APPROVED AS PRESENTED TO COUNCIL 05/20/25

MEETING MINUTES
STATE OF THE CITY, FEBRUARY 6, 2025

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 2025 State of the City Address. Mayor Eddie N. Lowe, Councilmember R. Griff Gordy, Councilmember Vickey F. Carter, and Councilmember Arthur L. Day, Jr. were present. Councilmember Steve Bailey was not in attendance. 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 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, Fire Chief Kris Kennedy, Human Resources Director Stephanie Chastain, IT Manager Mike Bauer, Phenix City Russell County Library Director Tammy Henry, Municipal Court Clerk Ruby White, Parks and Recreation Director Todd Hughes, Police Chief George Staudinger and Utilities Engineer John Spraggins. Also present were City Attorney James P. Graham, City Attorney Jim McKoon and Municipal Court Judge Greg Waldrep. Municipal Court Judge F. Patrick Loftin was not present.

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

Pastor Johnny Ellison of Chattahoochee Valley Baptist Church delivered the invocation.

Councilmember R. Griff Gordy led the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States Flag.

Mayor Lowe thanked the Citizens of Phenix City for allowing them to be stewards over their money. Mayor Lowe introduced the Council, City Manager, Assistant City Manager, City Clerk, Department Heads, Municipal Court Judges and City Attorneys. Mayor Lowe stated that with the combined number of years of service between the City Management and Department Heads was 310 collectively and that it comes with a lot of experience. Mayor Lowe also stated that the years of service directly correlates to how great the City has performed in the last 10 years and that the presentation would show the amount of success the City has had.

Mayor Lowe delivered the State of the City Address. Mayor Lowe reviewed the amount of grants received by the City over the past sixteen years, which is over fifty one million dollars and which is an increase since 2008 of 243%. Mayor Lowe stated that the City had to match funds in order to receive the grants and that the City was financially stable enough to invest those funds and that since 2008 the City's investments has grown 460%, which is astonishing. Mayor Lowe compared staffing of personnel for the past five years. Mayor Lowe stated that the City has budgeted for five hundred and seventy one positions throughout the City and currently have approximately four hundred and fifteen employees and that they are short one hundred and fifty six positions (27%) short of employees. Mayor Lowe also stated that the shortage of employees has improved since 2024 but that they are still short and that the City is still experiencing a workforce shortage. Mayor Lowe further stated that the City offers an excellent benefits package. Mayor Lowe reviewed past, present and future Infrastructure Projects and stated that from 2009 to 2024 the City has resurfaced a total of 70.96 miles for a total cost of $15,811,669.00 and that it has all been paid, with no additional debt for the City or the taxpayers. Mayor Lowe reviewed the proposed resurfacing plan for 2025, which has been equally distributed between the City's three districts based on crucial needs. Mayor Lowe also reviewed the current and future Utilities

Projects and stated that they were extremely important due to the health and safety of the citizens. Mayor Lowe stated that the costs of water utility repairs will highly increase over the next couple of years and that it is the responsibility of this Council to take care of what they can now, to save the taxpayers money as much as possible. Mayor Lowe reviewed the new commercial developments that will be opening potentially in April 2025. Mayor Lowe also reviewed the updates to the City's Comprehensive Plan and Entertainment District that is ongoing with City Planning. Mayor Lowe stated that the City's Fire Department is updating two of the pumper's engines that have to be replaced that will total $1,823.987.00. Mayor Lowe also stated that the new Fire Training Center is operational and has already hosted a recruit school with seven area Fire Departments participating.

Mayor Lowe reviewed the Parks and Recreation Department's upcoming events and the progress on the new Miracle Park that will be located at Lakewood Park. Mayor Lowe stated that the department coordinates and provides several events throughout the year and some are at no cost to the citizens. Mayor Lowe also stated that the construction of Miracle Field and additional improvements at Lakewood Park is in progress and that an architect has been hired to lead the next phase of design and development. Mayor Lowe further stated that the Preliminary Engineering is underway for the construction of three viewing plazas, steps, and a new pier. Mayor Lowe stated that the City is planning for future upgrades to Rosemount Park (Austin Sumbry Park), which includes adding an event space that will seat up to 500 people. Mayor Lowe also stated that the Lakewood Golf Course updates were completed.

