



City of Harrisonburg

409 S. Main Street
Harrisonburg, VA 22801

Meeting Minutes - Draft City Council

Tuesday, May 23, 2023

7:00 PM

Council Chambers

1. Roll Call

Present: 4 - Vice-Mayor Laura Dent, Council Member Christopher B. Jones, Council Member Dany Fleming and Council Member Monica Robinson

Absent: 1 - Mayor Deanna R. Reed

Also Present: 6 - City Manager Ande Banks, City Attorney Chris Brown, Deputy City Clerk Ande Banks., Police Chief Kelley Warner, Chief Matthew Tobia and Acting Deputy City Manager Amy Snider

2. Invocation

Vice Mayor Dent offered the invocation.

3. Pledge of Allegiance

Vice Mayor Dent led the Pledge of Allegiance

4. Special Recognition

4.a. 2023 Service Learning Program presentation

Ande Banks, city manager, stated this is either the seventh year the City has joined up with the honors government class at Harrisonburg High School in a Service Learning Program in which they condense their regular curriculum and then in the fall focus on visiting the 18 different city departments and learning about what they do. He stated then in the spring they work on projects along side city staff and tonight is the culmination of that work. Mr. Jay Hook, Honors Government Teacher, HHS, stated we have a great group of young people to present some really fine projects and hopefully they are learning how to be the future leaders of our community because that is why we created this program.

Grace Myo, Mia Beauzieux, Huda Al-Bandar, and Ivan Cigarroa Ruiz presented the project: An Exploration of Rocktown Trails which involved an awareness campaign for the trails at Hillandale Park.

Cole Purnhagen, Ricky Rodriguez Real, Quetzalli Arteaga-Vazquez, and Nadiel Ayala-Gallo presented the project: Stop the Bleed which involved raising awareness to the National Stop The Bleed Campaign and how to use the Stop the Bleed kits.

Toby Corriston, Zhir Azeez, Joseph Adams, and Adam Vanwyk presented the project: Outdoor Fitness Facilities which involved a proposal of this type of facility at one of the parks and different suggested designs.

Shyanna Davis, Yelianiz Gonzales-Rivera, Samantha Syharath, and Gali Santiago Henriquez presented the project: Creation of a Strategic Outreach Program, which sole purpose would be to challenge and engage teens between the ages of 13-19 at the Community Activity Center, Lucy Simms continuing education building, and parks throughout the city.

Mr. Hook commended the students for the work they did and thanked city staff for their guidance.

Council Member Fleming stated there was a 2008 census report that looked at where 16-year olds lived ten years later (2018), and in our region 65% of the 16-year olds were still living in the same region. He stated knowing that our students are getting these types of opportunities and possibly become future leaders, this work done in our schools is invaluable and thanked Mr. Hook for these types of programs.

Council Member Jones stated Mr. Hook led an excellent program for so many years. He stated one of the projects presented from previous years is the new Fire Station, which is now in progress. Mr. Banks stated there have been a few projects presented that were implemented.

Vice Mayor Dent stated we appreciate the youth of our city being engaged in community participation and thanked the students and Mr. Hook for present and future leadership.

5. Consent Agenda (any item placed on the consent agenda shall be removed and taken up as a separate matter, if so requested by any member of Council, otherwise all items will be voted on with one (1) motion)

A motion was made by Council Member Fleming seconded by Council Member Robinson to approve the consent agenda as presented. The motion carried with a recorded vote as follows:

Yes: 4 - Vice-Mayor Dent, Council Member Jones, Council Member Fleming and Council Member Robinson

No: 0

Absent: 1 - Mayor Reed

5.a. Minutes from the May 9, 2023 City Council Meeting

These minutes were approved on the consent agenda

- 5.b. Consider the special event application request for the 2023 Bike Virginia Tour taking place at Hillandale Park from Sunday, June 25 to Thursday, June 29.

This special event application was approved on the consent agenda

- 5.c. Consider the special event application request for the 2023 July 1st Fireworks display on Saturday, July 1, 2023.

This special event application was approved on the consent agenda

6. Public Hearings

- 6.a. Public hearing regarding the real estate tax rate for Fiscal Year 2023-2024 to be set at \$0.96 per \$100 of assessed value

Larry Propst, director of Finance, presented a request to set the Real Estate Tax rate for Fiscal Year 2023/2024. He stated State Code requires a public hearing is held when real property assessments are projected to increase 1%, and noted this increase is for 13.7%. he stated the advertised rate was at \$0.96 per \$100. Mr. Banks stated there was a 30-day public comment period that began the end of April. Vice Mayor Dent asked if any comments were received. Mr. Propst stated no comments were received.

At 7:41 p.m., Mayor Reed closed the regular session and called the first public hearing to order. A notice appeared in the Daily News-Record on Tuesday, April 18, 2023.

Panayotis "Poti" Giannakouros, stated on May 16, 2023, WHSV made a Facebook post entitled "What advice would you give someone who is buying a home for the first time?", and of the 358 responses to that post 106 included financial terms, 58 included housing inspection, and 22 realtors. He reviewed a post made on NextDoor regarding needing someone to fix a lawn mower. He stated it is required to cut your grass and many can't afford a lawn mower or afford to fix the one they have. He stated putting all this together the picture he sees is that housing stressed residents are neglecting maintenance inside the house while using their scarce time and money on appearances to fend off the threat of tall grass and weed complaints. He spoke further on maintenance of homes, fiscally stressed residents, and the Bluestone Town Center.

Nora McGuire White, 1051 Wyndham Drive, stated she has been in the city for 19 years, she is a JMU alumni, both her and her husband have helped coach and directed youth sports in the community, and parents of four boys of color. She stated the current and immediate problem specific to Council is our middle school football program, which was always ran by the city's Parks and Recreation Department, was transferred to the Harrisonburg High School Athletic Program. She stated they were advised last year that the middle school football program had been cut due to the

High School Athletic Program choosing to no longer support/sponsor the program. She stated the Harrisonburg Parks and Recreation Department took over the majority of the responsibility for the program last year and was told the school Athletic Program would take it back for this year. She stated that program had been cut from the schools proposed budget for this year and she asked Council that the middle school football program be reconsidered as a budget item. She shared her thoughts on the impact this would have, it could be devastating and the end to football as a sport in our community. She spoke on the Sports Academy model. She asked Council to reconsider putting the middle school football program back into the budget.

At 7:52 p.m., Mayor Reed closed the public hearing and the regular session reconvened.

Council Member Jones stated he appreciates Ms. White's comment, he noted that although Council cannot control the line item budget for the City Schools, he hopes this discussion was heard and continuing conversations can be had.

