AGENDA ITEM #: 6

// A special meeting of the Council of the City of Lynchburg was held on the 5th day of May, 2020 at 4:00 p.m. in the Council Chamber, City Hall, Treney Tweedy, President, presiding. The following members were present:

Present: Mary Jane Dolan, Jeff Helgeson, J. Randy Nelson, E. J. Turner Perrow, Sterling A. Wilder, Beau Wright, Treney Tweedy 7

Absent: 0

// In the matter of Public Works, Council discussed changes to the refuse collection program. Dr. Reid Wodicka reminded them of the changes they have approved to this point. Prior Council decisions include transitioning to a monthly billing structure (but not the rate yet) beginning January 1, 2021. There will be a bulk and brush schedule. Multiple cart sizes will continue. The six recycling centers will continue but there will be no curbside recycling at this point. Billing exceptions were removed for SNAP, tax relief and the Tyreeanna/Pleasant Valley neighborhood.

Further items for discussion are the refuse collection fee structure, the addition of a Bulk and Brush Education and Enforcement full-time employee and revisions to the Refuse Ordinance, which are tentatively scheduled for discussion on May 12, 2020.

The original staff recommendation was for $15.02 per month per trash cart for all sizes. This fee rate would be in effect for 18 months (January 1, 2020 – June 30, 2022). If a household desires or needs multiple cans, the fee multiplies by the number of trash carts. The present rate is $9.17 for the 64-gallon cart. At this rate, the service still requires a $1.67 million subsidy from the General Fund.

Given the economic changes due to COVID-19, staff has developed additional options and a revised staff recommendation for Council's consideration. Option A is staff's original recommendation. Option B recommends a $9.17 monthly fee starting October 1, 2020. Option C is to continue as we are now. It will be difficult to do an accurate inventory of existing carts by October 1, so there may be a period of time when people are being under billed, until we figure out how many households have more than one cart.

If Council adopts Option B, staff will begin monthly billing, complete the trash cart inventory and update accounts with the correct number of trash carts per account. Staff recommends that in FY2022, we begin the slow process towards revenue self-sufficiency.

In answer to a question from Councilmember Wilder, Dr. Wodicka said there is a potential for a rate increase for those that use the 32-gallon size cart because the $9.17 fee would be across the board.

Councilmember Helgeson commented that people without a can or a smaller can will be charged. This is a huge difference for those that buy a 32-gallon can tag. Ms. Gaynelle Hart explained that the fee is for the totality of the program. Recycling costs went up $100,000 this year. Councilmember Helgeson asked why Option B and C are so similar but there is an increase in the deficit with Option C. Dr. Wodicka noted that 90 percent of the overhead costs are the same whether they are stopping to pick up a 32 or a 64 gallon can. It is a convenience if a person wants a smaller can. Councilmember Helgeson noted that the smaller can encourages recycling, less waste and good stewardship. Dr. Wodicka clarified that everyone will pay for the service because they have the option to put out trash and they are paying for all the fixed costs of trash removal. For that reason, Councilmember Helgeson has a problem with Option B.

Councilmember Perrow is concerned that this is another burden that could weigh on someone. Council has already made the decision that it would like to implement this policy and needs to decide if this is the right time. Option C would put a large hold in their budget. Option A seems untenable to him, which was their initial decision before COVID-19 economic hardships. Councilmember Perrow would suggest they round the amount to $10 a month and start collecting it in October 2020.

Councilmember Nelson agrees we need to be weighing balancing the budget versus burdens on citizens. He commented that if a person uses the service very little, it is just as burdensome as a tax. He is opposed to anything that discourages recycling and environmental consciousness. He thinks a flat fee means the citizens lose a specific consciousness to try to be efficient. He is not in favor of Option A or C but does think Councilmember Perrow's suggestion of a $10 flat fee does make some reasonable prudence.

Councilmember Perrow made that as a motion, which was seconded by Councilmember Nelson. Councilmember Perrow thinks this option is better than a $15 a month fee. This is a 33 percent reduction in the plan they had originally approved. He is sensitive about change during a time of turmoil but he pointed out they will not have to purchase trash tags. He thinks it is a more equitable situation because everyone is contributing to the need for trash removal, not just those people who choose to buy trash tags.

In answer to a question from Councilmember Nelson, Dr. Wodicka said the inventory will be done in order to make people are paying fairly, as well as garnering an inventory for those that would like to switch out their cans. It is staff's plan to take some people that can be redeployed to do certain sectors of the City. Councilmember Nelson wondered if the trash collectors could do some of this. Dr. Wodicka said it is a point well take but it may be too much of an additional burden for the trash collectors to do with their normal duties. Councilmember Nelson thought they had GIS capability to scan the trash decals from the truck and determine if it is a valid sticker and for the right size can. Dr. Wodicka said they hope to have that capability in the future but do not have it right now.

