

CITY OF EDEN, N.C.

A special budget retreat meeting of the City Council, City of Eden, was held on Thursday, January 18, 2024 at 10 a.m. in the Council Chambers, 308 E. Stadium Drive. Those present for the meeting were as follows:

Mayor:	Neville Hall
Council Members:	Gerald Ellis
	Jerry Epps
	Kenny Kirkman
	Greg Light
	Bruce Nooe
	Tommy Underwood
	Jason Wood
City Manager:	Jon Mendenhall
City Attorney:	Erin Gilley
City Clerk:	Deanna Hunt
Media:	Roy Sawyers, Rockingham Update

MEETING CONVENED:

Mayor Hall called the special meeting of the Eden City Council to order and welcomed those in attendance. He called on City Manager Jon Mendenhall.

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Mr. Mendenhall said he appreciated everyone being there. Page one of the agenda packet showed the lineup for the day in the same format as years past. Staff would set the tone with updates on progress for the current fiscal year, recognizing that they were about halfway through the year with some things done and some yet to be done. Around 10:30, the budget process would be reviewed and it would be more time consuming than before as they were in a revaluation cycle and would have to talk about tax revaluation and its impact on the ad valorem tax rate. There would be a break and then departmental requests would follow at 11. A working lunch would be held at 12:20 in the Eden Room with goal setting as Council interacted with staff. Service level changes and/or special projects would be held at 1 p.m. Guest speakers would be there – Todd Hurst from the county to talk about revaluation, along with Anna Wheeler and Lindsey Pegg to talk about greenways. The EPA would be discussed as well as the pay salary study from last year. There would be a break at 2:20 p.m. followed by capital projects at 2:30 p.m., wrapping up at 3:30 with budget instructions and directions when Council would advise what they wanted to see done, if they were comfortable or wanted changes made. The City was halfway through the fiscal year. Earlier that week, Council heard about the audit and received the report from Rouse, Rouse, Rouse and Gardner. It was a very good report. A week before, staff had a staff budget retreat to finalize the items, so they had all been discussed. They were collaborating and coordinating accordingly based on that meeting.

Mr. Mendenhall said to set the stage for the first item, the audit report from the auditors was very, very good. There was an overarching theme and he had three highlights. The General Fund fund balance increased by \$3 million. Based on Local Government Commission calculations, they were at about 75 percent fund balanced. It was good, positive and a good buffer as they did not know a lot about the economy. They had talked about inflation and recessions in the past. They found themselves in a fluid situation economically. They were in a sea of change with an unsettling time globally. They needed to be conservative and have as much safety and security as they could afford to have locally. They were doing that by making sure they had adequate fund balance because they did not know what unexpected things could happen with war in the Middle East, in Eurasia and Eastern Europe. They were very unsettling times but the fund balance was good. The fund balance had increased 25 percent year over year. They had managed to increase fund balance and pay down debt. Debt had been paid down the last two years in the General Fund totaling \$2.5 million. There were only three debt issues outstanding. It was his goal with staff and with Council's guidance to address each of those three debt issues one at a time for the next three years until there was no more General Fund debt.

Updates on Progress from FY 23-24 –

What was accomplished in current fiscal year, etc. The current fiscal year saw the following accomplishments:

City of Eden - Work Program Goals of the City Council - FY 2023-2024 (FY 24)

- Marketing: Two additional festivals to be added to the calendar.

Marketing & Special Events Manager Cindy Adams said the City had very successfully added two new events. There were eight signature events before and they had added the powwow. She thought it would become an annual event because it was so successful. They tried it last year. There were 50 young Native American dancers. There were drums and mentors with a lot of people traveling three and four hours to be there. They stayed overnight. It did exactly what the occupancy tax was supposed to do – putting heads in beds in the motels. It was a very emotional and meaningful event. The participants as well as the audience got a lot out of it. They would be back at the end of April and had a planning session the night before. She thanked Council for allowing her to venture out and do something new. Again, it brought people to the City and allowed them to make connections they never thought would happen. Like other events, the people involved became like family and great partnerships were formed from it. The second new event was the year-long Year of the Trail. Eden and Rockingham County took the charge very serious from the governor and it really showed. At the recent regional trails summit in High Point, she said they stood out as a county for what they had done, what they were planning to do for the Year of the Trail. Council had done a proclamation. The first hike for the Dan River Basin Association (DRBA) was on the Matrimony Creek Nature Trail. Eden did the large clings that were on the windows up front, small clings for businesses, cups and coasters as well as advertisements. There was a big celebration week with the culmination at Reynold's Brewery. There was a great crowd of people coming together to celebrate not just what trails meant to Rockingham County but the state as well. The City celebrated at the 20th annual RiverFest. The branding was on business cards and everywhere. She thought people knew it was the Year of the Trail based on that. She again thanked Council for letting staff do that. Everything they did seemed to create relationships. She had formed a strong team with Ms. Pegg from the county and Ms. Wheeler from DRBA. They were friends and of like minds. They all worked hard to get things done. There were also relationships with Joe Miller with the state's Department of Natural & Cultural Resources, Elizabeth with Haw River State Park, RCC, the Rockingham County Education Foundation, Sam with the Mayo River State Park, and Rebecca, the public information officer for the county. It made the City stronger when they did those things. She again thanked Council for letting staff think outside the box to create those new events.

Ms. Adams reviewed occupancy tax numbers from the last five years: 18-19 \$85,804; 19-20 \$65,257 – down 23 percent due to COVID-19; 20-21 \$76,179 – up 16.74 percent from the prior year; 21-22 \$107,741 – up 41.43 percent; and 22-23 \$127,884 – a record which put the tax 18.7 percent over the prior year. It was in good shape and of course Purina had a lot to do with that. They had a lot of different things going on including reunions, events and corporate stays in addition to Purina, Weil-McLain and others. The City had nine signature events planned for the year and would be partnering with Preppy Pirate Outfitters to do a Shenandoah concert at The Farmhouse.

Mayor Hall said he was at the powwow the previous year and it had been moved from Grogan Park to the Morehead High School Gym. He asked what the location would be.

Ms. Adams said it would be back at the school. It worked well and logistics were so much easier and prevented the weather issue. The principal had agreed they could return there.

Mayor Hall said the stands were full.

Ms. Adams agreed and said she thought there would be even greater attendance because people knew what to expect and would spread the word.

Council Member Wood thanked Ms. Adams for her work.

- Planning & Community Development:

1. Small Area Plan Draper

Planning & Community Development Director Kelly Stultz said it had been an eventful year in her department with retirements, new hires and things going on. One of the biggest things they did was complete the Draper Small Area Plan. It was a portion of the Comprehensive Plan completed in the fiscal year before. The Draper Merchants Association was very active and met regularly at City Hall. Staff was trying to get some things the association was interested in and wanted to focus on into the next year's budget.

2. Downtown initiatives/façade grants/supporting funds

Ms. Stultz said about half of the façade grant funding had been spent which was pretty good since they were a little over halfway through the year. Another grant had been approved that week and had not yet been paid for. It was on The Boulevard.

3. Funding for appointed boards and commissioners (based on project submittals)

Ms. Stultz said other things that were budgeted and staff planned to do before June 30 were the Draper ferry sign, historic district signs, a celebration of Arbor Day and other small planting areas.

- Parks & Recreation: Freedom Park Upgrades

Facilities & Grounds Superintendent Brett Curry said he was filling in for Parks & Recreation Director Ray Thomas. The old playground had been removed and grading had been done in preparation for the new equipment which was delivered the previous day. The youth baseball and softball fields had been laid out and work would start on those as soon as the weather changed.

Mayor Hall asked Mr. Mendenhall if there was enough funding for the pavilion that had been discussed from the \$1 million provided by the state.

Mr. Mendenhall said he thought so although it had not gone out to bid yet. Based on current bid returns, he thought they would be alright to do the pavilion as well.

- Police: Implement Police Apprenticeship Program

Police Chief Paul Moore said in early 2023, the department sent recruitment teams into Morehead High School to begin the implementation of the program. There were not many takers. The department went to every marketing event they were presented with and there was no interest from seniors, although there were a couple of 10th and 11th graders interested. They had been following up with them through the year. The program was designed to hire the person, once they were 18 years old, and indoctrinate them into the department. Staff would assist the person to apply for the Criminal Justice (CJ) Fellows Scholarship available through Training and Standards. The person would go to school and work at the department 20 hours a week while in school. Once the person was 19.5 years old, they would be hired and sent to Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET). The department did start the BLET portion of the program after locating a couple of 19.5 to 20 year olds. They just completed the program and the department was waiting on their certification to come back. They had one person who was somewhat interested in it that year but they would have to wait and see. At the Chiefs' Conference he had just returned from, the CJ Fellows program was discussed and he learned there were 100 offered in the state. In 2023, there were four applicants and four accepted. That was how many people were wanting to get into law enforcement right now. The department would continue to work and be innovative to see if they could recruit some hometown heroes.

Council Member Underwood complimented Chief Moore on the way the new vehicles were marked. He had heard a lot of compliments from the public as well.

- Fire:
 1. Implement Fire Apprenticeship Program

Fire Chief Chris White said the program was to add three new full-time employees. As of November, the positions were filled leaving the department fully staffed.

2. Life safety upgrades and health risk management – radios, SCBAs, equipment, etc.

Chief White said the roof and siren were replaced at Station 1. As much rain as there had been in the past two weeks, there were no complaints about the roof leaking so the replacement was successful. The SCBAs were implemented and on the trucks and staff had been fully trained to use them.

Council Member Ellis asked how many were received.

Chief White said 38 total.

Council Member Wood asked if they were from Drager.

Chief White said no, they went with Scott. The radios were received and he commended Council Member Wood for his assistance getting the aliases and identifications put on the radios. Those had all been sent back to Motorola. They were currently undergoing programming. Station 4 was in the budget to be remodeled but that was on hold until Station 2 was completed as they did not want two stations down at one time. City Attorney Erin Gilley was reviewing the contract he had prepared for Station 4 so they could move forward when it was time to do it.

Council Member Underwood asked how many calls the department ran the previous year.

Chief White said 1,002.

Council Member Underwood said that was a record.

Chief White agreed.

Council Member Wood said the more than 200 radios for the Sheriff's Office were currently being programmed, then 911 radios would be done, and then the Fire Department was next in line.

Chief White said in talking with Ron at Motorola, they would do three radios at first. The department would then try them out for a couple weeks to a month to see if the radio layout was what they wanted. It would be easier to reprogram three radios than 60. They were just waiting on Motorola.

- Water Filtration, Water Resources, Wastewater Treatment Divisions: North Basin

Utilities Manager Melinda Ward said while staff had been busy keeping the plants running, she had been working to determine what kind of upgrades they could do. The north basin was currently 100 percent designed and everything had been sent to the state. The City was waiting on the state's approval. She hoped to receive the approval within the next month and then would go out to bid. In the meantime, the City had a contract with Synagro to clean out the north basin. Synagro started at the end of November and had been able to get about two-thirds of the material out and land applied. They had not been able to do anything the last couple of weeks due to the weather. They had until March to do it so they should be able to have it completely cleaned out before

construction began. The chlorine conversion had been designed but she had not met with the engineers to prepare it to be sent to the state.

Council Member Ellis asked if that was from gas to liquid.

Ms. Ward said yes.

*Review of the Budget Process –
the anticipated timeline for budget ordinance adoption, conditions facing other localities,
revenue discussion, etc.*

Mr. Mendenhall said the review of the budget process included the budget adoption schedule, conditions facing localities, discussion on revaluation and potential revenue changes. He reviewed the schedule:

- Budget Adoption Schedule
 - Tuesday, April 16 regular meeting – budget presented including the budget message
 - Tuesday, May 21 regular meeting – public hearing and adoption of the budget ordinance

- Conditions Facing Localities
 - This is a re-valuation year – a revenue neutral tax rate is planned, since this will more than likely result in a fractional rate a further tax decrease is also planned; the revenue neutral rate being \$0.4235, the tax decreased rate being \$0.42. Administration intends on proposing the \$0.42 rate resulting in a general tax decrease.
 - Green energy initiatives statewide combined with exceptionally high fuel costs will result in a large increase in electrical energy costs, this will be felt predominantly in water-sewer utilities. The amount of increase is 18% over 3 years. In order to account for this increase water-sewer rates will need to increase. Administration proposes to, as much as possible, keep this increase to a minimum.
 - It is recommended that conservative budgeting continue and that this budget be a continuation of previous spending patterns adjusted (as necessary) to account for material inflation and for the previously identified projects in the Capital Improvement Plan.

Mr. Mendenhall explained it was a revaluation year. Mr. Hurst would speak after lunch but had been invited to eat with Council so they could talk to him if they wanted as well. He would be talking about the revaluation process with the county. During revaluation, the county went out and assessed for tax purposes all the real property in the county. They made the determination and there was a schedule of values they used. They used contract assistance to get experts in as they did not have the staff to evaluate it in a timely enough manner. There were a huge number of parcels and they had a certain timeframe to look at them. A consultant would come in who was a subject matter expert. It was very normal for counties to do that. A certain number of counties did it every year. All of it was pursuant to state statute. It came up with a value for each and every parcel. Not all values or parcels were uniform. Not all properties would see the increase others would receive. There were different types of property – vacant property may be valued differently than a single-family dwelling, which may be differently than industrial or commercial. A lot of that was dependent on the market, the sales in the last period to be examined, and large economic things in play. There was not a lot of control on values – they were market driven. Revenue was determined through ad valorem taxes. There were two levers to the process: the value and the rate. If values went up and rates stayed the same, revenue increased proportionately. Revenue neutral was when the value went up and the rate came down so the net tax take remained the same. The burden on the taxpayer nominally remained the same. It would not always be the case as not everyone's values would increase at the same rate. Sales assessment was a key indicator in where values would go. The Department of Revenue looked at it yearly. Assessments were not done every year. The market increased values and assessments stayed the same. As the values increased more rapidly and that was what they were seeing throughout the country, there was a delta effect and it dropped from a one-to-one ratio to one to .6955 in Eden's case. The budget would be done by

the time the revaluation was completed as there were appeals that would be heard. (*Mr. Mendenhall discussed information in a handout provided to Council prior to the discussion.*) There was an estimated effective county rate, which the Rockingham County Board of Commissioners were responsible for setting, and an effective municipal rate. For the City to go revenue neutral, it would have to go from a 6090 rate to a 4235 rate. Management would like to plan for a revenue neutral rate based on the approximations. It would probably result in a fractional rate of 4235. Management proposed a uniform general tax decrease to the nearest whole penny of .42. From an economic development standpoint, the City wanted to have competitive rates and the lowest if possible. They did not want to tax citizens more than what was required for basic operations. Eden's combined rate would be somewhere around \$0.90, Martinsville's rate was \$1.04, and Danville's rate was \$0.84. Under the scenario, Eden would have the lowest municipal rate in the county, lower than Martinsville and close to – but not better than – Danville. The City looked forward to more investment, reinvestment, having a good tax environment and good pro-business type environment.

