



Minutes of the Roanoke Rapids City Council

A regular meeting of the City Council of the City of Roanoke Rapids was held on **Tuesday, May 19, 2026, at 5:30 p.m.** in the Council Chambers at the Lloyd Andrews City Meeting Hall.

Present: Emery G. Doughtie, Mayor
Sandra W. Bryant, Mayor Pro Tem

W. Keith Bell) **Council Members**
Andy Jackson)
Rex Stainback)
Curtis Strickland)

Kelly Traynham, City Manager
Geoffrey Davis, City Attorney
Traci Storey, City Clerk
Carmen Johnson, Finance Director
Christina Caudle, Human Resources Director
Larry Chalker, Public Works Director
Ashley Thomas, Main Street Director
Kristyn Anderson, Planning & Development Director
Kelly Daughtry, Parks & Recreation Director
Richard Cook, Fire Chief
Lawrence Wiggins, Police Chief

Mayor Doughtie called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Mayor Doughtie provided an invocation. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Adoption of Business Agenda

Mayor Doughtie asked Council members if there were any known conflicts of interest with respect to the matters before them this evening and called for a motion to adopt the meeting agenda as presented.

There being no conflicts, motion was made by Councilman Bell, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Bryant, and unanimously carried to adopt the agenda as presented.

Public Comment (Scheduled)

Ephraim Brodsky

Mr. Brodsky gave a handout to City Council and said on the back he included links to his letter to RRSpin, Boylan's study, *Should Cities Disband Their Police Departments?*, and the predictive financial model he built regarding the future of the City.

He stated he knew they were listening because at the last meeting the Mayor asked what percentage of the City budget goes to personnel expenses. The City Manager noted that the City provides preferred services that they are not required to provide and the Finance Director pointed out that the City's tax rate is the lowest in the region. He's raised all of these issues before, and they go to the hear of what they can afford and what they choose to prioritize.

He continued to say at the department head budget request meeting, close to six million dollars in basic infrastructure repair needs were requested, yet the budget amount proposed by the City Manager at the last meeting is actually lower than last year's budget. That tells him they are still trying to do more with less, and that is exactly why this discussion matters.

Mr. Brodsky said they have to be honest about the bigger picture. They live in the fourth poorest county in the state and Carolina Forward recently published a report saying that more than 41% of personal income in our county comes from government checks. That means a large part of the local economy already depends on public money. In a place like this, every budget decision matters even more.

The research and City budget scenario point to the same basic idea: if they keep doing things the same way, they keep getting the same results. They stay under pressure, taxpayers stay under pressure, and there is less room to invest in the services people actually use every day.

He stated Boylan's study suggests that disbanding a police department can reduce costs and harmful outcomes without increasing overall crime. That means Council should judge this not by habit or by who speaks the loudest, but by what works best for a small community that is always under a spotlight. The real question is not whether law enforcement matters; it is whether the current structure is the best and most affordable way to provide public safety for the whole city. If the City chooses dissolution, the City gains breathing room. That gives them a chance to lower the tax burden, protect basic services, invest in parks, roads, and services that promote civic engagement — the things families actually see and feel in daily life.

Mr. Brodsky said they should be honest about the larger picture. All of the public schools in the region have been facing sharply declining enrollment for the past decade, which is another sign that our community needs a stronger long-term strategy, not just the same old structure. That raises a fair question about why they should keep paying for overlapping services and duplicate costs when they are already struggling so much at the local level. This is a hard decision, but the facts matter. Transferring law enforcement to the Halifax County Sheriff is not about weakening the City, it is about making the City more stable, more affordable, and better prepared for what comes next. Raising taxes to pass another operational budget while the infrastructure crumbles is not an acceptable solution.

Mr. Brodsky shared information from the County's land use meeting. Last week, they had a public land use meeting at the 4H site in Halifax where they unveiled the plan for their parks and recreation department that they've built on a county level. Right now, the plan includes nothing in the 27870-zip code. That includes Roanoke Rapids incorporated and unincorporated area of Roanoke Rapids. That represents 26,000 of the 45,000 people that live in this community. They have no plans for them. They are building a state-of-the-art athletic facility at the 4H site in Halifax. Halifax has the population of 165 people.