Mayor Lowe stated that the Phenix City Russell County Library serves a population of over 58,000 people within the City and of that, over 53,000 are active Library Card Holders. Mayor Lowe also stated that the Library has had 11,791 citizens from other areas to include Lee County, Russell County and Muscogee County served at the Library. Mayor Lowe also stated that the Library has hosted job fairs, workshops, book sales, children's programs, home school programs, and partners with Chattahoochee Valley Community College to host GED classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

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.

Regina Mitchell, who lives in District 3, came forward. Ms. Mitchell inquired about the status of fixing the leaks throughout the City. Ms. Mitchell stated that she has had a leak on the road that she resides on since October of 2024. Ms. Mitchell also stated that the City came out and did some work on the leak, however it did not stop the water. Ms. Mitchell further stated that she spoke to several contacts at the City and it was stated that they were aware of the leaks and that it was on the list to be repaired. Councilmember Day stated that the City has several issues with leaks throughout the City and that the City has a contracting company that is in the process of fixing the leaks that are in all three districts and that they are prioritized based on the severity of the leaks. Assistant City Manager Chan Gamble came forward to speak about the progress of the leak repairs in the City. Mr. Gamble stated that in December of 2023, there were 331 leaks; by November of 2024, there were 121 leaks. Mr. Gamble also stated that due to staff shortages in the Utilities Department and with the pace that the leaks were being fixed, the Council authorized the City to put out a bid and hire a contractor to address the leaks. Mr. Gamble further stated that the contractor began in December and has fixed up to 60 of the leaks. Mr. Gamble stated that the process to determine which leaks are considered critical is that each leak is triaged by the volume of water that they are losing. Ms. Mitchell inquired as to when she can expect the

leak to be fixed. Mr. Gamble stated that he does not have the specific information for that particular leak but that citizens should see a significant improvement over the next three months. Mr. Gamble also stated that he wished that he could provide a specific date but due to the number of leaks and the other issues that come up with the Water Treatment Plant, he cannot provide the exact date. Mr. Gamble further stated that the City's Utilities crews were working to fix the leaks along with the contractor.

Mesha Patrick, who lives in District 2, came forward. Ms. Patrick commended the Council for their due diligence in their leadership over the City. Ms. Patrick stated that the Phenix City / Russell County Library should be the center of resources outside of the schools for Citizens. Ms. Patrick also stated that Director of the Library Tammy Henry has done an outstanding job of ensuring that attendees of the library feel welcomed and have available resources. Ms. Patrick inquired as to whether there are any plans to upgrade the inside and outside of the Library in the future. Councilmember Green thanked Ms. Patrick for her questions. Councilmember Green stated that the City has recently made some upgrades to the library with new paint, new carpet, and updates to the genealogy section. Councilmember Green also stated that for the outside, pressure washing the building and additional updates are possible in the future. Councilmember Green further stated that City Manager Wallace Hunter and Director the Library Tammy Henry have taken action to ensure the improvements were approved by Council and those have been completed. Councilmember Green stated that they need to see more of the number of Citizens visiting the Library that live in the City limits. Councilmember Green also stated that the Library's evening hours are convenient for those who work during the day. Councilmember Green stated that they recently had a Lunch and Learn Event at the Library, and have plans for additional events. Ms. Patrick inquired about the homeless within the City and what preventions are in place. City Engineer Angel Moore stated that the Assistance Program was a grant that was provided and a local Church ran the program until the funds were exalted. Ms. Patrick inquired as to what the process is for requesting the funds, if the grant is offered again in the future. Mayor Lowe stated that there are no updates at this time. Ms. Patrick inquired about Garrett Harrison Stadium. Mayor Lowe stated that they have had the discussion and that there are additional plans for updates to the stadium. Ms. Patrick stated that her final question was dear to all of them. Ms. Patrick stated that the crime in the City is getting out of control. Ms. Patrick also inquired as to what is now in place or future plans to put things in place to have a safer City especially for the older Citizens. Ms. Patrick stated that her grandfather has lived in the same residence for 50 years and that she has become more afraid for his wellbeing and safety. Mayor Lowe stated that unfortunately, crime has become a major problem throughout the entire Country. Mayor Lowe also stated that he wished that they had a model to stop all of the crime but that he has confidence that Chief of Police George Staudinger and his force is doing everything they can to prevent crime. Mayor Lowe further stated that the number one initiative with Council is the safety of the citizens. Mayor Lowe stated that he has had discussions with Columbus Mayor Skip Henderson, the crime is not just affecting Phenix City but Columbus, Georgia, and the nation, and that he believes that there should be additional education with the Citizens and schools on how to respect other people and be safer. Chief Staudinger stated that Citizens see what is on the news and that with that view only, the perception is that crime is out of control. Chief Staudinger also stated that in 2024 there were six homicides in Phenix City, which is 50% less than it was in the five previous years and that their goal is for that number to decrease. Chief Staudinger further stated that the Police Department diligently to bring criminals to justice and that the six homicides that the Police Department worked were all solved. Chief Staudinger encouraged the Citizens to look up the national average for crime to see that Phenix City is below the average. Chief Staudinger stated that it is a challenge with the crime rate when the neighboring City of Columbus is five times larger