Mr. Mendenhall said the City needed to be cognizant of green energy initiatives. The whole country and whole world were consumed with the idea, which may be a good idea or not dependent on one's philosophy. Consumers would have to pay for it. Green energy was not free and had a cost. Duke Energy would be passing on costs to the consumer of about 18 percent over three years. There were some lawsuits out there about rates possibly going higher. Staff proposed as much as possible to keep energy costs down, to keep what was being passed on to the customer down. Duke Energy was going from a two-tier system to a three-tier. Staff was going to change the system of pumps. When plants operated, they would take advantage of the lowest cost tier of electricity. A firm named No Cost Utility Solutions had been hired to audit all Duke Energy billing accounts and tier structures. The firm would ensure the City was being billed appropriately and advise if there were savings switching to a different tier. He reminded Council that whatever was saved would be eaten up by the Duke increase. The City was really trying to stay neutral and not pass the cost onto customers. Green energy, gas pipeline construction and power plant construction were all tied together. They had to realize the cost increase would not be done in three years but could escalate. The costs that the utilities passed onto consumers may very well escalate as well.

Mr. Mendenhall said it was recommended that conservative budgeting continue as had been done the last several years. They may have to adjust spending patterns as necessary to account for material inflation. Such inflation they had seen in the past had been chemicals at the plant, which had been accounted for, vehicle equipment costs, and safety equipment. They saw it in contracted services. Everyone was passing on costs. Staff would have to true up lines in the different line items. He did not think it was a huge cost increase but they needed to be cognizant to remain conservative and aware that inflation was still going on.

Council Member Ellis said it would be a big plus to bring in people from other places, having the lowest tax rate in the county.

Mr. Mendenhall said it would be the fifth lowest tax rate in the Piedmont Triad region, with Graham, Elon, Mebane and Yadkinville lower.

Council Member Nooe asked if fees were considered. Some of the fees were rather high in Graham and Mebane.

Mr. Mendenhall said no, this was only the ad valorem comparison. A lot of the communities had Interstate 40 running through them which made their sales tax takes very high. Graham had a \$0.28 or \$0.30 tax rate. A lot of that was due to sales tax along with fees being high. It pushed the tax burden on different people rather than the ad valorem rate payer. He asked if everyone was OK with the proposal or if there were any issues. As there was no response, he moved to personnel.

- Personnel
 - 4% Cost of living increase.
 - Up to 3% merit on a graduated scale, based on performance, evaluation is recommended.

Minutes of the January 18, 2024 Budget Retreat meeting of the City Council, City of Eden:

- Please see pay study conducted, if above recommendations are implemented average City compensation would exceed the statewide average for our population group by 10.22 percent.

Mr. Mendenhall explained a supervisor did an evaluation. They graded the employee on a bell curve type format and provided a merit increase. As an employee got merit increases, they advanced in the pay scale.

Council Member Ellis asked how it worked in the past on the merit increase.

Mr. Mendenhall said it was the first year doing merit increases and it had been positive. It had not been done in the past.

Mr. Mendenhall said the MAPS pay study would be passed out after lunch. With a four percent cost of living adjustment (COLA) increase, the City would be paying 10 percent over the statewide average. The 10 percent would likely come down as other communities were likely doing cost of living increases as well. Eden was not paying comparable to Burlington, Greensboro, Danville or Winston-Salem. The pay study would be looking at the people in the population group, comparing apples to apples. Not all apples were the same. Some of the communities in the eastern part of the state had different economic challenges, but the state looked at a statewide average.

Council Member Ellis asked if the four percent would help recruit police and fire personnel.

Mr. Mendenhall said yes. The COLA adjusted the starting salary up four percent, along with the employee up four percent. It moved the entire range. The key with COLA was to move the starting range as well to stay competitive. It had not moved in the past decade and the City suffered because of it. A police officer had a lot to consider other than pay, including a work environment and reactions from society. To want to be a police officer had to be financially advantageous. There were not going to get rich. There were a lot of risks to the job. Some localities had a family atmosphere and treated the officers very good while other localities did not. Eden needed to stay competitive so when an officer was looking at agencies, they were comparable and did not make a rush decision because the salary numbers were so different. If McDonald's and Burger King had a \$10 an hour pay gap, that was an easy decision for an employee to make – they would go to the one that paid the most. If an employer were comparable, maybe not equal, they could talk about insurance, quality of work life, how good Council was to employees but the salaries needed to be close.

Council Member Underwood asked if there was a pay adjustment for long-term employees when a new employee came in earning more than them.

Mr. Mendenhall said they tried not to do that. Department heads were encouraged to examine it. If an employee was out of kilter, with an employee making more than a supervisor or employees with less tenure making more than employees with a lot of tenure, market adjustments were done. If the veteran, seasoned employee was not a good performer, they may not have received a merit increase. If an employee was meritorious in their work, were hard workers and go getters, they would exceed a long-time employee who was not working hard. Based on the merit system, the hard workers would do better than someone who was just present.

Council Member Wood asked how long it had been since the merit system was used.

Finance & Personnel Director Tammie McMichael said in 2014, the ordinance was amended to provide for performance increases. Based on the budget condition each of those years, sometimes COLA covered that year. Over the last years, they had been very blessed to give higher COLA increases, 13.5 percent over the last couple of years, and 3 percent that year. In years they were financially able to, they did try to give more COLA and have the merit there for the true hard workers when their performance evaluation was done.

Council Member Wood asked if raising the starting salary and then not doing evaluation increases had compressed the salaries. He asked if the compression rate needed to be examined and then start moving forward with merit increases so everyone was on the same page.

Mr. Mendenhall said employees had been compensated through COLA 20.5 percent since 2020. Anytime a COLA was done during that time, staff fought compression by moving the starting salary and moving the employee. In the past, when employees received \$500 or whatever, the starting range did not move. There may be a small amount of compression but it had been fought over the last four years.

Council Member Wood said as long as it was being worked on, that was fine. It was one of the morale issues he had heard about, with new employees making near the salaries of long-time employees.

Council Member Underwood was thankful for the pay study. He had wanted it done for a long time. He had done some comparisons himself and knew that the City was under some like Reidsville. It was hard for the police and fire departments to attract employees when they could go 10 miles away and make more money. The City needed to be competitive across the board for all employees.

Council Member Ellis asked how many holidays employees received.

Mr. Mendenhall said 14 days. There was period of time when in lieu of pay increases, holidays were added. Most municipalities did not get Presidents Day or Columbus Day. This happened prior to his employment. It was not an Eden-only thing. Before sales tax reform in the state, people were trying to compensate employees any way they could without breaking the bank.

Council Member Ellis asked how many holidays Reidsville employees got.

Mr. Mendenhall did not know but could look into it. Sometimes it was an apples to oranges comparison but he would say anytime someone brought up Reidsville, it was important to realize their current tax rate was nearly \$0.74. They wanted to have that conversation that the pay was close enough to talk about work/life balance, vacation days, and insurance. The City's insurance was very good, dependent coverage was good. The cost for dependent coverage was cheaper than other agencies. If someone had a family, they may make less salary but their insurance costs would be lower.

- Discussion
 - Administration would like to propose a general tax decrease this year.
 - Administration would like to propose a fee increases this year:
 - General Utility Rate increase of up to \$1.00 on all charges to account for inflation.
 - Additional rate increases may be necessary only if vendor's raise their rate (e.g. solid waste).
 - As a matter of practice, the Council will be asked for a general direction and instruction to the City Manager on preparing the budget and establishing a tax rate so that revenues can be estimated and budgeted; this will occur later in the day today.

Mr. Mendenhall said Administration would like to propose a general tax decrease and propose a fee increase of a general utility rate increase of up to \$1 on all charges to account for inflation. He did not foresee it being \$1. Two years prior, it was \$0.50 on all rates and charges. Staff was trying really hard to take the least amount of money possible to keep the operation going, to compensate employees and to pay for capital and equipment. Staff was not looking to run the Bank of Eden, they just needed to pay the bills and keep the operation viable. By that he meant good fire and police departments, a water plant that produced clean water and a sewage plant that treated sewage. For 11 consecutive years, the water plant won state awards on water turbidity, meaning quality. Eden had some really good, quality water. There were a lot of communities in the country and world who did not have clean water. A hundred years ago, a lot of people died from dirty water. They had come a long way and should

be proud of that. He congratulated Public Works and Public Utilities for their hard work. The rate increase could be \$0.50, it may be \$0.35, but they would really try not to get to the dollar. Additional rate increases may be necessary only if vendors raise their rate (e.g. solid waste). Solid waste fees had been raised the last several years by \$1 per year. They were in year three currently, so the next would be year four. There would be another \$1 increase the following year. They wanted to pass that increase onto the customer as there was really no way the City could absorb it.

Council Member Ellis asked if there was a way to track excessive loads being collected by solid waste.

Mr. Mendenhall said there had been discussion that week about multi-family accounts and there were a lot of those. Those were the worst about abusing the City on bulk waste. They had commercial dumpsters which were run through the City. They were paying for a commercial dumpster but not paying the City's solid waste fee. He was sure everyone saw the items at the curb after someone moved out on Jay, Harris, Arbor and Pierce. He thought there was a plan to address that by adding a surcharge and fee structure, and then charge based on every clamshell bite of that. Staff would have to evaluate and see if it was effective on controlling that. What Council Member Ellis was talking about was similar and was abuse by single-family customers. The difference was that those people had an account so they were paying their monthly rate. It was hard to say where the waste came from. He did not know that the abuse was any worse than the apartments but the apartments were not paying any toward the monthly solid waste fee while the house was. He wanted to address the apartments first but he did think there was abuse on the residential side with trash coming from out of state or the county. There may be software that would flag that for the City to charge accordingly. He would talk with staff to see if that could be improved. The City did not want to encourage abuse to the system. Every ton of additional waste was money that the whole customer base had to pay for. He appreciated Council Member Ellis bringing it up as he thought there was room for improvement there.

Council Member Underwood wanted to compliment Operations Manager Darren Gatewood and Operations Superintendent Dusty Curry after they handled a complaint of a handyman bringing scrap waste into the City and causing the City to pick it up. He reported it to Mr. Gatewood and Mr. Curry who did something about it quickly.

Mr. Mendenhall appreciated him doing that. He encouraged everyone if they had a problem or saw something, to say something. There were very competent employees and Customer Service was at City Hall. Staff was only as good as what they saw and heard. At the end of the meeting, Council would be asked for a general direction and instruction to the City Manager on preparing the budget and establishing a tax rate so that revenues could be estimated and budgeted which would occur later in the day.

Break

Departmental Requests – Council to hear requests by departments grouped by functional area

Mr. Mendenhall explained these were big requests, goal-type setting things that needed to be done. They were separate from capital, which was set out on a 10-year plan. They were operational or administrative changes.

- Planning & Community Development:
 1. Conversion of part-time inspector to full time

Ms. Stultz said one of the things they deemed most important for the following year was to convert the part-time inspector funded in the current budget, which had not been filled, into a full-time position. The City's ISO issues were hampered by that. There was one employee and in recent times he had been spending hours and hours a day at Purina which sometimes meant people had to wait for what would normally be simple things, like a waterline inspection. It was not good for the City to be that dependent on one person. Chief Codes Inspector Bob Vincent had tried to take some off to make up for all the time he gained in overtime and there had not been a single day

he had taken that staff had not had to call him to do an inspection. Mr. Vincent was very gracious about it but it was not in the best interest of the City's citizens.

2. Downtown Banners

Ms. Stultz said staff wanted to place banners on The Boulevard, The Cook Block and in Draper. They wanted to do that in 2024 and give some spark to those areas. Draper was part of Main Street and had Christmas lights. Staff wanted to keep the downtowns looking as good as they could and satisfy some of the small area plan issues. In meeting with the people in those areas, there were some small things they wanted to try to do that year. Work would start on The Boulevard small area plan as soon as a group could be formed for the Municipal Service District.

3. Upgrade Wi-fi in Downtown Leaksville (joint project with IT)

Council Member Underwood said wi-fi needed to be in all areas of the City, not just Leaksville.

Ms. Stultz said when the issue had first been discussed many years ago, it was before everyone had an iPhone with a hotspot on it. The City had to be careful not to allow its wi-fi and computer system to be impacted by an outside entity. Wi-fi in those areas was not as crucial as it used to be because everyone was walking around with it. The City wanted to provide those services when it could. Staff had been working with IT to find a way to do it that did not make the City more vulnerable.

Council Member Epps noted that most new phones had it on there.

Council Member Wood asked IT Director Kevin Taylor if it was correct that the wi-fi was restrictive of what could be accessed. He asked Ms. Stultz to verify that she did not have a part-time inspector currently.

Ms. Stultz advised she did not. They could not find anyone who wanted to work in that position part time.

Council Member Wood asked if there was plenty of work to do with two full-time people.

Ms. Stultz said yes. There were two full-time people for 30 years until the current budget year they were in.

Council Member Underwood said Council needed to look at replacing that because he could imagine it was very hard on Mr. Vincent.

Ms. Stultz agreed. Mr. Vincent was very talented and the City did not want to lose him.

Council Member Underwood agreed and said the City needed a backup for Mr. Vincent for when he decided to retire. They needed to fill the position.

Mr. Mendenhall said it was important to know there was data behind this. Permit activity was up about 50 percent from the previous year. There was too much volume for one person. They might be alright with one and a half, which they were seeing but they could not find a part-time worker.

Council Member Underwood thought in looking into the future as well that there would be enough work for another position.

Mr. Taylor said when wi-fi was implemented more than eight years ago, the cybersecurity landscape was much different than it was now. They heard about a new data breach almost daily. There had been several data breaches of municipalities, county governments, schools and colleges in the state over the past year. Cybersecurity needed to be kept at the top of mind in anything they did. To truly be public access, a network had to be open without a

password or any sign in. An open wi-fi network was not secure. Anyone could use a laptop to spoof, or imitate, an access point. Because the laptop would be sitting closer to a person trying to connect than the actual access point, their computer would connect to that person's laptop instead of the access point, giving them an unencrypted view of all the traffic going from the laptop to the spoof laptop to the internet. The technical bar to doing something like that was so much lower now. There were instructional videos on YouTube and free software. There was no financial bar to hacking, and not as strong of a technical bar. Any network, even the internal one for employees, was filtered. It was monitored and filtered. They were using next generation anti-virus to make sure nothing got into the network. If something did, IT staff tried to make sure it could not traverse the network. Public wi-fi was a whole can of cybersecurity worms being opened in modern day.

Council Member Wood asked if there was a huge need for it in the Leaksville area. Most shops probably had their own accesses.

Mr. Taylor agreed that they did. He did a scan from the access point at the Fire Department in Leaksville several months back to see what networks he could see. Almost every business there had their own wi-fi inside of the business. If the City was providing public wi-fi, it was duplicating a service the business could already provide. At least two businesses were already running guest networks for their customers.

