

City of Pooler
Council Retreat Minutes
August 8, 2020
9:00 a.m.
Savannah Quarters

CALL TO ORDER:

Mayor Rebecca Benton called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

<u>Attendee Name</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Status</u>
Rebecca Benton	Mayor	Present
Tom Hutcherson	Mayor Pro Tem	Present
Shannon Black	Councilmember	Present
Aaron Higgins	Councilmember	Present
Stevie Wall	Councilmember	Present
John Michael Wilcher	Councilmember	Present
Karen Williams	Councilmember	Present
Robert Byrd	City Manager	Present
Matt Saxon	Assistant City Manager	Present
Chris Lightle	Chief Finance Officer	Present
Caroline Hankins	H. R. Director	Present
Steve Scheer	City Attorney	Present
Craig Call	Assistant City Attorney	Present
Ashley Brown	Chief of Police	Present
Wade Simmons	Fire Chief	Present
Phillip Claxton	City Planner	Present

The Mayor and City Manager welcomed the participants and stated the Council will hear from several presenters on major projects the City is planning.

1. Pooler Chamber of Commerce Update

Ms. Pam Southard and Mr. Jabron Webster with Pooler Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau, Inc. discussed upcoming activities of the Chamber including the creation of a new logo and mission change to include the larger Pooler trade area, not just the Pooler city limits. Ms. Southard stated their mission was to provide service to Pooler area businesses, not recruit new businesses to the area. City Attorney Steve Scheer noted that the hotel/motel tax dollars can only be spent for promotion of tourism as narrowly defined by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

Ms. Southard stated that the Port Wentworth Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem asked to enter into an agreement with the Pooler Chamber to provide tourism promotion services, but the Pooler Chamber has declined at this time.

2. Thomas & Hutton Presentation

Doyle Kelley, Danielle Easterly, and Lamar Mercer with Thomas and Hutton presented the results of the Pooler Parkway traffic study. The purpose of the study is to find alternatives to improve traffic on Pooler Parkway and reduce congestion. The study looked at eleven (11) intersections, including 3 intersections in downtown Pooler and potential new connections from the Pooler Parkway area to other areas of the City. Five (5) alternatives were presented. Each project was discussed in detail including:

- Alternative 1 – Intersection improvements with no new connections
- Alternative 2 – Extension to Durham Park Boulevard
- Alternative 3 – US 80 connection
- Alternative 4 – Extension to Durham Park Boulevard and a US 80 connection
- Alternative 5 – US 80 connection as a one-way road

The consultants preferred Alternatives were 1 and 4. The consultants propose:

- Roundabout at Tanger Outlets Boulevard and Tanger Outlets Main entrance (\$2 million)
- Dual lefts on Park Avenue at Pooler Parkway (\$800,000)
- Extension of Durham Park Boulevard from Pooler Parkway to Rogers Street (\$400,000 for the intersection improvement and \$4.3 million for the roadway extension)
- Connection to US 80 with two mini-roundabouts (\$5.9 million) or alternatively a connection to US 80 with one-way pair of streets (Rogers and Newton at \$2.9 million)
- Single land roundabout at Park Avenue and Canal Street (\$1.55 million)
- From I-95 to Benton Blvd: add a third lane on Pooler Parkway; construct a signalized RCUT at Pooler Parkway and Mill Creek Circle; dual right turn lanes onto I-95 southbound ramp; extend the left turn lane and add right turn lane onto Benton Boulevard (\$5,300,000)

Other identified projects included:

- Closing the median breaks along Town Center Boulevard
- Single lane roundabout at Town Center Boulevard and Maxwell Drive
- Add a mini roundabout at Maxwell and Traders Way

The total estimated total cost of these other identified projects is \$3.1 million.

Several Councilmembers had questions about the effectiveness of each project and possible sources of revenue to fund the projects such as fund availability from GDOT and TSPLOST.

3. Comprehensive Plan Update

Jackie Jackson, Director of Advance Planning and Special Projects with the Metropolitan Planning Commission delivered a presentation on the upcoming Comprehensive Plan update as required by Georgia law. She explained the purpose of the comprehensive plan, the minimum legal requirements, and the proposed timeline for completion. She also explained how the MPC will approach public involvement considering the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. She stated that as part of the process they would seek broad public input through surveys, both electronic and mailed, possibly pop-up events at the mall, or other city programs.

