimum pay, which was a 9% increase. Salary Grade 14 included Public Safety and some other positions, such as crew leaders. For those who were not Public Safety, the increase was 9%; for Public Safety, it was an increase of 13%.

This year, Brown stated, they were recommending a 5.2% COLA. The CPI currently was at 5.3%. For Grade 14PS, they recommended an 8.2% increase, which included the 5.2% COLA plus a $1,500 annual increase for all sworn and certified staff in the Police and Fire departments. They were using this amount based on the demands of the marketplace.

The recommendations to Council were that they approve a 5.2% COLA for all City staff effective Monday, December 6, 2021, and a $1,500 annual increase for all sworn and certified staff in the Police and Fire departments. Brown reminded Council that they had contracted with Management Advisory Group International to conduct a classification/compensation/benefits study that would be completed soon, saying they would probably have to tweak the pay scales after that study was complete.

The Georgia State Patrol had just raised its pay for new recruits to $47,300, Rorie commented, and Sandy Springs was at $52,000. The problem with that was that by looking at starting salaries, you did not get the impact of total compensation. Sandy Springs for instance, had a defined contribution package, while Peachtree City had a defined benefits program. The study would enable them to look at total compensation, not just salaries. Rorie said, however, that they would not be going too far out on a limb to go ahead and move the starting salaries up by 5.2% or 8.2% for Grades14PS-25PS.

Ernst asked why it had to wait until December? Rorie said if both increases were done both together, there would be an advantage in hiring and retention.

King agreed that it would enhance the recruitment effort. They would not be losing anything, and might prevent someone from taking a job elsewhere.

Rorie acknowledged that they would always lose people for various reasons, but they could ensure that the total compensation package was competitive. They did not want to be the employer of last resort.

Ernst said doing it all at once might save staff time.

Madden noted that residents appreciated the feeling of safety they had in Peachtree City, and he was in favor of doing what it took to have the best-trained and equipped Public Safety departments possible. It was important to show all employees that they wanted them to advance and stay with the City. The City was in the best financial shape it had ever been in, so they had the money. They should do this as soon as possible.

Prebor said they needed to do what it took to keep their good employees and recruit the best.

Rorie affirmed that it was their obligation to provide the best in Public Safety.

Fleisch asked if they needed two separate motions in order to change the date? Rorie said there could be a motion for the 5.2% COLA to be effective October 25, 2021, and a separate motion for the annual increase for Public Safety employees.

Ernst moved to approve the 5.2% COLA for all City staff effective Monday, October 25, 2021. Prebor seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Ernst moved to approve a $1,500 annual increase for all sworn and certified staff in the Police and Fire departments effective Monday, October 25, 2021. King seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

10-21-07 Acquisition of Easement Rights for Interparcel Access-MacDuff Crossing
Meeker said this had been a long time coming. It was for a permanent easement and maintenance easement from for inter-parcel access from The Overlook to MacDuff Crossing. The easements were appraised by Michael Biggers and valued at $203,650.

Council had no questions, and Meeker said the motion would be to acquire the access easement and maintenance easement and authorize the Mayor and City Manager to sign the necessary documents for such easements for the amount of $203,650.

So moved, said King. Ernst seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Council/Staff Topics
Rorie said they would begin digging and asphalting at MacDuff Crossing the following Monday.

Assistant City Manager Justin Strickland reported that construction would soon begin on an R-cut at SR 54 and Commerce Drive. An R-cut was a reduced conflict intersection. He showed an aerial photo of the intersection and explained how the R-cut would prevent left turns onto SR 54 going eastbound. Drivers who wanted to head east would have to go left and turn around at the SR 74 intersection. The State was doing this to reduce collisions at this intersection. There would also be a "box" installed at the intersection that vehicles should not block. This was a State project; no City funds were being used, Strickland noted.

Rorie said this was a project stemming from the 2014 traffic study and the 2017 access management plan on the SR 54 East corridor.

The Mayor mentioned the Faith and Blue event scheduled for the next evening at Drake Field, adding that the new City Christmas ornament would be on sale.

King moved to adjourn to executive session at 8:12 p.m. to discuss pending or threatened litigation and real estate. Ernst seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Ernst moved to reconvene in regular session at 8:49 p.m. Madden seconded. Motion carried unanimously. There being no further business, Ernst moved to adjourn the meeting. King seconded. Motion carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:49 p.m.

Martha Barksdale, Recording Secretary

Vanessa Fleisch, Mayor