

**HIGH POINT CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING
MARCH 4, 2019 – 9:00 A.M.
STRING & SPLINTER CLUB
305 W. HIGH AVENUE**

MINUTES

Present:

Mayor Jay Wagner, Mayor Pro Tem Jason Ewing (Ward 6); Council Member Britt Moore (At Large); Council Member Don Scarborough (At Large); Council Member Jeffrey Golden (Ward 1); Council Member Monica Peters (Ward 3); and Council Member Wesley Hudson (Ward 4)

Absent:

Council Member Chris Williams (Ward 2) and Council Member Jones (Ward 5)

Staff Present:

Greg Demko, City Manager; Randy McCaslin, Deputy City Manager; Randy Hemann, Assistant City Manager; JoAnne Carlyle, City Attorney; Eric Olmedo, Managing Director; Loren Hill, President-High Point Economic Development Corporation; Jeron Hollis, Director of Communication & Public Engagement; Ryan Ferguson, Marketing Manager; and Lisa Vierling, City Clerk

Guilford County Legislative Delegation Present:

NC Senate:

Senator Gladys Robinson (District 28)
Senator Michael Garrett (District 27)
Senator Jerry Tillman (District 26)

NC House:

Representative Cecil Brockman (District 60)
Representative Ashton Clemmons (District 57)
Representative John Faircloth (District 62)
Representative Amos Quick (District 58)

Others Present:

Fred Baggett, City's Legislative Counsel
Judy Stalder, TREBIC

News Media Present:

None Present

Mayor Wagner extended a warm welcome to everyone in attendance and hoped everyone enjoyed breakfast. He proceeded to provide an update on the many happenings in High Point. Of significance, he shared that High Point would soon be getting its very own baseball team—the High Point Rockers—and called their attention to the Nike High Point Rockers baseball cap as a token of the city’s appreciation. A personal invitation to attend the first game of the season was extended. The first pitch at BB&T Point Stadium will be on Thursday, May 2nd. The High Point Rockers are in the Independent Atlantic League of Professional Baseball. He reported they are currently in the process of signing players, many of whom have played in the Major Leagues at some point in time and several of the players have North Carolina connections such as Seth Maness, who pitched recently at East Carolina University and for the St. Louis Cardinals.

He alluded to all the development going on around the stadium in the midst of a transformation of our downtown. Mayor Wagner explained that for decades High Point’s downtown has been about furniture and the Furniture Market and mentioned three years ago during a City Council Retreat, the Council set some very strategic goals. One of the goals was to build a catalyst project in downtown that became what is now the BB&T Point Stadium, which has sparked additional major development around the periphery of the stadium. In preparation, the city began purchasing property downtown and acquired 12 acres; the stadium is sitting on top of 7 acres of that. The remaining property was land banked with an agreement that the master developer will begin building more new buildings downtown. In April or May 2019, the master developer will break ground on his first of four proposed buildings which will include a hotel, two mixed-use buildings, and 250 apartments that will be built around the outfield wall of the stadium.

He shared that partnerships with the High Point Chamber of Commerce and some local foundations, paved the way to get control over the old Adams Hosiery Mill, which is now known as Plant 7 and is being used for a business incubator with a focus on craft furniture. It will be a co-living, co-working space for small manufacturers handmaking lots of different types of furniture and accessories. Also connected to Plant 7 will be the new downtown events center that was made possible by partnerships with Dr. Nido Qubein, High Point University and the Congdon Foundation. Dr. Qubein was also successful in acquiring property a few blocks away for the new children’s museum.

Another priority and goal set by the City Council was to focus on cleaning up the widespread blight in High Point and pointed out as a result out of 271 backlog cases, all have been addressed except one. He attributed much of this success to Council Member Golden, who serves as the chairman of the Community Housing, Neighborhood Development and Public Safety Committee. Mayor Wagner reiterated it is all about cleaning up the city and doing what is necessary to influence and increase the property values in High Point.