A copy of the draft contract for services by the MPC was provided to Councilmembers which will be place on the August 17th Council Agenda.

4. Finance

Chief Finance Officer Chris Lightle discussed the status of the CARES Act, stating the City will receive approximately \$400,000 for the first phase which can be used to offset public safety activities related to COVID-19. The program presumes all public safety activities are COVID-19 related.

Councilmember Tom Hutcherson asked if the City could use that money to provide personal protection equipment to nursing homes and other entities. City Attorney Scheer stated that it could possibly violate the Georgia gratuities law.

5. Public Safety

Police Department

Police Chief Ashley Brown reviewed the crime statistics over the past several years in Pooler. He noted a general decline in Part 1 crimes because of more proactive policing. He discussed the status of several high profile cases worked by the Crime Investigation Division including the apprehension of two murder suspects; the indictment of individuals involved in theft of \$2 million in stolen equipment; the seizure of cash, equipment, and drugs; the arrest of three individuals involved in entering autos. Those arrests resulted in 87 felony warrants; and the arrest of those involved in a multi-state large-scale theft ring which stole \$400,000 from a Pooler resident and a total of \$17 million from other victims.

Chief Brown discussed activities of the traffic unit which has resulted in a decline in crashes and crashes with injuries over the past three years. He discussed the increased number of citations for DUI, traffic citations, and warnings.

Chief Brown discussed changes in procedure for jailing those arrested for crimes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, changes in court procedures, including video arraignment, temperature checks, live scan, PPE requirements, and sanitation stations for entry into municipal court.

Chief Brown discussed the current policies of the Police Department related to dealing with civil unrest noting the high standards of being a State accredited department. He noted that while the State requires 20 hours of training per officer for law enforcement, Pooler averages 100 hours per officer including classes in de-escalation and cultural awareness, ethics, and use of force. He also stated that all instances of use of force is reviewed by three levels of command.

He discussed that additional training in the future will include hand-to-hand defensive tactics, active shooter training for mass casualty events, and an early warning system to identify potential problem staff that will track the use of force and disciplinary history for every officer. He also discussed the development of a policy review board. Councilmember Hutcherson complimented Chief Brown on the overall efforts of the Police Department.

Fire Department

Fire Chief Wade Simmons provided a mid-year update of Fire Department activities and 2021 department needs. He stated that currently the City is rated by the Insurance Service Office (ISO) as a Class 2. For reference, he explained that Class 1 represents the best public protection and Class 10 indicates no recognized protection. He stated that Savannah was currently the only Class 1 department in the area. Councilmember Hutcherson asked what more the City could do to lower the rating to a Class 1. Chief Simmons stated that there would be virtually no practical benefit or insurance benefit to residents at Class 1. Class 1 would show an increase level of protection to only commercial and industrial uses.

Chief Simmons reviewed the 2020 versus 2019 calls for service noting a 2.8% drop in call volume for the year. Chief Simmons reviewed capital assets and staffing of the Fire Department:

- Currently the Department has 5 staffed companies mobilized out of 4 fire stations
- 4 staffed fire engines and 1 staffed aerial ladder/rescue truck with 3-4 firefighters each
- 2 reserve engines (a 1998 and 1999 model)
- 1 reserve, 100-foot aerial tower truck (2009 model)
- 1, 3,000-gallon water tanker truck (1999 model, refurbished in 2020)
- 1 rescue squad which is currently out of service (1989 model)
- 1 reserve engine/aerial combo unit, with a 75-foot ladder (1999 model)
- 1 Georgia Search and Rescue truck, 1 brush fire truck & Polaris, and 1 rescue boat (He noted the rescue boat was recently used to rescue a driver from their vehicle when it was submerged in a pond)

Chief Simmons discussed 2021 staffing, equipment, and training priorities for the department including:

- Fire Station 5 – Jimmy Deloach Parkway (\$1,675, 000); he stated he needed 12 firefighters. He noted that the response time (10 minutes and 41 seconds) is double that of the rest of the City

- Additional equipment for New Rescue Squad (\$80,000)
- EMS Training/Safety Captain (\$25,000); this will involve reclassifying an existing firefighter position
- Active shooter safety equipment (\$78,000)
- Fleet replacement status: he noted that repairs have been completed on the 3,000-gallon water tanker truck and is in service and that repairs to the rescue truck are in progress and due to be completed January 2021. He stated that both the 1998 Fire Engine and the 1999 75-foot aerial ladder truck needed replacement. The estimated costs are \$655,000 and \$1.6 million, respectively.