Council Member Wood said it appeared to him the public wi-fi was not even needed.

Council Member Epps agreed.

Mr. Taylor said that was the recommendation of IT staff, to pull back public wi-fi and make sure the City's network was as secure as it could be. If a public network was put out there, it would not be secure and staff could not guarantee that any devices using the public wi-fi would not get infected or have their traffic intercepted. He questioned who would then be liable – the City for providing the network or the end user connecting to the network.

Ms. Stultz said having four downtowns was like having four children. If one got a new pair of sneakers, everybody wanted one. They had wi-fi in Leaksville and the downtown group there had made noise about it. When the group discussed it with Main Street Manager Ken White, everyone in the room had an iPhone. They did not want it to look like the City was not cooperating with them, but Mr. Taylor had made her a believer that it was a little bit scary.

Council Member Wood said he thought it was a lot scary.

Council Member Underwood said if staff did not think it was needed, it should be cut off. Either all or none.

Council Member Wood said in today's time, everyone had an access point and the internet in that area was pretty decent anyway if someone were on cellular data.

Mr. Taylor said the network speed from a cellphone was almost always faster than what could be provided by wi-fi. They had to plan for capacity so the bandwidth for each user was limited. They did not want one person sitting on a bench outside a business watching a movie to consume the bandwidth for everyone else. The bandwidth for each user would be much slower than what someone could get if they connected to their cellular data.

- Fire: Conversion of day-time part-time program to full-time status (addition of 3 FT firefighters). If implemented there would be 7 firefighters on a shift, increasing availability by 75% since 2020.

Chief White said the department currently had 21 full-time staff members and would like to add three full-time positions. The basic function of the department was to protect the community from fire. Over the past several years, the service had transformed to an all-hazard commodity that included emergency medical services,

hazardous response, technical rescues and numerous other types of calls. Adequate staffing would be one of the key successes of the growth of the department. Over the past couple of years, the department's public education, call volume and training opportunities had grown tremendously. In 2019, the department ran 586 calls; in 2020, 582 calls; in 2021, 651 calls; in 2022, 871 calls, and in 2023, 1,002 calls.

Council Member Underwood asked if he could provide a breakdown for the different types of calls over the past year.

Chief White said type 100 calls were structure, chimney, motor vehicle and brush fires, or any fire to a structure or automobile. Those calls were as follows: 2019 – 80; 2020 – 83; 2021 – 87; 2022 – 83, and 2023 – 69. The number going down in 2023 was due to some expansion in public education. Type 200 calls through 911 were motor vehicle accidents, gas leaks, EMS calls, rescue calls, public service calls and so forth. Those calls were as follows: 2019 – 506; 2020 – 499; 2021 - 564; 2022 – 788, and 2023 – 933. He wanted to commend the department staff for their public education and getting into the community. Type 500 calls were service calls, lockout calls, assisting police or other government agencies – the service calls included public education events and installing smoke alarms free of charge to those inside the City limits. Those calls were: 2019 – 73; 2020 – 69; 2021 – 77; 2022 – 195, and 2023 – 257. The majority of those calls were public education events or installing smoke alarms.

Council Member Underwood said he presumed the lockout was something that had just been started.

Chief White said it was a non-emergency lockout. If someone was locked out with a child in the car and it was not an emergency, staff would assist any way they could. It was a service.

Council Member Underwood asked if the vehicle owner had to sign a form releasing the City from liability.

Chief White said they did and the form removed all liability from the City if any damage was done to the vehicle.

Council Member Ellis commended Chief White and his staff for what they did for the citizens and for his family over the past year.

Chief White had more numbers on how the public education and smoke alarm programs had grown. In 2019, there were 25 presentations to 25 different types of businesses with 1,622 participants, with 18 fire alarms installed. In 2023, staff did 188 presentations to 61 different types of groups with 47,852 participants with 214 smoke alarms installed and 203 batteries which were received through a grant and were free to the City. He again commended his staff for getting into the community and making the programs possible.

Council Member Underwood said he assumed Chief White wanted to do away with the daytime program due to the conversion. He would like to see him hold onto it because the department would be shorthanded some days due to accrued time staff needed to use.

Chief White said he would like to hold onto it as well but if he had to chose between the daytime program and three full-time staff, he would choose the full-time staff.

Council Member Underwood said he understood that but would like to see the daytime program continue as well.

Chief White had broken down some numbers. Since July, they had added three full-time people and done away with one daytime position. In July, there were 40 people who could work and only 32 who did work. In August, there were 46 who could have worked and only 36 who did work. In September, there were 38 who could have worked and only 26 who actually worked. In November, there were 44 who could have worked and only 29 who actually worked. In December, there were 42 who could have worked and 32 who actually worked. Between July and December, there were 15 days with no daytime employees working. In that same time period, there were 31

days with only one daytime employee working. Out of the 127 days in that time period, only 58 days were fully staffed.

Council Member Ellis asked if the part-time staff working now would receive the COLA increase.

Mr. Mendenhall said yes, the part-time firefighters were paid the same hourly rate as a full-time person because they were doing the same job.

Council Member Ellis asked about the employee absences Chief White had mentioned.

Chief White said they could be for many reasons. A majority of the part-time daytime staff had full-time jobs at other departments so they may have been out on a call all night or been called to their full-time job.

Council Member Underwood asked if he was using the entire roster on the comparison figures because he was assuming some of the guys on the roster could not work the daytime program.

Chief White said the daytime figures were just the employees who worked daytime on a regular basis.

Council Member Underwood asked how many part-time on-call employees were on the roster.

Chief White said he thought it would be around 16. All of the employees on the roster were active. There were 21 full-time staff and there were either 36 or 38 on the total roster.

Council Member Underwood said there used to be a lot more than that back in the day. They were going away.

Chief White said police, fire and any type of emergency services were dwindling down. Some of the mindset was that people did not want to do it part time, they wanted it as a career.

Council Member Ellis asked what the total response would be for a regular fire if the additional staff was added.

Chief White said from 8 to 5 weekdays, there would be 10 certified firefighters – seven on the shift and three in administration.

Council Member Underwood said the big question was how it would be funded.

Chief White said there were a couple of different ways. If they kept the daytime program, they would have to come up with the lump sum. If they did away with the daytime program, they would only need about half the lump sum.

Council Member Underwood asked how much the daytime program currently cost.

Chief White said around \$90,000. Hiring three full-time employees would be around \$180,000 to \$190,000 with their benefits.

Council Member Underwood asked if he ever tried to find a grant.

Chief White said staff was looking into grants, which were something new to him. They received an email about not receiving the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant. Staff had a Zoom meeting on June 26 about applying for grants. Staff did not want to jump into a grant without knowing how it worked so their meeting would be with FEMA on the grant process. Staff was looking into Assistance to Firefighter Grants (AFG) and had a meeting with them for that purpose. Ms. Stultz had advised she was willing to help them with the grants.

Council Member Underwood said it would be very advantageous to get in on a SAFER grant to start with.

Chief White said as a municipality, it was hard to get grants for the department because a majority were geared toward volunteer departments. Many grants were based on fewer staff and small populations. The City would be cut out of 85 percent of grants because of full-time staffing and the population.

Deputy Chief James Slaughter said in his research regarding the SAFER grant, he looked at who had received the grant and how they paid people. The City of Los Angeles, Winston-Salem and Burlington raised taxes to keep people from the grant on staff. Bigger cities did it all the time and did not question it. He knew raising taxes was something the City did not want to do. The grant usually was for four years. The key concern was how to keep the staff on after the grant was over.

Council Member Underwood said one thing they could do was cut the daytime staff back to one. That would leave a relief person if someone were out on leave, at least for a few more years.

Mayor Hall asked Mr. Mendenhall and Chief White to look at the personnel and determine what worked best for the department. He said one question he had was regarding the calls in 2023. There were 69 that possibly needed water on them.

Chief White said those were calls that did need water.

Mayor Hall asked if there was a lack of coverage with 21 full-time employees.

Chief White said they did on the initial dispatch. If staff got on a working structure fire, they had communications re-page for manpower, which allowed full-time staff to come back in and get comp time for that. They may come or may not.

Mayor Hall asked if there was a situation when they did not have enough personnel. He was trying to figure out why they needed three more staff. He knew at the Spray Cotton Mill fire they needed 25 departments. He asked if in an average year, they needed three more people, if they were not getting the response they needed. He had a hard time with it because every year they were asking for more and the only way to do it was to increase taxes.

Council Member Underwood said they could not predict what kind of circumstances they would be in. They had to be prepared for it. As the previous fire chief, he saw the need.

Deputy Chief Slaughter said one of the things he had Chief White run was that they had now come into the timeframe of overlapping calls. That had risen from eight to 20 percent in the last five years. Recently they were being slammed with four or five calls going on at the same time. For them to be able to provide for the citizens and get them what they needed in a timely manner, the staffing needed to be there.

Council Member Underwood agreed with him.

Mayor Hall said they could not prepare for everything.

Deputy Chief Slaughter said they could play what if all day long if they wanted to.

Chief White said they prepared for the worst and hoped for the best.

Mr. Mendenhall said they could not prepare because it was a what if, but they could look back in time and see things like availability of the daytime part-time employees, who were good employees. He agreed completely with Council Member Underwood that they did not want the program to go away. The problem was, and they

were seeing it in each department, was that the part-time workforce they had relied on for a long time was declining. The market and circumstances were causing the program to do away with itself due to unavailable people. Looking at the data from doubled up calls that Deputy Chief Slaughter had just addressed and looking at the time of day for calls, which was a traditional, historical number, was that fire calls were after 5 p.m. in the evening hours.

Mayor Hall said he thought they needed to point out what they were calling a part-time position, which to a lot of people meant 20 hours a week, weekdays 12 to 4 or whatever. This part time was anytime and it was for a particular reason. They only went to work when there was a fire.

Chief White said the department had two different types of part-time employees. Part-time daytime could work 8 to 4, and then the other was part-time on-call, meaning they could run the call from their house or place of business when the department was called out. The majority of them worked during the day.

Mr. Mendenhall said the part-time scheduled were the ones they were having trouble filling. They could sign up anytime but were not, which was the problem. It was affordable, but they could not have both. They could convert daytime part time to full time if they wanted to. They could leave it alone and realize they would only have one person most days. If they converted it, it would be a marginal increase. They could not pay the \$180,000 for the full time and the \$90,000 for the daytime part time. They could decide or give it some time and see how it worked.

Council Member Ellis said it would only be \$90,000 more to convert the program to three additional full-time staff.

Chief White pointed out the \$180,000 figure was salary plus benefits. It was close but not the true cost.

Council Member Ellis said it was \$7,500 to \$8,000 a month additional.

Council Member Epps said he was amazed at what the department accomplished with the staff they had. They were doing a great job.

Chief White said they did what they could. They worked as a team to get the job done.

Council Member Wood asked if the overall goal was to have two staff at each station.

Chief White said that would be the end goal but they were taking baby steps.

Council Member Wood said that was what he would like to see in the future. It would be a safe thing.

Chief White said the three additional personnel would help with the rating because there was a minimum staffing requirement. Currently there were six shift people and were only required to have four. A minimum of six would help the rating.

Council Member Underwood said four of those were drivers. They could be used as firefighters but were drivers more or less.

Chief White said the job title for all employees was firefighter / driver-operator.

Council Member Underwood said they would be tied up on the trucks.

Chief White said one would, so you had to take one out of the equation. You would actually take two because you had to have someone run command and someone run the truck.

Council Member Kirkman asked how many men the department got through mutual aid with Draper and Leaksville.

Chief White said it depended. They were not staffed full time so were basically the same as the City's part-time on-call. When the pager went off, they could cut it off or they could go.

Council Member Kirkman said Draper Volunteer Fire Department had two full-time men there all day. They had a part-time chief but there were always two there. He was in the department.

Chief White said the chief was not there full time because he worked full time for Danville.

Council Member Kirkman said again that there were always two there. Gary Martin was there daily. So the City always had two men coming from Draper. The City had spent so much money on the department it was unreal. And they were getting ready to spend more as the department would be requesting a truck. He was not denying that they needed to go ahead and do that. Sunset Beach bought one for \$900,000 to come in four years from now. Over a million dollars had been spent on the department since he had been on Council. He thought right now they needed to spend some money somewhere else.

Council Member Ellis said half of the million was on the building.

Council Member Kirkman said he was not discussing the building.

Chief White said the air packs were done on a grant and did not cost the City anything.

Council Member Kirkman said the City still spent the money.

Council Member Underwood said he saw the need but to collaborate with Council Member Kirkman, he thought they should keep the daytime program and maybe come back in a couple of years.

Chief White asked how many members Draper had on its roster and how many were certified firefighters.

Council Member Kirkman said it was full. He did not know the number.

Council Member Ellis asked if it was true that the rural certification would not translate to the City's.

Council Member Kirkman said they would as they were state certifications.

Chief White said Draper had about 40 members and less than 10 were certified firefighters. The other 30 could not go in if a house was on fire.

Council Member Kirkman said he was one of those as he could not do it anymore but they could sure work outside.

Chief White said they could get water for the firefighters.

Council Member Underwood said he thought they needed to hold on to the daytime program. He saw the need but he was trying to save some money.

Council Member Epps asked if they could get one instead of two or three. At least it would be better than none.

Mr. Mendenhall said yes, he believed so.

Council Member Underwood said if they were to add, it needed to be one per shift.

Chief White agreed saying adding just one would mean one shift would have more than another.

Mr. Mendenhall said the way it was set up, the request would be made and Council could mull it over and think about it. Goal setting occurred during the lunch period. He asked Council to think and talk about it.

Council Member Ellis said Council Member Kirkman was right that Draper did have 40 on the roll. Some of the training for the City did not correlate with the training for rural departments. He asked if that was true or false. He was referring to SCBAs and being able to enter a fire.

Chief White said they did not have the same SCBAs.

Council Member Ellis asked if the City was still Firefighter 3 and 4.

Chief White said it was just certified firefighters. The state had done away with the 1, 2, and 3 designation and made it just firefighter certified.

Council Member Underwood said it was the same as a Firefighter 3 was in years past.

Mayor Hall said the discussion could go on but asked if a firefighter committee could be formed with some of the firefighters from Council to meet with staff. That would allow the budget retreat to go on.

Mr. Mendenhall said yes.

- Water Treatment Plant: chlorine project
- Wastewater treatment plant
 1. Chlorine project
 2. North Basin project

Ms. Ward said as she mentioned earlier, staff was working on the north basin and chlorine conversion. The plan was to go out to bid soon with the north basin project. It was quite a large project so they hoped to get quite a few interested parties to bid. Once that was out to bid, staff intended to go out to bid for the chlorine conversion project hoping that whoever bid on the north basin may be interested in doing the chlorine conversion as well to save on costs, specifically mobility costs if one company got both jobs. They were trying to time it just right as there was no rush to switch the chlorine to liquid.