He said they are helping Hollister, an unincorporated community, build a sewer system. If they wanted amenities, they should incorporate. That's what Roanoke Rapids does, they incorporate and they pay a city tax and that covers their amenities. They are also partnering with Hollister to build a recreation center down there in the farthest south portion of the county. That's great, everybody deserves services, but the reality is that Native American tribes have access to funding mechanisms that they don't. That's the truth. That the whole truth and they have hard decisions to make. He knows that the timing for this decision is probably poor because now the news has come out that Mattel is going to build something here and everybody's thinking that's going to save them. The reality is that it won't. The only department that stands to gain from Mattel coming is tourism because they are going to pull a 5% hotel occupancy tax from every room. But the City will not see that money. That hotel while in Roanoke Rapids is going to burden the City's services. It's going to bring up the costs for everything, and the money is going to be redistributed throughout the county. The sales tax money will go to everybody, not just the City. These are things they need to think about when they're making these decisions. These decisions are hard for a lot of them. They have former law enforcement on Council, and a lot of people are law enforcement adjacent. But law enforcement people will get jobs. There is a shortage in the community. This isn't going to hurt the people; it will help them. Please make the right decision.

Public Comment (Unscheduled)

Joey Davis

Mr. Davis said he has been here for 46 years. He was a delivery driver in two locations where these things occurred. There were two things that brought this town down. Number one, the cotton mills. The greatest thing in the world was the unions coming to town. The union came to town and now look at the mills; they shut them down. The next thing is the Theatre. He was out there when it was built. They had to have this land from Weldon. They needed to annex this land from Weldon. They had to have it for Roanoke Rapids. So, they got it. It failed. He did not blame the people that bought it. They got a steal of a deal. He confirmed there was still \$5M owed on it. If it had been sold at a regular price, look what those millions of dollars could be doing for this city, fixing up different things. What really gets him now is they're paying the debt. If you ride by there now, low and behold, Weldon is on the building. The same people they took the land from. Hat's off to Weldon – well done.

Troy Williams

Mr. Williams said he moved here when he was 18 years old. He's worked hard to get everything he's got, and he has achieved a lot. He knows they are talking about raising taxes, but he went through a few of his rental houses just to see how much his tax value went up in four years. His house on Seventh Street went up \$20,000 in value in four years. His house on Hunting Ridge Road went up \$65,000. He said his house on Washington Street went up \$61,000, his house on Eighth Street went up \$36,000. Everyone talks about how they have not raised a percentage up, but he thinks that added up to \$182,000. That was just four of his houses; he has 29 houses. He said he did not understand where all of this money was going. He looked at what he paid five years ago and what he paid today and it's almost doubled. He thinks there are 6,895 homes in the city of Raonoke Rapids; where is all this money going.

He said in 2007 when he bought his house on Hunting Ridge Road, he was paying \$1,119 a year in property taxes. In 2022, it was \$3,162. In 2025, he paid \$4,075. That's four times as much as he was paying when he first moved into his house 19 years ago.

He said he owns 30 houses. People think all this is falling on the homeowners, but when your taxes go up like this it hurts the renters too and other people. Because if he is paying three times as much in taxes on his stuff, that means he's got to trickle it down and he doesn't like doing that because he does care. He knows everybody is struggling in Roanoke Rapids. He was just going to fix up a house that he was getting \$700 a month for and spent \$20,000 on this house. Now he is getting \$900 a month. So he spent \$20,000 to get \$200 a month because he does care what his stuff looks

like and wants to keep his stuff up; he was not a slum lord. He wants to understand where all this money is going because he was just talking about what his went up for 30 houses. There are 6,865 more houses in Roanoke Rapids that went up too. All his other houses are going up between \$5,000 and \$15,000 each. He wished everybody knew where the money was going because if he was paying three times as much taxes as he was four years ago, where is the money at; where is it going.

Brian Forbes

Mr. Forbes stated he has lived here all his life, his parents grew up here. He was also a volunteer at the Roanoke Valley Rescue Squad and has been volunteering there for about 30 years. His father and grandfather volunteered there. He was speaking tonight to give them an update. He was the new Commander for the rescue squad. In 2025, Roanoke Valley responded to 1,078 calls and this resulted in the volunteers volunteering over 21,000 man-hours that they gave to the community. Turning that into a dollar value, that dollar value would be very near to \$800,000. In 2025, they spent a total of 720 hours in training. They are well above that now and at this point they will probably double that for this year. They have also been trying to streamline their operations and try to do more with less.

He stated he knows this has got to be the worst time to ask, but he asked them to strongly consider a 2 cents increase. The squad desperately needs that 2 cents they had asked for earlier in the year. He knows that you have got some very difficult decisions to make, but Roanoke Valley does provide fantastic value for the dollars they get. He thinks they are in the neighborhood of \$86,000 in 2025, and they were able to provide almost \$800,000 of value. They are on track to surpass that this year.