At the conclusion of the Mayor’s update, he referenced the 2019 State Legislative Priorities that staff put together and is seeking support from our legislators on. He then introduced City Manager Greg Demko and asked him to review these priorities. Fred Baggett, the City’s Legislative Counsel, also provided some details and back ground information on some of the legislation.

Note: A copy of the 2019 State Legislative Priorities will be attached as a permanent part of these proceedings.

The 2019 State Legislative Priorities were identified as follows:

1. Lexington Avenue Gateway Project. East Lexington Avenue is a vital east-west transportation gateway corridor passing through the heart of High Point that provides access to the 70,000 Furniture Market visitors twice a year and provides direct access to High Point University and to the northern end of High Point's business district, known as Uptowne. The project is listed in the current State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP U-6050) and has transitioned to management by NCDOT. The city staff is working with NCDOT staff to keep the project planning moving forward. The High Point MPO will resubmit the project for consideration later this year.
2. Police Department
 - a. Gaining access to NCDOT right-of-way for automatic license plate Readers. The issue is these automatic license plate readers cannot currently be placed in the state right-of-way
 - b. Addressing issues with NC Domestic Violence laws to gain compliance with Federal gun possession prohibition rules. Under the current law, many of the charges are not technically compliant with federal prohibition. Will work with the District Attorney, the association against Domestic Violence, and others to come up with amendments to state law to make sure guns stay out of the hands of those committing these acts.
 - c. Fighting a Whistleblower bill that only applies to NC Police Departments. (This bill can produce the unintended effects of not allowing a police department to take disciplinary actions when an officer is wrong and will negatively impact our community and their trust of the department if they see that we do not take action against potentially bad officers who will be allowed to continue to operate).
3. Local Government Employees Requesting extra benefits. The city is opposed to the extension of any extra benefits to classes of local government employees that are not offered to all classes of employees.
4. Library State Aid. Asking to support state aid to library at the current levels: a) \$5 million in recurring state aid to public libraries; and 2) recurring \$250,000 for NC Kids—a free online digital resource available through public libraries. This is the main access to e-content for some of the smaller and poorer library systems that cannot afford digital subscriptions.
5. Blight Reduction. The city requests consideration of amendments to N.C.G.S. 160A-424 to enhance High Point's ability to conduct inspections on properties found to be in the top 10% of crime and disorder. Currently, a property in the top 10% of crime and disorder problems makes the property eligible for a permit or registration program, but it does not establish reasonable cause to conduct an investigation. The city believes that properties found to be in the top 10% of crime and disorder should establish a reasonable cause for a minimum housing code inspection.

Mr. Demko thanked those legislators who helped in getting High Point and other cities across

the State Receivership, which is another tool in the tool box to help fight blight. He pointed out there is a correlation between blight and gang activity and that eliminating violence in High Point is critical.

6. State Mass Transit Funding. The Urban Transit systems of North Carolina were negatively impacted by a 26% reduction (\$8.5 million) in statewide funds for the annual SMAP allocation for the current fiscal year budget. Discussions have begun on the FY 2020 budget, and a number of initiatives are underway to encourage our state legislators to replenish the SMAP program funds back to the pre-2019 appropriations and consider increasing it.

Mr. Demko applauded Loren Hill and the High Point Economic Development team and shared that they are bringing in jobs and investment to the city. He reiterated that High Point suffered the loss of over \$100 million in property values downtown and pointed out the city is ahead of the game in the goal that was set to recover the value in ten years.

Mayor Wagner expressed appreciation to the State Legislators for their assistance in maintaining the funding for the High Point Furniture Market. He emphasized that the Furniture Market is the largest economic event in North Carolina bringing in \$6.7 billion in economic impact. The \$3 million we get from the State each year is used for transportation logistics during the Furniture Market.

The Mayor asked if there were any questions from the Legislators or anything that they would like to share.

Representative Cecil Brockman thanked the everyone for pushing the funding for the annual John Coltrane Festival that is held in High Point. He expressed concerns regarding the loss of the much-needed grocery stores (Food Lion, Save-A-Lot) that were in in food deserts. He asked what could be done to get businesses to come and stay to serve the crucial needs we have.