- Water Resources
 1. Railroad Pump Station
 2. Purina sewer reroute

Ms. Ward said the Railroad Pump Station was hardly used since HanesBrands closed but it was still a vital pump station for the City and would be used exclusively for the Mega Park once something moved in. They wanted to ensure it was a functional pump station and was ready when needed. Over the years, it had deteriorated causing issues with safety and access. Staff wanted to improve access into the dry well side. They were still working on a plan for electrical access to the facility but the improvements would actually be good in case something new came in that required an expansion. They would be able to just switch over to a new pump station if they had to. It probably would not be complete until June so would not be ready for construction until the next budget year. When Purina started discharging, the flow was being directed to the Railroad Pump Station but the flow was obligated for the Mega Park. They wanted to make sure everything was open and ready for the Mega Park. Staff was working on a plan to reroute the flow from Purina to the Industrial Park Pump Station which was really right across the street. The problem was it was under the railroad. They knew it would be a little bit tedious to get

permission from the railroad and all the permits that would be required. They were looking to start the process now of designing, planning and getting it rerouted. The Industrial Park Pump Station had plenty of capacity and was actually currently under capacity. It could use the extra flow and could save money in the long run.

Council Member Underwood said if they did that, they would also have to get easements from land owners.

Ms. Ward agreed.

Council Member Underwood asked what happened if a landowner did not want to give an easement.

Ms. Ward said there were probably three different plans they could work with.

Council Member Underwood said one resident had contacted him and the resident was not happy about it and would refuse to do it.

Ms. Ward said staff was aware of that and letting Ms. Gilley handle it.

Mayor Hall said for public improvement, the City had eminent domain if they needed it.

Ms. Gilley said it could be used for utilities or a necessity. That was always a last option as they did not like to do that to citizens.

Council Member Underwood said the resident's plan was to build a house where the line was planned. He thought it would be trouble if the City took it from him.

Ms. Gilley said the City tried to work with citizens to purchase property because eminent domain was purchasing.

Council Member Underwood said the resident was not willing to sell.

Ms. Ward said this was for the sewer line going across the property. Staff was trying to work with the property owner. The plan was not to take up the entire piece of land. They could work to keep it at the edge of the border of the property.

Ms. Gilley advised she had done that with multiple citizens. A lot of people had sewer lines on the sides of their property on the borders.

Ms. Ward said he could not put his house on the edge of the property, it would have to be in the center.

Council Member Nooe asked if Purina was serviced now by gravity to the Railroad Pump Station.

Ms. Ward said yes, and it would still be gravity.

Council Member Nooe asked what the purpose was in moving it if it were functioning now.

Ms. Ward said they had not actually started but every time the City talked about the permit, Purina wanted to add volume to it or the potential of volume. The City was limited in how much volume they could permit them for because they were limited in the flow at the Railroad Pump Station because it was dedicated to the Mega Park. They could not give Purina more flow and then something come to the Mega Park. It gave Purina more flexibility to expand in the future if they wanted to. If they wanted to do everything the way they were now it may not have an effect. If they moved everything to the Industrial Park Pump Station, it provided them flexibility. It gave the Mega Park extra space they could utilize. It was a win-win for all.

Council Member Nooe asked if staff was going to upfit the Railroad Pump Station anyway.

Ms. Ward said it was a 5 million gallon a day pump station that only getting less than 100,000. Staff was actually adding water to it from time to time to keep it pumping.

Mr. Mendenhall said as an analogy, there were two empty buckets – one at Railroad built for Hanesbrands when it was a textile. It was 5 million gallon a day, not a whole lot going into it but Purina planned to go into it. Flow from the Mega Park in Virginia had been allocated to go into it. Industrial was the other empty bucket. It was built for Pluma and could handle 5 million gallons a day. There was hardly any flow going into Industrial. Staff was trying to push all of Purina away from the Mega Park to fill up the Industrial empty bucket to keep the Railroad empty bucket for Virginia so they got all the buckets full and did not have one empty and one overloaded. Basically, they were trying to balance all of the economic development flows because that was essentially what they were. They were in a pattern and were very hopeful about it. They lost Hanesbrands and lost Miller and were not going to get either two of those back. They were working on replacements for the economic cycle they were in. Purina was effectively replacing Miller, not at the same flow of a million gallons a day, but trying to reuse, reimagine and reinvest that site. Then there was Hanesbrands with a flow of 3.5 million gallons a day. Staff was hopeful to see similar flow coming from the Mega Park in Virginia. Everyone talked about building back and building back better. This was what building back looked like for Eden. That was the economic development for Eden.

Council Member Underwood asked why the City did away with the treatment facility on 770.

Ms. Ward said the wastewater plant was inefficient and would need a lot of upgrades to meet new requirements. A new treatment process would be required with the new permit. It was only a half a million gallon a day plant and would not have held more than that. There was no land to expand it. It could not have handled the flow from the Mega Park. The treatment plant on Mebane Bridge Road could handle the flow on that side of town as well as anything else for a lot cheaper than it would have been to try to upgrade that facility and to maintain two plants.

Council Member Ellis asked the amount the treatment plant could hold.

Ms. Ward said 13.5 million gallons a day.

Mr. Mendenhall said Ms. Stultz reminded him of the Southern Crescent Grant that was being applied for to pay for the Purina reroute. The City would know soon whether that grant would be awarded. He asked Council to take their goal sheet with them to be discussed at lunch. He had already marked through the wi-fi based on feedback and he had made note that there would be a fire committee. Staff would get Council's feedback on what needed to be done at that hour. He noted that Utilities Manager Terry Shelton was out sick and their thoughts and prayers were with him. Mr. Mendenhall would make the presentation.

- Status of the EPA Compliance Program
 - Compliance deadline is 2024
 - Projects are substantially complete
 - Cost with high inflation has been a problem, with help from granting agencies and the General Assembly, these costs have been mitigated with off-setting revenue not funded through user fees

Mr. Mendenhall said staff met with the Division of Environmental Quality (DEQ) after Thanksgiving to discuss what needed to be done before going to the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency). A meeting was scheduled with the EPA on January 22. The meeting would be to talk about compliance and the delisting of the Administrative Order (AO), as well as Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSOs), construction progress and next steps. The City was in good shape going into the meeting with DEQ and then rain happened resulting in three SSOs – Covenant Branch, Hale Street and Junction Pump Station. He began a PowerPoint presentation.

Background

History of Concern...

- 1st SOC from ~1987 to ~1992
- 2nd SOC from ~2004 to ~2009
- EPA AO - January 2011 to April 2017
- EPA AOC - April 2017 to April 2022
- EPA AOC (modified) - April 2022 to December 2024

...leading to progressive compliance

- SSOs trending downward
- Re-investment in infrastructure totaling \$51.6m (and counting)
- Projects on schedule
- Plan for completing deferred work upon EPA approval

Mr. Mendenhall noted the history of concern went back to 1987. SOC was state compliance. The SSOs were trending downward, even with the SSO events over the 10 days. Reinvestment and infrastructure were continuing.

Construction Progress

Summary statistics of construction: 5 of 11 complete, 4 of 11 in-progress = total complete or in-progress 82% complete, 18% deferred until after 2024.

Contract	Anticipated Construction Start	Anticipated Construction Finish
MBWWTP Solids Handling Improvements	Complete	Complete
Contract I - Infiltration/Inflow Reduction	Complete	Complete
Contract II.A - Bridge St Pump Station Rehabilitation	December 2022	July 2024
Contract II.B - Junction St Pump Station Rehabilitation	June 28, 2023	July 2024
Contract III - Bridge St Basin Rehabilitation and Replacement	November 2022	July 2024
Contract IV - Glovenia, Spruce, Chestnut, and Ash St Sewer Relocation	Deferred	July 2030
Contract VA - Junction Basin Rehabilitation and Replacement	September 2023	September 2024
Contract VB - Smith River Outfall Rehabilitation & Siphon Replacement	Deferred	July 2030
Contract VI - Kuder Street Basin Rehabilitation and Replacement	Complete	Complete
Contract VII - Dry Creek Basin Rehabilitation and Replacement	Complete	Complete
Contract VIII - Neighborhood LIFT Stations Improvements	Complete	Complete

Deferments

- ▶ Contract IV - Deferred
- ▶ Contract VB - Deferred, funding source identified and in application process

He said when the slide was created, it was \$51.6 million and there was about \$60 some million left to spend which was funded. Projects were on schedule although delayed a couple of weeks due to riverine flooding. There was a plan to complete deferred work if the EPA approved it.

Minutes of the January 18, 2024 Budget Retreat meeting of the City Council, City of Eden:

1986 to 2003
A Peek into the Past

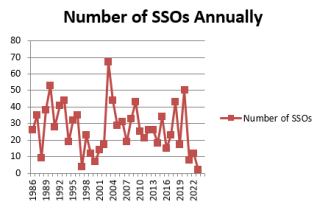
Year	Number of SSOs	Gallons Overflowed	Actual Percent in Inches
1986	26	363,780	
1987	36	4,127,230	
1988	9	383,050	
1989	38	1,474,845	
1990	53	2,610,390	
1991	26	1,761,900	
1992	41	1,462,565	
1993	44	1,760,890	
1994	19	1,887,210	44.54
1995	32	1,030,805	50.58
1996	36	2,280,850	65.58
1997	4	40,950	90.77
1998	23	3,300,075	43.90
1999	12	637,840	41.10
2000	7	621,584	36.49
2001	14	14,440	32.57
2002	17	477,622	40.31
2003	67	2,213,088	62.19
2004	44	273,494	42.74
2005	29	166,530	36.26
2006	31	395,406	44.01
2007	19	459,638	37.13
2008	33	43,975	46.49
2009	43	121,698	46.36
2010	26	122,111	46.28
2011	21	46,624	42.42
2012	26	116,627	36.93
2013	26	313,881	49.02
2014	16	132,468	44.28
2015	34	343,296	54.88
2016	15	100,110	46.75
2017	23	191,331	46.38
2018	43	202,410	71.07
2019	17	167,380	47.44
2020	50	733,877	67.71
2021	5	16,348	37.73
2022	12	24,480	46.97
2023	2	2,850	35.84
2024	3	16,300	2.78*
Average	26.02	836,026.11	46.86

* Data through January 10, 2024
Averages generated only through 2023

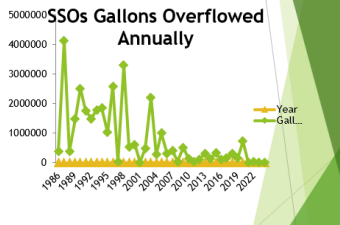
Mr. Mendenhall noted flows had decreased on SSOs. Rain was about the same.

SSOs

Chart Area
Number

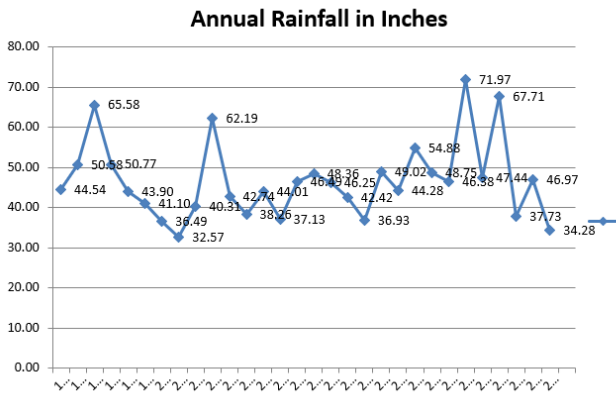


Volume



He said they could see the peak years and what resulted in state compliance actions. They really started to see work complete and come along in late 2021, early 2022. The point of the slide was that SSOs were decreasing gallons on the ground.

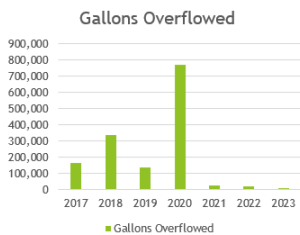
1994 - 2003 Annual Rainfall



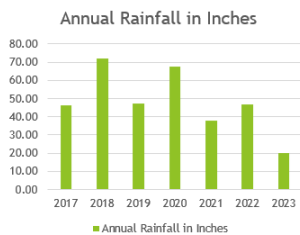
Mr. Mendenhall continued. Rainfall had been within range although there were some peak-type events. Rainfall was a combination of intensity, volume and duration. There could be a very rainy year where it was spread out and there was not impact, but they could also have a lot of rain in a short duration and that could cause a peak in SSOs.

SSOs Compared to Rainfall

Gallons Over-flowed



Annual Rainfall in Inches



In 2020, there were a lot of tropical events but it was evident the gallons had diminished significantly.

Historical Comparisons

Peak Rainfall Years



- 1996 - 35 SSOs = 2,590,850gal and 65.58in rainfall
- 2003 - 67 SSOs = 2,213,088gal and 62.19in rainfall
- 2018 - 43 SSOs = 300,410gal and 71.97in rainfall
- 2020 - 50 SSOs = 733,877gal and 67.71in rainfall

- Average since 1986 = 27 SSOs = 835,329gal and 46.67in rainfall
- Average since 2017 = 22 SSOs = 199,803gal and 50.35in rainfall
- Average since 2021 = 7 SSOs = 15,209gal and 39.66in rainfall

Actuals

- ▶ 2020 – majority of worst-first work completed
- ▶ 2021 – 11 SSOs = 22,898gal @ 37.73in rainfall
- ▶ 2022 – 12 SSOs = 24,480gal @ 46.66in rainfall
- ▶ 2023 (thru Oct) – 2 SSOs = 2,800gal
- ▶ 2023 was 0.07% of the worst gallons lost year (1987)

In 1996, there were 35 SSOs and 2.5 million gallons overflowed. The City was trending very good. In 2023 through October, there were two SSOs with 2,800 gallons, which was less than one percent volume metric of what was discharged in 1987. SSOs had continuously decreased in volumes.

Construction Progress

Summary statistics of construction: 5 of 11 complete, 4 of 11 in-progress = total complete or in-progress 82% complete, 18% deferred until after 2024.