Mr. Forbes said the problem they are running into is they don't have the funding to replace aging equipment. Their first-out truck, the one they depend on most, is well over 20 years old. Everyone knows that there is a missing person going on right now at the boat ramp here in town. Their first-out boat is 44 years old. When that call came in, that boat wouldn't run. They had to depend on outside agency to come to help them out with that. It took a couple of days to get parts and get things together to get that boat running. It does run now, but again, they are responding to these emergencies on a boat that's 44 years old.

He requested that they strongly consider a 2-cent increase. It is vital to the squad's operation. If he didn't believe in the squad and he didn't believe the squad had value for the citizens, he wouldn't be standing here in front of them.

Approval of City Council Minutes

Motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Bryant, seconded by Councilman Stainback, and unanimously carried to approve the May 5, 2026, Regular City Council Meeting minutes as drafted.

New Business

Consideration of Budget Ordinance 2026.21 (Fire Department Donation)

Finance Director Johnson said the Fire Department received another donation for the Veteran’s Breakfast in the amount of \$250. She presented the following ordinance for their consideration:

**Ordinance No. 2026.21
CITY OF ROANOKE RAPIDS
BUDGET AMENDMENT**

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ROANOKE RAPIDS:

SECTION 1. The following additional amounts are hereby appropriated for the operation of City Government and its activities for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2026, according to the following schedule:

SCHEDULE A – PROJECT FUND REVENUES

Fire Dept. – Veteran’s Breakfast Donations	
Project Revenues	<u>\$250.00</u>
FUND PROJECT TOTAL	\$250.00

SECTION 2. The following additional revenues and reductions in appropriations are available for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2026, in order to meet the foregoing appropriations, according to the following schedule:

SCHEDULE B – PROJECT FUND EXPENDITURES

Fire Dept. – Veteran’s Breakfast Donations	
Project Expenditures	<u>\$250.00</u>
FUND PROJECT TOTAL	\$250.00

SECTION 3. This ordinance shall become effective upon adoption.

Emery G. Doughtie, Mayor

Motion was made by Councilman Strickland, seconded by Councilman Jackson, and unanimously carried to adopt Ordinance No. 2026.21 in the amount of \$250 for donation to the Fire Department for the Veteran’s Breakfast.

Consideration of Budget Ordinance No. 2026.22 (Main Street/Liberty on Main)

Finance Director Johnson stated Main Street received entry fees in the amount of \$300 for the Liberty on Main Parade and Festival for July 4th. She presented the following budget ordinance for their consideration:

**Ordinance No. 2026.22
CITY OF ROANOKE RAPIDS
BUDGET AMENDMENT**

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ROANOKE RAPIDS:

SECTION 1. The following additional amounts are hereby appropriated for the operation of City Government and its activities for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2026, according to the following schedule:

SCHEDULE A – PROJECT FUND REVENUES

Main Street – Entry Fees to Main Street for Liberty Main Parade/Festival Project Revenues – Main Street	<u>\$300.00</u>
FUND PROJECT TOTAL	\$300.00

SECTION 2. The following additional revenues and reductions in appropriations are available for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2026, in order to meet the foregoing appropriations, according to the following schedule:

SCHEDULE B – PROJECT FUND EXPENDITURES

Main Street – Entry Fees to Main Street for Liberty Main Parade/Festival Project Expenditures – Main Street	<u>\$300.00</u>
FUND PROJECT TOTAL	\$300.00

SECTION 3. This ordinance shall become effective upon adoption.

Emery G. Doughtie, Mayor

Motion was made by Councilman Stainback, seconded by Councilman Bell, and unanimously carried to adopt Ordinance No. 2026.22 in the amount of \$300 for entry fees to Main Street for the Liberty on Main parade and festival.

Consideration of Audit Services for Fiscal Year 2025-2026

City Manager Traynham reported a couple of months ago the City’s long-time auditor informed administration that he would not be renewing the contract for the current fiscal year and beyond due to retirement. This left them in a position they have not been in for about 20 years. Administration brought the matter to City Council’s attention and completed a request for proposals (RFP) process for auditing services under the guidelines from the Local Government Commission. At the close of the RFP

process on May 13, 2026, at 3:00 p.m., the City Finance Director received one proposal. That proposal has been submitted to City Council for their consideration. The one proposal meets the criteria, but the City's purchasing policy, which is fairly outdated, stipulates the minimum of three bids. This policy is more restrictive than the procurement policies established and set forth by the State of North Carolina and federal levels which call for a reasonable number of responses to an RFP. Combined with the City's good financial standing and the difficulties that exist in trying to find a municipal auditor, staff believe it may be reasonable to only receive one bid response. According to the general statutes, this is a decision that rests with the City Council to appoint and approve an auditor to contract with. If the City Council want to move forward with this sole responding firm, the approval will be subject to the City Council waiving the policy and accepting one bid instead of three. Alternatively, City Council could direct staff to advertise another RFP process. It will probably take at least 30 days and bring that back to them. The end of the fiscal year is approaching on June 30th.

