

**WORK SESSION MEETING MINUTES**  
**January 2, 2024**

The members of the City Council of the City of Phenix City, Alabama met at 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time for the regularly scheduled Work Session on Tuesday, January 2, 2024, in the Council Chambers located within the Public Safety Building at 1111 Broad Street, Phenix City, Alabama 36867. Upon roll call, the following members were present: Councilmember Arthur L. Day, Jr., Councilmember Vickey F. Carter, Councilmember Steve Bailey, Councilmember R. Griff Gordy, and Mayor Eddie N. Lowe. Also present were City Manager Wallace Hunter, Assistant City Manager Chan Gamble, Acting City Clerk Shannon Davis, and City Attorney Jimmy Graham. Department Heads in attendance: Building Official Ray Rogers, Economic Development Manager Shaun Culligan, City Engineer Angel Moore, Fire Chief Kristen Kennedy, Golf Manager Mike Barber, Human Resource Generalist Eliza Phillips, IT Director Mike Bauer, Library Director Tammy Henry, Municipal Court Clerk Ruby White, Parks and Recreation Assistant Director Kristi Goggans, Police Chief George Staudinger, Public Safety Director Ray Smith and Graduate Engineer John Spraggins.

Upon a quorum being established, Mayor Lowe called the meeting to order.

Councilmember Gordy led the invocation.

Mayor Lowe called upon Ms. Pat Frey of United Way, Vice President-Home for Good, to address council, as listed on the agenda. Ms. Pat Frey and Melissa Harris, United Way Outreach Team Lead, came forward to address Council. Ms. Frey stated that she is representing United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley. Ms. Frey passed out information to Mayor and Council concerning the 2024 Muscogee / Russell Point in Time Count. Ms. Frey stated that the Point in Time Count will begin on the morning of January 29, 2024 and end the evening of January 30, 2024. Ms. Frey also stated that the count will begin with the ones in the shelters first and then outside for the unsheltered. Ms. Frey further stated that Ms. Harris and her team will lead the count for the unsheltered underneath the bridges, along the River Walk and other areas in the community to assess the needs of the homeless that are there. Ms. Frey stated that United Way has always had great support from the Phenix City Police Department, the Russell County Sheriff Department, the Columbus Police Department, and the Muscogee County Sheriff Department. Ms. Frey also stated that the number of homeless in our area has increased overall, about a 13% from last year's count and the national average has increased about 15%. Ms. Frey further stated that there was an eighteen month moratorium on evictions during the Covid-19 Pandemic and no one could be evicted because they failed to pay rent and some people chose not to pay rent and now the courts are beginning to file evictions. Ms. Frey stated that fair market rent has increased since the Pandemic and sometimes the maximum amount allowed for a payment voucher may be less than that amount. Ms. Frey also stated that any given day they may have about 70 people on the list that are trying to receive homeless prevention. Ms. Frey further stated that all City and Community Leaders are invited to join the United Way's efforts to combat homelessness in our area. Councilmember Bailey stated that people are homeless for many different reasons. Councilmember Bailey asked if during the count are there questions asked to determine how the person ended up in that situation. Ms. Frey stated that questions are asked but most of them are homeless due to an addiction or loss of income. Councilmember Bailey stated that there are help wanted jobs everywhere. Ms. Frey stated that it is not as easy as it sounds and it may depend upon the job market and the housing market. Councilmember Bailey inquired about the number of homeless veterans. Ms. Frey stated that there were less than 5% of homeless veterans in our community. Councilmember Day inquired if the Veteran Association assist with the placing of homeless veterans. Ms. Frey stated that in most cases the VA helps if the veterans has VA

benefits but it depends upon their discharged status whether or not they qualify for benefits. Councilmember Day stated that some people don't want help. Ms. Frey agreed and said that they come across that quite often. Councilmember Bailey inquired about the number of women and children that were homeless. Ms. Frey stated that she does not know the specific number but homeless families with children has increased by about 20%. Ms. Frey also stated that families with children take priority and they try to place them first. Councilmember Carter inquired if there has been an increase in the number of shelters in the area to accommodate the increase in the number of homeless people. Councilmember Carter stated that Mother Mary Mission recently opened a shelter for homeless veteran women. Ms. Frey stated that no emergency shelters have been created in the area. Ms. Frey also stated that the shelter at the mission is not an emergency shelter and neither is it a free shelter. Ms. Frey further stated that children need to stay in school and it is better for them to stay in the same area and at the same school. Councilmember Bailey stated that children can't help their situation but there are a lot of jobs in the area available for able bodied adults and those adults should do everything that they can for their family. City Manager Wallace Hunter stated that it has a great emotional effect on a child to be homeless. Mr. Hunter asked what is done to try to protect the children. Ms. Frey stated that families with minor children are top priority. Ms. Frey also stated that if a family with children is placed, they try to keep the children at their same school if possible to keep them with the same friends and teachers to lessen the emotional effect that it may have on them. Councilmember Carter inquired if there has been an increase of immigrants in the area that are homeless. Ms. Frey stated that there has been an increase of immigrants in the area but as of now they are not homeless but may be living in unsafe conditions. Ms. Frey also stated that United Way does not verify citizenship and wants to help everyone. Mayor Lowe thanked Ms. Frey and Ms. Harris for coming to speak with Council.

Mayor Lowe stated the Planning Commission meeting scheduled for December 26, 2023 was canceled due to no agenda items.