Council Member Fleming stated one of the first things Council did in January was pass a measure that would extend real estate tax relief to seniors, and hopefully that will continue to help those on fixed income with this increase. He stated we need to make sure we connect with the folks who can benefit from that program.

Vice Mayor Dent stated this is the third of three tax increases we had planned to fund the new high school; we had originally planned to increase by \$.04 but was able to reduce the increase to \$.03. Mr. Banks reviewed the original plan to fund the high school and noted that in working with the School Board the total amount of borrowing was reduced as well as some injection of ARPA funding that came to the schools that went directly into that project.

Council Member Fleming stated it is helpful to know what some of the other comparable cities are doing: Roanoke is at \$1.22, Manassas is at \$1.40, Manassas Park is at \$1.45, Danville is at \$0.89. He stated generally Harrisonburg maintains a tax rate compared to the other 37 or so cities that is generally favorable.

A motion was made by Council Member Fleming, seconded by Council Member Robinson, to approve the request as presented. The motion carried with a recorded vote as follows:

Yes: 4 - Vice-Mayor Dent, Council Member Jones, Council Member Fleming and Council Member Robinson

No: 0

Absent: 1 - Mayor Reed

6.b. Consider approving an easement from the City to 49 West Water Street Investments, LLC

Chris Brown, city attorney, stated the request is from 49 West Water Street

Investments, LLC for a waterline easement to serve a water suppression/ sprinkler system to the property. He stated the waterline is normally ran to the property line by the city, the owner of the building on W. Water Street is wanting to operate an escape room and the Building Official and Fire Marshal advised them that they would need a sprinkler system. He stated the water line is across the street however right in front of the building there is a limestone stormwater facility that was built in the 1800's and they would have to bore through that to get to the waterline for service. He stated the next closest waterline is on Main Street, and the request is to have an easement so they can run the waterline through the parking lot owned by the city, through the alleyway and to the property. He stated since this will be on city property an easement must be granted by City Council.

At 8:02 p.m., Mayor Reed closed the regular session and called the second public hearing to order. A notice appeared in the Daily News-Record on Monday, May 15, 2023, and Monday, May 22, 2023.

Hunter Woodard, member of 49 West Water Street Investments, LLC, stated they looked at every possible way to get the water to the property for the sprinkler system, and understands the inconvenience to the neighbors this may cause but they will try to minimize it as much as possible. He stated they will have to dig into S. Main Street and asked if there was any way the dig on S. Main Street could be done during the evening so as to not cause issues with traffic. Mr. Brown stated that would be handled through the public access permit process and the director of Public Works, and it should be able to be worked out.

At 8:06 p.m., Mayor Reed closed the public hearing and the regular session reconvened.

A motion was made by Council Member Fleming, seconded by Council Member Jones, to approve the request as presented. The motion carried with a recorded vote as follows:

Yes: 4 - Vice-Mayor Dent, Council Member Jones, Council Member Fleming and Council Member Robinson

No: 0

Absent: 1 - Mayor Reed

7. Regular Items

7.a. North End Gateway Public Art Installation Update

Vice Mayor Dent stated there is a request to postpone item 7a as Mayor Reed is absent. Council Member Fleming stated we will need to reconnect with the artist for his availability. Chris Brown, city attorney, stated with a motion to postpone indefinitely it is up to Council to bring it back, but he recommends Council ask the city manager to try to get a new date where everyone can present together as soon as possible. Mr. Fleming asked if everyone is ready to present tonight. Mr. Brown

stated Ms. McCombe is but not sure if the artist has joined virtually. Ms. McCombe stated the artist is in Sweden teaching a class and is no longer online virtually. She stated she does have the presentation ready and could possibly reach out to him to get him back online. Mr. Brown stated there may be other parties that are interested in this that may not be present.

A motion was made by Council Member Robinson, seconded by Council Member Fleming, to table this item indefinitely. The motion carried with a roll call vote as follows:

Yes: 4 - Vice-Mayor Dent, Council Member Jones, Council Member Fleming and Council Member Robinson

No: 0

Absent: 1 - Mayor Reed

7.b. Presentation of the Harrisonburg City Public School's 2023/2024 Budget

See supplemental page for minutes on this item.

7.c. Consider adopting the Fiscal Year 2023-2024 budget and approving the Appropriation Ordinance

Ande Banks, city manager, stated the proposed budget, Budget-in-Brief, and PowerPoint presentation, were attached to the agenda item and staff is available for any questions. He stated this item includes the request to adopt the appropriation ordinance for the 2024 Budget.

Vice Mayor Dent stated we have already had vote on this item and is sort of considered a second reading. Chris Brown, city attorney, stated traditionally we have had the public hearing and then a full vote for the second reading. Council Member Fleming stated he appreciates this being on the agenda again as he was absent at the last meeting for the second vote.

Council Member Fleming stated he appreciated that Mr. Banks really focused in on the compensation piece of this for our staff, recognizing that this is an organization that he runs, many folks often think of city services and may not think of this as an organization that needs to be taken care of, and we need to find growth and opportunities for our staff. He stated the compensation study showed we were far behind with many salaries, when you want to invest in the future there are a lot of things we can invest into, but our most valuable asset are the employees that work for the city. We want to make this a destination point for people to come work in municipal government.

Vice Mayor Dent stated we really appreciate the Classification and Compensation Study and implementing that to appropriately reward and retain valued employees.

Mr. Banks stated he appreciates Council's support, he pointed out the importance of

his leadership team, the department directors, who worked hard for months putting together their draft budgets, Mr. Propst, who is one of the best Finance Directors in the Commonwealth, our acting deputy city manager, Amy Snider, and all of the employees. He stated our organization provides services, we don't make products, and it's people that make those services happen.

Council Member Jones stated many people forget we are in the service delivery business, it is our number one job, if we deliver bad services the people won't be here to complain about other issues in the city such as teacher pay, because they won't live here.

Vice Mayor Dent stated as we aspire to be the capital of the Shenandoah Valley, we are motivated to pay accordingly so people will be attracted to the city.

A motion was made by Council Member Fleming, seconded by Council Member Robinson, to adopt the FY 2024 Budget and the appropriation ordinance as presented. The motion carried with a roll call vote as follows:

Yes: 4 - Vice-Mayor Dent, Council Member Jones, Council Member Fleming and Council Member Robinson

No: 0

Absent: 1 - Mayor Reed

7.d. Consider adopting Section 13-1-27 - Use of photo speed monitoring devices in highway work zones and school crossing zones.

Tom Hartman, director of Public Works, presented the request to allow for speed cameras in construction zones and school zones. He stated it became apparent the need for these during the current road construction on Route 33 for bridge replacement. He stated it has been a safety issue with vehicles not obeying the posted 25mph speed limit. He reviewed statistics statewide on incidents in work zone areas and stated staff at Public Works and Harrisonburg Police Department have been working on ways to reduce the speeding. He stated a study was done with a third party consultant, reviewed the data obtained from that study, and noted it became apparent that speeding was definitely an issue in this work zone area. He stated something needed to be done to protect VDOT workers, contractors, city staff, and the public for the next three years of this project.