than Phenix City. Chief Staudinger also stated that the additional revenue that the City is bringing in with new businesses and jobs have made it possible for the City to build new buildings like the Public Safety Building and help with new programs and these resources are key to helping the Police Department. Chief Staudinger further stated that the Police Department has been collaborating with other Police Departments in the region to hold forums to discuss solutions for crime prevention. Chief Staudinger stated that there have been several changes that have affected the Police Department's workforce over the last year that involve retirements and challenges in retaining and hiring qualified officers. Chief Staudinger also stated that due to quite a few reasons officers retired, there are many new officers and they are not as experienced but that they are doing a great job. Chief Staudinger further stated that the Police Department held their first Junior Police Academy Event last year with two different age groups of youth, that attended and that they are going to offer it again in 2025. Chief Staudinger stated that they have also increased the number of beds that they have with Russell County Jail. Ms. Patrick inquired if there were going to be additional opportunities to meet and talk about gun violence. Chief Staudinger stated that as his career has progressed, he has seen a change in gun violence with an increase in the types of guns that are being used and that he is pro for 2nd Amendment but that he is also pro for common sense when handling guns. Chief Staudinger encouraged Citizens to reach out to their local and State Government Representatives in regards to the gun violence and additional controls. Chief Staudinger stated that the Police Department is working with the Citizens and staying more involved with youth and in the schools to build the trust and the strong relationship.

City Manager Wallace Hunter asked Chief of Police George Staudinger to review the State Legislator's Gun Carrier Laws. Chief Staudinger stated that the conceal carrier permit allows them to carry guns in their vehicles also with no permit and that the Police Department is very limited in what they are allowed to do to stop those kinds of issues. Chief Staudinger also stated that this area was conservative, where they believe in going to Church and the right to own a gun but that there is a level of common sense that should be utilized with the right to carry a gun. Mayor Lowe stated that the City is trying and that it is challenging.

Annie Davis, who lives in District Three, stated that she wanted to first thank Councilmember Day for assisting with her current situation. Ms. Davis also stated that Phenix City has a website that the Citizens utilize and she inquired if the site can be setup where the Citizens can input their address to see if it is on the list or the status of the water leaks. Ms. Davis further stated that it would be more reassuring if Citizens could see that they are on the list and their status. Ms. Davis stated that she has been living in a hotel for five months due to the water issues at her home. Assistant City Manager Chan Gamble stated that they could make the information open to the public in regards to the addresses. Mayor Lowe clarified with Ms. Davis that the issues she is experiencing is not due to flood but rather sewage damage and Mr. Gamble confirmed that Ms. Davis issues was related to the sewage back up. Ms. Davis stated that her goal for the information being available on the City's website was for citizens to be able to look up any work that was being done at their residents by the City. Mayor Lowe stated that there is a level of trust that they must have and what the City says they will do, they will do it.