Mayor Lowe called upon Acting City Clerk Shannon Davis who discussed the following with Mayor and Council:

1. Advised Council of a regular scheduled Council Meeting to be held on Wednesday, January 3, 2024 at 9:00 a.m. at the Public Safety Building. This meeting will be held on a Wednesday morning due to the New Year's Day Holiday.
2. Advised Council that the Planning Commission will meet on Tuesday, January 9, 2024 at 5:15 p.m.
3. Informed Council that the Phenix City-Russell County Library Board will meet on Thursday, January 11, 2024 at 5:30 p.m.
4. Informed Council that Troy University will hold their Fall Commencement Ceremony on Friday, January 12, 2024 at the Columbus Georgia Convention and Trade Center at 7:00 p.m.
5. Informed Council that the 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Unity Award Breakfast will be held on Monday, January 15, 2024 at the Columbus Georgia Convention and Trade Center at 7:00 a.m.
6. Informed Council that City Offices will be closed on Monday, January 15, 2024 in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday.
7. Advised Council of a regular scheduled Work Session to be held on Tuesday, January 16, 2024 at 3:00 p.m. at the Public Safety Building. This meeting will be held on a Tuesday afternoon due to the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday.
8. Advised Council of a regular scheduled Council Meeting to be held on Wednesday, January 17, 2024 at 9:00 a.m. at the Public Safety Building. This meeting will be held on a Wednesday morning due to the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday.

9. Advised Council that the Downtown Redevelopment Authority will meet on Thursday, January 18, 2024 3:00 p.m.
10. Advised Council that the Board of Zoning Adjustment and Appeals will meet on Thursday, January 18, 2024 at 5:30 p.m.
11. Advised Council that the Planning Commission will meet on Tuesday, January 23, 2024 at 5:15 p.m.
12. Advised Council that the Housing Abatement Board will meet on Thursday, February 1, 2024 9:00 a.m.
13. Informed Council that the State of the City is scheduled for Thursday, February 1, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. located at the Public Safety Building.
14. Advised Council of a regular scheduled Work Session to be held on Monday, February 5, 2024 at 3:00 p.m. at the Public Safety Building.
15. Advised Council of a regular scheduled Council Meeting to be held on Tuesday, February 6, 2024 at 9:00 a.m. at the Public Safety Building.
16. Advised Council that the Planning Commission will meet on Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at 5:15 p.m.
17. Advised Council that the Board of Zoning Adjustment and Appeals will meet on Thursday, February 15, 2024 at 5:30 p.m.
18. Informed Council that City Offices will be closed on Monday, February 19, 2024 in observance of President's Day Holiday.
19. Advised Council of a regular scheduled Work Session to be held on Tuesday, February 20, 2024 at 3:00 p.m. at the Public Safety Building. This meeting will be held on a Tuesday afternoon due to the President's Day Holiday.
20. Advised Council of a regular scheduled Council Meeting to be held on Wednesday, February 21, 2024 at 9:00 a.m. at the Public Safety Building. This meeting will be held on a Wednesday morning due to the President's Day Holiday.
21. Advised Council that the Planning Commission will meet on Tuesday, February 27, 2024 at 5:15 p.m.
22. Reviewed upcoming board appointments.

Councilmember Carter stated that she received a call a couple of weeks ago concerning a street in District Two that needed cleaning. Councilmember Carter also stated that the work order was called in, and is now completed. Councilmember Carter thanked the Public Works Department for taking care of the area in District Two and all that they do to keep Phenix City clean.

Councilmember Bailey inquired about an update on obtaining outside contractor bids to help repair water leaks throughout the City. Assistant City Manager Chan Gamble stated that a couple of contractors have been contacted and the Utilities Department is gathering the structure of cost and process before it is presented to Council. Mr. Gamble also stated that the Utilities Department has hired three new employees in the past couple of weeks and they are expected to start soon.

Councilmember Bailey inquired about an update on the Bridgewater Sewer Line Project. Councilmember Bailey stated that he has not had anyone to complain about the area, he just wanted an update just in case someone asked him. City Manager Wallace Hunter stated that the project has been placed on hold and as of now, the changes that were made last year are still working and no issues have been reported. Graduate Engineer John Spraggins stated that the re-routing portion of the project has been placed on hold due to significant cost increase of the alternate route.

Councilmember Day inquired about an update on the Racetrac Gas Station, Circle K Gas Station, and any new businesses on Highway 431. Building Official Ray Roger stated that the Circle K Gas Station is complete and a Subway Restaurant will be added soon next door. Mr. Rogers also stated that the Racetrac Gas Station is under construction.

Councilmember Day inquired about the More Than a Game Program at the Meadowlane Park in South Phenix City. Parks and Recreation Assistant Director Kristi Goggans stated that the More Than a Game Organization has not been in operation at the park for quite some time and the area is currently being reserved for the Phenix City Titan Football Program and local slow-pitch leagues.

Councilmember Day stated that there has been a couple of Police Officers to retire or resign from the Police Department. Councilmember Day inquired about the effect that it has had on the Police Department. Chief of Police George Staudinger stated that Sergeant James Belin retired after twenty five years of public service. Chief Staudinger also stated that Sergeant Roderick Johnson decided to resign from the Phenix City Police Department to work for the Auburn, Alabama Police Department Drug and Narcotic Taskforce. Chief Staudinger further stated that Retired Officer Sergeant Jason Searcy worked for the Phenix City Police Department for 19 years recently passed away and his funeral service will be held on January 3, 2024. Chief Staudinger stated that Sergeant Searcy was one of the hardest working officers that he knew and asked for prayers for his family.

Mayor Lowe went over the agenda items.

City Attorney Jimmy Graham reviewed the claims with Council.

Mayor Lowe stated that there being nothing further to discuss, the meeting adjourned until 3:00 p.m., Tuesday, January 16, 2024.