Kelley Warner, chief of Harrisonburg Police Department, stated the ultimate reason for this request is to address the safety issues in that corridor and others in the city. She stated the national approach on how to reduce fatalities across the United States is by using the United States Department of Transportation's Safe Systems Approach. She shared what this approach involves, and noted being able to staff the area with patrol personnel and vehicles is not possible due to staffing shortages. She reviewed Speed Safety Cameras, the process of how they work and how citations

are issued, implementation timeframe, and the goal for these cameras.

Council Member Fleming asked if the 60-day warning period will miss the incoming college students. Chief Warner stated information will be shared by JMU with the incoming students upon coming back to the city, and signs will be posted. Council Member Fleming stated a lot of this request makes sense, safety is an issue, many localities have cameras for these specific reasons. He stated the only concern he has heard is regarding privacy through vendors, selling information, etc., but it does seem that there is legislation to protect this. Chief Warner stated Bridgewater recently installed cameras in their school zone, initially had 23 violators but that has been reduced to four now, so it does work. Council Member Fleming spoke on reports provided to the General Assembly on violations obtained by these cameras. Further discussion took place about the statistics for these cameras and enforcement.

Council Member Robinson asked if the cameras are on all the time. Mr. Hartman stated they are only turned on when there is active work being done in the work zone. Council Member Robinson asked how the drivers will know if the cameras are on or not. Mr. Hartman stated we want drivers to obey the speed limit 24/7 regardless of if work is being done or not.

Vice Mayor Dent stated this model is capturing violations and giving citations is punishing people after the fact, the signs and such could help preventing them from violating. She asked if there were alternative methods reviewed like flashing signs if they are going to fast, which gives real time feedback instead of a citation in the mail. She stated she thinks that could be more immediately helpful to slow people down. Chief Warner stated that is an option, but she is not sure if that would be as effective in this particular work zone area as it is not a two-lane roadway, she thinks this ordinance would be more effective. She stated she would rather inform the public, on a large scale, of what is coming. Further discussion took place of location of signage.

A motion was made by Council Member Robinson, seconded by Council Member Jones, to approve the ordinance enactment as presented. The motion carried with a recorded vote as follows:

Yes: 4 - Vice-Mayor Dent, Council Member Jones, Council Member Fleming and Council Member Robinson

No: 0

Absent: 1 - Mayor Reed

7.e. Consider approving an Encroachment License Agreement for 60 W Market Street

Chris Brown, city attorney, stated this is a request to allow a sign that would encroach over a public sidewalk located at 60 W. Market Street from RMCO, LLC. He stated the owner will indemnify the city and provide insurance and will remove promptly if the

city needs it moved.

Vice Mayor Dent asked how far the sign is off the ground. Mr. Brown stated it will be at least 128 inches.

A motion was made by Council Member Fleming, seconded by Council Member Robinson, to approve the encroachment agreement as presented. The motion carried with a recorded vote as follows:

Yes: 4 - Vice-Mayor Dent, Council Member Jones, Council Member Fleming and Council Member Robinson

No: 0

Absent: 1 - Mayor Reed

8. Supplementals

- 8.a.** Consider a supplemental appropriation for the Harrisonburg City Public School division in the amount of \$2.5 million

Larry Propst, director of Finance, presented a supplemental request from Harrisonburg City Public Schools for funds received that were unexpected (grants, donations etc.), and from the School Nutrition Reserve fund to the Capital Improvement fund for cafeteria equipment at Rocktown High School.

A motion was made by Council Member Jones, seconded by Council Member Fleming, to approve the supplemental as presented. The motion carried with a recorded vote as follows:

Yes: 4 - Vice-Mayor Dent, Council Member Jones, Council Member Fleming and Council Member Robinson

No: 0

Absent: 1 - Mayor Reed

- 8.b.** Consider a supplemental appropriation for various departments in the amount of \$761,375.85

Larry Propst, director of Finance, presented a supplemental request from City Departments for funds received that were unexpected (grants, donations etc.), to the respective department and project budgets.

A motion was made by Council Member Jones, seconded by Council Member Fleming, to approve the supplemental as presented. The motion carried with a recorded vote as follows:

Yes: 4 - Vice-Mayor Dent, Council Member Jones, Council Member Fleming and Council Member Robinson

No: 0

Absent: 1 - Mayor Reed

9. Reallocations

- 9.a. Consider the reallocation of funds in the General Capital Projects Fund in the amount of \$672,356.88

Larry Propst, director of Finance, presented a reallocation request from the Martin Luther King, Jr. Way Bridge project that is now complete into the new Public Works Building project.

Mr. Banks stated Mr. Hartman provided a list of specifics for the increase in funding needed for this project as follows:

- Existing soils were found to be less than optimal which required additional engineering.
- Upsize the generator to provide 100% back-up power.
- Escalation of building material costs
- Changes in security and fire alarm component changes and increases.

A motion was made by Council Member Jones, seconded by Council Member Robinson, to approve the reallocation as presented. The motion carried with a recorded vote as follows:

Yes: 4 - Vice-Mayor Dent, Council Member Jones, Council Member Fleming and Council Member Robinson

No: 0

Absent: 1 - Mayor Reed

10. Other Matters

10.a. Comments from the public, limited to five minutes, on matters not on the regular agenda. (Name and address are required)

Stacy Mayfield, 1131 Sharpes Drive, spoke on the importance of teacher's compensation and support of athletics in the schools.

Rachel Patterson, 1809 Putter Court, stated she feels the Public Comment period at the end of the agenda seems like an equity issue, people cannot always stay late. She recommended the public comment period be moved up to earlier in the agenda to make more possible for people to attend.

Nora McGuire White, 1051 Wyndham Drive, stated the teacher compensation and support of athletics in school go very much hand in hand. She spoke on the need for the athletic programs, encouragement from coaches and teachers, culture that connects the dots, and the need to find a way to support the students.

Paul Somers, 622 E. Wolfe Street, spoke on the skate park to keep the conversation going, the diversity of people that use the skate park, and the petition they have about the skate park that includes 1300 signatures, 13,000 views and 700 shares. He spoke on the worries the skateboard community has about getting a metal skate park instead of what is desired.

Panayotis "Poti" Giannakouros, stated the speakers tonight may not realize how much courage it takes for them to stand up and say the things they said but they have his

undying gratitude and admiration. He spoke about how people who don't comply with the tall grass and weeds ordinance don't apply for stormwater credits, homelessness, Council Member Fleming and Vice Mayor Dent.

