

**MEETING MINUTES
STATE OF THE CITY, FEBRUARY 1, 2024**

The members of the City Council of the City of Phenix City, Alabama met at 6:00 p.m. Eastern Time in the Council Chambers located within the Public Safety Building at 1111 Broad Street, Phenix City, Alabama, for the purpose of conducting the 2024 State of the City Address. Mayor Eddie N. Lowe, Councilmember R. Griff Gordy, Councilmember Steve Bailey, Councilmember Vickey F. Carter, and Councilmember Arthur L. Day, Jr. were present. City Manager Wallace B. Hunter, Assistant City Manager Chan Gamble, City Clerk Shannon Davis, and Office Manager Tonya Williams were also present. Department Heads in attendance at the were: Building Official Ray Rogers, Economic Development Manager Shaun Culligan, Economic Development Planning Specialist Jennifer Lowman, City Engineer Angel Moore, Assistant City Engineer Mike Pattillo, Graduate Civil Engineer Chris Casey, Finance Director Labrita King-Copeland, Staff Accountant L. Bashara Holland, Fire Chief Kris Kennedy, Human Resources Director Stephanie Chastain, IT Manager Mike Bauer, IT Technician 1/Web Specialist Brannon Prather, Phenix City Russell County Library Director Tammy Henry, Municipal Court Clerk Ruby White, Parks and Recreation Director Todd Hughes, Police Chief George Staudinger, Public Safety Director Ray Smith and Utilities Engineer John Spraggins. Also present were: City Attorney James P. Graham, Municipal Court Judge Greg Waldrep, and Municipal Court Judge F. Patrick Loftin. City Attorney Jim McKoon was not present.

Mayor Lowe welcomed everyone to the presentation of the State of the City.

Pastor Noble D. Williams of Greater Mount Zion Baptist Church delivered the invocation.

Blake Gayles, student of Glenwood School, led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor Lowe introduced Council, Department Heads, Municipal Court Judges and City Attorneys.

Mayor Lowe delivered the State of the City Address. Mayor Lowe thanked the Citizens of Phenix City for allowing them to be stewards over their money. Mayor Lowe reviewed the amount of grants received by the City over the past fifteen years which is over forty eight million dollars. Mayor Lowe compared staffing of personnel for the past five years. Mayor Lowe stated that the City has budgeted for five hundred and sixty five positions throughout the City and currently have approximately three hundred and ninety nine employees. Mayor Lowe also stated that the City is still experiencing a workforce shortage. Mayor Lowe reviewed past, present and future Infrastructure Projects and Utility Projects including the City Wide Resurfacing Project, Lakewood Golf Cart Path Improvements, Martin-Idle Hour Park Nature Trail, the Seale Road Bridge Project, Saddlebrook Sanitary Sewer Project, and the Waste Water Treatment Upgrade and Expansion Project. Mayor Lowe advised that the City of Phenix City continues to maintain its "AA-/Stable" Credit Rating from Standard and Poor's in the General Fund. Mayor Lowe spoke on the new Public Safety Building Expansion/Renovation where the State of the City meeting was being held and the new Fire Training Center. Mayor Lowe stated that the City was very proud of the "State of the Art" building. Mayor Lowe updated everyone on the Phenix City Retail Projects and Commercial Developments along Highway 80, Highway 431 South, and 280 Bypass / Highway 431 North. Mayor Lowe also stated that the Sierra Pacific Industries would bring approximately 300 jobs to Phenix City. Mayor Lowe reviewed the Parks and Recreation Department's upcoming events. Mayor Lowe stated that the Phenix City Russell County Library serves a population of over 58,000 people and of that 58,000 people over 53,000 are active Library Card Holders. Mayor Lowe also stated that the Library has hosted job fairs, workshops, book sales and partners with Chattahoochee Valley Community College to host GED classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Upon the conclusion of the presentation, Mayor Lowe stated anyone wishing to address Council with any questions, comments or concerns should come forward and do so at this time. Mayor Lowe asked Citizens desiring to come forward to please state their name and the district that they live in.

Sherry Daniels, who lives in Ft. Mitchell but works in Phenix City at Communities of Transformation located at 1201 32nd Street in District One, came forward. Ms. Daniels thanked Mayor and Council for the appropriation that their organization receives. Ms. Daniels stated that their organization helps people gain employment and asked if the City had any written material on available jobs. Stephanie Chastain, Human Resource Director, stated that she will give Ms. Daniels her business card after the meeting.

Belinda Strickland, who lives in Ft. Mitchell but also works in Phenix City, came forward. Ms. Strickland asked if there was a specific time that Sierra Pacific Industries will began hiring their employees for the Phenix City location. Shaun Culligan, Economic Development Manager, stated that the company is in the process of hiring now and applications are taken on the Indeed, Inc., Employment Website and their projected completed date will be towards the end of 2024.

Khalil Sumbry, who lives in District Three, came forward. Mr. Sumbry stated that he has about five acres of commercial property located in District Three that he would like to use and build something for the kids to have something to do and a place to go. Mayor Lowe advise Mr. Sumbry to contact the Building Department for zoning information as the first step. Mayor Lowe stated that he wants to make sure that the property is in compliance for the right zoning for that area. Mayor Lowe also stated that there is an old saying, "Don't put the cart before the horse" and he doesn't want Mr. Sumbry to spend money in something that may be out of compliance and that is where some people go wrong and get mad at the City because they didn't do their homework.