Contract	Anticipated Construction Start	Anticipated Construction Finish
MSWWTWP Solids Handling Improvements	Complete	Complete
Contract I - Infiltration/Inflow Reduction	Complete	Complete
Contract II.A - Bridge St Pump Station Rehabilitation	December 2022	July 2024
Contract II.B - Junction St Pump Station Rehabilitation	June 28, 2023	July 2024
Contract III - Bridge St Basin Rehabilitation and Replacement	November 2022	July 2024
Contract IV - Gloventia, Spruce, Chestnut, and Ash St Sewer Relocation	Deferred	July 2030
Contract VA - Junction Basin Rehabilitation and Replacement	September 2023	September 2024
Contract VB - Smith River Outfall Rehabilitation & Siphon Replacement	Deferred	July 2030
Contract VI - Kuder Street Basin Rehabilitation and Replacement	Complete	Complete
Contract VII - Dry Creek Basin Rehabilitation and Replacement	Complete	Complete
Contract VIII - Neighborhood Lift Stations Improvements	Complete	Complete

Deferments

- ▶ Contract IV - Deferred
- ▶ Contract VB - Deferred, funding source identified and in application process

Mr. Mendenhall said all the projects should be complete, the last one being Contract 5A – Junction Basin Rehab. A lot of that was due to material delays. The American Rescue Plan Act money came in at the same time causing a lot of entities to have money to spend on water and sewer but the manufacturing capacity was not there. The City was doing the EPA AO during the middle of all that making it more complex. Staff anticipated being done by September. One contract had been deferred completely. One had been deferred with funding sources identified through a meeting in Raleigh the previous spring. Staff was in the BRIC grant process to help with that. The City was the top-rated application in the state for that grant, which was for the siphon, thanks to Planning and Utilities. If the City received that grant, we would have additional money to look at Contract 4, which had been deferred. All of the information would be presented to the EPA. Five of the 11 projects tied to the EPA AO were complete, with four in progress and 18 percent of the projects deferred. The deferments were pre-approved by the EPA.

Next Steps

City of Eden

- Requests a timeline to delist the AOC once all non-deferred work is complete.
- Requests indefinite deferment on work deferred as of Dec 1, 2024. City has identified funding for Contract 5B, is desirous that this work be done. Contract IV has not been related to SSOs for the last 7-year period and there is no environmental protection or fiscal benefit.
- Upon completion of current construction 91% of the remediation plan projects would be completed and SSOs would be cut by 99.93% from peak – occurrences, a successful remediation program benefiting people and the environment.

Coordinating Activities

- City of Eden coordinated with DEQ on 11/27/23 providing an update on progress and a desired path to delisting. DEQ is supportive of delisting.
- Recent DEQ CEI visit found 0 violations
- No I&I SSOs in last 6mo reporting period

Staff would be requesting the EPA delist the City from the AO and to not have to complete the non-deferred work and to indefinitely defer Contract 5B, as well as recognize that 91 percent of all the remediation efforts had been done with SSOs cut by 99.9 percent on a volume metric and on an occurrence basis. The City would be in a delisting period sometime in the winter of 2024. The City would continue to be part of DEQ's inspection process and submitting annual reports to make sure we stayed in compliance.

Update of the Impact of a Severe Weather Event and Our History

Total Annual Rainfall for 2023 in Eden, NC 39.84 inches.

Average Annual Rainfall in Eden, NC for the last 29 years is 46.85 inches

In 2023 there were 2 SSOs, both caused by blockages not related to I & I.

In the last 37 years the average number of SSOs per year has been 26.9 events

The volumes in gallons reaching waters during 2023 was 2800 gallons

The average volumes of SSOs reaching water in the last 37 years has been 835,329 per year.

January 9, 2024, there was a severe weather front that moved through the Eden area dumped 2.75 of rain in a period of 14 hours. This was significant because in the three weeks preceding this event, three rainfall events had been dropped 4.98 inches of rain creating saturated soil conditions. On January 9, there were three SSOs due to rainfall with a 15,300 gallons flow of wastewater reaching the state waters.

The biggest overflow was at Covenant Branch. Staff would be looking at an attenuation or EQ-type basin and reusing the Industrial Pump Station at MGM for that. That would resolve the Covenant Branch problem. The January 9 event caused a lot of SSOs throughout the state.

Mayor Hall thanked the staff, and especially Mr. Shelton. The AO was an unfunded mandate they originally thought was going to cost \$40 million. There had been changes in leadership at the City, COVID-19, grant applications and they were almost at the end of the project. He congratulated all the people who had worked on it and helped secure funding for it. He appreciated all the hard work and looked forward to the AO ending.

Council Member Underwood asked what the balance was on it.

Mr. Mendenhall said the balance yet to be completed was about \$10 million. There was debt service in excess of probably about \$30 million that would be payable over 20 to 25 years. It was like buying a house – payments

would have to be made for a long period of time. That was one of the stresses on the Water & Sewer Fund. The City would be making payments on the EPA AO for a long period of time moving forward. It was a big spend over a long period of time, involving many Councils and elected officials. He thanked those who came before and those who served now, it was a big deal. The City would end up spending \$60 million, compared to other communities who may spend \$2 million on a pump station. The sewer was important and he appreciated Council sticking with the staff to get through it.

- City Council to review the pay study and accompanying presentation.

Mr. Mendenhall said Ms. McMichael was passing out a pay study of salary comparison City versus statewide for the population group 10,000 to 24,999. It was conducted on 11/30/23 using 2022 data. It was published by the North Carolina League of Municipalities (NCLM) who received the data via contract from the MAPS Group. The City could have contracted with the MAPS Group for about \$30,000 and gotten the same information. He reviewed the report Council had: the grade, minimum, midpoint and maximum ranges, the position, the code was important because everyone named jobs differently in the state, but certain positions had certain functions and the state assigned them codes. The City matched the code statewide. There was a salary survey average, along with the delta, which was the difference between the average versus the City's midpoint. The City presumed a four percent COLA, so they would be comparing the most comparable starting July 1. They escalated the minimum, midpoint and maximum by four percent to see if the City would be competitive. Staff reviewed the report every year, and had for probably 20 or 30 years, to make sure things were comparable and adjustments would be made. Before the four percent projection, the City was six percent ahead of the state average. If the four percent COLA was given, the City would be 10 percent on average higher, keeping in mind that every place was different in their economies and abilities to pay. The diversity was sometimes hard but it also gave a good basis because it spread the numbers out and they could be seen statewide. The following page listed anyone who fell below the delta, meaning their salary was lower than the state average, what their salary was and how the City planned to close it. There were 10 employees listed and each had recommendations or notes listed. There were 192 listed positions although that did not mean there were 192 employees. Some positions had multiple levels – such as equipment operator one through four. Some positions were open and unfilled. Fifteen positions fell below the state average and of those, 10 potentially needed adjusting. Of the 10, eight fell outside the action level. Adjustments would be made to fix that, either through the COLA process or market adjustment. There were zero employees in FY 2024-25 that needed to be adjusted and one may need to be adjusted in FY 2025-26. There was one unfilled position that may need adjustment and would be looked at further. There was a pay differential between what some localities were paying. That could be seen sometimes because of keying errors or someone highly skewed in their range, like an Engineering Tech 1 or Police Officer 1 making \$75,000. That was like an Engineering Tech III or Police Officer IV in the City. Some cities may just have a Police Officer and Senior Police Officer, or not Firefighter 1–3, just Firefighter and Fire Engineer. Those were little variances that Council needed to be aware of. The pay study was complete and staff had addressed the variances they thought existed. Staff thought the COLA would address the 10 listed employees. That was staff's recommendation to Council. They would do the pay study again the next year as it had been done every year.

Council Member Underwood appreciated the information. The employees did a great job and deserved the increase.

Council Member Epps agreed.

Recess for lunch

Mayor Hall thanked The Blissful Palette for providing lunch and thanked Ms. Adams and Administrative Assistant Tesh Johnson for organizing it.

- City Council to hear a report on the countywide revaluation from Todd Hurst, Tax Administrator.

Mr. Mendenhall said this was for Council to review possible increases in various types of municipal services or special projects.

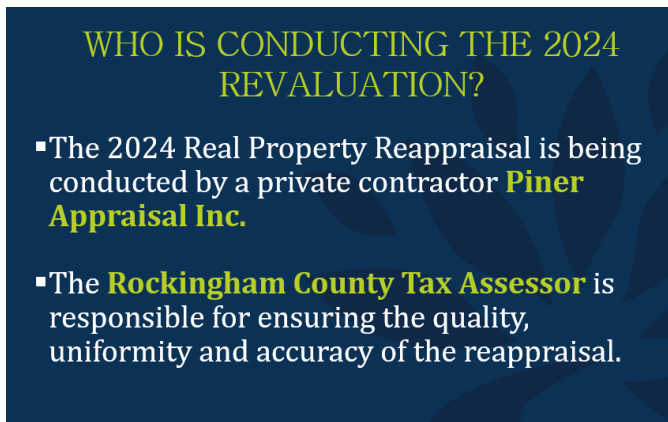
Mr. Hurst reviewed slides from his PowerPoint presentation:



APPROVAL PROCESS FOR THE 2024 SCHEDULE OF VALUES

- This Public Hearing is just one of many steps in the approval process of the 2024 Schedule of Values that is **required by Statute**.
- The 2024 Schedule of Values is **available for viewing** in the Tax Office.
- After the completion of this Public Hearing, the next step is to receive **approval** of the 2024 Schedule of Values **by the County Commissioners**. The request for the approval will be made at the **December 4, 2023** Commissioners' meeting.
- Once the 2024 Schedule of Values has been approved by the County Commissioners, there is a **30-day appeal period** that follows.
- **The approval process must be completed before January 1, 2024.**
- **The 30-day appeal period from the approval date published will be January 5, 2024.**

Mr. Hurst read the information from the above slide. To his knowledge, no one appealed the schedule of values by the deadline.



WHO IS CONDUCTING THE 2024 REVALUATION?

- The 2024 Real Property Reappraisal is being conducted by a private contractor **Piner Appraisal Inc.**
- The **Rockingham County Tax Assessor** is responsible for ensuring the quality, uniformity and accuracy of the reappraisal.

Mr. Hurst said Piner Appraisal Inc. was from Morehead City and would be conducting a full listing measure for the county. He, as tax assessor, was responsible for ensuring the quality, uniformity and accuracy of the reappraisal.

WHY IS REVALUATION TAKING PLACE?

- Rockingham County's last Revaluation was completed in **2019**.
- **North Carolina General Statute 105-286** requires all counties to reappraise real property at least once every eight years.
- The **intent** of revaluation is to **achieve equalization** and **uniformity**. Revaluation (General Reappraisal) is a **mandatory requirement** of the State of North Carolina; it is **not optional**.
- Revaluation is the process of reappraising real property to its **current Full Market Value as of January 1, 2024**.

Mr. Hurst read the slide above.

WHAT IS MARKET VALUE?

- **Market Value** is the **most probable sale price** which a property should bring in an open and competitive market with a willing and able buyer and seller, both having full knowledge of the value and neither being forced to either buy or sell.

HOW ARE MARKET VALUES DETERMINED?

- **Market Value** is **determined by analyzing sales** in the marketplace.
- The 2019-2023 Sales File Database currently contains over **8,500 total** Rockingham County **sales**.
- These **sales are then verified** as either **qualified** or **unqualified** through the examination of sales questionnaires, listings, revenue stamps, field review and other sources.

Mr. Hurst read the above slide and noted the sales file database was through September. Staff was still working on October, November and December. He continued reading the following three slides.

WHEN WILL THE NEW ASSESSED VALUES BECOME EFFECTIVE?

- The **new assessed values** will **become effective** as of **January 1, 2024**.
- Property owners **will be notified** of the **new property values** by mail in **late March 2024**.

HOW MUCH WILL MY PROPERTY VALUE CHANGE?

- **Property value changes will vary** depending upon several factors, such as the type of property, the physical condition, and location.
- There is **not a set value** or **set percentage rate** of increase or decrease that can be applied across all types of properties throughout Rockingham County.
- As a result, the resulting rate of property value decrease or increase **will be varied**.

HOW MUCH WILL REVALUATION AFFECT MY TAX BILL?

- At this point in time, there is no way to determine how much your tax bill will be affected by revaluation.
- The Rockingham County Board of Commissioners, City Councils, Town Councils, and Fire Districts will **set the effective tax rates by July 1, 2024**.

WHAT IF I DO NOT AGREE WITH THE NEW ASSESSED VALUE?

- An appeal can result in **no change, decrease, or increase** in value.
- Use the **Online "Check My Value" tool**, then submit your appeal if you still disagree with the value.
- Or fill out and sign the appeal form included with your Change of Value Notice and **PROMPTLY return** it to the Tax Office by mail or email.
- **Include** the documentation and/or supplemental information necessary to review the appeal.
- If you are **still not satisfied** with your value, the next level of appeal is to **the Rockingham County Board of Equalization and Review**.
- If you **do not agree with the Board's decision**, you can appeal to **the North Carolina Property Tax Commission in Raleigh, NC**.

Mr. Hurst read the above slide and added that staff requested the appeal forms be submitted within 30 days of receiving the new assessed value. He continued reading the below slide.

WHY DO I HAVE TO FILL OUT A FORM?

- All Real Estate is in a **constant state of change**. There are approximately **55,000 tax parcels** in Rockingham County. It would be impossible for the Tax Department to know everything about each one.
- The appeal form allows the Tax Department to **gather information** on your particular parcel and **assures the accuracy of the information** in our database.
- You may already have an independent appraisal of your property you can submit with your appeal.
- The form allows you to **provide information** that explains your reason(s) for appeal.
- Allows the **Tax Department to allocate its resources** to process all appeal requests **promptly** and **efficiently** in order to **save tax dollars**.

ONLINE “CHECK MY VALUE TOOL”

Rockingham County - Check My Value

Parcel Number: 113239
 Owner Name: AWESOME, I AM
 Address: 1 VALUABLE FL

Your value of 122,412 is within the expected range.

After comparing your property to other properties around you, your value was within the expected range. If you are not satisfied with this valuation and would like to talk to the county about it, please click the button below.

Here's how we got the expected range.

10 Comparable Properties below

Location	Parcel	MRID	Type	Year	SQFT	Story	Const	Qual F	Beds F	Baths	Fire	Other	Unimproved	Stages	Acres	Land	Sales	Price	Sales Date	Tax	Tax per
1 VALUABLE FL	222213	R999	RD1	2004	1,176	1.0	D/A	3	2.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	\$36,000	\$114,000	08/23/2013	\$122,412	\$104.09
2 VALUABLE FL	222211	R999	RD1	2004	1,170	1.0	D/A	3	2.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	\$36,000	\$112,000	06/17/2009	\$128,304	\$109.59
4565 BIG VALUE DR	222224	R999	RD1	2003	1,170	1.0	D/A	3	2.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	\$36,000	\$112,000	06/17/2009	\$128,304	\$109.59
4575 BIG VALUE DR	222225	R999	RD1	2003	1,100	1.0	D/A	3	2.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	\$1,100	\$36,000	08/01/00	\$120,000	\$109.17
110 VALUABLE CT	222236	R999	RD1	2001	1,178	1.0	D/A	3	2.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	\$36,000	\$116,000	08/23/2013	\$128,311	\$109.68
167 VALUABLE CT	222237	R999	RD1	2001	1,212	1.0	D/A	3	2.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	\$36,000	\$131,000	09/14/2010	\$128,504	\$103.80
225 VALUABLE CT	222238	R999	RD1	2001	1,288	1.0	D/A	3	2.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	\$60,000	\$102,000	05/25/2010	\$126,961	\$88.57
103 VALUE TRAIL	222239	R999	RD1	2001	1,288	1.0	D/A	3	2.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	\$60,000	\$106,000	12/29/2010	\$126,152	\$97.94
230 VALUABLE CT	222250	R999	RD1	2000	1,302	1.0	D/A	3	2.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	\$60,000	\$108,000	08/01/00	\$128,830	\$95.29
210 VALUABLE CT	222251	R999	RD1	2000	1,380	1.0	D/A	3	2.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	\$2,879	\$36,000	08/01/00	\$132,960	\$95.91
212 VALUABLE CT	222253	R999	RD1	2000	1,232	1.0	D/A	3	2.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	\$36,000	\$108,000	08/01/00	\$130,387	\$105.82

Have Questions?
 If you have any questions please see our FAQs page.
 THIS IS NOT A LEGAL DOCUMENT. Rockingham County shall assume no liability for any errors, omissions, or inaccuracies in the information provided regardless of how caused, or any decisions made or actions taken or not taken by user in reliance upon any information or data furnished hereunder. The user knowingly waives any and all claims for damages against any and all of the entities comprising the Rockingham COUNTY TAX DEPARTMENT that may arise from the assessment data.