She added that audit contracts are for one-year terms. Administration requested an estimate of three years of fiscal year accounting which includes the current year – FY2026, FY2027 and FY2028. Those estimates are relatively competitive with what the City has been paying the current auditor and in line with the budget.

City Manager Traynham asked for City Council to either provide a motion to waive the policy and approve the responding firm, BRC, for entering an audit contract or to readvertise and go through another RFP process with the understanding that they may not receive any other responses.

Councilman Bell asked if the firm met the City's required criteria. City Manager Traynham replied from what she gathers is yes. They met the expectations and serve several communities in North Carolina. Across NC, there are probably over 100 municipalities that still cannot get an auditor to work for them. They could be small cities and towns, so they do not know what their situations are. Municipal auditors are becoming more difficult to find. She did not want City Council to feel pressured with either one of the options but needs direction from them to either pursue a contract with BRC or readvertise.

Mayor Doughtie asked if the current auditor contract was year to year also. City Manager Traynham replied yes.

Mayor Doughtie stated the fee for this firm was fairly within range. City Manager Traynham replied it is what they would expect from their current auditor. If City Council selects to contract with BRC and have a good year, they will not have to go through another RFP process next year. They can consider a new contract with them

next year. Annually, City Council is required to enter a new contract so there are no long-term obligations. They hope to develop at least a 5-year relationship with an auditor with the level of work and detail required. The current request is for one year.

City Attorney Davis added he was dreading the day when Mr. Redman would retire because they've had such a good relationship with the City. By law, they are supposed to have audits every year and the City has always done that and done very well with those audits. As the city manager said, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find folks to do municipal audits and they are in demand. He was surprised when he saw how reasonable the quote was. Even though the City has this purchasing policy, they are not required to have it in this case. It is certainly more restrictive than what most other municipalities would have. There is absolutely no legal problem with City Council waiving the policy since it has been advertised and solicited. It is City Council's decision to decide whether to waive the policy and enter a contract or to readvertise. Again, from a legal standpoint, there is no problem with waiving the policy.

Motion was made by Councilman Strickland, seconded by Councilman Bell, and unanimously carried to waive the current purchasing policy and enter a contract for audit services.

Presentation of Budget Message and Proposed Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Budget

City Manager Traynham presented the budget message and an overview of the Fiscal Year 2026-2027 budget. She stated this has been a very difficult budget year to balance. They are seeing a lot of effects of increased costs, especially in the wake of COVID and other events taking place globally. She summarized the following memorandum dated May 19, 2026, and budget revenues and expenditures spreadsheets (On file in Clerks Office):

Proposed Budget Message for Fiscal Year July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027 (FY27)

Pursuant to Section 159-11 of the North Carolina General Statutes (NCGS), attached is the proposed budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2026, and ending June 30, 2027, together with this budget message for the City Council's consideration.

This is a challenging budget cycle that is met with expenditures outpacing stabilizing revenues. I thank our entire management team for their assistance in the budget process and for continuing to prioritize the needs of our operational departments. I also thank our finance department staff for their assistance in preparing this proposal.

The recommended general fund operating budget for FY27 totals \$21,113,732. This represents an overall increase of approximately 6% from the FY26 adopted general fund budget.

The FY27 Revenue Estimate totals \$18,952,038, a 4% loss of revenues, or less \$884,016 compared to the current year revenue estimates.

The City Administration is recommending an ad valorem property tax rate of \$0.681 cents per \$100 valuation, a 4-cent increase from the current rate of 64.1 cents to generate an additional \$560,640 in property tax revenues. This ad valorem rate, in combination with other revenue sources including fund balance, will fund our operations for the coming year, although there were significant cuts made to bring the budget to the recommended amount.

Taking the additional tax revenues into account, the FY27 Budget requires \$1,601,054 undesignated funds to balance the budget.

This proposed budget is also reflected by the City's recent financial condition and operating performance. The audit further reflects strong tax collection performance and a solid General Fund position, all of which provide important financial context for the FY2026-2027 budget recommendation.

The current recommendation is to hold an additional budget workshop prior to holding a Public Hearing.

