



**MINUTES
WATAUGA CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING
SATURDAY, JUNE 1, 2024
WATAUGA FIRE DEPARTMENT CONFERENCE ROOM
8:30 AM**

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Arthur L. Miner called the meeting to order at a.m.

ROLL CALL

The meeting convened with the following members present:

Arthur L. Miner
Lovie Downey
Pat Shelbourne
Cris Blackburn
Andrew Neal
Malissa Minucci
Mark Taylor
Jan Hill

Mayor
Mayor Pro Tem/Council Member Place 3
Council Member Place 1
Council Member Place 2
Council Member Place 3
Council Member Place 5 (Absent with notice)
Council Member Place 6
Council Member Place 7

and
Sandra Gibson
Linda Proskey
Randy Barkley

Interim City Manager/Finance Director
City Secretary
Fire Chief

PUBLIC COMMENT

No Requests for public comment were received.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY FOR ACTION ITEMS

No Requests for public testimony were received.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Discuss and provide directions to the City Manager on the budget and strategic plan for upcoming fiscal year 2024-2025 budget.

Sandra Gibson, Interim City Manager, presented the item, seeking the council's input and direction for the upcoming budget. The following topics were discussed:

Strategic Plan Update

1. **Future Potential Emergency Issues** – Discussed preparation for potential emergencies such as severe weather, terrorist attacks, and domestic incidents, as well as the city's resource response. The city operates under Tarrant County's emergency management plan. Communication strategies for informing residents were also considered. It was agreed to replace "COVID" with "Global Emergency."
2. **Vision Statement** – Council members discussed potential wording changes but reached a consensus to leave the Vision Statement unchanged. No changes were made to the Mission Statement or the Strategic Plan's history.
3. **Goal #1: Maintain Financial Strength of the City** – Initiative numbers 2 and 3 were combined, with plans for an annual review. The discussion included available grants and their requirements. New priorities include enhancing cybersecurity, identifying and protecting personal identifiable information, and committing to regular maintenance and upgrades for city infrastructure and facilities.
4. **Goal #2** – A strategic initiative to develop a tax abatement policy was added to the WRAPP program. Additionally, plans for enhanced beautification efforts and improvements in the economic development corridor were incorporated.
5. **Goal #3: Expand Public Safety Through Non-Enforcement Efforts** – Recommendations included enhancing community policing programs and crime prevention efforts. Ms. Gibson asked the council for clarification on these goals, leading to a discussion on community policing, neighborhood watch programs, and citizen involvement. Emphasis was placed on enhancing police and fire department engagement in community efforts. The review frequency was updated to "annually" as needed. Additionally, a proposed mental health coordinator is included on the upcoming agenda. Mayor Miner mentioned grants that support mental health initiatives and suggested looking into those.

RECESS

Mayor Miner recessed the meeting at 10:04 a.m.

RECONVENED

Mayor Miner reconvened the meeting at 10:14 a.m.

6. **Goal #4: Strengthen Future Planning** -Interim City Manager Gibson recommended that the city ordinances be reviewed annually, with a formal review planned for 2024–2025. Mayor Miner suggested that staff should first identify which ordinances need updates and consider any relevant legislative actions prior to the review. Councilmember Downey noted that the sign and vicious dog ordinances should be revisited. Interim City Manager Gibson proposed removing the section under item 2 regarding a complete code review

before 2026, instead setting the review as an annual task, which the Council approved. Additionally, the requirement in section 3 to complete an ordinance rewrite before October 2026 was removed.

They also discussed the timing of a needs assessment for the Police Department and Library, which was recommended for reconsideration in 2026. Councilmember Taylor emphasized careful timing for needs assessments due to potential costs. They also discussed alternative locations for Animal Services, with a recommendation to proceed with a needs assessment for that department.

The section on short-term rentals and hotel occupancy tax has been completed, and a fund is being established. They discussed identifying short-term rental properties and creating an ordinance to ensure compliance with fire, safety, and health codes. It was decided to place this topic on a future workshop agenda.

For the Street Maintenance program and the maintenance schedules on the city website, the council requested it be added to a future workshop agenda.

