

# City of Graham

## City Council Special Meeting Minutes

### Budget Planning Session

#### March 24, 2025

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The City Council of Graham held a special meeting, a Budget Planning Session, at 10:00 a.m. on March 24, 2025, at the Children's Museum of Alamance County, 217 S. Main Street, Graham, NC.

#### Council Members Present:

Mayor Jennifer Talley  
Mayor Pro Tem Ricky Hall  
Council Member Bobby Chin  
Council Member Joey Parsons  
Council Member Bonnie Whitaker

#### Staff Present:

Megan Garner, City Manager  
Aaron Holland, Assistant City Manager  
Renee Ward, City Clerk

Mayor Talley called the meeting to order, and Council Member Chin gave the invocation.

### **Council's Strategic Actions/Goals**

#### **1. Hire City Engineer – analyze salary and job expectations**

- What deficiency are we trying to correct?
- Based on responses from our population peer group, we would need an average of 6 engineers and a budget of around \$700,000 annually, not including special projects.

City Manager Garner asked the Council to relay the deficiencies the Council had recognized to give staff direction if the Council decided to fund an engineering position or department.

Mayor Talley shared that she was receiving complaints from developers regarding the initial reviews during the Planning Board review.

Assistant City Manager Holland shared what engineers are responsible for and the cost of going to another engineering firm.

Council Member Parsons expressed concerns that Alley Williams, Carmen, and King (AWCK) do not have the City's best interest in mind when working on projects for the developer.

Mayor Talley shared those developers get frustrated when the goal posts seem to change, making it challenging for developers to meet expectations. She also shared that it was taking months to get responses from the engineering firm.

Council Member Whitaker asked what the City was paying for engineer services.

Assistant City Manager Holland said approximately \$400,000 for planning reviews, specialized engineers - \$500,000 and for special projects – greater than 500,000, such as water lines replacements.



City Manager Garner suggested sending out RFQs spelling out what we need from an engineering firm and have RFQs for the rest of services needed. These would be brought back to Council for approval.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall agreed with submitting RFQs.

Council Member Whitaker agreed and said it was time to get another firm.

Mayor Talley wanted someone professional and put a mechanism in place to ensure we are monitoring what we are being billed for.

Council Member Chin asked if there was enough workload to hire a full-time engineer and make sure they are only making them do what the Code states and not going above the code and adding to it.

Assistant City Manager Holland shared that the Council gave the direction to use on-call engineers, which we had.

Council consensus was to find a firm that encompassed all the services that (AWCK) was providing and use (AWCK) as a backup so services would not suffer. Also, the City's expectations should be included in the RFQs so developers do not have to wait months for services to be completed.

Engineering Departments - Population Group 10,000-24,999			
City Name	Population	Full-Time Employees (including support staff)	Budget
Harrisburg	19500	6	\$ 600,000.00
Henderson	15000	4	\$ 472,000.00
Hendersonville	15000	14	\$ 1,133,500.00
Kinston	19500	8	\$ 760,000.00
Morganton	17500	5	\$ 434,000.00
Mount Airy	10500	4	\$ 600,000.00
Reidsville	14500	2	Budget embedded within PW/ Utilities
Southern Pines	16000	2	Budget embedded within PW
Stallings	16500	5	\$ 838,000.00
Waxhaw	21700	5	\$ 688,000.00

## 2. UDO revision

- Estimated to cost around \$200,000 and take two budget years

Council consensus was to move forward with the cost to be separated over two budget years.

## 3. Downtown Master Plan revision

- Staff received comments from Mayor Talley and Council Member Chin

Council consensus was to prepare for a rewrite, submit an RFQ, and rescind the current Downtown Plan pending the rewrite. Assistant City Manager Holland will research available grant opportunities.

## 4. Implement payroll software and Personnel Policy

- Payroll software estimated to go live in May 2025
- Personnel Policy scheduled for consideration for April 2025



Council will meet with the City Manager to review the Personnel Policy update and give input.

#### **5. Sesquicentennial Park Repair/Move**

- Soils report complete – identified some issues but can't say the entire structure was buried
- RFP currently being prepared to get a cost to move the park

Mayor Talley asked for a copy of the soil report and to review the RFQ before sending it out. City Manager will send the soil report to the Council.

#### **6. New Fire Station**

- Staff has identified a portion of the property at Graham Regional
- If this area is utilized, a land swap with PARTF will be required
- FY 2026 is anticipated to include the cost to advance this initiative

Council consensus was to move forward with a substation.

#### **7. Market Graham with Better Signage -Interstate**

- What are the specifics of what we want to advertise?

The council consensus was to advertise "Visit Historic Graham" and possibly use wayfinding signs.

#### **8. Comprehensive Plan Update**

- Nearing completion

#### **9. Economic Development Board – needs to be defined and possible grant support for local businesses**

- The Chamber of Commerce handles this for us routinely as part of our contract.

#### **10. Effective tax rate and balanced budget**

- What does this mean to the City Council?

(.2899 is the current tax rate for real and personal property.) City Manager Megan asked the Council to direct staff on an effective tax rate.

Mayor Talley suggested having a bond referendum to build a fire department.

City Manager Garner shared that it may be too late for the November election because the process would take several months due to State Statutory requirements.

