

City Council Community Budget Forum
March 17, 2021
6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
Via ZOOM

The Charlottesville City Council met in open forum to offer community members an opportunity apart from Council meetings or work sessions to comment on the FY 2021-2022 City Budget. The meeting was held electronically in accordance with local ordinances to ensure continuity of government and prevent the spread of disease during the coronavirus pandemic. The meeting was broadcast on the City's online streaming platforms and on local Channel 10; however, meeting participants were required to register at www.charlottesville.gov/zoom. Per normal City Council meeting guidelines, speakers were given a three-minute window for comment.

Mayor Walker called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

Clerk of Council Kyna Thomas called the roll and recorded all Councilors present: Mayor Nikuyah Walker, Vice Mayor Sena Magill, and Councilors Heather Hill, Michael Payne and Lloyd Snook.

Mayor Walker turned the meeting over to City Manager Chip Boyles who shared a summary of budget proposals, budget themes, Council priorities, and staff recommendations should revenues be more favorable than projected. He shared future budget discussion dates and turned the meeting back over to Mayor Walker.

Mayor Walker opened the floor for public comment, managed by Communications Director Brian Wheeler. The following members of the public spoke:

- Mary Bauer, Chair of the Human Rights Commission, spoke in support of the City providing attorney representation for tenants experiencing eviction.
- Jay James spoke in support of funding for the Bridge Ministries substance abuse and re-entry program.
- Jay Swett spoke in support of funding for the Bridge Ministries substance abuse and re-entry program.
- Nancy Carpenter spoke in support of funding to address affordable housing.
- Valerie Palamountain spoke in support of funding for the Bridge Ministries substance abuse and re-entry program.

While awaiting additional members of the public to join the meeting, Mayor Walker asked for Council feedback.

Councilor Snook expressed concern with the suggestion of having a city program or a city staff position to represent tenants experiencing eviction. Councilors discussed funding a non-profit organization that already provides such services or addressing housing issues before they reach the level of going to court. Mr. Boyles advised that this may be an opportunity to pilot a program with American Recovery Plan funds.

- Matthew Gillikin spoke in support of funding alternatives to policing and identifying criteria needed to shift away from the current budget and model of policing. He asked that the Police Civilian Review Board be given access to review the police budget and asked for funding the Schools request.

Chief Brackney provided a response summarizing the Charlottesville Police Department budget based on provision of services.

- Elizabeth Stark shared information about evictions and housing justice initiatives. She spoke in support of the City providing attorney representation for tenants experiencing eviction.
- With no other speakers coming forward, Mary Bauer was given a second opportunity to speak. She shared additional information about local evictions.

Councilor Payne asked questions about the Vibrant Community Funds and the Marcus Alert System Bill as a local opportunity area for the upcoming year.

Vice Mayor Magill advised of a lack of bed space, often requiring police to remain with people in a mental health crisis for an extensive number of hours. She and Councilor Snook shared a brief update of the mental health initiative ad-hoc committee, advising of a desire to present to City Council during the first meeting in August.

Mayor Walker shared information about Imagining a Just Cville work group meetings. She also added that some of the community requests come at a high cost and would not be able to be implemented as quickly as some would hope, although Council would be more proactive in providing updates.

Councilor Snook shared ideas from the mental health work group about future efforts toward suicide prevention.

Chief Brackney added that although the Charlottesville community is resource-rich, there is limited capacity to deliver the necessary services. She also advised of state-level and federal mandates on police.

- Pertelle Gilmore spoke in support of funding for the violence interrupter initiative.

- Ang Conn spoke in support of reducing the police budget in order to fund community programs to handle mental health crisis, substance use, and gun violence situations. She suggested imagining a community without police and without policing.

Mayor Walker and Councilor Hill shared thoughts on approaches to addressing the large number of issues so that community members can thrive.

In response to a question from Councilor Snook regarding certain ratings in the Vibrant Community funding matrix, Ryan Davidson, Senior Budget and Management Analyst, advised that he would review data holistically and provide information. Kaki Dimock, Director of Human Services, suggested that Council would be within its rights to make a decision other than the recommendations presented by the Vibrant Community Fund report.

Councilors continued discussion about where funding would come from for violence interrupter initiatives. Responding to Council inquiries, City Manager Boyles provided information about the potential timing of American Rescue Plan payment(s).

- Joy Johnson, Chair of the Public Housing Association of Residents, spoke about the Vibrant Community Fund process for working with agencies during the application process.
- Tim Wallace, Director of Development for the Legal Aid Justice Center, recommended changes to the Vibrant Community Funds process.
- Sherri Frantz spoke in support of funding for the Charlottesville-Albemarle Rescue Squad.

The meeting adjourned at 8:11 p.m.

BY Order of City Council

BY Kyna Thomas, Clerk of Council