Councilmember Perrow noted there will still be a shortfall of around $1,400. Ms. Svrcek said they did some recalculation and it is about $2,500.

Councilmember Helgeson said he cannot support Option B because last year, there was a 37.5 percent increase in the trash decal fee. The $40 can went to $55 and they will no longer have the option to pay the lower fee. Going to $110 will be a 200 percent increase. Also, those that did not have a cart at all will be charged just because they have a water bill.

Vice Mayor Dolan asked for clarification that this fee also covers bulk, brush and leaf collection. Dr. Wodicka said that is correct. She noted that it is not like a person is not getting any service, if they do not have a cart, because there are other things that could be putting out for pickup.

The motion passed by the following vote:

Ayes:	Dolan, Nelson, Perrow, Tweedy, Wilder, Wright	6
Noes:	Helgeson	1

Ms. Hart addressed Council about the need for a Bulk and Brush Education and Enforcement employee. The present condition of brush and bulk collections is not acceptable to Council and projects a negative image for the City. The lack of structure leads to excessive and unpredictable setouts, primarily with bulk items. Building a system that everyone can understand will allow staff to continue to provide service while cleaning up our community. The proposed position is critical to solving this issue. Ms. Hart provided them with some recent pictures showing some bulk and brush pickup issues. Councilmembers wondered why there was not a fine for some of these examples because Councilmember Perrow noted that some of them look like borderline criminal behavior. Ms. Hart noted there will be a recommendation for a stiff fee for cleanup for these types of situations in the upcoming ordinance. She said they work with Community Development on issues of littering on private property. Dr. Wodicka noted there is just a lack of structure they are trying to address. Ms. Hart said education will come before enforcement. If people continue to violate the ordinance, they could incur a fine. Mayor Tweedy noted these pictures show a lack of personal responsibility and accountability. She said they see examples of this misuse all through the City when they are driving around. Councilmember Wilder said he sees this all the time in his ward and gets calls frequently about it.

Mayor Tweedy asked Ms. Hart to talk about whether or not this is a result of evictions. Ms. Hart said they did not find this to be the cause of most of the unsightly setouts. Staff thinks it is a result of people flipping houses or people that are moving on and they choose to set their stuff out prior to moving to another location. It could be the landlord setting the stuff out but they are generally related to a legal eviction where people are served.

Councilmember Helgeson said this is the worst he has ever seen it and it might be related to people being home during the pandemic. He asked what they are doing to make a difference on this tomorrow because he thinks they have been talking about this for 15 to 16 years. Ms. Hart said they will be bringing them an ordinance next week that will clarify how big the pile can be and what types of things the pile can contain. Then there is a proposal for a potential fee or fine for noncompliance. They would like to add another knuckle boom truck eventually. Councilmember Helgeson wondered why this has not been brought up during the past 16 years and Ms. Hart said she believes the problem has been getting worse. It could be because more properties are becoming rental properties. She has been working with a task force for the past two years to see what they could do to change it. Councilmember Helgeson hopes the ordinance will actually address the person who is actually setting the trash out as opposed to the property owner. Ms. Hart said their first step will certainly be toward the occupant, if they can find them.

In answer to a question from Councilmember Wright, Ms. Hart said they pick up an average of 200 to 250 tons of bulk pick up a month. She would need to work up the costs of this service and he said he thought that would be interesting to know.

Councilmember Nelson made a motion to delay the start of the new employee until October 2020, which is item number 21 on the list, pending the approval of the new ordinance. Councilmember Perrow seconded the motion and asked what the amount of money is they are discussing. Ms. Witt said the revised amount is $37,305. Councilmember Helgeson said he can appreciate this position but he would like to see the ordinance of what the person will be enforcing. He would like to put this off, especially in light of the fact that they still need to critical public safety positions. Councilmember Nelson noted there is already an ordinance the person can enforce and if the ordinance is changed, the person will enforce that one. Either way, it is a position that is needed now. Councilmember Wright would agree that it needed now. If they push it off, they should not put it off too far. Mayor

Tweedy wondered if the final approval process for a potential rental or building permit could be tied to whether or not there have been issues of excessive trash. Dr. Wodicka said they could explore that possibility with Community Development but the building code certainly limits them on what they can do. Councilmember Wilder said they see these issues all the time when they are doing neighborhood walkthroughs. Often they are out of state owners or the person living there may have died. You will see a beautiful property and then see one like in the photos shown today. He is very thankful for the compliance team.