Mr. Hurst said the above slide showed a sample of what the online Check My Value tool would look like. It would open in the next month or so with all the new values on it. Residents would be able to compare their properties with others.

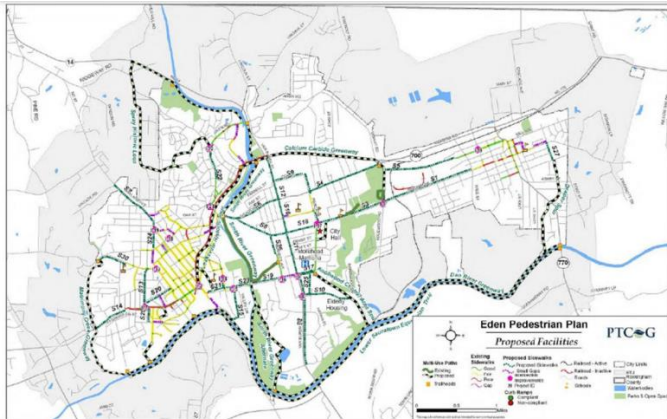
Thank you-Questions?

If anyone would like a copy of this PowerPoint please email taxadm@co.rockingham.nc.us

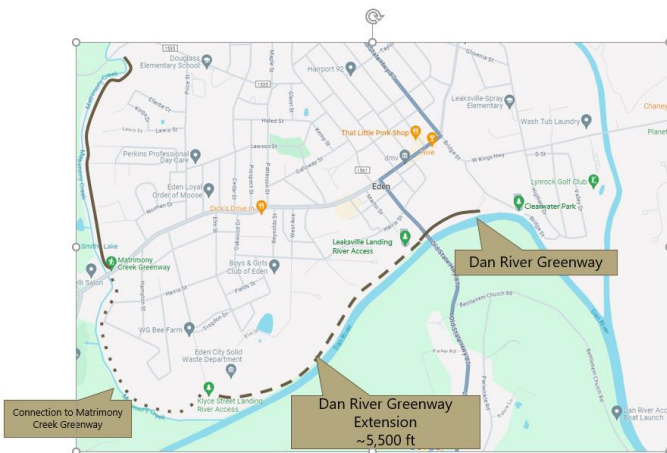
He ended the presentation and thanked Council.

- City Council to hear a presentation on a partnership proposal to extend greenway opportunities from Lindsay Pegg, Rockingham County Tourism Manager; Anna Wheeler, Dan River Basin Association N.C. Program Coordinator; Keith Elliott, Dan River Basin Association Recreation Assistant

Ms. Wheeler started a PowerPoint presentation.



Ms. Wheeler said the map showed the existing Edén Pedestrian Plan and that the Dan River Greenway Extension was part of the plan.



Ms. Wheeler noted the current Dan River Greenway went from Leaksville Landing to Bridge Street, almost touching Clearwater Park. The proposal was for the section between Leaksville Landing and Klyce Street River Access, and potentially connecting to Matrimony Creek Greenway, dependent on how much sewer was disturbed. Master plans included public input and there was obviously money and lots of effort put into the plan.

Current Conditions

- Gravel, flat for trucks and driving
- Gates for preventing motorized use
- Views of the beautiful Dan River
- Culverts over drainage areas
- Dan River Access connections
 - Klyce Street
 - Leaksville Landing



Current Conditions

- Walkable
- Addition of crushed gravel would allow for more users to enjoy (strollers, bikers, elderly)
- Addition of Trailhead Kiosk and mile markers like Matrimony Creek



Project Constraints

- Standing water
 - Could be moved to field edge
- Missing culvert
 - 4 active water crossings
 - Temporary piping
- Property/Easement Acquisitions
 - Four landowners between the Klyce Street Access and Leaksville Landing



Mr. Elliott said he had walked the trail even before construction began and the area was perfect for a walking trail. It was fairly opened up after all the construction but two years before, it would have required basically a bush ax to get through sections of it. It was a pretty section of river. He had grown up in Eden and remembered when the dump was there. There were some crossings and conditions that would have to be dealt with as a trail but it was not much different than conditions that had to be overcome when River Road was turned into the greenway years before. They could see places that had potential and needed to act on them when they became available. Currently there were some culverts over ditches that would have to be dealt with but they would have to be dealt with anyway for sewer line maintenance. The area was very walkable and flat, similar to the Smith

River Greenway without the climb toward the YMCA. It would be nice for bikers and the elderly. There would be an additional trailhead and kiosk. Nature had taken care of a lot of the work. There were some water crossings to deal with but there was a lot of potential there. He hoped when it dried up some of Council would visit the site and see how pretty it was.

Benefits of Greenways

- Healthy, livable, and safe communities = Better places to live
 - Affordable exercise and recreational opportunities within the community
- Provide new opportunities for outdoor recreation and non-motorized transportation
- Link neighborhoods with downtown shopping, restaurants and entertainment = Connecting people and places together
- Protect the environment
- Historic preservation

EXAMPLE OF GREENWAY ACTIVITY:

Smith River Greenway Numbers

(Jan-Dec 2023)

- 98.6K Visits
- 74 min avg. time spent
- \$49.8K median household income
- 42 median age



Ms. Pegg said in 2023, Ms. Adams put a lot of hard work in the Year of the Trail campaign, which was a historic campaign for the state. It was a great campaign for the county as well, which was a Tier I rural county. The county was in the top counties hosting the most events for Year of the Trail. As part of her job in tourism, she was trying to get people here, excited about the county and RoCo. That was where partnerships came in she would talk about later. With any greenway or outdoor recreation asset, a more healthy, livable and safe community was being created. That was important because it made people want to move, live or visit and spend money here. The extension would provide new opportunities for outdoor recreation as it would be expanding a really great trail. There were a lot of great trails but not of substantial length. It would be a great addition to the trails already in the county, not to mention it could be a non-motorized trail meaning bikes as well. It was hard to come by trails that could be walked and biked at the same time. She encouraged Council to think about what that could do to foot traffic just off Washington Street. Greenways were good for linking neighborhoods with downtown shopping, restaurants and entertainment. They could really play off the events the City already hosted. That had been done the prior year with Trail Days Weekend and RiverFest. Events on the river and trails were successful, they had linked up what events that were already happening. Greenways were a source to protect the environment. There were wonderful natural resources in the county and she spent a lot of time highlighting and promoting those. Greenways also benefitted historic preservation. Eden had a lot of history including the rivers and the modes of transportation they used to provide. She was able to pull a report from placer.ai detailing visits on the Smith River Greenway from January to December last year: almost 100,000 visits with an average time spent there of 74 minutes. That was great. There were people visiting and spending time there and would be looking for things to do after they left the greenway. That's where the City could promote shopping and dining and any entertainment going on.

Outdoor Recreation Economy

- Trail tourism creates economic impacts:
 - Increase foot traffic to downtown = increase in visitor spending
 - Recreation rentals:
 - Canoes/Kayaks
 - River Tubing
 - Fishing
 - Guided Trips
 - Opportunities in construction and maintenance
 - Additional parks & recreation programs



Ms. Pegg said trail tourism did create economic impacts. Just for the state, outdoor recreation had an economic impact of \$14.6 billion in 2022, which greatly surpassed the \$11.3 billion in 2021. Visitor spending in the county had increased because of the RoCo blueway initiatives and that branding. The county had worked really hard and partnered with the cities and DRBA to have county signage and information guiding visitors on where to go and what to do next. That created visitor spending and an impact on the county. The county was right at \$89 million in visitor spending in 2022 which was an almost 14 percent increase from 2021. The highest year prior to 2023 was 2019 at \$80 million in visitor spending. That put the county as number 22 in tourism revenue for the state in 2022. She hoped 2023 was better and she thought it would be as there had been a lot going on. The increase in foot traffic and visitor spending had a huge impact when greenways and trails were added to a community. It also created the potential for additional recreational rentals – canoes and kayaks. Currently in the City there was no where to rent those despite the rivers. Guided fishing trips could be created as there were great sections in the river to fish. She suggested looking again at river tubing, maybe in a different part of the river. Having a greenway running a stretch between river access points would make a tubing adventure safer as people could watch. The extension could bring more people in to do construction and maintenance and could create additional Parks & Recreation programs. People could use the greenway and speak to the Boys & Girls Club and YMCA to bring kids out and teach them about the benefits of outdoor recreation and the wonderful things that could be seen along the trail.

Additional Amenities

- Potential for river tubing
- Easy access for inexperienced boaters
- Additional safety access points
- Fishing access
- Hiking viewpoints



Ms. Pegg noted the extension would create the potential for river tubing. There would be easy access for inexperienced boaters, meaning if someone was in trouble they could see that they could get off the river because of a trail or greenway that could be easily accessed. It would create additional safety access points and fishing access potentially from the river banks. It could create overlooks for people walking. There was one at Jacob's

Creek where walkers could sit and view the river which created a nice amenity. There were a lot of things that could be done with the extension but especially increasing foot traffic and bringing more people in.

Other Opportunities

- Historical significance- trail to Historic Leaksville
- Kiosks and interpretive signage
- Connecting neighborhoods to trails
- Boys and Girls Club/YMCA program opportunities
- Knowledge of how sewers work - educational experience
- Ability for public art- sewer line art



Ms. Wheeler said the City had traditionally capitalized on additional opportunities on the trails and greenways. There was an easy connection on the historical significance to Historic Leaksville. It was promoted during RiverFest with the hiking opportunity there. Kiosks and interpretive signage could be installed about the environment or about the history on that section of the river, which included a Native American fish weir. All the sewer line easements for the trail went to neighborhoods and behind houses which could connect those to the trail. It was recommended that kids get at least 60 minutes outside each day so the trail was good for kids who lived in that area. The extension would be useful for the Boys & Girls Club and YMCA program activities. As the sewer easement work was being done, it could be turned into an educational experience about the sewers and how they worked. A lot of people did that in bigger cities. People were so interested in how their money was spent. There were taxes being spent and showing people how that was done by keeping their water clean and how sewers worked would be of significance to the community. The new sewer line caps on the extension would be a beautiful place for public art, including a mural by students or a professional.

Potential Partners

- Dan River State Trail
- MARC
- Rockingham County TDA
- NC DNCR
- Boys & Girls Club of Eden
- Rockingham County Arts Council



Ms. Pegg said a big part of the idea was looking at how the City could partner with other agencies. On behalf of Visit RoCo (Rockingham County), she could see that as a big partnership as well as working with DRBA. The Museum and Archives of Rockingham County would be a potential partner. They had already been reached out to so they were people who were on board and they had already had conversations with about other projects, and potentially this one as well. They had worked a lot with Joe Miller from the N.C. Department of Natural & Cultural Resources and he was on board for something like this, as well as the Boys & Girls Club of Eden and the Rockingham County Arts Council. Jenny Edwards was a big trail champion. The more people you could have on board, the more successful, fun and easier things would be.

Council Member Nooe said one of the slides mentioned easements. He asked if those would be required or if there were already easements that could be used.

Ms. Gilley said that was a good question. She had looked at it per Mr. Mendenhall's request. Easements had been obtained for the sewer line, which did not give the right to have a greenway easement. She thought the area was flat and the residences were up higher, so it would not be at someone's house. She had experience from dealing with the Matrimony Creek Nature Trail that easements had to be obtained from every single person. Having Matrimony Creek would be a good example to show people that the easement would not be so intrusive. The City had purchased a lot from Jeff Johnston right beside the river access and there were four other property owners toward Public Works. The City did use eminent domain as a last resort for easements for water and sewer lines but would not ever do that for a greenway easement, even though there was probably authority to do it. Staff would make sure all property owners were on board before it moved forward.

Council Member Nooe said one of the property owners expressed concern to him about the trail.

Ms. Gilley said if the property owners could not be persuaded, the project would probably end.

Mr. Mendenhall said there were two different thoughts – that Council needed to be apprised and on board, and that the City did not want to do anything adversarial to the homeowners and tax-paying residents. Staff would have to go out and talk with them. There were maybe six in that stretch by looking at the map. There was a strong group advocating for it which was a good first step. The next step would be to approach the property owners and make sure their private property rights were respected. There was a lot of federal money - \$400 to \$500 million - coming for greenways.

Ms. Pegg noted in the state there would be \$25 million.

Mr. Mendenhall said there was a lot of money in taking what was called gray infrastructure and making it green. There was a thought process in talking with Soil & Water in Wentworth and the Piedmont Conservation Council, which he was a part of and did some work for philanthropically, that the watersheds needed to be protected and there were a lot of federal funds available to do riverine corridors and buffering. It did a lot for conservation and for the stakeholders before Council. It did a lot for the City as well as operators of a municipal water system. It would help protect the drinking water source. It checked a lot of dual use buttons and with federal funds available, the City may get traction with that. He thought it was important that Council hear from the advocates who made some very good, relevant points. The next step would be to see if they could make property owners happy. He appreciated Ms. Pegg, Ms. Wheeler and Mr. Elliott. They were a great team and did a lot of work with the City.

Council Member Ellis asked Ms. Pegg to repeat what she said about the county's status during the Year of the Trail campaign.

Ms. Pegg said Rockingham was one of the top counties as far as events hosted, which was saying a lot when they went up against counties like Guilford, Forsyth and Mecklenburg, as well as the Raleigh/Durham area, who all had dedicated Parks & Recreation staff at the county level. Rockingham County's success fell to the municipal level.

Council Member Nooe asked if the available funds were for maintenance or new construction.

Ms. Wheeler answered it was mostly new construction.

Council Member Nooe said he walked the trail behind Karastan and part of it had failed.

Ms. Wheeler said maintenance after was the hardest thing after construction.

Ms. Pegg agreed they did not want to spend all that time, money and effort if the maintenance was not worked out. The City had a wonderful greenway plan that was still viable in her mind.