Mayor Wagner agreed that is a very complex issue because grocery stores look at the demographics and numbers. He pointed out the city has already started putting strategies in place and felt it was about turning the blighted neighborhoods around, reinvesting, and attracting affordable housing. He noted that the Council would definitely bring this topic up while visiting the representatives in Washington, DC to see if anything can be done to redo the regulations. He pointed out the Greater High Point Food Alliance was formed and felt they are doing a great job in tackling some of these issues (i.e. community gardens, selling at the Farmer's Market, access to food/food pantries, etc...), but in the longer term, it will take turning these neighborhoods around.

Randy Hemann, Assistant City Manager, thanked the Legislators for securing support and investing heavily in the city's Farmer's Market. He shared that the attendance increased from 3,000 to 15,000 after the investment and they have also seen a big increase in the number of vendors. He noted that statistically this support has greatly improved access.

Council Member Wesley Hudson added that he does a lot of work with the Food Alliance and pointed out that High Point has over a 10% immigrant population, and they want smaller markets, fresh produce, and fresh foods. He shared that smaller markets are more successful in those communities and maybe the answer is not big grocery stores.

Senator Gladys Robinson added that United Way has also been instrumental in tackling issues with food drops, starting food pantries, etc.... She agreed there are a lot of concerns that need to be addressed to tackle these issues and pledged to work aggressively to come up with a solution.

Knowing what High Point is dealing with as far as crime, Representative Amos Quick commended High Point for having crime on the legislative agenda. He shared that many residents are living in almost terror and commended High Point for making an effort in trying to make High Point safer.

Loren Hill, President- High Point Economic Development Corporation, mentioned that the Economic Development Corporation's Annual Report, which is a countywide document, was emailed out on January 31, 2019, and contains all the Guilford County industrial projects. He encouraged legislators to place a copy in their offices and thanked them for their assistance.

Mayor Wagner reported on Smart Growth America's recent visit to High Point. They have agreed to work with the city to attract and stimulate small scale manufacturing and will be studying the southwest High Point area, which resulted in a lot of blight in the surrounding neighborhoods when an old industrial site closed down. He commended the High Point City Council members for their willingness to do new things and for their receptiveness to new ideas. He pointed out the city has to plan its success, and in doing so, they are trying to get staff, the business community, and philanthropy community involved as well. He thanked everyone in the room for doing that and thanked the legislators for partnering with the city to make that happen..

Senator Jerry Tillman pointed out that North Carolina ranked #2 in the State to do business and noted this has been the best economy North Carolina has enjoyed in years.

Council Member Don Scarborough mentioned the impact that High Point University has had on the community and the redevelopment of downtown High Point and attributed it to Dr. Nido Qubein's leadership. Mayor Wagner agreed that much of the success would not have been possible without Dr. Qubein's leadership.

Representative John Faircloth reported that the Furniture Market is healthy and much to be proud of in Guilford County and High Point; however, the issues of education and healthcare still need to be addressed.

Senator Tillman mentioned an exciting project that Dr. Sharon Contreras, Superintendent of the Guilford County Schools, is working on regarding a workforce internship program. Mayor Wagner agreed that a trained workforce is a tiebreaker in getting companies/industries to locate here.

Senator Gladys Robinson mentioned the Medicaid expansion bill that she filed and noted they are trying to get bipartisan support for the bill. She asked for everyone's support.

Mayor Pro Tem Ewing mentioned the current attempts for privatization of ABC stores in North Carolina and advised that the City Council has a resolution opposing the attempt that will be considered in a future meeting. He stressed the importance to keep as much of the current legislation in place as possible and noted over \$430 million in revenues from sales are distributed out to communities with High Point receiving about \$2 million. Mayor Wagner agreed and noted the loss of those revenues will cause jurisdictions to raise property taxes to make up the difference. Council

Member Golden felt the privatization would make it more difficult to monitor liquor sales and with the current system in place it is easier to control.

Adjournment

There being no further questions or comments, the meeting adjourned at 10:30 a.m. upon motion duly made and seconded.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jay W. Wagner, Mayor

Attest:

Lisa B. Vierling, City Clerk