Councilmember Helgeson asked if the current enforcement employee could be giving notices about violations of the bulk and brush program, rather than adding a brand new position. Ms. Hart said the current employee has more than he can deal with now. He can barely get around the City one time to check properties for overflow. They need one person actually dedicated to the brush and bulk problem to work with citizens to get it into compliance. Councilmember Helgeson noted that for him it is a matter of priorities and this is more of a priority for him rather than someone having their trash can slightly ajar. He appreciates this problem more than anybody but he would hope they could find some efficiencies. He does not think he can support this new position at this time.

The motion passed by the following vote:

Ayes:	Dolan, Nelson, Perrow, Tweedy, Wilder, Wright	6
Noes:	Helgeson	1

Dr. Wodicka outlined the timeline for implementing the program.

// In the matter of Budget, Council discussed the “list.” Ms. Svrcek noted that items 11 and 12 for the Registrar’s office can be funded out of the City Manager’s discretionary fund, as they are nominal amounts. Councilmember Wright asked how much would be left in the fund and she thought about $25,000. Council was in agreement to remove these two items from the list.

With regard to the funding of nine additional firefighters, Dr. Wodicka indicated they had put together four options for them to consider. Chief Greg Wormser explained that these options give them a way to finesse the process moving forward. Councilmember Nelson had asked what the change would be in overtime funding and that would equate to around $80,000 but that is anecdotal and not something he can guarantee. He noted that pre-COVID, they would have started the process of recruiting for these positions because they would have known where they stood by now. They could be looking at October at the earliest before these positions could be filled. He understands the budget constraints but noted that the nine additional firefighters are certainly to make sure their response times are acceptable and in order to deliver an effective service.

In answer to a question from Councilmember Wright, Chief Wormser said that if they hire only six firefighters, there is no relief factor. There is currently no relief factor across the department. We need another eleven firefighters to create a relief factor for the rest of the department. Respectfully, adding just six firefighters “kicks the can down the road” a little bit. Councilmember Wright asked if they picked the option to hire them in January 2021, does staff think they can find the $529,000 to fund them. Dr. Wodicka noted it would be half of that approximately for six months. Ms. Witt said she would like to know where they are January 1, 2021. Ms. Svrcek would recommend they put this on the future list that is reviewed in January 2021. There is no doubt that this is needed but it is matter of resources, which are now even more constrained. Until she knows what revenues look like for the future, she is hesitant to commit to anything.

Councilmember Wilder asked what the time period is for training. Chief Wormser said they would try to hire experienced providers, so the training would be a little more compressed based on their capabilities. It might only be four to six weeks. If they had to run a full recruit academy, it would be 19 to 21 weeks. The market is not great but he should be able to hire six experienced providers by October 2020. He reminded them they would not have the $80,000 is overtime savings unless they hire nine. It would actually exacerbate the problem. If they were able to hire nine, they would look to have a traditional recruitment academy in January 2021.

Councilmember Nelson asked if these services would be directed toward the Timberlake/Wards Road/Graves Mill Road area of the City. Chief Wormser said absolutely it would be focused on Timberlake Road. Councilmember Nelson does think this is a responsibility the City has but the question is when and how do we do it. He would like to do a little bit of two things. He would like to cut some items from the list to free up some funding, as well as postponing it awhile until they get a better handle on their revenues. He is not comfortable putting it off until January 1, 2021. He would like to look at it October 1, 2020. He made that as a motion, which was seconded by Vice Mayor Dolan. Councilmember Nelson understands the need now for nine positions, after hearing the explanation. In order to realize the overtime savings and reduce the stress on the rest of the personnel that is having to carry a heavy load, he would like to look at funding all nine of the positions in October 2020. Vice Mayor Dolan agrees this is something that needs to be done and probably the sooner, the better.

Mayor Tweedy asked Chief Wormser to clarify whether or not there are 69 additional firefighters needed because there is public confusion. Chief Wormser said there is a standard National Fire Protection Agency 1710. They know by their Standard of Cover that the department strives to adhere to 1710 as a goal. It is not a goal they can attain right now but they are working on it. 1710 refers to the number of firefighters on fire and ladder trucks. We currently achieve 1710 in several ways and he is not aware of any fire department in the state of Virginia that adheres to 1710 in its entirety, as it relates to staffing. They do need more staff but he is not sure it would be 69 additional firefighters. That would be a discussion for later. His job is to manage resources effectively and provide the best safety to the City's residents. In terms of how money they might be talking about, he would say $3 to 3.5 million to hire 69 additional firefighters and we do not have the facilities we need to make those firefighters comfortable. That would be a challenge in some fire stations.