10.b. City Council and Staff

Council Member Jones stated we used to have the public comment period at the beginning of the meetings, and they were even longer then, and he has noticed that we have longer agenda items, even though we always want more people to attend our meetings we have an active and engaged public. He stated we have done public comment in the beginning, public comment at the end, sign in sheets, no sign in sheets, it doesn't make a difference. Mr. Brown stated there was a period where at least one group, maybe more, intentionally abused the process, they would bring as many people as possible to comment during public comment with the objective to try to drag out public comment and delay City Council getting to other items on the agenda in order to pressure Council to do certain things. He stated that was when Council decided to move the public comment period to the end of the meeting. Council Member Jones stated he is aware that Brian Mancini, director of Parks and Recreation, has been working with the schools on Parks and Recreation programs such as football.

Council Member Robinson stated that sometimes she feels she gets more comments from the public via email than actually in person. She stated it is always good to see people attend the meetings and bring up issues that are important. She stated many don't utilize the call in option. Council Member Jones stated we need to remember that there are many residents that cannot watch the meetings from home due to lack of internet or cable tv.

Council Member Fleming stated the Long Range Transportation Plan for the area has been passed and it goes to 2045, not much public visibility of this project or the work that goes on towards this, but in our area, we have 55 projects that are getting funded, 30 of which are fully funded. He stated the Stormwater Advisor Committee (SWAC), just celebrated the 10-year completion of the Mountain View Restoration Project, the Levitt Foundation Concert Series, through the Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance, will begin on July 12, 2023.

Vice Mayor Dent stated on addendum to the Long Range Transportation Plan that was passed by the Harrisonburg Rockingham Metropolitan Planning Organization, was the one change we made based on public comment that the bike lane proposed for Stone Spring to Erickson Avenue stating a narrow bike lane on the road of that speed was still dangerous. She stated the result was that it was removed from the currently funded plans and put it towards a study for what would be the better option of safety for the bicyclists, be it a shared use path or protected bike lanes. She stated this is one example of how public comment works. She stated Thursday, May 25,

2023, is the Valley Tech Con, in which she will be attending, there are spaces still available for anyone that would like to attend.

11. Closed Session

11.a. Virginia Freedom of Information Act, Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711(A), under: Subsection 7 for consultation with legal counsel regarding specific legal matters requiring the provision of legal advice by such counsel

At 10:22 p.m., a motion was made by Council Member Jones, seconded by Council Member Fleming, to enter into closed session as authorized by the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711(A), under: Subsection 7 for consultation with legal counsel regarding specific legal matters requiring the provision of legal advice by such counsel. The motion carried with a recorded roll call vote taken as follows:

Yes: 4 - Vice-Mayor Dent, Council Member Jones, Council Member Fleming and Council Member Robinson

No: 0

Absent: 1 - Mayor Reed

12. Adjournment

At 11:14 p.m., the closed session ended and the regular session reconvened. City Attorney Brown read the following statement, which was agreed to with a unanimous recorded vote of Council: I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge (1) only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements under Chapter 37 of Title 2.2 of the Code, of Virginia, 1950, as amended, and (2) only such public business matters as were identified in the motion by which the closed meeting was convened were heard, discussed or considered in the closed meeting by the City Council.

At 11:14 p.m., there being no further business and on motion adopted, the meeting was adjourned.

CITY CLERK

MAYOR

Agenda Item 7B – Supplemental Minutes:

Dr. Michael Richards, superintendent, Harrisonburg City Public Schools, stated he is very happy to present the schools' budget. He stated they presented a couple times publicly already and is here to answer questions tonight. He stated he provided a PowerPoint that is an abbreviated version that has all the numbers in it, it connects the strategic plan to the budget items. He stated he wants to emphasize that the School Board always connects their strategic plan to each budget. He stated nothing in the budget is outside of the strategic plan and wanted to take every opportunity to point out the great work that the school board, some of whom are with us here, and the City Council have done, at least over the last four years. He stated he know it's been going on longer than that too. He stated to support a very special school division, we have some features to our division that are very unique. For example, we have a Fine Arts Academy that is second to none. He stated he have seen many Council Members at the performances, so he knows that many have experienced that first-hand. He stated we have a Fine Arts Academy and it's different from other school divisions. He stated we have not only a Governor's STEM Academy that we share with other divisions, but we have our own Governor's STEM Academy at our high school, and we've recently worked out an arrangement with the state so that we can continue to have that at Rocktown High School as well, which is pretty amazing. He stated we have the World is My Classroom Initiative, which gives kids opportunities, you've seen some opportunities tonight, to go deeper with their learning, with authentic relevant learning. He stated we have the only Dual Language program in the valley and we're the only ones in the Commonwealth, so this work that Council and the school board have done over the years, I know it's a different Council now, a different school board, but the history of it is pretty amazing. He stated he takes very opportunity he can to mention that and it's with great and deep gratitude that he has toward the work that's been done.

He stated he put an abbreviated PowerPoint for Council; it has a preamble in it about our mission critical focuses this year. He stated those shift a little bit each year, they shifted a lot with the pandemic. He stated it's got some of the strategic planning items that are important to our budget and all the bottom-line numbers spelled out. He stated instead of presenting this in detail he thought he would open it up for questions and we can then refer to the PowerPoint as needed if that suits the Council.

Vice Mayor Dent asked if he meant rather than walking through the presentation, he would open it up for questions instead.

Dr. Richards stated that is what he was thinking, he could refer to it if needed.

Council Member Jones asked Dr. Richards to tell him about the outcomes for black and brown children.

Dr. Richards asked if Council Member Jones was talking about academic outcomes.

Council Member Jones stated whatever, he is assuming it's going to be a positive outcome.

Dr. Richards stated there are many roads to go down with that; we could look at the efforts they are making with diversity hiring which is very important to the outcomes for black and brown students. He stated we have recently had some hires that are going to be very positive and move us in a very positive direction in that way. He stated much of the work that they have done in their strategic plan is focused on equity, so equity is when we look at each individual students' needs and we understand that there are some learning gaps, there are some discipline gaps that we have. He stated what that means is there's disproportionality when you look at students of color and other students in terms of academic outcomes and also in terms of discipline outcomes, but these are things that we're addressing in our strategic plan and that we address every day, and that our educators address every day.

Council Member Jones asked if he were a student, are there a lot of barriers for him to get to Dr. Richards or to be heard as a student, or to be heard by my counselor. He stated if we need to be heard by you, maybe by leadership beyond the classroom, because there's so many conversations and large issues that our students are faced with that maybe weren't necessarily faced with a day-to-day mental health perspective and the trust level varies according to the demographics of that child and how they view themselves.

