

ROME CITY COMMISSION

Monday, September 27, 2021

The Rome City Commission met at 6:30 p.m. this date in the City Commission Chambers of City Hall, 601 Broad Street. Mayor McDaniel presided with Mayor Pro Tem Stevenson and Commissioners Bojo, Cochran, Davis, Doss, Quick, Askew, and Collins present. Mayor McDaniel opened the meeting with prayer and led in the salute to the flag.

Minutes – September 13, 2021 and September 22, 2021

The minutes of the September 13, 2021 meeting and the September 22, 2021 Special Called meeting, as submitted in writing by the Secretary, were approved by an unanimous consent.

Manufacturing Day

Commissioner Quick presented a joint City/County proclamation proclaiming October 1, 2021 as Manufacturing Day in Rome and Floyd County. This proclamation was presented to Rome/Floyd County Economic Development Director Missy Kendrick and Ben Murray and Pam Powers-Smith of the Greater Rome Chamber of Commerce.

Mary McJunkin, 100 Birthday

Mayor McDaniel presented a proclamation recognizing the 100th birthday of Mary McJunkin. Ms. McJunkin is also known as being Rome's own "Rosie the Riveter". Ms. McJunkin was present.

Georgia Cities Week

Commissioner Doss presented a proclamation proclaiming October 3 – 9, 2021 as Georgia Cities Week in Rome. This proclamation was presented to Mr. Doug Walker. Mr. Walker outlined some of the events that are scheduled for Georgia Cities Week and was speaking on behalf of Ms. Kristi Kent, the Public Information Officer for the City of Rome.

Fire Prevention Week

Commissioner Askew presented a proclamation proclaiming October 3 – 9, 2021 as Fire Prevention Week in Rome. This proclamation was presented to members of the Rome Fire Department and Fire Prevention Office, including Fire Department Mascot "Sparky". Fire Marshal Mary Catherine Chewing spoke regarding the importance of Fire Prevention Week.

Curfew Ordinance Amendment

Mayor McDaniel stated that the amendment to Rome's Curfew Ordinance, presented at the September 13, 2021 meeting, remains "on the table". There was no action at this time to remove this topic from the table and to continue discussion.

Z21-08-03 Rezone 109 Sunset Drive

Commissioner Quick presented rezoning file Z21-08-03, the request to rezone property located at 109 Sunset Drive and identified by Tax Map # J15W-060 from Suburban Residential to Heavy Commercial. The Planning Commission has unanimously recommended approval.

Assistant Planner Brice Wood reviewed this file, displaying maps and photographs of the subject and surrounding properties. Mr. Wood stated that the Rome Ford Automobile Dealership wishes to establish a Service Center on this property.

Mayor McDaniel called a Public Hearing to order. Speaking in favor of the rezoning request was Mr. Chuck Hardin, 160 Three Rivers Drive. Mr. Hardin is an engineer for this project and represents the owner. He stated that the Ford Dealership would like to establish a new repair and service center on this site. There was no one else to speak regarding this matter, and the Public Hearing was closed.

Commissioner Collins asked if a site plan had been submitted for this property. Mr. Wood replied that it had not, and that this would be categorized as a speculative rezoning. There was also some discussion regarding the setbacks that will be required; even with heavy commercial zoning, there is at least one residential property in the surrounding area. Mr. Wood stated that a variance may be needed in order to meet the buffer requirements. The adjoining property owners in the area, including the residential sites, have been notified.

Commissioner Quick moved to approve the rezoning request as submitted. Commissioner Bojo seconded, and the vote was unanimously in favor.

Z21-08-04 Rezone Sunset Drive

Commissioner Quick presented rezoning fine Z21-08-04, the request to rezone property located on Sunset Drive and identified by Tax Map # J15W-054 from Suburban Residential to Community Commercial. The Planning Commission has unanimously recommended approval.

Assistant Planner Brice Wood reviewed this file, displaying maps and photographs of the subject and surrounding properties. Mr. Wood stated that this site adjoins the property addressed in file # Z21-08-03. This lot would be combined with Tax Map # J15W-060 for the Ford Dealership Service Center.

Mayor McDaniel called a Public Hearing to order concerning this request. Speaking in favor was Mr. Chuck Hardin, 160 Three Rivers Drive. Mr. Hardin reiterated that this parcel will be part of the new Ford Service Center. There was no one else to speak regarding this matter, and the Public Hearing was closed. Commissioner Quick moved to rezone this Sunset Drive property from Suburban Residential to Community Commercial as requested. Commissioner Bojo seconded, and the vote was unanimously in favor.

John Bennett – Former City Manager

City Manager Rich announced that former Rome City Manager John Bennett had recently undergone heart surgery. Mr. Bennett is progressing as planned, and the City wishes him a speedy and full recovery.

Northwest Georgia Regional Hospital Property

Mayor McDaniel introduced the topic of the former site of the Northwest Georgia Regional Hospital. The State of Georgia closed this facility several years ago, and the City of Rome has had an interest in acquiring that property since that time. The Rome/Floyd County Development Authority has recently met with the State Properties Commission and Governor Kemp. Our

local offer of \$2.25M to acquire this site has been accepted by the State of Georgia. We will purchase the property in the “as is” condition with the existing structures. Mayor McDaniel also stated that funds were allocated in the 2017 SPLOST for economic development.