Councilmember Perrow found his explanations interesting. The overtime would actually go up if they only hire six firefighters because they would not have the relief factor. If they had four additional firefighters, they would not be able to have an additional EMS unit but they would have some relief. Chief Wormser said that is correct. Councilmember Perrow would like to continue to look at removing some items from the list so they can fund six or possibly all nine firefighters and does not think he will be voting for this motion.

Councilmember Nelson would like to look at this is October when they know where they are at in terms of revenue. It is kind of a failsafe "veto" opportunity for them in October. He would like to have them to have an eye on a target as a goal.

Councilmember Helgeson would like to see them rectify this tonight rather than "kicking the can down the road" to October. When medic units are being called by our citizens and they are not available, that is not good. He would like to see them find $529,000 in extraneous expenses and fund it July 1, 2020 or find $264,000 to start them in January 2021. That would give them time to recruit them. He would like to see them take some things out of the budget that might be considered "fat." We could look at some other departments where we can take out some nonessential functions and add these folks because our citizens demand it. He asked Chief Wormser if the Standard of Cover identified they needed 69 additional firefighters. He also asked if they are not pretty far behind other localities in Virginia.

Chief Wormser does not recall the Standard of Cover mentioning 69 additional firefighters needed. 1710 does cover that requirement. Yes, are behind and that is why he is asking for nine firefighters and an additional 11 down the road. He thinks that if the firefighters can see a light at the end of the tunnel, it helps them to stay and lets them know that Council cares about them. He can appreciate Councilmember Nelson's desire to see if the revenue is there in October but he thinks it can be quantified now.

Councilmember Nelson is not metaphorically "kicking any can down any road." He is suggesting they move it forward tonight and look at in October. To the extent that there are other things in the budget that could fund this definitely this year starting October 1, it may be appropriate to postpone his motion until they go through the other things on the list. He withdrew his motion and Vice Mayor Dolan withdrew her second of the motion.

Councilmember Wright wants to make sure they have the money going forward. They are groping through a dark tunnel right now and we do not know what funding will look like in FY2022. He would like them to pause and see what remaining items on the list they could look at to be shifted over to fund the additional firefighters.

Councilmember Wright asked if the $6.5 million deficit takes into account managed vacancy savings for quarter one. Ms. Witt noted they have a hiring freeze so they do not know what that number will be right now. He asked if the hiring freeze will not be lifted any time soon if that money should not be made available. Dr. Wodicka said it is one-time money only. Councilmember Wright noted there are other items that are on list that are one-time money and he does see why they should not factor it into the savings available to them. Ms. Svrcek reminded them that they normally use managed vacancy funds for pay-as-you-go capital in the next budget. He said he would be curious to know if we continue the hiring freeze, except for public safety, how much they would save in the first quarter of FY2021. Ms. Witt said she would need to work with Human Resources on that number.

Councilmember Helgeson asked if Schools has a hiring freeze. Ms. Svrcek said she would need to check with the superintendent. Councilmember Perrow suggested they talk about schools now because it could have such a serious impact on what they are doing. Councilmember Perrow is inclined to support the City Managers recommendation to cut schools funding by $2.2 million. He noted they have been doing an excellent job continuing to meet the needs of the students but there are costs they will not have to encumber because the buildings are closed for the most part.

Councilmember Wright asked Dr. Crystal Edwards to address how the loss of $2.2 million would impact schools. She said there are four command centers at the four large schools. They are also doing maintenance and technology at all the other locations. She mentioned that they are also going to experience a cut in sales tax and lottery funds. They came in pre-COVID with level funding. She reminded them that they already took $1.5 million from them, so they are not really experiencing any "savings" from the schools because they already lost $1.5 million of City funding. They do not know yet the status of whether or not the buildings will be open in October or if they might be operating on alternating schedules.

She explained that they received about $18 million in federal funding from sales and lottery taxes. They are hoping that hit that is not too huge. They are trying to mitigate that hit on their own without asking the City to help them. They have some hiring freezes and there are positions that have not been refilled or have been repurposed. They are very concerned about losing $2.2 million next year, especially in terms of what they will have to do differently with instruction and providing for the needs of kids. They do not know what kind of condition the children will be in when they return and they need to have, the social and emotional services available for them, along with instructional services.