Chief Simmons discussed Fire Station 5 (Nordic Drive & Nordic Way). He stated that this has been in the planning process since 2014. The coverage area for the station is 2.83 miles with an estimated population of 2,088 (assuming a 2.62 persons per dwelling unit). He stated the site which is approximately 1 acre was donated to the City. The building proposed will be approximately 10,000 square feet (8,000 sq. feet of bay and a living area). The estimated cost of the structure is \$1.5 million. He noted that homeowner insurance rates have increased in the area to \$4,000 annually. He stated the service area includes:

- 797 current homes in the Hunt Club, the Farms, and Magnolia Drive area
- 107 townhomes and 212 single family lots under development in the Hunt Club and the Farms
- Morgan Lakes Industrial Park with 10 warehouses and over 2.6 million sq. feet of space; an additional planned truck yard and more warehouses planned
- Fibertex Manufacturing located on Triple B Trail – 52,800 sq. feet
- 96,000 sq. feet of warehousing constructed by Congress Street Investors also on Triple B Trail
- Agro Cold Storage – 345,000 sq. feet on Nordic Drive
- TCW trucking warehouse and maintenance facility with 10,000 sq. feet and over 200 trailer storage slots
- Port City Logistics on Nordic Way – 236,520 sq. feet of warehousing
- 200 Nordic Drive warehouse – 230,000 sq. feet
- Lift Power Facility – 50,000 sq. feet

Chief Simmons discussed a new position EMS Training/Safety Captain. He stated that the position will supervise, oversee, and perform tasks associated with the day-to-day operations of Emergency Medical Services. He discussed in detail the job duties of the position.

Chief Simmons stated the cost to sustain the Fire Department for FY2020 will be \$5.5 million.

6. Public Works

Assistant City Manager Matt Saxon provided a status of the following projects:

- Wastewater treatment plant
- Road work on Louisville and Quacco
- Drainage project and Pipemakers canal

7. Recreation

City Manager Robbie Byrd briefly discussed the status of the artificial turf installed at the football field and the final phase of the recreation complex to include additional soccer facilities, which is the largest sports program by participation in the City. The improvement will allow the City to host soccer tournaments. He also stated that the project includes lacrosse fields.

8. Planning and Zoning

City Planner Phillip Claxton reviewed the significant changes to the zoning code update. Those major changes included:

- Expansion of the number of uses allowed in almost all zones
- Using NAICS numbers as much as possible for definitions of uses
- Addition of a process to appeal the decision of the zoning administrator (this would include interpretation of ordinances and is typical in most ordinances)
- Mild changes in the schedule of dimensions to slightly increase densities
- Slight lowering of the minimum parking standards
- Rewrite of the Mainstreet Overlay to make it consistent with the intent of the downtown master plan
- Addition of a Planned District Overlay that will allow a petitioner or Council at its discretion to make any base zone a planned overlay requiring a phased development approval
- Addition of a required traffic impact analysis for new development
- More clear buffer standard requirements between zoning districts
- Eliminating the 20-acre requirement in the R-4 District, townhomes to allow opportunity for smaller parcels to be rezoned for infill development
- Modification of the agricultural zones to protect ag uses and inhibit suburban sprawl

Mr. Claxon also identified possible changes needed in the future:

- A new zoning district for warehousing and distribution, removing those uses from I-1 and I-2
- A phase development review process in the Mainstreet Overlay
- A TND zoning district
- Amendments as a result of the comprehensive plan update process
- Amendment of the tree protection ordinance, specifically to allow more native canopy species

Councilmember John Michael Wilcher stated the International Code for swimming pool fences was only (4) four feet and asked why that had been changed to (6) six feet. Mr. Claxton stated that was per the request of Councilmember Stevie Wall. Councilmember Wall stated that he was fine with (4) four feet if that was the International Code.