The due date for section 12, evaluating code compliance processes to improve city beautification, was set to annual. Mayor Miner discussed the issue of uninhabitable houses and the need for a policy, mentioning a disconnect between departments on this issue. Interim City Manager Gibson agreed and stated she would meet with relevant departments to develop a policy.

7. **Goal #5: Improve Community Involvement** - The council discussed conducting a citizen survey to gauge public opinion on city performance. The last survey, conducted in 2019, had a modest response rate of about 400 residents. They decided to conduct the survey in-house in 2025.

RECESSED

Mayor Miner called a recess at 11:31 a.m.

RECONVENED

Mayor Miner reconvened the meeting at 12:11 p.m.

Continued with Goal #5:

The council discussed continuing the Watauga 101 program. The last time it was offered, only three applicants applied, so the program was canceled. They plan to try again in Fall 2024 or Spring 2025.

They discussed using technology to encourage citizen participation, including the possibility of a digital budget and the pros and cons of social media engagement. The council asked that different methods continue to be explored.

8. **Goal #6: Improve the City Brand** - The council reviewed recent social media improvements and the positive feedback received from the community. Interim City Manager Gibson inquired if they wanted to hire an external consultant for city branding, but the council felt external help was unnecessary. Retail Coach is assisting with external outreach, and current in-house efforts have been effective. Interim City Manager Gibson suggested creating a budget video, while Councilmember Shelbourne expressed interest in a printed or mailed newsletter. Councilmember Taylor noted this might not be cost-effective and asked Interim City Manager Gibson to review the Parks and Library departments' spending on printed materials distributed at city facilities. Additionally, the council suggested checking with Community Impact to explore partnership opportunities and discussed the possibility of investing in a stand for local restaurants to distribute city information.
9. **Goal #7: Attract, Retain, and Motivate Qualified Staff** - Human Resources recommended rephrasing the goal to "Make Watauga a Great Place to Work by Attracting, Retaining, and Motivating Employees." The council agreed to continue annual reviews of recruitment and retention efforts, focusing on ways to distinguish Watauga from neighboring cities. They suggested removing the second initiative and replacing it with an annual evaluation of staffing needs to ensure each department can effectively serve the community. They also discussed reinstating the annual employee Christmas party and changing the employee survey to a biennial schedule. Additionally, they proposed removing the PTO initiative and expanding employee appreciation efforts through recognition and rewards.
10. **Goal #8: Evaluate Technology and Workplace Solutions** - It was recommended that initiative number one be postponed to 2027, while initiative number two has already been completed and can be removed.

The council discussed AMI (Advanced Metering Infrastructure) technology, including implementation requirements, potential cost savings for both the city and residents, and the option of financing through debt. This technology would allow the city to monitor water usage daily, enabling faster notifications to residents if there is a significant increase in usage.

Interim City Manager Sandra Gibson noted that she would review the council's questions and recommendations, with plans to present updates to the council for review and approval in August or September.

RECESSED

Mayor Miner called a recess at 1:10 p.m.

RECONVENED

Mayor Miner reconvened the meeting at 1:30 p.m.

Interim City Manager Gibson discussed employee staffing, benefits, and compensation. Key challenges include meeting departmental staffing requests,

improving retention, maintaining competitive benefits, and conducting a compensation and classification study.

RECESSED

Mayor Miner called a recess at 2:31

RECONVENED

Mayor Miner reconvened the meeting at 2:40

Interim City Manager Gibson discussed the increases in water and sewage charges. She also spoke about offering a Homestead exemption, including the minimum and maximum amounts that could be offered and how this would impact the budget.

The Mayor requested an investigation into the necessity of the vehicles the city owns across all departments.

Councilmember Neal emphasized the need for further advancements in cybersecurity.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Miner adjourned the meeting at 3:29 p.m.

Approved: this 9 day of December, 2024

Signed: this 10 day of December, 2024

APPROVED:

Arthur L. Miner /s/

Mayor

ATTEST:

Linda Proskey /s/

Linda Proskey, City Secretary