The $2.2 million cut would be critical and would mean that they would need to start to lay off essential staff. They do not want to lose their talented workforce. Councilmember Wright noted that the schools budget is approximately a fifth of their overall operating budget of approximately $200 million. Councilmember Wright noted that is expecting schools to absorb approximately a third of the $6.5 million deficit. Ms. Svrcek noted that $1.5 million was in her original budget proposal. He said he was not necessarily thrilled with that proposal either. She did acknowledge that $2.2 million is what she is proposing now. He said he is highly uncomfortable with that if it means laying off essential staff.

Dr. Edwards explained what they did to absorb the original $1.5 million that they did not receive from the State. They cut things like professional development for staff and tuition reimbursement, extra slots at the governor's schools and additional field trips. She asked the board for a salary reserve. They will continue to feed the children over the summer. They worked through many of the issues and had a balanced budget again. They will get some stimulus money but it in no way makes for the third of the budget they received in sales and lottery taxes. They are projected to get around $3 million but she pointed out that 22 percent of that goes to non-public schools. That is because they are the fiscal agent to receive the money and distribute it.

Councilmember Wright asked her if she had a sense of the total loss in revenue and the net after they receive the stimulus money. She said they keep guessing at the net. She said the projections are anywhere from 10 percent to 50 percent in loss of sales tax revenue. He asked if the board has had a chance to discuss all of this. She said they have not had a chance to discuss the proposed additional $700,000 cut. She mentioned that their state revenue increased by $2.5 million, however $1.8 million of that goes to health insurance claims and VRS. She has not accounted for an additional $636,000 in sales tax revenues anticipated pre-COVID because she no longer thinks that is a realistic number. She also noted that in order to accept the additional $2.5 million, they have to match it with $1.5 million, which was built into her level funding request. Councilmember Wright noted that the school board should be able to have a chance to meet about this, as he received a number of calls from board members. He thinks it would imprudent for them to act on their budget today until the board has a chance to meet this Thursday.

Councilmember Nelson made a disclosure that his wife is the principal at one of the elementary schools but both the City Attorney and Commonwealth Attorney have advised him that it is not a conflict of interest. He affirmed that he can be objective and unbiased on this matter. Councilmember Nelson noted that at the March school board meeting, Dr. Edwards had indicated that there would be substantial savings due to the school buildings closing. What is "benefitting" the school's bottom line this spring was hurting everybody else and their bottom line. The same forces and factors are having directly opposite effects. Dr. Edwards would not agree that is a fair statement because she is not receiving, or does not anticipate receiving, the same amount of revenue to pay her teachers, and they are still working. She does not know where she is going to plug the hole that she will have from not receiving the funds she normally receives on the state side. Some of it will be plugged from the fuel savings and the savings in utilities in not having the buildings completely open. She has to project revenue losses from both the City, as proposed by the City Manager, and the State.

He noted that the school board gave her in March the ability to create a salary reserve fund. He understands why she has not funded it at this time, as there may be eyes looking at that reserve fund and gauge schools' needs. He wondered if she could project her end of year fund balance at this time. She said she could not give him an estimate at this time but it will not be nearly the $5 million they had and the City has taken $1.5 million of it. She does not want to give them a number and have Council hold her to it. She knows she will get approximately $526,000 in Medicaid at the end of June, but it may roll over to fund balance. She reminded them that they are struggling with revenue shortfalls just as like the City. They are continuing to pay essential workers, although she acknowledged there are some hourly workers that have not been getting paid. The teachers and administrators are still working. The largest part of her budget is the personnel.

Councilmember Nelson said it sounds like she is suggesting that any savings are offset by her loss of sales and lottery tax revenues. He did not know it made up that much of the schools budget. She said she is suggesting they are doing the same thing that Council is doing, which is being cautious and thoughtful about what is to come. She does not want to be the type of leader that does not plan for a huge hit that they might take from a loss of state sales and lottery taxes. They are holding on to savings right now and she thinks that is the prudent thing to do. She also does not want to have any excess spending or hiring right now.

