

Mayor and Council Work Session / Retreat Minutes - Final MAYOR AND COUNCIL (Combined Session)



Derek Norton, Mayor
Tim Gould, Mayor Pro Tem (Ward 6)
Glenn Pickens (Ward 1)
Latonia P. Hines (Ward 2)
Travis Lindley (Ward 3)
Charles "Corkey" Welch (Ward 4)
Susan Wilkinson (Ward 5)
Rickey N. Oglesby, Jr. (Ward 7)

Lanier Islands
Legacy Lodge & Conference Center
7000 Lanier Islands Parkway
Buford, GA 30518

City Attorney Scott Cochran
City Administrator Joseph Bennett
City Clerk Heather K. Peacon-Corn

**April 24, 2025
3:00 PM**

1. Roll Call

Present: 8 – Mayor Derek Norton, Councilmember Glenn Pickens, Councilmember Latonia P. Hines, Councilmember Travis Lindley, Councilmember Charles Welch, Councilmember Susan Wilkinson, Mayor Pro Tem / Councilmember Tim Gould, Councilmember Rickey N. Oglesby Jr.

Also Present: 1 – Scott Cochran

Staff: 16 – Julie Barwig, Jennifer Bennett, Joe Bennett, Jill Head, Dat Luu, Brian Marcos, Russell Martin, Mary Moore, Paul Osburn, Heather Peacon-Corn, Eric Randall, Kristin Robinson, Carol Sicard, Christy Ullman, Andrea Worthy, Keith Zgonc

2. Call to Order

Mayor Derek Norton called to order the April 24, 2025 Mayor and Council Combined Work Session held at Lanier Islands Legacy Lodge & Conference Center (7000 Lanier Islands Parkway, Buford, GA 30518) at 3:02 PM.

3. Formal Business

A. 3:00p – 5p Joint Work Session – Mayor/Council/Staff

Mayor Norton presented a list of projects and invited discussion from the council and staff on the various topics:

South Cobb Drive Improvements:

- Longer Term Project
- \$26M of the \$35M already secured – end of 2029 for completion
- Congresswoman McBath newly representing Smyrna – visited and learned about this project

Tolleson Pool/Tennis:

- Henry County has an indoor aquatic facility which cost \$53M
- That is cost-prohibitive for the City of Smyrna
- \$18M project - \$10M of previous aquatics money from SPLOST, perhaps a bond or general fund or both
- Completion estimated Memorial Day 2027

Emory Adventist Site

- 12.7 acres
- 90-120 day bond will be validated
- Pickleball facility should be a focal point
- Could be a public-private partnership
- Many ideas have been broached\
- Mayor Pro Gould stated this is a unique opportunity
- The Bouncers, sponsored by Anheuser-Busch, was discussed

Ward 7 Splash Pad:

- Buried timber became a setback
- It has been dug out, and they are moving forward
- Completion date – end of the year

First Baptist Church Development:

- An almost 10-acre site combined with the ½ acre from the Presbyterian Church
- Approximately 2,700 responses online
- Church will rent from the city until their new church is completed
- Substantially complete by the end of next year
- Public input, high-level master plan
- Stone chapel will be salvaged
- \$16.2M bond

First Baptist Chapel Renovation:

- \$500K in bond, sold the Atlanta Rd property (\$3.3M) – part of this bought the GA Power building, part of it is sitting in a bond disposition account
- December 2027 – the new church building may be substantially complete
- Timeline to spend the \$1.7M – by end of December 2026
- Mayor Pro Tem Gould asked about ADA compliance. It will need to be brought up to code

Georgia Power Building:

- IT, Human Resources, and Utility Billing may be moved to GA Power building
- GA Power building is on a transit line, City Hall is not, so it is more convenient for payments, etc.
- Awaiting structural engineer
- Court to move to HR/UB area which will alleviate foot traffic in City Hall
- Court Services to be renovated to hold council spaces – meeting spaces, offices, etc.
- Timeline – within the next year

Downtown Surface Lot:

- Original contractor hit a spring and cannot finish
- Total of 44 parking spots
- Should be completed by July

Castelaw Site Purchase:

- Zoned for high density, LOI, general fund may fund its purchase rather than bonding
- Walton has a master plan for that site, three weeks to a month for appraisal
- Future recreation use
- They wanted to have senior living in the back with city use in front

IGO Land Purchase:

- Approved a 290-unit apartment – Worthing
- Funded from parking deck line item
- LOI with Worthing, placeholder for future city facility

Downtown Bathroom/Playground:

- Part of the Splash Pad with the reflecting pool was a design disaster
- Bathroom will go where the train park used to be
- Delay on the playground equipment
- Hoping everything will be done in July
- Bids and plans took longer than expected

Street Resurfacing:

- 2022 SPLOST overages will go toward this = \$10M
- \$20M can go toward bond debt

Bridge over Cobb Parkway

- \$3.3M city portion
- Partnership with Cumberland CID
- Attempting to get funds from ARC and other entities

Mayor Norton explained that these projects were discussed for a couple hours earlier. The overarching theme of that discussion was how the story is being communicated internally and externally. Communication was the focus – signage, website, updates, etc. Councilmember Lindley said he would like to see a Coming Soon button on the website for updates of the city projects.

Russell Martin, Community Development Director

- Staff worked together as a team to put together prior to the last retreat a strategy for the delivery process for city projects (workflow), and it felt like it was not well-accepted
- Councilmember Lindley complimented Community Development staff for their good working relationships with developers
- Staff tries to work with developers to make it more accommodating to come into the city as long as state and local laws are followed

- There is uncertainty when it comes to Mayor and Council because there is no sense of what exactly Mayor and Council want
- Mayor Norton suggested maybe Council and Community Development sit down together to discuss the path forward
- Andrea Worthy, Economic Development Director, noted that she learned at a recent conference that retail coming into cities are the three C's – chicken, car washes, coffee shops, and childcare

Keith Zgonc, Police Chief

- Internal survey – 40 responses of sworn officers – many excited about embracing technology, but many are concerned about their fleet of older Crown Vics
- Staff levels have improved over the past two years– effective Monday, the department is only four people short
- Target number of employees is 87 – some have left and then come back
- Two people are in DUI activities – DUI arrests have picked up which increased jail numbers
- What has helped with staffing? Culture/environment, pay/compensation, economy
- Not a significant increase in applicants, but there is a better caliber of applicant – military, right out of college, etc.
- Smyrna is staying competitive with salary
- The department is authorized for 95, but because of all the changes in the city, the department is not as busy with calls of service compared to five or six years ago

Brian Marcos, Fire Chief

- Fire Department is currently at 88 staff
- It is highly competitive to retain firefighters – able to keep them because of the reputation and culture
- More competitive pay, more responsibilities, more opportunities – the more variety of incentives (tuition reimbursement, proficiency pay, sellbacks, etc.), the better situated we are to retain employees
- Create levels of ownership at every level
- An anonymous survey resulted in 87% saying they would highly recommend someone work for the Smyrna Fire Department
- Facility improvements were just completed, all on budget, all on time
- Fleet/apparatus lag time is crushing – current schedule for replacement does not correspond with lag time
- EMS – demand for services has increased – state regulatory burden has intensified
- City events are getting bigger and bigger – need to lay groundwork for safety policies to avoid dangerous occurrences

Dat Luu, IT Director

- Consolidated staff computers and reduced the number of subscriptions
- Just purchased 200 computers to meet an October 14, 2025 deadline
- Just put out an RFP for five-year cybersecurity – 40 proposals came in – they will evaluate and assess to determine potential policy changes, funding necessities, etc.
- Had the first penetration test – those issues presented have not been fixed yet
- There may be a request in the future for cybersecurity in-house staff
- Still trying to hire a Network and Server Engineer
- Cameras – Community Center has issues with their old cameras – but these will probably be the next big issue in the future
- Consolidate multiple door lock systems – it takes money to change the systems out, so this is moving forward but slowly

Mary Moore, Library Director

- Some departments have an opportunity for progression
- Other departments do not have opportunities for growth or promotions – someone would need to quit or retire before someone else could move into that position

Mayor and Council expressed their appreciation for leadership and staff.

6. Other Business

7. Adjournment

Mayor Derek Norton adjourned the April 24, 2025 Mayor and Council Combined Work Session at 4:41 PM.

Facilities are provided throughout City Hall for the convenience of persons with disabilities.

THIS MEETING WAS PROPERLY NOTICED AND POSTED AT THE FOLLOWING LOCATIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE NOTICING STANDARDS AS OUTLINED IN O.C.G.A. 50-14-3:
The City of Smyrna website – www.smyrnaga.gov
City Hall, 2800 King Street SE, Notice Boards