Dr. Richards stated that's very true, for example, he has a Student Advisory Council, and it is purposefully made-up of a diverse representative group of 21 students this year and we meet monthly. He stated it's a time for them to bring him issues that they are facing and that their peers are facing, things that are of importance to them and so we've been doing this for a while, and there's an accumulation of projects that have happened and an accumulation of information that's been brought to him. He stated he brings in staff members, has brought in Mayor Reed to these meetings, any of Council is welcome to come as well if you'd like to, to let students tell you what the issues are and I'll tell you one of the issues that's related to something that you brought up is, the student said hey, we need to get more students involved in Fine Arts. He stated it seems that the Fine Arts

program doesn't attract as diverse of a student population as other programs do, like the STEM Academy is very diverse. He stated the students addressed that issue, and they brought in directors from the Fine Arts Academy, Mayor Reed was there with us that day, and the students got a chance to talk about their perceptions of this and their ideas on how to solve it, so we have been working on that project as well, but they have a lot of access to me.

He stated if Council Member Jones is talking about him specifically, they have a lot of access to him. He stated he goes to events and spend a lot of time with students on the campuses and open to anything that they bring to him.

Council Member Jones stated the reason why he asked that question was because it empowered him as a student, he remembers the more accessibility he had to leadership and the person who's in charge, it changes the conversation and the power dynamic. He stated he thinks that's extremely important, that children, especially children of color and female children understanding that, because of how the world views them.

Dr. Richards stated he invites Council Member Jones to come to one of these meetings if he'd like. He stated several of his staff members come and bounce ideas off the students and see what they think about important issues.

Council Member Jones stated he appreciates Dr. Richards opening up this way, that those are the types of things that he would like to know. He stated he trust Dr. Richards as far as finances go, but what it really boils down to is the outcomes, because depending on what Dr. Richards does, what the chief of police does, and what his neighbors tell him, that's the easiest way to know the schools.

Council Member Robinson stated she had a question, not budget-related, but since Council Member Jones brought it up, what outcomes do we have in terms of black and brown students, and as Dr. Richards mentioned the discipline gaps and the gaps in academic outcomes, she thinks that is directly related to the lack of peripheral involvement in that the lack of parental involvement stems from many different things. She stated it may be work, it may be not being able to relate, not being able to feel that being understood from a cultural perspective, and she has talked with quite a few black and brown parents, and one of the things that she is very interested in is what efforts, if any, are being made to reach out to black, indigenous people of color, parents where they are just trying to be as inclusive and accommodating as possible because parents say their child is enrolled in said class and they don't remember ever being talked to about why they should or should not be enrolled in a specific class. She stated one of the

examples is full year algebra in the semester and that be followed with the geometry and things that allow them to be able to receive an advanced diploma, and so a lot of parents feel that they are not being given the opportunity or the information needed to make decisions until it's too late.

Dr. Richards stated that's a major issue in public education generally. He stated some of the magnet schools in the state that such as Thomas Jefferson, for example, has been in the news a lot. He stated there's been a lot of effort to try to build that knowledge early in families and give access to families, but we in Harrisonburg don't that passively, we don't just say the opportunity is there, he knows a lot of people want to substitute the word opportunity for the word equity, well, he likes equity and opportunity together. He stated so it's not a matter of the opportunity part is not passive, the equity part is not passive, it's about us reaching out. He stated it's about us going to them and talking to them and helping them understand these things. He stated those are conversations that we have with staff all the time and I hear Council when you say that there are parents who come to you, and I get that, and we always need to improve this work. He stated he wants to point out that our staff are very much aware of that. He stated so, for example, with our STEM Academy, it's pretty diverse, and we're unusual in that sense because some of the problems you see in other parts of the country, like I hate to single them out, but they've been in the news a lot, the Thomas Jefferson School for the sciences, part of the problem is they're not diverse and there's a quandary about that. He stated if you're in such a diverse population, why aren't you more diverse, that's a very good question. He stated so the idea that there's some kind of cultural disconnect and some families are not getting the information they need to know that algebra needs to happen now, and then geometry in order for you to have the prerequisites, otherwise it's too late. He stated I do want to commend our staff for stepping up to that challenge and really helping our families, but clearly from what you're saying, we need to do more. He stated one thing he should have said when he was mentioning our superlatives is that we are very unique in the sense that we do have school liaisons, and in the new high school, they're positioned right out in the front and their offices in the current high school are in a central entryway to the school and so we really emphasize that connection with parents, and again it can't be passive. He stated you can't just set it up and wait for parents to come, you have to go out and speak with them, and staff members who could certainly speak even more to this if need be. He stated maybe we could present at some point to Council on this topic.

Council Member Robinson stated definitely, because she thinks that for some of us who are more familiar with scheduling practices and feeling comfortable interacting in the school system, it's kind of up to us in the sense to go after some of these parents to try to get them to be more active. She stated and she is very interested in his thoughts on the formation of a black PTA or something that encourages black and brown parents to be on

site, in the building, and she knows one parent in particular, Shonda Green, has talked with Doctor Hensley a lot about trying to increase the presence in the school system.

Dr Richards stated that's a great a great idea and he knows Miss Green very well and thinks that's something that we can certainly consider. He stated so those are very good conversations and he appreciate Council having them and bringing them up here.

Council Member Jones stated he just wanted to make this point, he says Amen to what Council Member Robinson said and to further add to her point, we've just approved the budget, and so there's obviously a disconnect for City Council, there's a disconnect for the school board, there is this a disconnect for the systems that you have to meet people where they are, if you're not going to look like who you are, because obviously people won't come if you keep having the same party and nobody shows up. He stated you keep having the same party, you have to do it somewhere else and do it differently and you serve something different. He stated you don't just say oh, they didn't know because to your point, equity has to meet opportunity, but it also has to meet some sort of affection and compassion in meeting people if you really want a good outcome. He stated if you just want to say you did the work, you just do the work.

Dr. Richards stated our diversity hiring efforts do need to make our families of color feel much more welcome. He stated we've put a diversity hiring effort in place recently that's, as he likes to refer to that Bruce Springsteen song lyrics, "you can't have a fire without a spark", we have the spark. He stated he thinks they are developing the spark and they are attracting a much more diverse, talented group to our applicant pools we made an effort to put together interview committees that look like our schools, so they look like our student and family populations in particular. He stated that effort is bearing some fruit now and thinks that escalates and grows when you start that and people really start to see that there's an effort; we just hosted a group of prospective employees from Puerto Rico and we didn't just advertise in Puerto Rico, we went and got them, we went to a job fair. He stated so we're making an effort, a concerted effort to reach out and to try to hire the very best staff, but you're not going to have diverse staff if you, as you said, have the same party and the same people come. He stated so we need to have more people come to this party and that's what we're working on.