Councilmember Nelson noted there are 99 open positions posted on the LCS website. They are still posted as open as of May 1. She said they will see all their open positions on their website but you will not see them interviewing for all of the open positions. The Fire and Police Departments have had ongoing open positions. They have had ongoing transportation positions open and they put a freeze on their classified positions. They have to fill some essential positions. He asked if the pre-COVID budget she submitted was based on filling all of these positions. She said it included all these positions, as well as some additional positions that the community and staff have been asking. But all of that is out of the window budget now. He asked if it is fair to say that these 99 positions will not be filled now. She said that would be like saying that if the Chief of Police left, we are not going to fill his position. She said the classified positions and the substitute positions on that list have not been filled. There are also persons that have retired or resigned and their positions have not been refilled or even posted. Councilmember Nelson asked if an experienced person leaves, if there could be savings from not paying the new employee as much money. She said absolutely and they tried to account for that in order to fund salary increases. We they are looking at ways to fund themselves as best as they can without coming to the City for match funds. Councilmember Nelson thinks that taking those things into account, there could be a lot of savings in personnel going into next year. She said that is true if you just look at the expenditure side but this budget was built on full funding from sales tax and a request for level funding from the City. Councilmember Nelson acknowledged she does not have control over revenues but she has a lot of control over expenditures.

Councilmember Nelson said there are phases to the recovery process. The ones that will reopen last will be where large groups have to gather. Schools will be one of the last ones given permission to reopen. He thinks that will not be sooner than August, possibly September. That sort of budget would be very different from a traditional budget. She said that would be fair to say but absolute essential learning is still going on. Councilmember Nelson said he is not disputing that. Dr. Edwards said the biggest part of her budget is not the utilities for the buildings. It is her personnel. Schools' greatest challenge will be how they reinvent themselves and how they rethink education in the fall. They will not be off the hook to do distance learning. They have to train their personnel and there are many unknowns that she has to work out yet. The students are not going anywhere and they still need them. Councilmember Nelson said that is not the issue. The students need far more than what the school division can deliver at this time under the circumstances. There is no question about that. The burden of recovery for some students that are not taking advantage of what the teachers are doing for them is going to be drastic. His question is regarding the savings realized from three and a half months of shutdown and whether there will be savings in the fall if schools do not reopen immediately. There would be savings from activities that cannot be offered and busses not running as often. That is not an insignificant figure and those are hard facts that would be good to know.

He suspects they will have a significant fund balance at the end and they all know the policies of the City regarding what fund balances can be used for, one-time expenses such as medical insurance and capital improvements. He would suggest they authorize $700,000 to be put into a reserve and decide if it needs to be given to the school division in October based on whether or not they open on time. She does not know if that would be sufficient and does not want to have that discussion without talking to her full board.

Dr. Edwards does not want anyone in the public to think that it is possible for a school to have a zero fund balance. Things happen during the school year and they need a fund balance. The City has a 10 percent fund balance. The City has an emergency fund but schools is not permitted to have one. She is not suggesting that they want to have large fund balances. It is not reasonable for Council to think they can continue to pay teachers and staff that support the kids if their revenue from the State decreases. Councilmember Nelson asked his question again about setting aside $700,000 to see where schools are in October, which would give the City some flexibility in this very unique situation.

She noted that are stewards, along with the City. They are not trying to bankrupt the City or harm the City. They also want to help the City and our residents. She would ask, and her board would ask, for not hard and fast decisions because this thing is evolving. She agrees they all need flexibility. If we are all good stewards of our funds and we are working together, she thinks they would be in better shape. She cannot predict the future and cannot say if they will be okay. She would ask the City Manager to do the same thing because we are all in the same boat in terms of trying to predict the future. They have given the City money before because they work together as a community. It is driving her nuts that she cannot predict the changes in revenue but she can promise them they will be thoughtful and mindful. They are working with them to make the best of the situation.

He asked what is driving them to do summer food deliveries when things are so tight. It is not done over holiday vacations. She said that normally they invite the public to come out and they feed them at the pool and other locations. The residents are not gathering now and she does not think anyone in the community would not want them to try their best to feed their families. They feel they need to provide some access to food for people that cannot get out and get food.

Councilmember Nelson asked if the summer food program was implemented because it is reimbursed by the federal government. Dr. Edwards said the move is supported by the state and the state superintendent. Some of the costs are reimbursable under the summer meal program but it might not cover all of it.

Councilmember Wright would ask that she and the board would run some best and worst case scenarios of what it would look like for the end of the year fund balance and any vacancy savings that she could expect for the remainder of the year and the first quarter of FY2021. Dr. Edwards said they can work on it.