City Manager Traynham stated their relationship with Halifax County in the collection of the City's property taxes results in a much higher collection rate percentage due to the fact all taxes are on one bill. By contract, the County takes 2% off the top of the collections which equates to approximately \$200,000 per year. For the City, it would take one and a half positions to do the work. They feel the County collecting it and for the benefits of the high collection percentage to maintain that relationship with them. The City does collect the school district's portion from the County and disperse that to the Roanoke Rapids Graded School District for no charge or fee doing so.

She recommended City Council consider holding an additional budget workshop. She believes they have some difficult decisions that they will have to make in the future going forward. Her recommendation will always be to maintain the police department; that is not an option to save money. She is not recommending dissolving the police department in the budget. In fact, she is recommending funding them and providing some incentives for recruitment and retention of their valued law enforcement officers. Public safety expenses are very high, and it has grown exponentially globally. Public safety items are expensive and expensive to maintain. Compared to current ad valorem tax collections for the City, what they bill the citizens covers the public safety budget for police and fire including the retirement contributions to the State.

City Manager Traynham referred to the packet and reviewed the revenue summary. She stated the amounts shown for ad valorem taxes is based on the current tax rate.

It shows a 3% increase from last year so there has been a little growth. They are starting to see sales tax revenues starting to cool and level off.

She continued to review the FY2027 budget expenses. The spreadsheet shows the percent change between the current year's adopted budget compared to the FY2027 budget recommendation. She noted one of the major ones is for Information Systems that include IT and other securities involving software and internet devices especially for protecting confidentially and personal identifying information. The total recommended expenses are 6% higher than the current budget.

City Manager Traynham reviewed the following Departmental Expenses:

General Government Expenses

- Includes multiple departments: Administrative, Human Resources, Finance, Main Street, Legal, Elections, Legislative.
- Also includes liability insurances, leases and other expenses for the general government.

Public Safety Expenses

- Total budget is \$8.25M – 10% increase over current year budget
- Police – 64% of Public Safety budget
- Fire – 36% of Public Safety budget

Public Works Department Expenses

- There are multiple divisions that fall under Public Works: Government Building, Garage, Street, Solid Waste/Refuse, Cemetery
- The budget recommendation is a 3% increase over current year.

Parks & Recreation Expenses

- Includes: TJ Davis, Aquatic Center, Chaloner Rec, Jo Story Senior Center, Andrews Meeting Hall, Kirkwood, Library, Canal Museum, Parks and Special Programs.
- The budget recommendation reflects a 3% decrease over the current year.

Planning Expenses

- Total budget recommendation has a 1% increase.

She continued her presentation with Personnel Services. She acknowledged that the City's personnel costs are high. Most cities/towns and local governments average about 65% of their budget to personnel costs. They are a service industry. Unlike a private business where personnel costs may be lower, personnel services are the City's greatest expense at \$14.6M for FY2027. It is about a 10% increase compared to the

current year. It includes a 3% COLA for all full-time employees and a pay for performance incentive for merit increases to stay in line with The MAPS Group study that was completed and implemented this current year.

City Manager Traynham reviewed the Operating Expenses (Non-Personnel). This demonstrates the vast difference between personnel expenses and non-personnel expenses. The operating expenses for FY2027 are \$5M compared to \$14.6M for personnel costs. This shows no percent change for operating expenses. She stated she did not think the departments have any other places to cut because they are extremely lean. They have buildings, facilities and properties that need maintenance and improvements. They are having to cut out and defer projects in order to make a budget for other rising costs.

She referred to the page for Equipment/Tools which shows how they allocate their spending on just equipment and tool expenses. It reflects a 18% reduction to the current year.

She stated the Maintenance & Repair budget reflects a 9% decrease compared to the current year. This is not adequate to take care of the City's buildings, facilities, and properties. However, it is about deferring certain needs and needing some guidance and direction.

City Manager Traynham said since 2010 compared to 2025 actual budget, public safety personnel costs increased 61%. More importantly, the Local Government Retirement System from 2010 to 2025 increased 340%. The City does not have more employees now than in 2010; they have less employees in that department. This is a mandatory contribution. Those rates have increased every year. In 2010, the City's contribution was just under \$300,000. This current year, they are contributing over \$1.4M. She said the ad valorem tax revenues in that 15-year period have increased 38%. Unrestricted intergovernmental funds including sales taxes increased 53% in that 15 year period. As a result, general fund revenues have increased 49% over that time. They are seeing a revenue decline as expenses continue to increase. She reported in 2025, the \$9.9M in property tax revenue essentially covered the public safety costs and \$1M LGERS pension contributions. There have been some efforts by the State to try to slow and study the LGERS contribution rates. The City supports legislation that tries to reduce the burden annually, but it continues to increase.