Mr. Elliott said it actually was not their idea, they had seen it on the City's Greenway Master Plan.

Council Member Nooe said he liked to walk the greenways but maintenance needed to be considered. Some of the areas were above the flood but a lot were not and required the sediment to be removed each time the river got up.

Ms. Pegg said in those instances, the trail material needed to be considered – whether it was crushed gravel or a more natural path.

Review of the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and delivery of Capital Improvement projects in the upcoming fiscal year.

Mr. Mendenhall reminded that the City had a 10-year CIP that it balanced annually. The requests, more often than not, had appeared on the plan before. They would be reviewing the projects in the cycle to be done and the departments were adding the 10th year onto the plan, so it always stayed 10 years out. Costs changed and it had to be rebalanced and they tried not to have a peak year, meaning they did not want to go from a \$1.5 million capital spend to a \$5 million capital spend. They tried to keep it relatively steady. There were also annual tweaks due to management personnel trying to continuously improve. For example, Parks & Recreation with Facilities & Grounds was going to ask for a new mower but had been talking to grounds staff to see if they could get more mower life by blowing leaves with blowers rather than trying to mulch them. Staff was always trying to do the best as stewards of taxpayer dollars and trying to get the most continuous improvement possible. Two other items to note were the request to pre-order a fire engine and the request to pre-order an automated garbage truck. They were in the CIP and budgeted for. Council had set up a Capital Reserve Fund the prior year and put back \$300,000 for the large capital items. Due to scarcity, the City could no longer buy a demo or go to a lot, purchase and drive away with a fire engine. Fire trucks were probably 36 to 40 months lead time while solid waste trucks were probably 24 to 36 months lead time. Two years prior, Council authorized a knuckle boom truck that they were supposed to get at the beginning of the current fiscal year and it had been pushed back to the end of the fiscal year if the City got it at all. Council had authorized a dump truck chassis that had been ordered since the first week in July and staff had yet to get it, utility body truck for water resources the same thing. The heavy equipment was getting scarce to find. The thought was to get ahead of the curve. They did not want to need it a certain year and wait four years to get it, depleting the assets and equipment because they did not plan for the long lead time. Staff was trying to front-end the lead time while not incurring any additional costs and getting the scarcity item addressed. He wanted to prepare Council that they would hear those requests because it was a real problem. He was afraid it may get worse because of the amount of technology and change in vehicles. They did not want to get into a situation where they did not have a garbage truck although fortunately the City had reserve units. Staff was seeing parts and those sorts of things taking them down to reserve unit trucks. At the NCLM spring conference last year, he heard about communities not being able to get a garbage truck or they had privatized solid waste and the rate increases were such that they were trying to take it back over but could not because they could not find any trucks to use. He commended staff for looking at it and figuring how to propose to Council what could be done so the equipment could be received in a timely manner.

Council Member Kirkman knew the City had to have the fire and garbage trucks and he was not opposed to them. He asked if the City would save any money by locking into them now.

Mr. Mendenhall said he did not think so.

Council Member Kirkman said he was referring in a way to prepaying. He read the information from Sunset Beach and it looked like they did get some savings, although he thought they may have prepaid the entire thing.

Mr. Mendenhall asked if he meant they did a front-loaded payment before they received the truck.

Council Member Kirkman said yes.

Mr. Mendenhall said that was something they could talk about and would be a question for Ms. McMichael. The City bought a dump truck that threw a rod while being delivered. The City refused to pay and told the company to take it back. That would be his only hesitation in prepaying.

Council Member Kirkman said he understood that and he was just trying to figure out ways to save money.

Council Member Underwood said Mr. Mendenhall mentioned privatizing something. He did not see where anything could be gained by doing that.

Mr. Mendenhall said he would not recommend privatizing anything at the present time.

- Finance: Replace meter reading vehicle

Ms. McMichael said Billing & Collections had two meter reading vehicles. In the CIP, staff projected they would replace the oldest one, a 2014 Ford F-150 4x4, 10 years out. It had over 127,000 miles. Staff thought the upcoming budget may be a good time to think about replacing the vehicle at a cost of about \$45,000.

Council Member Ellis asked about the specifications.

Ms. McMichael said it was a two-door, four-wheel drive.

Council Member Ellis asked if she would keep the old truck.

Ms. McMichael said yes. The division had one full-time meter maintenance technician as well as some part-time staff which included Buddy Bowman. They would do interviews to have a backup for Mr. Bowman as he was recovering from a medical issue. The division also shared an employee with Design & Construction.

Council Member Underwood thought it was a good idea.

- Information Technology: Standard life cycle refreshes

Mr. Taylor said the IT Department did lifecycle replacements annually. In the 1960s, a computer scientist developed Moore's Law, stating every 18 months processing power would double and in the intervening years, he had not been proven wrong. Every 18 months, processing power doubled and software developers started writing their updates and software to meet the new processing power. To stay on parity with the curve, the department replaced a third of the laptop fleet every year and a quarter of the desktops a year so that no desktop was no more than four years old. Staff also did a five-year lifecycle with the servers. In the upcoming year, staff would replace a pair of hyper v host servers. That was in his request for the year.

Council Member Ellis asked how often the Police Department had theirs changed.

Mr. Taylor said the laptop in the vehicle was no older than three years. Those laptops took a beating as they were in cold, hot, dusty and high vibration environments for 12 hours a day.

Council Member Ellis asked if it would be better to replace them more often.

Mr. Taylor said staff had good luck using regular laptops in the vehicles since 2008. The only breakage they ever saw was with laptop screens, which was probably when the officer closed the screen and leaned on it, cracking

the screen. They did not see motherboard failures but every now and then did have a hard drive failure. He thought three years was a good life cycle for those. What wore out the quickest were the touchpads and keyboards because they were used on every call as officers typed up notes and entered data.

Council Member Ellis asked if they were in fire trucks as well.

Mr. Taylor said no but there were tablets in some of the fire trucks.

Council Member Ellis asked if they were needed in the fire trucks.

Chief White answered from the audience that if they were on scene long enough, personnel could start putting the report in from the scene.

Deputy Chief Slaughter also answered from the audience that it allowed them to access hydrant points and waterline areas.

Council Member Ellis asked Mr. Gatewood if he had laptops in the trucks.

Mr. Gatewood answered from the audience that a lot of personnel used their phones. The water department did have tablets they used.

Council Member Ellis asked Mr. Taylor to look into laptops for water and sewer department heads, and the fire department as well.

Mr. Taylor said Mr. Gatewood had been issued a laptop that was his daily driver. Most department heads had laptops.

Council Member Ellis said he meant for the trucks.

Mayor Hall said they did not need them.

Council Member Ellis said he just wanted to see what the cost would be.

Mr. Taylor said between \$800 and \$1,100 for a laptop, around \$300 for the dock, around \$300 for the mobility connectivity modem for a total of about \$2,500 to \$3,000 per vehicle.

- Parks & Recreation:
 1. Replace one vehicle
 2. Replace one mower, add two leaf units
 3. Replace Bridge Street playground
 4. Roof replacements:
 - a. Public Works operations at Klyce Street
 - b. Senior Center
 - c. Amphitheater

Mr. Brett Curry was requesting replacement of a Facilities & Grounds service truck. The 2004 model they had was a total loss in an accident. He requested replacement of two mowers, one of which was lost in an accidental fire while getting up leaves at City Hall. Instead of bagging leaves, the division wanted two stand-on leaf units that could also be used after events to clean parking lots. Those could be used by the Street Division as well. Staff also requested to replace the Bridge Street playground which was more than 20 years old, as well as the roof at Public Works which was failing and had several leaks. The Garden of Eden Senior Center roof had leaks that had

been patched. The amphitheater roof at Freedom Park needed to be replaced as the shingles were wearing and some had blown up.

Council Member Ellis asked what size the mower was.

Mr. Curry said the division currently had 60-inch Toros and he assumed that was what they would replace with.

Council Member Ellis asked if they would need different mowers for Freedom Park if the grass was changed.

Mr. Curry said they may need to look into a reel mower or something like that, similar to what was used on a golf course to cut the Bermuda grass the way it should be done.

Mr. Mendenhall thanked Mr. Curry for filling in as Mr. Thomas was out sick and their thoughts and prayers were with him. It was a credit to the department heads always having their number two there as that knowledge was passed on. Mr. Curry did a great job.

- Police: 5 vehicles

Chief Moore said the department was requesting five patrol vehicles, which was consistent with their 10-year replacement plan based off mileage, as well as cost of operation and repair. It would include the total upfit of each vehicle.

Council Member Underwood asked how it was determined who received the new vehicle.

Chief Moore said it was based on need. They looked at the mileage of the officer's current car as well as their productivity. It was not a reward.

Council Member Ellis asked what type of vehicle they planned to get.

Chief Moore said they would stick with the Durango. The department had begun to build the fleet with that which would help Fleet Maintenance build a stock of replacement and repair parts.

- Fire: request to pre-order a fire engine for FY 2026-27 budget

Chief White thanked Mr. Mendenhall for giving Council information ahead of time about the need for the fire truck. The department wanted to start the process to pre-order a fire truck. It had been in the CIP for several years for 2026-27. Staff had a meeting in December with the sales representative for the fire company they planned to buy from. The representative said there was a four-year waiting period to get the truck from the date of the order. Staff had discussed how they wanted the truck to be compared to what they currently had. Based on that, the representative created a proposal and it said there was a minimum of 38 to 44 month wait before the truck would be delivered, meaning if it were ordered in July it would be July 2028 before it was delivered. That was already two years behind the CIP. There was also a fire truck scheduled in the CIP for 2031-32 so by the time the first truck was done, it would be time to order another one. The representative said the City was liable for no costs until they accepted the truck. Throughout the process, they could watch as the manufacturer built the truck from the ground up. Staff would have to do an acceptance test when the truck was delivered and would not be responsible for any fees until it was accepted. The truck as proposed was \$1 million. There would be some costs above that as the truck would have no equipment on it and the department had no extra to put on it. The total would roughly be \$1.1 million. He thought it was super important to prepare for it now, and he knew some money had been put back. He thought the City should continue to put money back to pay for the truck when it came in.

Council Member Underwood asked if it would be replacing a truck.

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Chief White said no.

Council Member Underwood asked if it would then allow the department to have two reserves.

Chief White said it would actually allow them to have three.

Council Member Underwood asked what brand they would purchase.

Chief White said Sutphen. The last three trucks were ordered from them and staff was extremely happy with them and their products and services.

Council Member Epps asked if it locked in the price by preordering.

Chief White said they did not discuss it in depth but there was a contingency fee for price hikes included in the million dollars. Until they gave the order, they could not get a definite price. Staff planned to basically go with the same chassis as Engine 4 and the same cab with minor changes. They would do away with some of the seating, a different bumper and smaller water tank. The backside would change tremendously as far as compartment space. The back half of the truck was what they had to work on.

Council Member Underwood said considering the wait time, the item was a no brainer.

Mayor Hall asked if a million was the maximum amount it would cost.

Chief White said that was what was on the proposal.

Mayor Hall asked if the City would still pay \$1 million if the price had increased to \$1.5 million in four years.

Chief White said a contingency fee had been added but they did not discuss it in depth.

Mayor Hall asked if the representative was saying the truck was now \$750,000 but could go up to a million.

Chief White said it was listed as a million with \$20,000 contingency.

Council Member Underwood asked what the possibility was to go ahead and give them consent to do it.

Chief White said staff had about half of the truck ready. He was not prepared to go into all the details when talking to the representative, he had just wanted the basics of how to do it as Chief White had not been part of the process before. It was about a four-hour meeting.

Council Member Underwood asked if it was Robert.

Chief White said no. First Choice bought Stephens and that was who they were dealing with.

Mr. Mendenhall said the budget would be by and large prepared in April. He commended Chief White for the information but they did need to look at the total cost out the door. Chief White would need some time to look into all of it. He recommended giving a little time to get everything in order to know a price going out the door. They would also need to deal with how to fund the budget gap. Staff had planned to fund \$500,000 pay go and knew it was going to be more so had put back \$300,000 the previous May or June. Staff needed to put more money in the Capital Reserve Fund to be spent when the truck was received. Staff needed to figure out all the components. They needed a consensus from Council if that was the direction they wanted to go in. Staff did not want to finance the truck if they could help it as interest rates were high and they were trying to use pay go. He

thought there was some money that needed to be put back that year, probably in June and have it set aside and ready to go to write the check.

Council Member Ellis said he thought they needed to move forward so when the truck was delivered in four years it would be paid for. Chief White needed to get his specs finalized and work with Mr. Mendenhall on the final numbers. Having the truck would be a positive, and would be good to have in order to help protect Purina's facilities.

Mayor Hall asked again about the price. He asked if the City would have to pay \$3 million if when the truck was ready that was what it was valued at.

Mr. Mendenhall said the City wanted a fixed price.

Ms. Gilley said it needed to be in writing and staff would ensure it was before anything was agreed upon.

Mayor Hall said it should not matter if it took six months or six years, the price they agreed upon should be what was paid.

Council Member Kirkman agreed. They needed to have a locked-in price.

Chief White said if Council gave the go ahead that day, they were still looking at three to four months to configure and get everything in place to order. They did need to say they wanted a bottom dollar price when they placed the order.

Council Member Underwood asked how the department's maintenance budget was looking.

Chief White said it was good. He commended Fleet Maintenance Superintendent Jason Barnard and Fleet Maintenance on doing the department's six-month preventative maintenance check to prevent big problems from happening.

Council Member Epps said that sounded good.

- Sanitation:
 1. Solid Waste Trailer
 2. Request to preorder an automated garbage truck for the FY 2026-27 budget
- C&D: Tandem dump truck

Mr. Gatewood said the Solid Waste Division wanted to purchase a new garbage trailer to haul garbage to the landfill from the transfer station. The current one was a 2012 model. The division also wanted to preorder an automated garbage truck. Delivery was 24 to 36 months out. With Council's permission, they would go ahead and order one. The Collection & Distribution Division wanted to purchase a tandem dump truck. Currently, if they were going to the quarry, they had to run two eight-ton trucks. A tandem would allow one truck. It could be used for various projects and would be a big benefit to the City.

Council Member Underwood said it was budgeted a year or two before and never purchased.

Council Member Ellis asked if they currently used two 8-ton trucks.

Mr. Gatewood said yes. If they were hauling rock for the stockpile, they used two. It would be a money saver as far as fuel costs.

Council Member Underwood said from the way it sounded, it was needed.

Council Member Kirkman asked what the garbage truck price was.

Mr. Gatewood said the last price they received was \$297,000.

Council Member Underwood asked if he would be locked in on the price like they wanted the fire truck to be.

Mr. Gatewood said he thought that would be worked out as well. They would use the same precautions ordering it as they would the fire truck. Staff just wanted their name on one now. As Mr. Mendenhall had said, they were still waiting on a truck chassis ordered in 2022-23. Things were so far out, if they did not put their names on something now, it would continue to be further down the road. They used things every day and they wore out. Staff maintained them the best they could but eventually they had to do something.