Dr. Janet Goodwin who lives in District Three, stated that she is concerned about the water bills that have increased. Dr. Goodwin also stated that she is aware that while some residents overpaid their bills, many were told that they underpaid. Dr. Goodwin further stated that her water bill has tripled. Dr. Goodwin inquired as to what the City is planning to do for future issues were it is no fault of the customer. Assistant City Manager Chan Gamble provided an overview of the last fifteen years when they first installed the new automated meters and registers for the residents of

Phenix City in 2010. Mr. Gamble stated that prior to the new system, the Utilities Department had to manually go to every home location, read the meter and return to the office to input the readings for the bill payment process. Mr. Gamble also stated that with the new technology, the Utilities Technician operates the Utilities truck with Wi-Fi capabilities to drive to the residents and the system automatically reads the meters. Mr. Gamble provided the detailed process for how the registers are suppose to work. Mr. Gamble also provided the facts on the technical issues that the faulty meter registers have had and how the Utilities Department worked with Master Meter, Inc. to have the Utilities Department replaced twice and correct the issues but ultimately have gone with a new company. Mr. Gamble further provided an overview of the billing process that the City has been following to adjust the bills and have allowed residents to make payments to catch up and issue refunds to those that overpaid. Mr. Gamble stated that they have successfully taken legal action against Master Meter, Inc. to recoup a large amount of funds that they have used to attempt to correct the issues. Dr. Goodwin inquired about the process to take if she felt that she was overcharged for her water bill. Mr. Gamble stated that they would investigate the history of her bill in order to determine if that was the case and if she is due a refund. Mr. Gamble explained how the bills were setup to show the adjustments made and that only the January 2025 bill should have the adjustments.

Raven Peterson, who lives in District Three inquired about the future plans with Economic Development in her neighborhood near Seale Road in South Phenix City. Mayor Lowe stated that originally, Seale Road was very active with many successful businesses and they were established and added to the capital by the business owners in that area. Mayor Lowe also stated that this was the misconception that people have about Seale Road and that he and the City Manager are blamed all of the time. Mayor Lowe encouraged Ms. Peterson to gather a group of citizens and work to raise the capital to have new businesses on Seale Road just as others have done throughout Phenix City. Mayor Lowe stated that the City could not use taxpayer funds to invest in businesses. Ms. Peterson inquired about grants that can be used for new businesses. Mayor Lowe stated that particular grants can be used and that she would need to look for them and the City's grant team is consistently looking for grants. Mayor Lowe also stated that they need people in the community to assist with looking for possible grants and that applying does not guarantee that it will be awarded. Ms. Peterson inquired about stray animals roaming the streets and the danger it could be for their children. Chief of Police George Staudinger provided Ms. Peterson with his contact information and asked that she let him know when there was a problem. Chief Staudinger provided an overview of the stray animal situation that is occurring throughout the City. Councilmember Day acknowledged Ms. Peterson's concern regarding businesses on Seale Road. Councilmember Day stated that they should come together as a group to develop a plan for additional businesses. Councilmember Day also stated that there are plans to repave Seale Road. City Manager Wallace Hunter stated that he has been fair in his work to change the City. Mr. Hunter also stated that many people still look at things in the way that they use to be and not the way that they are today. Mr. Hunter further stated that Seale Road had many businesses in prior years because colored people were not able to go anywhere else to start a business but that is no longer the case. Mr. Hunter stated that when the older generation passed away, the new generations have not continued the legacy with the businesses in that area. Mr. Hunter also stated that new businesses that want to come in to the City are going to build where there is a lot of traffic coming through the City and that they cannot force businesses to build in particular locations. Mr. Hunter further stated that if they wanted to see Seale Road active as it was, the citizens should take pride in their area and work together to build it back up. Mr. Hunter stated that they have fought hard for segregation to allow them to start businesses anywhere throughout the City. Mr. Hunter also stated that the Economic Development Team is consistently promoting

all areas of the City for new business development. Mr. Hunter further stated that they do expect the Federal Funds request process and available funds to be streamlined as with new governments leaders taking office, those changes are expected. Mr. Hunter stated that they hope that there will be programs in place to provide resources to rebuild older properties and homes. Mr. Hunter also stated that it was concerning to him when they could not get the youth to help in cleaning up their neighborhoods and take pride in what they are doing and that there has been so much of the pride lost in the community. Mr. Hunter further stated that he hoped that more citizens would attend the Council meetings to continue to be aware of what it is being accomplished the City. Mr. Hunter stated that the Church's and the School System are trying to accomplish improvements but that it is going to take the community as a whole to join them. Economic Development Manager Shaun Culligan inquired as to some examples of what Mr. Peterson stated about new businesses. Ms. Peterson provided an overview of the types of businesses. Mr. Culligan provided Ms. Peterson with his contact information and stated that he would appreciate the opportunity to discuss in further detail Ms. Peterson recommendations.