Councilmember Helgeson commented that they have to balance the City's needs and the schools' needs and the biggest one, which are the taxpayers' needs. 15,000 of our residents have lost their jobs. Mayor Tweedy wished to clarify that number because she thought it was 5,000 Lynchburg residents. Councilmember Helgeson noted that they were given the number of 15,000 people in the region that came to work in Lynchburg each day have lost their jobs. Councilmember Helgeson noted 30 million across the country have lost their jobs and it will grow again this Thursday. Councilmember Helgeson noted that is why they are asking so many questions and the citizens are asking questions too; some of them are teachers that he has heard from. He appreciates her numbers on the Empowerment Academy because that is about another $500,000. He would like them to figure out a way to consolidate because now the money for the task force has no longer been set aside but it has been meeting for a while and talking about consolidation. We have elementary schools with 524 kids and some with 169 kids. School consolidation would allow them to keep the teachers and the level of service without all the extra levels of administration. She gave him a number last week of $1.5 million for assistant principals that are not funded by the state and 100 percent funded by local taxpayers. He would like the board to consider that they have lost lots of kids. We have hundreds of fewer children just in the past couple of years. He recognizes that the kids have needs but they need to be working together for our taxpayers. He would like to see some of these unfilled vacancies never filled.

Councilmember Helgeson noted that we have fiscally stressed now, one of the highest in the state. One reason is we fund our schools very well. They would like it to go to the "boots on the ground." He realizes she does not want to make some of the changes he is suggesting but he thinks they are needed. The local taxpayers contribute about $29 to 30 million to schools. He thinks it has gone through the roof in the past few years. He thinks that according to the standards, they are supposed to contribute about $20 million and they contribute about double that amount.

Councilmember Perrow thinks that it is a noble idea to feed the children over the summer but it sounds like that is a new program in a budget time like they are in. She said they had feeding centers before in the summer. Councilmember Perrow said local dollars should not be used for that because it is outside the direct mission of the schools. He understands you cannot teach a hungry child so you need to feed them when they are in school. They have managed at other holidays and summers with churches filling in the need at times. We are in a time of austerity and the local taxpayers do not have to pick up this feeding program. We cannot print money and we have to make some hard decisions. He understands the needs of the children but the schools budget has increased more over the past ten years than any of our other departments' budgets. It has gone up and up and there is no end in sight. He needs a restatement of the state revenue, the federal revenue, the other revenue and the local revenue as found on page 267. He wants to see her best estimate of those revenues. He thinks they need these numbers to make real decisions. He has no more questions and he knows what will happen. They will come back and say they need all the money we asked for but we need to make some tough decisions in tough times. Everyone is suffering. They are not having any fun up here.

Councilmember Wilder thanked her for her support of their children. They are not just the schools children. They are all of our children and he appreciates what they have been doing to feed the children. He is in the schools a lot and he sees the challenges the teachers and janitors and everyone face. There are so many challenges here and he would like to acknowledge the school board members for working with her. He was not comfortable with the original cuts and he is definitely not comfortable with the additional $700,000. He would like to not see such a deep cut to the school system. We do not know what it is going to look like in the fall. Poverty brings a lot of challenges and we have kids with so many needs. We are obligated to educate our children and cannot just say you have too many needs. He commends her for wanting to feed the children and he commends the bus drivers and others that are making sure the children have food. It shows they care about our kids and their wellbeing. He will do what he can to support the school system. We have to continue to work together to find solutions.

Mayor Tweedy asked Dr. Edwards to address Councilmember Helgeson's suggestion regarding consolidation. Dr. Edwards said some of the buildings will not hold 500 or 600 or 700 children. They had demographic enrollment software in their pre-COVID budget because we are already looking at how we enroll children and placed them in buildings. That software has had to be removed from the budget.

Dr. Edwards mentioned that the budget they submitted pre-COVID was for flat funding and she believes they have received flat funding for the past four years. She also reminded them they returned $862,000 last year once they figured they did not need it. They have been making do and she thinks some of the changes Council is asking for are already being done by the school system. She also wanted to point out that tonight is their board meeting but the members that are there unanimously agreed that it was important to attend this meeting and then have their meeting on Thursday. That speaks volumes in terms of them all being in it together.

Councilmember Wright wanted to clarify that the superintendent has control over some discretionary spending but a lot of it is mandated and they have to provide services to children indiscriminate of need. Dr. Edwards noted that she does not get to pick the children. She wants them all but she does not get to isolate them. Councilmember Wright wanted the public to understand that there are state mandates that she has to abide by. For example, the state mandates a certain amount of children per counselor and she cannot change that to save money. Councilmember Wright wanted to point this out because Council has been sympathetic to other departments when they say they have state mandates.

Councilmember Wright also wanted to remind them that the schools task force money that was set aside for the future of education has already been pulled back ($1.2 million) to help fund the budget gap. He also mentioned that the goal of the task force is not consolidation of schools. Its goal is to think about and look at best practices for running a modern school division and see what changes might be made over a whole spectrum of needs. Consolidation might be one thing it looks at but that is not the reason the group has convened. He wants to make that very, very clear because some folks have not understood that. He also noted it is National Teacher Appreciation Week. He is certainly very grateful for all the educators in our school system for what they do keep our kids educated and provide them with the best opportunities.