- Water Treatment Plant:
 1. Repair sludge scraper
 2. Upgrade PLC and SCADA
- Wastewater Treatment Plant:
 1. Clarifier rehab
 2. Replace lightning mixer at effluent
- Water Resources: Skid steer for material handling

Water & Wastewater Superintendent Chris Powell said staff was asking to refurbish a sludge scraper, which over time tended to rust and break down. The whole unit would be sandblasted and painted in order to function properly for the water treatment.

Council Member Ellis asked the cost difference between repair and replacement.

Mr. Powell said the repairs were done every few years as the scraper was underwater most of the time. The paint was aquatic to extend the life of the scraper. He also wanted to request an upgrade to the PLC and SCADA system. As mentioned earlier, the plant was converting to sodium hypochlorite from chlorine gas. That would be a perfect time to update the SCADA system when the conversion was being done. Feed and those sorts of things were tied into the SCADA system. For the wastewater plant, staff was asking to do a clarifier rehab. The units operated underwater at all times so the metal was going to break down. The clarifier would be sandblasted, damaged areas repaired and painted with aquatic paint to extend its life.

Council Member Ellis asked if they would be done at the same time.

Mr. Powell said yes. Staff would coordinate with the company to sandblast the first unit and then go to the other plant to sandblast there, followed by painting.

Council Member Underwood asked if it would be cheaper to go with sodium hypochlorite, compared to chlorine gas.

Mr. Powell said it would not be cheaper, but it was safer. The City used to buy it from Harcros Chemical and had received a three-month notice that the company was getting out of chlorine, leaving the City at the mercy of a single vendor. Most municipalities were upgrading to sodium hypochlorite. It was safer. The emergency management plan was eliminated by switching. People did not have to be SCBA certified or go on an air pack to change tanks.

Council Member Underwood thought it was a step in the right direction.

Council Member Ellis said in discussions the previous year, he noted they did not want it to blow up.

Mr. Powell said staff would also like to replace the Lightnin mixer at the effluent discharge. The City was not allowed to discharge any chlorinated water to the river. Replacing the mixer at the effluent would help mix the sodium bisulfite, which took the chlorine out of the water once it was disinfected at the plant. Replacing it would make sure every bit of chlorine was removed before the water was released into the river. Water Resources had a 1984 tractor and were requesting to purchase a new skid steer. Staff was currently using Synagro's front loader to offload the chemical totes used by the CleanB system at the plant. It would be beneficial to have a piece of equipment to handle the chemicals coming in. The tractor they had was unable to lift the weight of the chemical totes. The skid steer could also be used for groundskeeping such as road repair at the plants, snow removal and bush hogging.

- Fleet: Addition of a maintenance bay at the City Fleet Maintenance Garage

Mr. Barnard said the division was asking for a drive-thru bay to be added on to the shop. The fleet was growing and trucks were getting bigger. Employees were having to work outside or schedule work based on the weather.

Council Member Underwood asked what the estimate was.

Mr. Barnard said \$250,000 in the CIP but staff had not sought bids.

Council Member Underwood said it was needed.

Council Member Kirkman asked if it was a prefab building.

Mr. Barnard said no.

*Budget Instructions and Directions –
Council to instruct staff to prepare a budget, guidance on tax rate, etc.*

Mr. Mendenhall said there were a lot of moving parts. He had prepared a brief summary to help Council with the budget instructions and directions, which was then distributed to the members. They tried to think about constituents when they talked about things. He wanted to talk about each group and what they got out of the budget in what was being proposed at the retreat. Obviously, they did not have final tax numbers and were still working on Duke Energy.

He asked what was in it for future citizens. Savings had increased, debts had gone down. The General Fund had a fund balance increase of \$3 million, a 75 percent fund balance and increase of 25 percent. There was \$2.5 million in General Fund debt that had been paid off in two years. There were only three debt issues remaining and there would be an attempt to pay one off in the upcoming year. The future was for everyone that came the following day and so on.

He asked what was in it for the taxpayers. For taxes to decrease. There was a general tax rate decrease proposed, and it was an approximate as they had to see where Mr. Hurst ended up on the revaluation, moving from 60 and 9/10ths percent to 42 cents even, which would be a 31 percent rate decrease. The City would be in the top five lowest taxed in the region, the other four being Graham, Elon, Mebane and Yadkinville. The City would be lower than Martinsville and not quite as low as Danville. Those changes were for the existing taxpayers. When the taxpayers saw the revaluations, taxpayers would think their taxes would go through the roof so it was important for Council to communicate what their goal was. Yes, the values were up but the City intended to go revenue neutral and bring the rate down. The City did not want to unnecessarily burden taxpayers more than what it cost to run the government if that was the direction Council wanted to take. They needed to think on the talking points because it was going to happen very quickly that the values would be published and people would get the notices.

People would get scared. They needed to have some reassurance from their elected officials about the direction of the tax rate. Management was proposing the 31 percent rate decrease and Council needed to be on the same page and of the same accord about what they wanted to do as a Council so they could communicate to the residents about what they planned to do. Council would not be tied to it until they voted on it. He asked that Council let staff know which direction to go at the end of the presentation.

Mr. Mendenhall continued by asking what was in it for utility customers. No one wanted a utility rate or any type of increase. Staff wanted to keep the costs in pace with inflation. The utility rate increase as proposed would be up to a dollar but as he had indicated earlier, staff did not anticipate it being a dollar, that was an up to amount. Staff would try to get as low as they possibly could. They had to pay debt, pay the Duke Energy increase, pay for employees, pay for chemicals and so on. Staff was committed to not charging the consumer any more than it cost to effectively run the utility operation at a quality level, meaning they wanted to continue making sure the water quality that had won awards and what he affectionately called Eden's finest was still there. Staff would do everything they could to do that and at a reasonable cost. The EPA AO bill would be due every year as the debt services were paid on it moving forward for a long period of time, almost into 2050. The City had to pay for it and the costs had to be borne by the utility customer. There was debt service in the rate increase. It was low and manageable debt but the sheer amount of it had to be serviced and there was an expense to that.

He asked what was in it for the citizens. Improvements to services. There would be a committee talk about the fire service. The City was investing and reinvesting in capital with a plan to keep the capital up so they were improving the assets, maintaining the buildings, vehicles and equipment. That was the 10-year plan to keep it stable and level so they never got into a situation where the assets were depleted. They did not want to run anything into the ground but wanted to keep them maintained, do preventative maintenance and that sort of thing. Staff continued to invest in maintenance and repair. They had heard how the Fire Department was working with Fleet to do preventative maintenance. Facilities did a lot of preventative maintenance as well. The employees did a very good job at that. It was not foolproof. There would be water line breaks, leaky roofs and storm damage. They would always be faced with those moving forward. The City continued investing in recreational programs of the youth, which was for the future citizens too. They wanted youth who were engaged with the community, were good servant leaders and who understood the importance of community. They saw that with recreational programs and the Eden Youth Council. There were a lot of things going on that were positive. The participation rate particularly with youth athletics had improved tremendously in large part due to the Prowlers program. That was a very positive thing. They had football, volleyball, basketball and baseball/softball. The City wanted to keep that investment moving forward. The youth truly were the future. They would be sitting where Council and where he was sitting one day and the City wanted to make sure they were prepared for that.

Mr. Mendenhall said there were always challenges. There were challenges during budgets in past years and times were still tight today. The City wanted to be conservative. He often told staff he wanted the best for the citizens and employees but he did not want it "gold plated." Staff wanted a conservative budget that got the very best of what they needed without excess and without waste. He wanted to highlight that there were about \$27.5 million in federal and state grants currently under management through the Planning & Community Development Department by Ms. Stultz who had partnerships with departments within the City and with the Department of Commerce and other state departments. The grants impacted water and sewer, parks and recreation, as well as community, housing and neighborhood improvements. There were a lot of grants being recaptured and brought back. That was a tremendous thing because it was helping improve the services to the citizens.

He asked what was in it for the employees? The City was only as good and as strong as its employees. Employee pay was competitive as they had discussed. A four percent cost of living increase was proposed. Salaries and pay had increased 20.5 percent since the pandemic in 2020 to address competition and compression to make sure the employees were taken care of. It was an important thing. It was a credit to the current and past Councils. Employees would not get rich working for the City but would be able to afford a quality of life that afforded a family and food on the table, which was the goal. The employees were taken care of.

There were a lot of things going on in the budget that addressed economic development with a couple of talking points: low taxes – the lowest he thought in the history of Eden and maybe the lowest in the history of the three cities before Eden, as well as sewer plant capacity – a modern sewer plant with the north basin and work on the clarifiers. Work had already been done on the digester and work would be done on the flash mixer. It would be a top-notch sewage plant which was important for water quality in the river and industrial capacity for new industry. It was an important economic development tool. The Virginia megasite enhancements, rerouting the Purina sewer to make sure there was enough capacity to sell as much water and sewer to the Mega Park as possible. The key to keeping rates low was to do one and/or two things: grow the number of customers so the costs were spread out between customers to be much lower or grow the amount of volume through large volume customers so the volume metric cost per gallon was much lower. That could be seen in larger municipalities – they had 100,000 accounts and the bills were low, whereas the City had 6,600 accounts and the bills could be lower. That was what the City wanted to do and why economic development was so important. There was an industrial site on New Street being cleared for growth. There would be capacity and availability for new industries to come into the corporate limits of the City on New Street in partnership with the county. The ISO had been improved for the fire service. As Council Member Ellis mentioned, there had been a billion dollars of investment and one of the key questions Purina had asked was about Eden fire and fire service, and wanting a contract for the Eden Fire Department to respond to that plant. The City was happy to do that and thought the fire service was a very important selling point for industry. He noted a fact Ms. Pegg had mentioned that Rockingham County was the 22nd fastest growing tourism county in the state. He reviewed the selling points for economic development as they moved through the budget process: low taxes, competitive utility rates, available sites for industry and low insurance rates because the ISO rating had improved to a three. The City was never satisfied with that as we wanted to be better and as good as we could get. That was due to hard work in the Fire Department and by previous chiefs. It was a continuation and that was how the City got to where they were and were very proud of that. The City had a pro-business climate and an excellent quality of life. What they had talked about that day addressed all those things. He asked Council for direction and instructions to prepare the budget and work on the timeline for budget adoption.

Council Member Underwood thought things looked good and were headed in the right direction. He had a concern, and he thought other members of Council did too, that the seniors were outgrowing the Orchard Drive facility. They wanted a bigger facility. He did not know whether they needed to build one or look at the place on The Cook Block that was open for rent and it was larger than Orchard Drive. He thought it had been in the budget the previous year to build at Bridge Street. The City needed to do something for the senior citizens.

Council Member Epps thought the system for the Purina sewer was a good way to go. The railroad depot in Draper would be perfect for a senior center. The building looked nice.

Council Member Underwood said they needed a large facility as some had mentioned indoor pickleball courts.

Mr. Brett Curry responded from the audience that there was a building already available in Draper School.

Council Member Wood said he was getting ready to mention that.

Ms. Stultz responded from the audience that as soon as a roof could be put on it, the gym would be ready for use.

Mr. Mendenhall reiterated that the suggestion was made for Draper School to be used if grant money was coming available. He believed, and confirmed with Ms. Stultz, that a positive report had been received on that. He asked Council for their response on the seniors using Draper School.

Several members responded that it was a great idea.

Council Member Ellis said if they could be patient, a lot of things could come out that they wanted for the Parks & Recreation Department. With the decreased tax rate, hopefully people would want to move to Eden. The City

was also nationally known because of Tabitha Brown. The City was able to save \$3.2 million the previous year for the fund balance, which was very strong. He did not recall a fund balance that strong in his years on Council. The City was getting ready to complete the EPA AO that had been going on since 2013. It was not easy, but they were able to bear it, like they were with the million-dollar fire truck. It had been a positive meeting.

Council Member Epps said he had been on Council for 21 years, with two more years to go. When the EPA put the order on the City, they threatened the City with shutting down future development. It was a challenge to come up with the millions of dollars needed. God had blessed them. They had gotten far by faith and he felt they would finish up with a big smile on their faces.

Mayor Hall said Mr. Mendenhall met with staff the week before and he assumed they had told Mr. Mendenhall the same thing they said to Council. He knew Mr. Mendenhall was the person who would have to make it balance. He asked if he was in the ballpark. He thought the four percent would cost, based on a rough calculation, around \$700,000.

Mr. Mendenhall said that was right. He thought he was in the ballpark on balancing it. The next step would be department heads making their line item budgets based on the feedback from Council. It would have to be tweaked for inflation. Like they always did, they would have to come in and go line by line. They first determined the delta and then went line by line to make it balance. If they were way out of kilter, they would have to make some hard choices. He felt like they would be alright. They ran a lot of models and projections weekly. It was not a done deal until Council adopted it.

Council Member Underwood said for some of the departments who had lost positions, they really needed to look at filling those, especially in Planning & Community Development to get Mr. Vincent some help. He knew he had his hands full and he could not do it all. If Mr. Vincent left that day, the City would be in trouble. He asked Chief Moore how many positions he was currently short.

Chief Moore said they were currently short five positions and that was considering the four who had just graduated BLET and were awaiting their certifications. The positions were two school resource officers (SRO) and three detectives. Every school was funded for an SRO by the school system right now. Soon they would have four of five schools filled. They were pushing hard to get the last SRO in place. He and Deputy Chief Anthony Lovings had met and discussed how that was a priority right now.

Mayor Hall noted Greensboro had more than 100 vacancies.

Council Member Underwood asked if Chief Moore saw a need to add positions in the future.

Chief Moore said yes, but they needed to fill the vacancies they had now. He thought they were doing everything right. It was moving in the right direction. The staff loved working for Eden and loved what they were doing. They spread the news and that helped Eden. The bottom line was there just were not a lot of young people wanting to get in the line of work anymore. The department would not accept just anyone, they had a standard and would hold that line of who they were trying to recruit.

Mr. Mendenhall said Council heard that the employees loved being here. He encouraged Council and citizens to tell the employees how much they were loved. It was especially important for the Police Department. Not every community could come up and say they supported their Police Department 100 percent. It was positive for the City to say that and mean it.

Council Member Ellis told Chief Moore the department had done an outstanding job with everything that had gone on in the past year.

Minutes of the January 18, 2024 Budget Retreat meeting of the City Council, City of Eden:

Chief Moore said the department would have a swearing-in ceremony and officer appreciation on February 5. He would send information to invite Council.

Council Member Epps asked Mr. Mendenhall if he needed to hire anyone for Administration.

Mr. Mendenhall said not at the present time. He thought they were doing alright. There was a Customer Service position that needed to be filled as an employee was leaving.

ADJOURNMENT:

As there was no further business to discuss, a motion was made by unanimous consent to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,

Deanna Hunt, City Clerk

ATTEST:

Neville Hall
Mayor