Dr. Janet Goodwin, who lives in District Three, stated that she participates in Keep Phenix City Beautiful and provides items like trash bags and other items to support the cleanups. Dr. Goodwin stated that with the prior City Council (12 years ago) a group of them spoke to City Council in regards to resources and recommendations for Seale Road. Dr. Goodwin also stated that at that time, Council stated that they could not enforce businesses to up keep their properties but that they would work with the community and the residents. Dr. Goodwin further stated that they attempted to collaborate with the businesses with Keep Phenix City Beautiful and only one business was willing to work with them. Ms. Davis stated that their neighborhood needed to take some responsibility. Councilmember Day stated that there is so much vandalism, destruction and thief occurring in the different Parks and other areas and that it really bothers him. Councilmember Day also stated that the City replaces the equipment and when he returns, it has been vandalized again and that it is the responsibility for all of the residents of District Three to collaborate to find and maintain a solution. City Manager Wallace Hunter stated that it is hard to have an audience take away what was provided and take action on it. Mr. Hunter also stated that the City could not change the hiring policies and when people come into a job interview or into the Human Resources Department smelling of drugs and that is a problem.

Joann Lyles and Betty Richardson who live in District Three, inquired about what can be done in regards to the thefts in their neighborhood. Councilmember Day stated that he has been down there numerous times and has seen this for himself. Chief of Police George Staudinger stated that they are aware of the problems and that they have made an arrest. Chief Staudinger also stated that the best solution for the Police is to determine which residents the disturbances that they are coming from and go there to confront them. Ms. Richardson stated that since the Police Department has gone to the neighborhood, it has gotten better. Ms. Richardson also stated that some people in the neighborhood have been shooting fireworks in the middle of the streets and that is unsafe. Ms. Lyles stated that there is a huge leak that is shooting out water that goes across the driveway. Utilities Director John Spraggins took note of the address to follow-up with Ms. Lyles. Councilmember Day inquired if there was a cone at the location and she stated that there was. Councilmember Day stated that when there is a cone on the site, it means that the Utilities Department is aware of the problem.

Jimmie Luke, who lives in District 3, stated that there is a sign that needs to be repaired around 8th Street South. Mr. Luke provided the information to City Engineer Angel Moore and she stated she would send out someone to review.

Mayor Lowe stated that Council appreciates all of the questions and feedback from the Citizens. Mayor Lowe also stated that they want everyone to get involved and the Council has nothing to hide. Mayor Lowe further stated that the entire State of the City presentation that was discussed and shown is available for citizens to view on the website. Mayor Lowe stated that they are transparent and that they do want to have conversations with Citizens. Mayor Lowe encouraged everyone to reach out directly instead of using social media platforms and believing false comments. Mayor Lowe also encouraged everyone to work together as an entire City and community to make the City better because it takes all of them. Mayor Lowe stated that the Council's goal is to do it right and therefore; they need input from each citizen.

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

Mayor Lowe thanked everyone for attending and stated that they expect them to keep Council accountable just as they are asked to be accountable. Mayor Lowe also thanked the City Council, City Manager, City Department Heads and the Citizens for attending the meeting tonight.

Matthew Malone who is not originally from Phenix City but has lived in the City for many years stated that he has been in the community long enough to be concerned. Mr. Malone stated that many people have expressed concerns about making things better. Mr. Malone also stated that to some degree everybody has the ability to be the change that they want to see. Mr. Malone further stated that there would be different opinions and perceptions that are based on everyone's experiences however, a community can achieve more by bringing it together to work as a group. Mr. Malone stated that he felt the need to share with everyone and thanked Mayor Lowe and Council.

Mayor Lowe thanked everyone for attending the State of the City meeting.

Mayor Lowe stated that may God continue to bless everyone individually and collectively.

There being nothing further to discuss, the meeting concluded at 7:52 p.m.