Commissioner Stevenson moved for the City of Rome to authorize an expenditure of \$1.125M of City SPLOST Funding for the acquisition of this property. Commissioner Collins seconded the motion.

Commissioner Cochran expressed his concern for this decision. He feels that attempting to use this site for industrial development is not the best alternative. Commissioner Cochran provided a considerable amount of information regarding other manufacturing sites that are in much closer proximity to I-75 in Bartow and Gordon Counties. He does not feel it is realistic to expect an industrial prospect to bypass all of the available industrial property to travel the extra distance in order to locate in Rome. Cochran also stated that, if the property is somehow used for industrial purposes, that those companies would likely receive tax abatements on both their real and personal property taxes. There is also a likelihood that, if industrial jobs were established at this site, they would be relatively low-paying jobs. Commissioner Cochran feels this is a \$1.125M gamble by the City of Rome and that a better use for this property would be for residential housing. Since Rome has been discussing our housing shortage in depth in recent months, this could be a prime location for housing which would generate much more tax revenue than industrial uses would likely generate. Housing at this location would give some of the workers in our area, that have been forced to live in other areas, the ability to establish residency in our community. He encouraged the City Commission not to continue making the same mistakes and expecting different results.

Commissioner Davis stated that the funds allocated through the 2017 Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax Referendum did not require them to be spent specifically on industrial uses. Any economic development purpose is allowable. Commissioner Davis also spoke regarding our change in the method of industrial recruitment when the City of Rome and Floyd County removed this function from the Chamber of Commerce. Commissioner Davis feels that Commissioners were told at that time they would have more input and information regarding industrial recruitment; however, she feels this is not the case. Commissioner Davis also referenced the \$100,000 of City Tax Funds that were spent to develop a plan for this Northwest Georgia Regional Hospital site, and that plan indicated a variety of uses, not just industrial. Commissioner Davis also made reference to the 20+ homes that are currently located on a portion of this site.

Commissioner Collins expressed his opinion that the City of Rome should proceed with the acquisition of this property, and we can then decide the highest and best use. Commissioner Stevenson concurred that acquiring the property is our first step. Commissioner Doss reminded everyone that the City of Rome has been interested in this property for a long time, and it is great news that we can now acquire the property at a much more reasonable price than we could have several years ago. Commissioner Quick congratulated all the efforts of the City, the County, the Rome Industrial Development Authority, and the State of Georgia to bring us to this point of the property acquisition.

With the discussion concluded, Commissioner Stevenson’s motion to authorize \$1.125M towards the purchase of this property was approved by the following vote:

YES: Stevenson, Bojo, Davis, Doss, Quick, Askew, and Collins
NO: Cochran

Rome/Floyd Joint Services Committee

Mayor McDaniel announced that the Rome/Floyd Joint Services Committee will meet on Tuesday, October 5th at 8 a.m. in the Floyd County Administration Building.

Water and Sewer Committee

Commissioner Bojo announced that the Water and Sewer Committee will meet next on Thursday, October 7th at 9 a.m. in the Sam King Room.

Public Works/Traffic/Transit

Commissioner Cochran announced that the Public Works/Traffic/Transit Committee will meet on Wednesday, October 6th at 9 a.m. in the Sam King Room.

Health Department – COVID

Commissioner Cochran provided some statistical information regarding COVID rates in our community. He stated that, locally, 17% of the population has received at least one shot and 15.5% of the population has received two vaccine doses. There were seventeen additional COVID related deaths in our local hospitals over the past week.

Commissioner Davis reminded everyone that COVID vaccinations are free and are available at many locations in our community.

Special Committee on Housing

Commissioner Davis announced that the next meeting of the Special Committee on Housing will take place on Wednesday, October 6th at 4 p.m. in the Sam King Room.

David Clonts – ULDC Board of Adjustments

Commissioner Doss moved to approve Mr. David Clonts to serve as a City appointee to the ULDC Board of Adjustments. Commissioner Quick seconded, and the vote was unanimously in favor.

Tayesha Lytle – Downtown Development Authority

Commissioner Doss moved to appoint Ms. Tayesha Lytle to serve on the Downtown Development Authority. Commissioner Quick seconded the motion, and the vote was unanimously in favor.

Rome/Floyd County Planning Commission

Commissioner Quick announced that the Rome/Floyd County Planning Commission will meet next on Tuesday, October 5th at 2:30 p.m. in the Sam King Room.

Fiddlin' Fest

Commissioner Quick announced that the 2021 Edition of the Downtown Development Authority's Fiddlin' Fest Block Party will take place on Saturday, October 9th from 12 noon until 6 p.m. Portions of Broad Street will be closed during this annual Block Party event.

Task Force on Downtown Safety

Commissioner Askew announced that the Task Force on downtown safety will meet next on Thursday, September 30th at 6 p.m. in the Sam King Room.

Vaccination Incentive

Commissioner Collins announced that there is a COVID vaccination incentive program that will take place on October 16th from 1 – 5 pm. at the Community Kitchen. Those getting vaccinated at this event will be entered into a raffle for a cash prize. This program is being sponsored by Georgia Power, Floyd Hospital, and other local businesses.

Adjourn

With there being no further business, Mayor McDaniel adjourned the meeting at 7:40 p.m.

Joseph F. Smith
City Clerk