The Durham City Council held a virtual Special Work Session on the above date and time with the following members present: Mayor Steve Schewel, Mayor Pro Tempore Jillian Johnson and Council Members Javiera Caballero, DeDreana Freeman, Mark-Anthony Middleton and Charlie Reece. Excused Absences: None.

Also present: City Manager Tom Bonfield, City Attorney Kim Rehberg, Budget and Management Services Director Bertha Johnson, Budget and Management Services Deputy Director John Allore and City Clerk Diana Schreiber.

Mayor Schewel called the virtual meeting to order and welcomed all in attendance.

Director Bertha Johnson introduced the agenda.

SUBJECT: REVENUE LOSSES

Director Johnson summarized the balances and impacts from COVID-19 on property tax, sales tax, occupancy tax and Powell Bill collections as of the end of the FY3Q. Property tax collections would remain stable as payments had been made to the city’s coffers in December 2019/January 2020; however, sales tax collections were expected to be down in the coming reimbursement months. Utilizing Fund Balance for operations was a result of the challenges to modify the budget during the pandemic. Staff was ensuring that a plan was in place with a feasible strategy. Review of the General Fund Multi-Year Plan prompted the following questions:

Q: Where were the revenues from the sale of the West Chapel Hill parcel included in the figures?
A: No revenue had been built into the model for the sale. It was noted that the funds would flow into the General Fund. From there, Council would determine the placement of the appropriations.

Q: What was the biggest risk the city was facing? Sales tax? Other?
A: Sales tax collections and business regeneration, stalled construction, uneven footings of non-profits and basic uncertainty. It was predicted that the slowdown could continue into FY22. Saving Fund Balance was a priority. Pay and benefits may be impacted, if so the budget would have to be amended. Quarterly reports will be shared with Council regularly. It was hoped to bring back pay adjustments next year and to continue providing training of staff.
SUBJECT: PAY AND BENEFITS

Regina Youngblood, Human Resource Director, presented the staff report and stated there would be no pay increases, the allocation by the city into retirement accounts would be sustained, and health insurance benefit premium costs to employees increased. There had been 176 employees furloughed, the majority in Parks and Recreation and provided the demographics/gender. Premium pay was being paid to employees with external facing positions and five-weeks of COVID-19 leave was allotted to all.

Questions:

Q: How was it decided who would be furloughed? Was racial equity considered?
A: To be sensitive to the impacted employees and to protect privacy, the demographics and positions would be provided to Council by email and rationale in the upcoming presentation by the interim Parks and Recreation Director.

Q: Can a summary of job titles and functions of the furloughed employees be shared with Council.
A: Yes. Additional information would be provided in the staff reports.

Q: Have full-time Parks and Recreation employees been furloughed?
A: No.

Q: When will the part-time furloughed workers be brought back?
A: Parks and Recreation is working with reopening government plans – estimated mid-July to September to slowly reopen. Considerations were parking, school crossing and water programming. Summer programs that were not being provided this summer, provided the basis of the rationale for letting to the part-time employees servicing those programs.

Q: Was there a staff person in every department that reminded employees of wellness opportunities?
A: Yes, every department has a HR Champion that served the purpose.

Q: Is there a benefit guide for Council Members?
A: Yes, it will be re-sent to Council.

Q: Were racial equity and gender tethered to the furlough decisions?
A: The furloughed positions were associated with temporarily halted programs of which the support staff were predominantly women and African-American.

Mayor Pro Tempore Johnson began presiding over the meeting.
SUBJECT: GENERAL SERVICES- REPORT

Jina Probst, Director of General Services, presented the staff report by updating Council on the COVID-19 response, and to share the changes in operations with budget highlights. She stated that custodial services and facilities maintenance were integral to the COVID-19 response.

Q: Were personnel services due to pay for performance, current year implemented or not in FY20-21?
A: The increases were instituted in FY19-20 as implementation of the pay study hit General Service employees; date of implementation was Jan. 1, 2020.

Q: What impact would the economy have on the operations of the Ballpark and DPAC?
A: City Manager Bonfield would update Council on the two facilities. He noted that the DPAC’s year would end favorably; however, next year’s impact was unknown. He explained that there was no General Fund exposure from the DPAC.