Council Member Robinson she graduated from Harrisonburg High School in 1987, the Harrisonburg High school today is very different from the Harrisonburg High School of back years. She stated it looks different, the teachers look different, she sees more color,

more acceptance, more of an effort into making sure that we're trying to move toward staff and faculty that looks like the community that we live in. She stated what hasn't changed is that back then, we were still talking about the gaps in discipline and academic outcome, in dropout rates, and we're talking about brown and black children, and today we're talking about discipline gaps, academic outcomes, and we haven't mentioned it tonight specifically, but dropout rates, and we're still talking about African American children. She stated we're talking about black and brown children, and she wants to say that very much that she is speaking from her heart and haven't had this discussion with her Council members, that as we get more diverse, we are helping everyone and everyone's climbing to the top and they are excelling and we are still sliding to the bottom, black and brown children, and she just doesn't want to talk about black and brown children when we're talking about sports. She stated she loves that sports are the one thing that we can gain some interest, some buy-in, and we have wonderful coaches who make you realize and make students realize, make her grandchildren realize that basketball and sports in that game isn't about just what you do on the court, but we're teaching them about life. She stated she doesn't want that conversation only to evolve or happen in a sports arena, she doesn't want to talk about it in freezing cold at a football game. She stated she wants to see us everywhere doing good up there at the top with everyone else excelling and she's tired of talking about discipline gaps in academic outcomes. She stated after all these years we still can't figure out what the problem is, and as Council Member Jones just mentioned, if we look out in the audience, we know what the problem is, black and brown adults aren't here, so this party needs to change.

Council Member Fleming stated his wife ran Fine Arts for the Chicago Public Schools. He stated she had 40,000 kids and 60 schools and the exact same problem there when they started this, that parents weren't going to the Fine Arts programs there, they were going to the math and science. He stated they're in the language programs, but the highest performing schools were the Fine Arts programs, far above the other schools. He stated he noticed when we were talking about the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), not too long ago, we were looking at the current high school and that Fine Arts would be a focus there, so he thinks one of the things that will help folks who want to go into the Fine Arts understand that it's a facility at the same level as our new facility and what needs to happen there. He stated he did notice that there were plans, for example, the dance studio in 2026-27, and he suggested, maybe that needs to get moved up earlier.

Dr. Richards stated it has been.

Council Member Fleming stated he thinks the facilities and understanding opportunities will be important for folks to see they are for them and that might be one of the things that can help a more diverse crowd move into that particular program.

Dr. Richards stated that they received some money from the state, the General Assembly passed a law that allocates some refurbishment money to school divisions that need it, and we got some. He stated we actually just received another grant that's not been made public, well, it has been in public, but he hasn't said it yet publicly, is we just received another \$276,000 from the state, and that's specifically earmarked for improvements at Harrisonburg High School. He stated so the money that we've received has been, again we use what's called an equity framework when we make decisions, so we bring in lots of voices and so a lot of people have been involved in talking about what upgrades we need to make at HHS, and a lot of that discussion has to do with which programs support our diverse students the most, and so the medical Health Sciences programs are going to get upgrades. He stated we're also going to upgrade as you said, the dance studio, right now they're dancing on an inappropriate floor that's not made specifically for dancing, it's the stage, and a lot of people need the stage to use for different things, and so we're going to build a dance floor for them and a changing room and other things as well. He stated but then we're excited that we have another \$276,000 now that we can use for HHS renovations.

Council Member Fleming stated that he noticed that the school construction funding, that there's still another \$85 M actually out there and asked if Dr. Richards had identified projects that might probably get into that?

Dr. Richards stated, if you look at the list of recipients, we're low on the list in terms of the dollar amount, and we actually put in more into that and they kicked some things out and said you can't do those. He stated so some of the higher numbers that you see are school divisions that have in their CIP the need for a whole new facility, either a new school or an addition to a school, they're also low in the ranks, or how high in the ranks everyone played it in terms of fiscal stress. He stated so we're #113 out of 131 school divisions in the state in terms of financial stress. He stated so we're stressed financially and so we put in a lot of stuff into that grant and a lot of it was kicked back out and we're looking into it now, we're trying to figure it out, but it looks like those projects had to be solidly in the CIP and on their way to being approved before they could be in that grant. He stated that he did manage to eke out that \$276,000, but we're going to follow through with an appeals process, and we're going to go for some of that 85 million.

Council Member Fleming stated he guesses the first round is for folks who, for whatever reason, didn't meet an opportunity for those first round of allocations.

Council Member Jones stated as clear and as transparent as Dr. Richards has been, he hopes and assumes that Dr. Richards will be able to get with Miss White and other parents to have an athletic conversation. He stated if Brian Mancini and Parks and Recreation, and/or the city manager, needs to be pulled into the conversation that can be done.

Dr. Richards stated they are happy to.

Council Member Jones stated if he has to volunteer to coach, then we should happily want to talk to the people that want to be involved and want to help.

Dr. Richards stated Ms. White makes a very, very good point, and we've had conversations, we know dollar amounts, we know that if we were to fully take this on without the help of Parks and Rec, it would be two athletic trainers and there would be coaches to hire, and we're in a very tight budget year, he was hoping they could continue with the arrangement they have with Parks and Rec and continue the middle school football program as it is, at least at this point. He stated now, if the state were to come back and give us more money, maybe we can start talking about, of course, we would start talking about what would we do with that, and maybe that could be part of the conversation as well.

Council Member Jones stated let's hope there's good outcomes there. He stated some people are not here to represent themselves, and sometimes absence is viewed as agreement and it is not, in fact, presence typically shows affordability because typically people can't afford to show up sometimes if they don't have the money or they don't have the time, and sometimes it's both.

Dr. Richards stated the athletics academy, I think Ms. White referred to it as a sports academy, we are putting together a parent committee to advise us on that, but he does intend to establish an Athletics Academy and he hears Council Member Robinson loud and clear, when you say let's not talk about our black and brown kids and their achievement only in the context of sports, that's a mistake, but it is also very important for students to have many choices and for them to have a place they call their own. He stated he would love it if all of our students said hey, STEM is for me or hey, Fine Arts is for me, he would love it if they all said it, hey, the Athletics Academy is for me. He stated it doesn't matter who they are, but he wants them to have a place and he thinks that opens up more possibilities for all of our students and our diverse population.

Vice Mayor Dent stated she has a specific question about the budget, page 13 of the presentation, the total expenditures by function, wanted to call attention to that the largest item by far, 74% of the school budget, is for instruction. She asked what that includes.

Dr. Richards stated everything that happens inside the classroom but not the furniture or the technology, so the salaries for teachers, for the support staff for the principal, everything that happens on a campus, but not the solid goods, paper is in operations. He stated all of the programming, the salaries, all of that is instruction and it's very important that school divisions are heavy, really heavy on the instruction side and lighter on all the other areas.