She stated this draft budget does not include some grants the City may or may not get.

Councilman Bell stated when they look at the large portion of the budget being personnel, they are actually kind of low compared to school systems. School systems

average around 75-80% is personnel including benefits such as retirement and insurance. Some may think that is a lot to put into the retirement system. As the city manager said, this is mandatory by the State. In one of his previous careers, he was an Army soldier and retired from that. He worked as corrections officer in a maximum security prison about 4-1/2 years. He was a teacher and then a school administrator for 19 years. When the wave came over the State Legislature in 2012, that group of people that took over and basically became the majority. They wanted to become more business friendly to attract businesses from out of state into NC. The state tax rate has been lowered consistently. One of the main places hit is the Department of Education. What he saw as a school administrator was the employee's retirement contribution was 6%, the school system's portion was 7%. The legislature started to chip away not just on school systems, but local government retirement system. They starting requiring local governments to start paying more; the employees' portion stayed the same. By the time he retired 10 years later, from where they came in 2012, the school system went from 7% to 22%. The City wants to save money and reduce stress on the citizens because that is purpose to be good stewards of the revenue they bring in. But, when the State does things like that, they need the public to be educated, and he hoped he did that tonight. Sometimes people make erroneous statements verbally, publicly or on social media and have not done their research to find out things like he just said. They can check on the State website and see the trends.

City Manager Traynham thanked Councilman Bell for his comments. She said for a civilian employee, about 21% of their paycheck goes to the retirement system before it hits their pocket. For law enforcement officers, it is about 23-1/2% of their paycheck.

Councilman Bell said to the law enforcement, employees of the fire department, finance, human resources and public works, they are worth every penny.

Councilman Jackson referred to the loss of revenues and asked City Manager Traynham what they were doing to try increase what they are losing business wise. He used the Town of Morganton for an example. They abated taxes on new businesses coming in but set a timetable for them to be built in a certain length of time to get a tax reduction and streamlined building permits. She said she was not familiar with their program, but the City moved its permit system online which has resulted in much faster processing. If he was referring to any incentives for new businesses, that is not included in the proposed budget. Ad valorem taxes were the City's largest single source of revenue, so consideration of a tax increase is the most efficient way to go about receiving that. They could increase their user fees.

She referred to another attachment City Council received in their packet, the proposed Fee Schedule for FY2027 (On file in Clerk's Office). Any proposed changes were highlighted. The solid waste fee is proposed to be increased by \$10 per year. This fee is part of the tax bill and would be for both residential and commercial users. The City has over 6,000 residential users. She reviewed the other proposed increases. She stated the fees go to offset some costs, but their fee structure is not cost-based because they are a public service. They try to make it affordable for residents to be able to use facilities and participate in programs. They welcome any suggestions for recommendations as the fee schedule is part of the adopted budget.

City Manager Traynham said they have until July 1st to adopt a budget. They have some work to do to consider some cost measures and set forth a plan looking into the future. The City has made some investments into some software programs they continue to implement. They believe that could help with reducing a couple of positions as certain retirements occur. Those services are keeping them from having to hire additional people to process things.

Councilman Stainback spoke to the comments that have been made in the community recently about ideas on how to make the town better. One of them being merging the City's public safety departments to volunteer groups, defunding the police department and letting the County take over. These are novel ideas in his opinion. A lot of this is being led by people that don't even live in the city. They don't depend on their public safety officers. He did not think it would work if they did away with the police department and fire department and become a place where everyone would want to come to. There would be no way he could support that in any form or fashion. He was not sure how many officers they were short now – it floats between eight and fourteen which is equivalent to two whole shifts of police officers. Several years ago, they had seven officers on shift, now they are lucky to work with four, sometimes three. Administrators are having to come out and work shift work on the weekends. He appreciates what they do and he knows times right now are lean. Hopefully, they will come out of this hole that was not created by them. A lot of debt was left for them many years ago. They do not owe nearly as much as they used to owe, and he can see the light at the end of the tunnel. He stated he would not support the defunding of the City's public safety.

Councilman Strickland said he concurs with Councilman Stainback on that. He cannot see defunding any public services, especially the police or fire department.

Mayor Pro Tem Bryant concurred with the other Council members. When she thinks about living in the city and having a response time of about three minutes compared

to maybe 45 minutes in the county. That alone makes her know they must keep their police department.

