The Durham City Council met in a regular session on the above date and time virtually via Zoom with the following members present: Mayor Steve Schewel, Mayor Pro Tempore Jillian Johnson and Council Members Vernetta Alston, Javiera Caballero, DeDreana Freeman, Mark-Anthony Middleton, and Charlie Reece. Absent: None.

Also Present: City Manager Tom Bonfield, City Attorney Kim Rehberg, City Clerk Diana Schreiber and Deputy City Clerk Ashley Wyatt.

Mayor Schewel called the meeting to order, welcomed everyone in attendance, and thanked Deputy City Manager Wanda Page for coordinating the virtual meeting.

Mayor Schewel requested a moment of silent mediation in honor of Maryann Black, Ray Erkhart, and the unknown patient to lose their battle with COVID-19.

[CEREMONIAL ITEMS]

Mayor Schewel read into the record the proclamation recognizing National Community Development Week.

Mayor Schewel read into the record the proclamation recognizing National Crime Victims’ Rights Week.

[ANNOUNCEMENTS BY COUNCIL]

Council Member Alston read a prepared statement regarding her resignation from the Durham City Council effective April 9, 2020 at 11:59 p.m.

Mayor Schewel recognized that there were 34 emailed public comments and that they all regarded curb side service for local breweries. He also gave a brief report on the status of COVID-19 in Durham and asked Council Member Middleton to compose a prayer in honor of the various upcoming religious holidays.

[PRIORITY ITEMS]

There were no priority items by the City Manager, City Attorney, or City Clerk.

SUBJECT: REPORT ON THE CITY’S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

City Manager Bonfield read prepared remarks that highlighted the malware attack that affected the City of Durham, COVID-19, and also recognized all sworn and civilian city staff for their work to keep the city moving forward.
Jim Groves, Director of the Emergency Operations Center provided council with county wide updates regarding how the EOC was supporting city residents and providing resources in relation to the homeless population, food security, public health, and COVID-19.

Council Member Reece asked what was being done to assist families.

Mr. Groves responded that there has been an interagency task force created to address families that need assistance, specifically with young students.

Mayor Schewel stated that Durham Public Schools were also providing meals on a daily basis.

Deputy City Manager Bo Ferguson, provided an update on some of the services covered under the operations portfolio. Some of the services that were operational were the following: street repair, limited litter pickup, limited construction plan reviews, water waste and plants must remain online, fire investigations, foster care inspections, and water distribution. He also made special mention to some hundreds of staff members that were unable to telework and that had inquired as to when they would be able to return to work.

Council Member Reece asked if bulk pickup was suspended and if residents were being charged for yard waste pickup.

Mr. Ferguson responded that bulk pickup as well as fees for yard waste pickup had been suspended.

Council Member Reece asked if there was any feedback about how residents were complying with social distancing in trails and parks.

Mr. Ferguson stated that he did not have exact numbers, but there had been some complaints that were received.

Council Member Middleton thanked city staff for their hard work in keeping the city running he also asked if the city had enough Personal Protection Equipment to accommodate all of the City of Durham’s front line staff.

Mr. Ferguson stated that the city had all of the core basic equipment that was needed, however staff would continue to monitor any updated information on the CDC website that could require anything additional in the future.

Mayor Pro Tempore Johnson thanked staff and appreciated their work in managing the current crisis.

Mayor Schewel suggested that staff look into including more social distancing signage at the American Tobacco Trail.
Council Member Alston thanked staff for their hard work.

Sean Egan, Director of Transportation provided a report on transportation in the city. He stated that only rear doors were being used on buses, Durham station was being cleaned daily, para-transit was operational, Go-Durham had restricted hours, and fare was free for essential employees. He also recognized Go-Durham staff members for keeping service going.

Council Member Reece asked if there had been any conversations about closing certain streets to allow for more social distancing.

Mr. Egan stated that he had received feedback about certain places in the city dealing with overcrowding, specifically the American Tobacco Trail. He stated that his department would be looking into additional measures to continue to get the message out to residents about the need for social distancing.

Council Member Reece thanked the department for suspending the fees for on street parking that allowed for more residents to comply with social distancing when traveling to downtown.

Council Member Alston asked if there were any measures in place that allowed for social distancing on the buses.

Mr. Egan stated that there were voice announcements on the buses as well as signage to remind passengers to comply with social distancing requirements.

Council Member Middleton echoed the comments of Council Member Reece and asked if bus drivers had Personal Protection Equipment.

Mr. Egan replied that some bus drivers were choosing to wear masks and gloves; however, they were not being issued to them and that the department would continue to monitor the CDC for any updated requirements. He also stated that para-transit customers were being asked to meet drivers at the curb to limit their interaction with them as opposed to the typical door to door service.