Vice Mayor Dent stated, we as a Council, historically and as well as now, really do support paying our teachers well, I see that there's a nearly 7% increase in that.

Dr. Richards stated the Senate and the house both proposed the 7% salary increase, we put in a 5%, we put that in because we don't want to over promise. He stated the state gave us a skinny budget, the budget that the governor put forward as the second year in the biennium, and we'll put that forward as our budget because we can't at this time know if there's going to be any additional funding. He stated we would, you know, if we did, if the state did come through, if the conferees come out of their committee meetings and the governor agrees that we need to give 7% for all SOQ funded positions, we need to have that conversation. He stated our teachers, and our other staff need more than 5%.

Vice Mayor Dent stated we do support paying the teachers.

Council Member Fleming stated he noticed the increase in instruction there as well, and that's a significant increase and he think that's the proper way that we should have increases in the system, so it's good to see it moving up. He stated one of the things that he heard most from the community and from teachers in general over the last couple of years was the in-classroom support for teachers in the classroom, it's interesting that you gave the new positions here, we trust what needs to be done in your school and when he saw the permanent substitutes, he thought that that sounds like a brilliant idea.

Dr. Richards stated that position means you're probably on campus to substitute where there's need, and many ask for that type of position. He stated the Staff Advisory Council stated the number one thing that they asked for was for that and adjustments of time in the schedule during the day, and so those are two of the key projects we've been working

on. He stated we thought of renaming those instead of permanent subs to give them more of a hybrid feel so they could step into more, maybe provide them with more training so they could step into more responsibilities. He stated the idea is to free up teacher time and so what's happening right now is, for example, behavior specialists might be engaged in something that their permanent sub could do if they're on campus and might be doing that now when they shouldn't be supporting a teacher in a classroom, the teachers asked for help, and we can't because staff is spread thin, so the idea of the permanent sub, which is a staff generated idea, is that they would be able to free up the people who need to be in the classroom. He stated we've had a severe shortage of subs and so these positions, we think this will have a good impact on our teachers and our students. He stated we can only afford 22 1/2 positions, some adjustments are being made to use staff and free staff up more efficiently to support. He stated so those you won't necessarily see in here, there are a couple of them in here, but the permanent subs are one very specific position for classrooms support, but many of those mental health positions and those sorts of things were brought in last year when we had an increase of 78 positions, and we've been doing that for several years now trying to put more of that support in place and if you look at our levels of support and our ratios, we're pretty well off and he thanked Council for that, we're pretty well off compared to some other divisions.

Council Member Fleming stated when he worked on the Student Wellness Committee and saw the multi-tier assistant support staff person there and he was excited to see the program get moving. He stated we're the type of district that can really make that successful because we put a lot of money into a lot of resources into that type of support. He stated it's way short of what we need, but it's greater than most other districts are able to do.

Dr. Richards stated keep in mind that it is a gradual roll-out, that's a major change that will support students and will also support teachers in terms of having a cannon of things they can do at different tiers in the students learning journey, and so they will have those tools available to them and know how to use them. He stated so it's going to support the classroom substantially, but it's a major change. He stated we're going to roll it out in the way that is considered state-of-the-art, which is over a four-or-five-year period, so he doesn't want to over promise there either.

Council Member Fleming stated he is just going to make more comments, just really about kind of our larger budget, which we will be passing. He stated that's related to the schools because this is a large increase, that was putting forward a 13% increase, it is a big increase. He stated he thinks as he mentioned earlier this is critical for us, this is one of the most important things we do is fund our schools. He stated the City Council has always funded and supported those schools, there are many times when he was on the

other side of this conversation with Council Member Jones, making that push and opening this for a long time. He stated it's interesting that Dr. Richards mentioned the fiscal stress in the State and the Commonwealth measures fiscal stress for community, and when you look at Harrisonburg, on the radio this morning, and I brought this up as well, that the 133 localities in Virginia Harrisonburg is listed as a high stress. He stated it's a measure of our capacity to generate revenue is what they do, it's a relative term, it's compared to the other places. He stated and of the 133 we are 16th from the top, the most difficult to generate revenue. He stated it comes out to \$1,532 per person, but Charlottesville, Lynchburg, Fredericksburg, they aren't in the same boat we are. He stated so our ability to generate those revenues can be really difficult for us and its stress for us. He stated they have another rating they call their vulnerability rating and of the 133 localities in Virginia, Harrisonburg is fifth in vulnerability.

Council Member Jones stated it is because we are 60% ALICE population.

Council Member Fleming stated it's important to recognize that that doesn't tell you about the fiscal health of your city, this is a comparative number looking at your ability to generate tax, if not, it talks about what the challenges are because if you look at our credit rating, our ability to have a budget or our ability to have a large fund reserve, that this number doesn't tell us that. He stated it's called stress and it's related to other places, but it doesn't really tell us that. He stated he thinks it really points to the value that this Council places on education that even in this environment, and we know it's hard on residents, but we know how critical it is to fund our schools, it's our future, 65-75% of these folks are going to be here, and he just wants to make a note of the context of this that it's a big ask that we're asking of our residents, the City Council, we have to make this ask of residents, it's a big ask and personally, he has done that in the past, and he will continue to do that. He stated education funding is a priority for him, but we are a stressed community and so we provide excellent services that would be the envy of many other municipalities.

Dr. Richards stated he realizes that and that's why he started his visit with Council tonight with gratitude and then to give a little more context to that to maintain our level of funding, the federal government gave us a considerable addition to our revenue last year and the year before and this year cut us a bit and the state. He stated kind of a similar situation gave us a big boost two years ago and a very big boost last year and a much smaller boost this year. He stated so what happens then is, and he mentioned the financial stress before when he mentioned that grant that we received, although he did the inverse, he put us at the bottom in terms of being stressed as most stressed and all the ones above us are less stressed. He stated so what happens then is the locality is then footing the bill when this happens, when the state and the federal government don't step up as they have, and Virginia has been behind in education funding for a long, long time. He stated

at every meeting like this across the Commonwealth, you're going to hear a Superintendent say to a City Council or Board of Supervisors we're falling behind, and the states not really doing much about that right now. He stated to their credit, they have looked at teacher pay a bit more than they have in the last five years or so, there's been more of a focus on teacher pay which is very good, but we're still very low in Virginia in terms of paying our teachers. He stated he appreciates any effort this Council makes to boost teacher pay and by "teacher pay", he does mean all staff pay. He said some of our lowest paid employees we've given them a bit of a boost in the last few years, and we appreciate the effort that City Council has made to help with that, but teachers right now in particular stand to lose some ground, health insurance costs are going up for the city and for the schools 12%, also, teachers are set to get their 5% raise, which is what the state currently has blocked in, but it really needs to be more than that and so he is hoping that the state will come through with more than that and we can have a conversation. He stated he knows Mr. Banks and he will have a conversation if that happens and probably set up a liaison meeting of the Council and the board and talk that through.