Councilman Bell said he concurs with the others on everything. The police and fire departments do a fine job, and they do a lot with little. They have a vested interest. Most of the people in the fire department and police department grew up here and they have family here. When you get people vested in the community, they do a much better job because their heart is in it. They do not look at pay first; they are just great people. Again, City Council appreciates everything they do.

Mayor Doughtie said he believes the City's main function should be to keep people safe. Police and fire make a prominent effort in that. He also concurs with the rest of Council about the safety of the citizens. When people talk about quality of life, being safe is about as high quality you can have. He thinks that helps when people are looking at relocating in this community that having a good fire department, a police department that is respected and gets the job done. City Council is proud of the employees that work here. He believes they need to keep that strong. It makes him feel good at night when he locks his door to go to bed and there are people out there working to keep them safe. They all appreciate it very much. He challenged anyone who would want to go out on shift at night with two or three people, he thinks they would have a real appreciation for those men and women out there performing a service for the citizens. It is very important. Anything else to him would be second or third down the line from police and fire. In his opinion, they got to have them. They have to have good ones and they do.

City Manager Traynham thanked the Mayor and City Council for their consensus on the matter of maintaining the police and fire services. They will continue to move forward without any changes in service levels.

Mayor Doughtie asked City Manager Traynham what did they need to do next.

City Manager Traynham replied they could hold a work session on June 2nd and hold a public hearing on another date. She recommended a work session on an earlier date and then hold the public hearing on June 2nd to receive comments. A public hearing is required to receive comments. Public input is desired. Facebook is not the forum for public comments. Administration understands people have busy lives and coming to a meeting can be a challenge. They could possibly create a limited forum for feedback on the budget. The most important thing is that they hear from people that have a vested interest in the community – residents, property owners. They know the citizens in general want quality facilities, they see the improvements just like they do. She commended the Parks & Rec department that has done a lot without almost

nothing by fundraising and donations to keep programming alive. They lost a significant amount of staff prior to 2010 and still continue to maintain things. This city was developed by the mill industry. The mill provided these parks and recreation facilities and schools. Now the mill is gone, and the City has a lot of property. There is a small town feel here. Looking at peers statewide, Roanoke Rapids is a small city and a gateway into North Carolina coming in on I-95. She believes there is still a lot of opportunity in the Entertainment District. She understands there is renewed interest there, but they still need to live in reality too. She suggested in the upcoming year, to create a budget committee to work towards making recommendations for efficiency improvements that could take place over the next three years to help reduce overall operating costs. Sitting down to make a budget for the annual fiscal year is not the time to throw out some major changes. It is their duty and responsibility to be responsible of taxpayers' funds and make the best use of it while providing services. The need for spending is going to continue to increase. Revenues can be challenging but they do see flexibility. Revenues have gone up and down over the years. A lot of it depends on what is happening on a global level, populations, economics and spending.

She said as for the work session, she can poll City Council tomorrow to schedule a date. City Council can still consider scheduling the public hearing on June 2nd as planned.

Councilman Jackson stated it is important for the public to understand that in 2018-2019, the City was operating off of a \$18M budget. In 2025-2026, it is a little over \$19M which is just an increase of 9.9%. But at the same in 2024-2025, the City Council that was here at that time elected to go down 2 cents on property tax to remain neutral which he believes hurt.

City Manager Traynham corrected Councilman Jackson that the 2-cent reduction did not bring them to revenue neutral. It was still above revenue neutral, but it did decrease.

Councilman Jackson continued to say that tires have increased by 25% in cost, gas has increased; it was \$2.72 a gallon in 2018. They are caught between a rock and a hard place.

Motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Bryant, seconded by Councilman Stainback and unanimously carried to schedule a public hearing on the proposed FY2027 budget at the June 2, 2026, City Council meeting.

City Manager's Report

City Manager Traynham deferred her time to Main Street Director Thomas to update City Council on things going on in the community.

Main Street Director Thomas stated they had a significant amount of business outreach happening. She has a Main Street Advisory Committee member that is going out with her; they have been out seven times. They are going out directly to businesses including the 100-800 blocks of Roanoke Avenue, 100-700 blocks of Jackson Street, and portions of east and west 10th and 11th Streets. On those visits they talked about what those businesses do, type or way they would like to receive information specifically from the Main Street department, such as emails, telephone calls, dropping by. She was surprised by how many preferred them to drop by. They also asked businesses about their interests, concerns and needs. They wanted direct feedback from business owners and help rebuild this program. Once they complete that, she will give them a more robust report on it.