Council Member Caballero asked if there were different standards for Go-Durham and Para-transit drivers.

Mr. Egan replied that there were different standards.

Mayor Schewel stated that he would like to see all bus drivers in the city wearing masks.

Mayor Pro Tempore Johnson stated that the CDC guidelines stated that the public should wear cloth masks when going outdoors and to reserve surgical masks for healthcare workers.
Chief Davis provided the following report on the Police Department and stated that there were new call taking protocols, only calls that required a Police Officer were being dispatched, additional updates to social media platforms, and internal documentation distributed to officers to ensure they receive the most up to date form of the stay at home orders. Chief Davis also recognized the Police Department for all of their hard work and appreciated the administration enacting premium pay for essential employees.

Mayor Schewel thanked Chief Davis for her report and for the work of the Police Department.

Council Member Reece thanked Chief Davis for her report and asked if police officers were wearing masks when dealing with the public.

Chief Davis stated that officers were wearing masks with any encounters with the public.

Council Member Middleton thanked Chief Davis for the work of the Police Department and asked if there was any restructuring to operations/priorities to limit the interactions between officers and the public.

Chief Davis stated that all calls would be dealt with; however, the manner in which they would be addressed would be different.

Council Member Alston thanked Chief Davis for her leadership and how she responded to the crisis.

Mayor Pro Tempore Johnson appreciated the leadership of Chief Davis and the work of the Police Department during the crisis.

Council Member Reece asked on behalf of residents, how the Police Department would be dealing with more people than normal wearing masks.

Chief Davis stated that during the global pandemic, people with masks would not necessarily stand out.

Mayor Pro Tempore Johnson thanked Council Member Reece for bring up the topic of residents wearing masks.

Collin Davis, Leader of the EOC Taskforce on homelessness provided the following report and stated that his taskforce was focused on three areas of people: Unsheltered, sheltered, and those existing jails and hospitals. He stated that the procurement of hotels for those people and those that were most medically vulnerable in congregant living facilities had taken longer than expected. He advised that although some people would be in hotels there would still be some people that remained unsheltered.

Mayor Schewel asked how quickly residents at shelters would be able to be moved into hotels once the Durham County Commissioners signed off on the contract.
Mr. Davis stated that they would possibly be ready move the residents on the day the contract was signed since room assignments had already been underway as well as other logistics.

Council Member Middleton asked if there were any other obstacles aside from the contract not being signed.

Mr. Davis stated that the hotel(s) had been working with the county to agree on the terms earlier in the day.

Council Member Reece asked how the healthcare needs of the homeless population were being met.

Mr. Davis stated that most of their healthcare needs were met by nonprofit organizations.

Council Member Reece asked about the social distancing requirements at the Durham Rescue Mission.

Mr. Davis stated that the Health Department would be better suited to answer that question.

Council Member Freeman asked if there would be a report coming on assisted living facilities and regarding coordination efforts with the Health Department.

Andre Pettigrew, Director of The Office of Economic and Workforce Development, gave the following report on his department and stated that businesses in the community were resilient, but that the road to recovery would be long. He advised that he would meet with stakeholders in virtual meetings to allow for exchanging of information, webinars were being provided to share information to the public regarding the provisions of the C.A.R.E.S Act, workforce solutions staff members had been deployed to process unemployment insurance claims and that additional information could be found on Durhambusiness360.com.

Council Member Freeman asked if the Hispanic and the Hispanic Professional Business Chamber had been included in any conversations surrounding business relief.

Mr. Pettigrew advised that they had not specifically been involved in any conversations.

Council Member Freeman asked for clarification on the Durhambusiness360.com website.

Mr. Pettigrew clarified that the website was to designed to feature a full range of support services for small businesses to access.

Council Member Freeman asked if the phone numbers and website information for NC Works was also included.
Mr. Pettigrew advised that the most direct way to get in contact with NC Works was through the NCworks.gov website.

Council Member Freeman asked if there were any handouts available that also included the website information.

Mr. Pettigrew stated that due to the social distancing policy that there were no physical handouts.

Council Member Caballero asked if there were any multi-lingual resources available for small business owners.

Mr. Pettigrew stated that his department was in collaboration with the Neighborhood Improvement Services department to assist with the Spanish language translation.

Mayor Pro Tempore Johnson asked how the city could convey information regarding assistance to residents who may have not been eligible for traditional unemployment benefits.

Mr. Pettigrew stated that he would rely on council to help with spreading the information that was primarily located on their departments website in addition to using a news release.