Council Member Jones asked how many of the 78 positions budgeted for last year were filled. Dr. Richards stated all 78 positions were filled.

Council Member Jones asked of those 78 filled positions how many of those stayed. Dr. Richards stated he didn't know, but he could find out though.

Council Member Jones asked if they were in a natural deficit or, did it expand? Dr. Richards stated we do pretty well, he meets with his colleagues around the region regularly.

Council Member Jones stated most people are talking still about the great resignation, and of all the things he heard tonight that is one he hadn't heard.

Dr. Richards stated we do pretty well with that, in terms of hiring, we have a bit of an easier time than most jurisdictions in the valley and elsewhere with hiring. He stated people do want to come to Harrisonburg, our four visitors from University of Puerto Rico last week, were thrilled with the potential of living here. He stated we have people who really want to come and work in Harrisonburg. He stated we're paying a lot more attention now to retaining our diverse employees, because we want to set up supports for them, make sure that they feel welcome, make sure that they feel that they've got people they can talk to, understand the concerns and issues that they might face and so we're working on that design for some time now. He stated we do a little bit better than some of the other

jurisdictions now, that doesn't mean we don't have hard to fill positions, we do, and we have to recruit pretty aggressively for some of our positions and some of the 78 last year were definitely hard to fill positions.

Council Member Jones stated everyone was talking about the \$0.10, does that include the furniture, fixtures and equipment or are we going to be looking to go back to the well again?

Dr. Richards stated it is his understanding that there is money built into the current budget.

Larry Propst, director of Finance, asked that the question be repeated.

Council Member Jones stated he was curious about the furniture, fixtures and equipment for Rocktown, if it was built into the \$0.10, will it naturally be built into next year's budget, or should we be looking for an increase.

Mr. Propst stated some of that was built in initially to the bond issuance. He stated there is an upcoming supplemental for the schools in which we are transferring some school nutrition fund reserves to the project, but that was planned from the beginning.

Dr. Richards stated there will be another addition to the appropriation for Rocktown, we are seeing a big increase this year in terms of hiring a principal, hiring a bookkeeper, a counseling director, hiring a custodian, we take ownership of Rocktown in January, so we have the custodian coming on, we have utilities to start paying because we take ownership of the place next school year. He stated right now, every time you open a school, it's not a matter of simply transferring half the students and half the staff because you have to have a new principal, you have to have a new bookkeeper and so forth, so there's always that kind of addition when you're opening a school and when you're opening a high school. In particular, there's a planning process that goes into place, so the new principal will start the planning, but when it comes to staff, when you have a school with 2000 people in it and let's say just for the sake of argument, that you're building another school that can take half of them and you move half of the students, you always give teachers some sense of choice, do they want to move or stay, do they like what they are doing or would they like a change, but again, for the sake of argument, you can say mathematically that you're going to move half the teachers. He stated but when it comes to all of the other things, it's not a one-to-one relationship, there is going to be an additional ask next year for Rocktown and there is an additional ask as you can see

right now for Rocktown, but the FF&E was covered, \$7M was covered in the original contract.

Vice Mayor Dent stated as she looks at the School Transportation Fund, the school buses, as you know, she is a big fan of the electric buses, we're getting two of them, likely to get them in December. She stated so that doesn't affect this year, but just foreseeing ramping that up over the next few years because we are building out the infrastructure for ten EV buses, so we want to make that transition a priority for the environment and for students' health too.

Dr. Richards stated we're making headway on our solar projects, he knows the city has put in the trenching for the electric buses, we hope to do more of that, there's grant money involved in that, which is always good, we work very closely with the Transportation Department, we have regular meetings and we plan for the future, He stated we're planning for Rocktown opening, he thinks the city has made some progress in terms of some hiring, he personally is training as a field trip driver, so he is over there and sees new drivers coming in, which is very encouraging and some wonderful people are driving our kids around. The transportation budget is initiated through conversations with the city, and then the city has to decide on an ask from the schools, and we of course put that into our budget, so that's a dynamic conversation with the city.

Council Member Fleming asked if they have a figure for the difference between the difference between a 5% and 7% raise for your non-SOQ & SOQ employees.

Dr. Richards stated any state revenue has strings attached, people in the General Assembly have ideas, they say let's get more money if they do this, and so, in this case, when the state offers what is usually referred to as a teacher raise, it's a raise for SOQ (standard of quality) funded positions, it comes right out of the Virginia Constitution in terms of every child being entitled to a high-quality education. He stated the General Assembly and the Board of Education decide what does that mean, how many students per counselor, English teachers, etc. He stated they say, well, we're going to raise teacher pay and what they do is they give you an amount of money that will bring you to half of whatever that raise is. He stated so if they say we're going to give you a 5% teacher raise, it's really 2 1/2 percent for all SOQ funded positions because then the school has to match it, that's the string. He stated in this case, to give you a dollar figure, each 1% we get the city gets \$750,000 and we have to match that with \$750,000. He stated the big question would be once the state does raise the so-called teacher pay from 5% to 7%, he wants to sit down with city staff and then Council and school board members and talk about that. He stated he would want to give our teachers the additional 2%, but it will cost the city

\$750,000 to do it. He stated he is being very transparent about that, that we would push for additional 2%, but that would be a recommendation that he would make if they got money in terms of them lifting the support cap that's been in place. He stated Council Member Jones mentioned classroom support since the Great Recession. He stated there's been a cap on the number of SOQ funded positions for support in classrooms, there's a real movement now to remove that cap, and the Virginia Association of School Superintendents and other organizations have been pushing for that for some time. He stated it looks like it may have some momentum, that would bring in \$1.8M to the city, so we would talk then about how we could support our classrooms better with that. He stated one question that was brought to my attention before the meeting was what if the state provides more money, I think we have a process in place that's very robust where staff in both areas sit down, Mr. Banks, myself, and staff members sit down and talk about what we're going to recommend, and then of course it becomes a decision with City Council, after school board recommendation.

Vice Mayor Dent stated it seems we have a structural problem that we have to pass our budget before the state has to pass theirs.

Dr. Richards stated it has put us all in a very difficult position.

Vice Mayor Dent stated Council really appreciated the in-depth presentation.

Dr. Richards stated he appreciates the opportunity.

Council Member Fleming stated thanks for bringing your school board and teachers here because I know tomorrow is SOL-day for many of you.

Council Member Robinson stated it shows true dedication.