She reported the Main Street Committee is coordinating the City's Liberty on Main Parade and Festival scheduled for July 4th which is tied to America's 250th. This includes the parade, vendor and participant coordination, public safety and planning and working with the public works department. This event is not just an activity; it is a way to bring people together and create foot traffic. Also, when they talked with the businesses in the district, they told them they would like to have their business information on a table there. That will allow people attending the event to know what businesses are downtown and uptown. She said the event will have music, vendors, a kids splash down where the fire department will have a truck out and get the kids wet. The parade route is on Hamilton Street. They are still seeking vendors, and they need to apply by June 15th. There will be a schedule of events. They plan to have a most patriotic contest, trivia showdown and music there as well.

Main Street Director shared information about the Wavemakers Youth Entrepreneurship Program. This is a youth entrepreneurship program designed to help middle and high school students learn about business basics, creativity, problem solving and confidence. So when they see problems, they see it as an opportunity to come up with solutions and that is what they want to have from young people. This is in support of Halifax Community College as well as Innovative Networking Group. This is a 4-day program, June 8-11, 2026, from 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. at City Hall, 1040 Roanoke Avenue. There is no cost to participants and breakfast will be served. Students must be rising 7-12 graders. For more information on this program and other activities, contact her at 252-533-2838.

She said there has been some beautification along Roanoke Avenue. Begonias have been planted in the planters. She thanked RRHS teacher Karen Forte and her students for planting them. The plants were provided by Littleton Plant Farm. This turned into more of a community event. Sieglenda and Wes Starling with Stephens Outlet saw what was happening and planted plants on the other side of Roanoke Avenue in the 1000 block also. They were not all provided by the City, some were private investment. She thanked Melissa and Tony with The Mill Coffee and Eatery for all they are doing for beautification of Roanoke Avenue.

She attended an event for seniors recently and held a senior community survey. Instead of just hosting events or hoping they know what people want, she asked people to get feedback, so they know what they are doing is what people are actually interested in. She received some good feedback. Seniors were interested in having a senior seating area, being able to have a shaded rest area and accessible parking so they will not have long walks to events. She assured them they would make sure that happens at Liberty on Main. They will also try their best to have Motown, beach music and line dancing at the event.

Councilman Jackson stated he was glad to see the entrepreneurship program. He asked if she knew about the entrepreneurship courses at Halifax Community College. Main Street Director Thomas replied yes, she was working with Kelly Barber with HCC's Small Business Network. She is assisting in two days of the program and providing subject matter experts for her. They are hoping these students will transition later and take these classes and stay in Roanoke Rapids. They want the young people to learn here and stay here, not learn then take all that good stuff elsewhere. They are starting younger, 7-12 graders.

City Manager Traynham spoke to the department heads/management team about all the work they put in developing and identifying their needs, getting estimates and finding out what they need then finding out the City cannot afford any of it. What tends to happen is they stop asking for it. Those needs continue to go undocumented. Since taking the position as City Manager, she has been committed to annually identify these needs and continuing to talk about them annually and keeping them on the record. When there are certain funding opportunities or grants, those needs are documented on the record. She thanked them for their efforts and the time it takes to do so and for the service they do for the community. Public service is a thankless job. Speaking on behalf of the employees, they care; they care about this community and improving it. Keep up the good work and she was proud to work among them. They will be a team and work through this together.

Finance Director's Report

Finance Director Johnson reported for the month of April 2026, General Fund year-to-date receipts totaled \$17,286,004.00 and year-to-date expenditures totaled \$16,028,613.00. As a result, year-to-date revenues exceeded expenditures by \$1,257,391.00.

She stated the City has revenues to collect for FY2025-2026 which include:

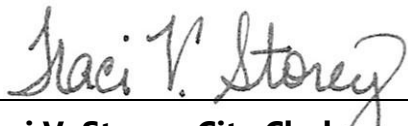
- **Ad Valorem** Tax for May & June
- **Motor Vehicle** Tax for May & June
- **Sales & Use** Tax for March – June
- **Hold Harmless** Tax for March – June
- **Utility Franchise** Tax Quarterly Payment in June
- **Beer & Wine** Tax Payment in May
- **Residential and Commercial Solid Waste Fees** for May & June

She said they will receive these revenues through August.

Mayor Doughtie asked how does this compare to where they were last year at this time. She replied they are dead even with last year's revenues at this time, 84% YTD.

Adjournment

There being no further business, motion was made by Councilman Stainback, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Bryant, and unanimously carried to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 7:07 p.m.



Traci V. Storey, City Clerk

Approved by Council Action on: June 2, 2026