Mr. Claxton distributed to Council and discussed a draft food truck ordinance. He also provided copies of a draft food truck application prepared by Occupational Tax Clerk Hadassa Villafana. He stated that the draft zoning code update allows food trucks as a permitted use in commercial zones and other locations. He stated that regulations are necessary if food trucks are to remain in the zoning code. A separate ordinance is being proposed instead of including it in the zoning code update.

Mr. Claxton stated that the regulations in the ordinance are similar to the City of Savannah's however does not allow food trucks on any public property. Food truck permits are limited to applicants who have a brick and mortar restaurant in the City of Pooler.

City Attorney Scheer and Assistant City Attorney Craig Call questioned the legality of limiting food truck permits to only Pooler restaurants. They stated the City clearly could require the applicant to have a tax occupation certificate in Pooler, however the limitation needed further review.

City Manager Byrd stated that it was unfair to restaurants in Pooler who pay property taxes in Pooler to allow food trucks from other cities to operate in Pooler. Councilmember Wall concurred with that sentiment and he would be opposed to any change allowing outside food trucks.

City Planner Claxton and City Attorney Scheer were directed by Council to research the legality of the ordinance as written and review other options to address the inequality of allowing out of city food trucks to operate in Pooler.

9. Miscellaneous Topics

Councilmember Tom Hutcherson gave a presentation on items that he desired Council to support including:

- Pooler personnel protection equipment support to nursing homes and senior living apartments, including a two-month supply of masks and hand sanitizer. Councilmember Hutcherson provided a list of the facilities and breakdown of the number of residents and staff for each.

City Attorney Scheer stated that this would likely violate the Georgia gratuities law.

- Councilmember Hutcherson discussed the creation of a Pooler Youth Council; he stated that he has many years of experience in youth development and this program could be beneficial in creating future leaders for the community. He reviewed a draft mission statement and objectives for the organization. He discussed other communities in Chatham County that had youth councils, including Savannah, Tybee, and Garden City.

He discussed likely activities the organization can become involved with. He stated that in many communities the youth council has a direct impact on city policies.

Mayor Benton agreed that this would be a good project and thanked Councilmember Hutcherson for his thorough research into the program.

Councilmember Karen Williams discussed the appointment of membership to the Tree Board. She briefly described the membership requirements of the Tree Board and identified some people that met the qualifications and were willing to serve.

City Manager Byrd stated he thought the Tree Board was taken out of the City ordinances and questioned the value and purpose of the Board. Likewise, City Attorney Scheer stated that by law the City is limited in the authority it can delegate to another body.

Councilmember Williams stated that the mission of the Tree Board would be prescribed by Council as they see fit and it was not her intent to give away authority of the Council. She stated that the Board would only advise Council. She also stated that the establishment of the Board was necessary to be a participant in the Tree City USA program. Councilmember Williams stated that the tree preservation ordinance needs to be updated and the Board could provide input. Councilmember Aaron Higgins stated that in general he was not in favor of growing government bureaucracy, however, felt the Tree Board could provide valuable input and Council can limit their authority.

10. Executive Session – to discuss personnel, legal, and real estate matters

Mayor Benton asked for a motion to convene into Executive Session. ***Councilmember Higgins made a motion to enter Executive Session. The motion received a second by Councilmember Wall.***

Result: Motion to enter Executive Session was approved without opposition.

After the Executive Session. Mayor Benton asked for a motion to reconvene the open meeting portion of the Council Retreat. ***A motion was made by Councilmember Wall to reconvene. The motion received a second by Councilmember Williams.***

Result: Motion to reconvene the open meeting portion of the Council Retreat was approved without opposition.

11. Adjournment

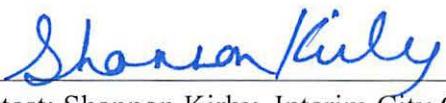
There being no further business, Mayor Benton asked for a motion to adjourn the Council Retreat at approximately 2:00 p.m. *A motion was made by Councilmember Wall to adjourn. The motion received a second by Councilmember Higgins.*

Result: Motion to adjourn the Council Retreat was approved without opposition.

The foregoing minutes are true and correct and approved by me on this ____ day of _____, 2020.



Rebecca C. Benton, Mayor



Attest: Shannon Kirby, Interim City Clerk