Mayor Pro Tempore Johnson asked if council could receive something to distribute to the public.

Mayor Schewel stated that he hoped the city would allocate funds to assist undocumented workers in the city that could not receive benefits elsewhere.

Bertha Johnson, Director of Budget and Management Services provided the following report by briefly highlighting topics that consisted of; the department moving forward with the budget process, 3rd quarter financial report being underway, sales tax revenue loss, next fiscal years' projections, preliminary budgeting, the city could lose 20% of discretionary spending, and public engagement in the budget process.

Mayor Pro Tempore Johnson requested suggestions/ideas from the BMS department on how best to use the fund balance to help with city needs.

Council Member Reece recognized the hard tasks that the BMS department would have to face in creating a budget and expressed his gratitude to Ms. Johnson and her staff.

Council Member Alston echoed the sentiments of Council Member Reece and asked for clarification regarding the sales tax revenue loss.

Ms. Johnson estimated that it would have been a 10% sales tax revenue loss.
SUBJECT: APPROVAL OF WARD 3 VACANCY PROCESS

Council Member Reece introduced the item, noted that the Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black people passed a resolution supporting a special election for the ward vacancy, and outlined a preliminary timeline for the council to vote on.

Mayor Pro Tempore Johnson asked if the timeframe to receive applications could be adjusted.

Council Member Reece advised that it could be adjusted.

Council Member Middleton thanked Council Member Reece for his work on the item and suggested that a special election move forward as opposed to the Council appointing someone. He cited the current pandemic and the monopoly of its adverse effects as reasons why a special election should have taken place.

Mayor Schewel called for a 5 minute recess of the meeting.

The meeting resumed at 10:05 p.m.

Council Member Middleton continued to express concerns for race equity and representation for being factors as to why the special election would best remediate the council vacancy and requested that his colleagues considered his proposal.

Mayor Pro Tempore Johnson thanked Council Member Reece for his work on the item. She stated that Council Member Caballero was appointed through the same process and although the pandemic would create challenges, the appointment was still something the council could do.

Council Member Caballero thanked Council Member Reece for his work on the item and thanked Mayor Pro Tempore Johnson and Council Member Middleton for their comments. She called attention to the City Council Meeting taking place that evening to demonstrate that city business was still moving forward and that the council appointment should have moved forward.

Council Member Freeman thanked Council Member Reece for his work on the item. She noted that inclusion, representation, staff involvement, and moving too fast with the council appointment process were concerns that she had and asked additionally how public engagement would be handled. She also stated that finding housing for the unsheltered, short term rentals, and assisting families with young children were more prudent as opposed to appointing a new council member within the proposed timeframe.

Council Member Middleton thanked all of his colleagues for the spirited discussion and noted that the city was currently operating under emergency functions and that the council appointment did not quantify as an emergency at that time.
Council Member Alston suggested that a council appointment could be a more accessible and inclusive way for people to join the city council. She stated that political campaigns required funding as opposed to filling out an application.

Council Member Freeman agreed with Council Member Alston, however she stated it was because of this reason that a 30 day turn around could be too fast for some people who were dealing with issues stemming from the pandemic who may have otherwise wanted to apply to be on council.

Council Member Middleton echoed the sentiments of Council Member Freeman.

Council Member Reece relayed the vacancy process:

4/13 Notice to be posted in newspapers, website, public affairs/social media, sunshine list – English and Spanish – application, questionnaire and vacancy ad
4/23 Work Session, applications due by 5 pm
4/27 Special meeting (morning) for 3-7 finalists, prior to W/S
4/30 Interviews conducted- Special Council Meeting (evening)
5/4 Council conducts vote to appoint, swear in at regular meeting

MOTION by Mayor Pro Tempore Johnson, seconded by Council Member Caballero, to accept the resignation of Ward 3 Council Member Vernetta Alston effective April 9, 2020 at 11:59 p.m. was approved at 10:43 p.m. by the following vote: Ayes: Mayor Schewel, Mayor Pro Tempore Johnson and Council Members Alston, Caballero, Freeman, Middleton and Reece. Noes: None. Absent: None.

MOTION by Council Member Reece, seconded by Mayor Pro Tempore Johnson, to approve the vacancy process as proposed, was approved at 10:46 p.m. by the following vote: Ayes: Mayor Schewel, Mayor Pro Tempore Johnson and Council Members Alston, Caballero, and Reece. Noes: Council Members Freeman and Middleton. Absent: None.

[ADJOURNMENT]

Seeing no further business to come before the council, Mayor Schewel adjourned the meeting at 10:48 p.m.