Council appreciated the Director’s performance during this difficult time.

SUBJECT: PARKS AND RECREATION - REPORT

Interim Parks and Recreation Director Joy Guy presented the staff report; she introduced her team and explained the changes in operations prompted by the pandemic. She transitioned staff to telecommuting, maintained connectivity with her team via Zoom check-ins and noted a number of employees had completed certifications. Part-time employees were furloughed due to loss of programs and facilities; and explained the phased reopening plans (I-IV)

Council discussed the need for youth programming during the summer months; stated there was no cessation of gunfire during the pandemic.

Questions:

Q: What facilities are possible to open?
A: City lakes are re-opening on a limited basis with social-distancing on-the-bank fishing and self-launches at Lake Michie; a lottery system was established to assign fishing times and no motorized rentals have been permitted. Special handling of life preservers with reduced point of contact has been implemented.

Q: What are the plans for outdoor pools?
A: Since there is a state mandate limiting mass gatherings to ten persons, the question of how to open a pool to small groups was addressed. Due to the weather, there is expected to be lot of demand. Pools were expected to reopen in 2021. City Manager Bonfield explained that the policy was reflective of peer NC cities.
Q: Which trails are less crowded?
A: Third Fork Creek and Ellerbe Creek trails are less crowded- this information would be helpful on social media.

Q: When would baseball leagues be able to re-access facilities?
A: Depending on the guidelines of the NCHHS that related to sporting events, baseball, softball and longball. There were concerns expressed about a summer without youth activities in place.

Council reiterated 76% of the furloughed staff were African-American and 78% from Parks and Recreation, it was difficult to understand, an equity issue and that persons working at the margins were vulnerable.

SUBJECT: TRANSPORTATION – REPORT

Sean Egan, Director of Transportation, presented the staff report that included a request for one, new full-time employee as a Business Services Manager; updated Council on NCDOT’s funding crisis that impacted 12 city projects.

Q: Can CARES funding support the new position?
A: It was estimated that it could supplement 1/3 of the expense, but this fact would be researched before it could be confirmed.

Q: How to ensure safety of the paratransit employees?
A: A lot of effort has gone into sourcing the availability of protective equipment for paratransit staff.

Q: What percentage of riders are wearing face coverings?
A: From 10% to less than 50% of the riders were wearing face coverings. GoDurham communications staff were intent on educating riders and the joint project of face coverings would provide transit riders with the needed PPE.

Council appreciated Mr. Egan’s leadership and encouraged him to bring back furloughed employees as soon as it was possible; asked how would excess parking be handled in the next 12-18 months; appreciated staff’s adoption of methods for restaurants to conduct berm-side delivery operations; supported closing streets into Bike Boulevards and favored corridor improvements; and encouraged racial equity along the lines of fines and fees.

In response to racial equity concerns, Mr. Egan responded that 90% of the ridership consisted of persons of color and that city staff were strong partners who advocated for transit services and investment therein.

City Manager Bonfield spoke to the resumption of city services and levels that would involve incorporating staff from the Equity and Inclusion Department.
Additional discussion ensued regarding:

How to pay for the Business Services Manager with shifted funding sources.

Workforce Statistics. More information was requested on workforce statistics of part-time workers at Parks and Recreation, specifically, those working 5-25 hours/week; and a list of job titles and demographics on the furloughed workers.

A request for an organizational chart similar to the one utilized by Transportation of who was furloughed and who kept working from the part-time staff.

Appreciation was given to the custodial workers who have persevered throughout the pandemic and were deserving of accolades.

It was announced that Cynthia Greeley, local Durhamite, won the James Beard Award in Journalism.

Council thanked staff and with special mention of the new interim and appointed directors who were succeeding in their new roles.

Gratitude was given to the City’s First Responders in PD and Fire, as well as, Emergency Services.

Thoughts were shared about the loss of loved ones, Andrea Harris and Marianne Black.

Solidarity was voiced to the late George Floyd who passed in Minnesota at the hands of police; and sent prayers to the Floyd family. Black lives matter.

The Special Work Session adjourned at 1:27 p.m.

Diana Schreiber, CMC, NCCMC
City Clerk