Mesha Patrick, who lives in District Two, came forward. Ms. Patrick inquired about affordable housing for low and middle class citizens of Phenix City. Ms. Patrick asked if the City had a plan in place to build or rezone places for more affordable houses. Mayor Lowe stated that the first step begins with investors that are willing to use tax credits and build affordable housing. Shaun Culligan, Economic Development Manager, stated that the City is currently going through some zoning changes that will allow additional types of housing in certain areas. Mr. Culligan also stated that you have to have so many investors committed to develop affordable housing. Councilmember Bailey stated that the City did get involved in the Liberty Hill Project when the Phenix City Housing Authority built apartments on City property where the old Cobb Hospital was located.

Mel Long, who lives in District Three, came forward. Mr. Long thanked Mayor and Council for bringing new business to District Three. Mr. Long stated that he once felt that the City overlooked the southern part of the City and would always put restaurants, stores, and gas stations in the North or Central parts of the City. Mr. Long also stated that he is very proud of the fact that times have changed and there is now a grocery store, gas station and fast food restaurants in South Phenix City. Mr. Long further stated that Highway 431 South is a very busy highway and now travelers are able to stop at Wendy's and Jacks to grab a bite to eat before they turn onto the 280 By-Pass. Mr. Long stated that he is very proud to have lived to see the growth of Phenix City and gives credit where credit is due. Mayor Lowe stated that every District of Phenix City is growing in the right direction and Council has always been consistent and spreading business throughout the City but it takes time and planning for things to come to fruition. Councilmember Day stated that he represents District Three and that there are more businesses to come in District Three near Downing Drive.

Robin Young, who lives in District Three, came forward. Ms. Young inquired about a completion date for the new bridge that is being built on Seale Road near 5th Street South. Angel Moore, City Engineer, stated depending upon the weather and other conditions, the estimated time of completion is March or April of this year but it is not guaranteed. Councilmember Day stated that Council is excited about the design of the bridge that will include a walk way for pedestrians.

Regina Mitchell, who lives in District Three, came forward. Ms. Mitchell stated that a red light was added on Highway 431 South near Renfro's Grocery Store after it opened and it was definitely needed. Ms. Mitchell inquired about installing a traffic light on Highway 431 South at the intersection of 5th Street South near Rainbows Foods. Ms. Mitchell stated that particular intersection is very dangerous. Mayor Lowe stated that highways belong to the State and they are the ones who decided if a highway warrants a red light. Mayor Lowe also stated that there has to be a certain distance between lights and it depends on the flow of traffic. Councilmember Gordy stated that the City and the County have both reached out to the State about that area. Councilmember Day stated that he has received several complaints about that intersection as well. Councilmember Day encouraged Ms. Mitchell and others as Citizens to contact their State Representative since the issue is on the State level. City Manager Wallace Hunter stated that obtaining the red light from the State for the light at Renfro's was not a simple task. Mayor Lowe stated that the Alabama Department of Transportation were apprehensive of installing the light because of the distance to the red light at the intersection of Highway 431 and Highway 165. Mayor Lowe also stated that the State also looks at the number of fatalities at an intersection.

Belinda Strickland, who lives in Ft. Mitchell, stated that they own several properties in Phenix City. Ms. Strickland asked if she could receive a copy of the State of the City presentation. Mayor Lowe stated that a copy of the presentation will be on the City's website or contact the City Clerk's Office. Mayor Lowe also stated that Council has always been transparent. Ms. Strickland stated that the meeting has been very enlighten.

Councilmember Bailey stated that City Employees go above and beyond for the Citizens of Phenix City. Councilmember Bailey pointed out City Engineer Angel Moore who is in charge of eight City departments. Councilmember Bailey stated that the City has people that work for the City and actually care about the City and the people that live in the city and to them, it is not just a job.

Councilmember Day stated that he agrees with Councilmember Bailey and that City Employees give a lot of themselves. Councilmember Day also stated one department will help another if they are able to and the Parks and Recreation Department has helped the Public Works department on numerous occasions.

Councilmember Carter stated that 2024 has gotten off to a great start. Councilmember Carter also stated that Mayor Lowe has done a great job with giving the citizens an over view of the City. Councilmember Carter further stated that Council will continue to recognize the areas that the City needs to improve. Councilmember Carter stated that the City's finances are in a very positive state and it is something to be proud of. Councilmember Carter also stated that she represents District Two and she is thankful to live in such a great City and work with a great Council, City Manager and City Employees.

Councilmember Day stated that he has lived in Phenix City a long time and he can see the progress it has made and he is excited about the progress that is yet to come.

Mel Long, who lives in District Three, stated that he had to thank the Police Department for everything that they do to keep the citizens of Phenix City safe. Mr. Long also stated that every time they call on the Police Department they are there to help and have a quick response time. Mr. Long further stated that they are very respectful when they come out to an event and people feel more comfortable at an event when they are there.

City Clerk Shannon Davis stated that all of the information from the State of the City Meeting will be on the Transparency Portal on the City's website: www.phenixcityal.us. Ms. Davis also stated that the City Clerk's office can be reached at 334-448-2727.

Mayor Lowe thanked City Council, City Manager, City Department Heads and the Citizens for attending tonight's meeting.

There being nothing further to discuss, the meeting concluded at 7:40 p.m.