The Council's consensus was to evaluate the revenue/neutral tax rate and include a 2 cent increase for the upcoming fiscal year.

Mayor Talley asked for the County to conduct a re-evaluation of industrial properties in Graham.



### 11. Restructure Sanitation to Meet Demand

- Public Works modifies sanitation routes on a near-weekly basis
- FY 2026 is anticipated to include one new sanitation collector

The City Manager will incorporate this position into the FY 25-26 budget.

### 12. Effective Retention Policy

- Many factors play into this initiative
  - Longevity, competitive salaries, benefits package
- Proposed Personnel Policy revisions improve this factor

No action was needed.

### 13. Identify areas in the Land Use Plan/ETJ for potential development

It will be in the plan reviews.

### 14. Increase the Capacity of the Water Reservoir

- Hazen (engineers) is evaluating the reservoir capacity and possibilities for improvement.

This will be included in the second funding year. (FY26-27)

### 15. Address funding for resurfacing and backlog

- Public Works allow more narrow roads because the paving funding has been insufficient for an extended period of time





#### **16. Marketing City events: website – social media – share positive stories – market services – active boards and commissions**

- Increased presence on social media
- Increased website postings

We have a third-party vendor preparing social media graphics.

#### **17. Explore options to build a sports complex**

- Withers Ravenel has begun work on the master plan

No action was needed. Withers Ravenel staff will hold a Master Plan Community Engagement at the Graham Regional Park on April 14, 2025, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., to get input from park visitors.

#### **18. Increase Volunteer Firefighters' Program**

- Staff is evaluating methods to increase volunteerism

City Manager Garner shared staff were revising the tier schedule based on certification and years of service.

Mayor Talley asked that supervisors recruit volunteers.

#### **19. High Quality of Life for Residents**

- What does this mean for the City Council?

Council shared that quality of life consisted of safety, quality drinking water, trash pick-up, police and fire services, and City events.

Council asked to put money aside to replace water lines on the City's north side.

#### **20. Development and Expansion**

- What does this mean for the City Council?

Council wants to expand and develop industry, retail, grocery stores, and family restaurants.

#### **Additional Items Discussed:**

- Council Member Chin asked about potential uses for repurposing the old ladder truck. Council Member Parsons asked if you could take the old ladder truck and make it a crash truck for accidents (blocking traffic).
- Mayor Pro Tem Hall asked about creating a fire district in our ETJ areas and collecting a tax for that service as set by Alamance County.



## **Council's Top Strategic Action Priorities:**

### **1. Explore digital signage at City Hall to promote events downtown**

- Eligible use of TDA funds; approximately \$45,000

Consensus was to explore pricing for a sign on the front lawn of City Hall with digital messaging.

**Items 2 through 10 were discussed above.**

### **2. Restructure Sanitation**

### **3. Complete the Comprehensive Plan**

### **4. High-quality infrastructure**

### **5. Address the Sesquicentennial Park repair/move to a new location**

### **6. Implement Edmunds payroll software and Personnel Policy**

### **7. Market Graham with better signage along the interstate.**

### **8. Revise the Downtown Master Plan**

### **9. Hire a City Engineer**

### **10. Update Unified Development Ordinance (UDO)**

## **Additional Items Discussed:**

Mayor Talley suggested a competition for a rebranding logo/slogan, which would involve getting submissions and offering a prize.

City Manager Garner shared that rebranding was in the works and the Council would see something soon.



## **FY 2026 Considerations**

- **Consolidating Building Maintenance into One Department (Property Maintenance) With A Dedicated Employee**

City Manager Garner shared this would help eliminate the cost-of-service calls unless it was specialized equipment/job.

- **Sanitation costs**
  - **Separate rate structure for B-1?**

Mayor Talley expressed concern about businesses using other businesses' trash cans and businesses holding events and being charged additionally for trash pick-up after events. She was against increasing trash pickup costs and said that other business owners would not be happy.

Council consensus was for no separate rate for B1.

City Manager Garner asked if a fee schedule for contaminated recycling for first and second offenses was something City Council wanted staff to evaluate.

Council consensus was not right now.

- **Municipal vehicle tax**

Council consensus was for no vehicle tax.

- **Council's desire for tax rate?**

Council consensus was a two-cent tax increase for the upcoming fiscal year.

- **Modification of the health insurance to remove GLP-1 medication for weight loss**

City Manager Garner shared that the City would no longer pay for weight loss medication in the upcoming fiscal year.

- **Onboarding of financial advisors to assist with structuring long-term debt, including capital items for both the general fund and utilities**

City Manager Garner shared the Davenport Group was helping with structuring long-term debt.

### **Additional Items Discussed:**

Mayor Talley asked about allowing residents to have an extra sanitation can.

City Manager Garner shared that Public Works lacked the manpower due to additional growth and the expense of wear and tear on sanitation trucks.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall asked staff to present the cost of personnel and a sanitation truck so that residents could have an extra trash can for a fee.



Mayor Talley asked for a list of properties the City rents to other agencies.

Mayor Talley said hiring a utility crew would save money on repairing and replacing water lines.

**Meeting adjourned at 2:36 p.m.**

*Renee M. Ward, CMC*

City Clerk

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