She thanked Dr. Edwards for pointing out that the private schools get some of the funding because she is not sure the public understands that piece. It benefits many citizens. Councilmember Perrow noted that private school parents are taxpayers too. She noted that public school parents are taxpayers too.

Mayor Tweedy would also like to ask the City Attorney if the task force can still meet in some form, such as electronic meetings.

She noted that many things are based on unknowns. We could end up having ten Empowerment Academies because of social distancing. Most of the discussion about cuts and consolidation was pre-COVID and now we do not know where we are going. We are not opening up local government to large numbers until safety measures are addressed and the various phases are allowed.

// Dr. Wodicka gave them an update on the City actions regarding COVID-19. They have been working on a plan for the homeless population that might get exposed to the virus. They are still working on obtaining and making sure our folks have adequate PPE. They served 1,352 children and 778 adult meals last week. The long-term recovery group is meeting twice a week. Economic Development approved a business recovery loan process. They will be talking about extending the water cutoff date to June 30. The hotline for seniors is continuing to be staffed at the Templeton Senior Center and answered 52 calls last week. They have received volunteer support from the Natural Bridge and Appalachian Trail Club to maintain the City's earthen trails during the month of May. They are seeing sales increase at the Community Market. The Lynchburg Public Library has begun delivering books that have been on hold to over 200 library patrons last week.

// In the matter of Roll Call, Councilmember Nelson had no items.

Councilmember Wilder thanked all the citizens for working so well together. He is seeing beautiful acts of humanity.

Councilmember Wright asked for the Lynchburg Cooperative Extension item to be added to the "list" for consideration at the next meeting (the $2,000 item not the salary increases.)

Councilmember Perrow thanked Ms. Svrcek for the sheet but seems to remember some rows that were on previous versions. Ms. Witt said the City's contribution to schools over and above the state's requirement is in the City Manager's budget summary. Councilmember Perrow noted they keep adding things to the list and we do not have the money. There is not enough money to go around so we are in for a long slog to balance this thing.

Councilmember Helgeson would like to put the $600,000 for downtown traffic back on the "list." Ms. Svrcek noted Council approved two-way traffic and money for design is already being spent. The money is in a prior year budget as well and has been appropriated. He would also like the amounts for training, conferences, travel and dues from the City Manager's budget put on the list. Mayor Tweedy asked if they are opening up the budget discussion again and Councilmember Helgeson noted Councilmember Wright added an item.

Vice Mayor Dolan noted that the money for two-way traffic cannot be used to fund ongoing compensation. She also wants to thank all the essential workers such as public safety and grocery stockers. She would also like to thank the public for wearing masks in public to protect other people. It is very respectful to do and she thanks them very much.

Mayor Tweedy had the following announcements. The local election was moved from today to Tuesday, May 19th. The deadline to request an absentee ballot by fax, email or regular mail is Tuesday, May 12th by 5:00 p.m. The deadline to return your absentee ballot is Saturday, May 16th by 5:00 p.m. In-person absentee voting is available daily from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. until Saturday, May 16th. Thanks to everyone for compliance with the COVID19 staying at home, social distancing and wearing masks in public directives. To continue to stop the spread, we cannot become complacent. She wanted to state publicly for those that have emailed her that it is a person's personal accountability and responsibility to protect others. She cannot issue a directive forcing people to wear masks.

Mayor Tweedy had a proclamation to read for Public Service Week for May 3 through May 9.

// On motion of Vice Mayor Dolan, by Councilmember Helgeson, by the following recorded vote elected to hold a closed meeting to for the discussion and consideration of prospective candidates for the position of City Manager pursuant to Section 2.2-3711(A.)(1) of the Code of Virginia.

The motion passed by the following vote:

Ayes:	Dolan, Helgeson, Nelson, Perrow, Tweedy, Wilder, Wright	7
Nos:		0

// The meeting was re-opened to the public.

Councilmember Helgeson made the following motion:

WHEREAS, the Council of the City of Lynchburg has convened a closed meeting on this date, pursuant to an affirmative recorded vote and in accordance with the provisions of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act; and

WHEREAS, Section 2.2-3712 of the Code of Virginia requires a certification by City Council that such closed meeting was conducted in conformity with Virginia law;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Council of the City of Lynchburg certifies that, to the best of each member's knowledge, (i) only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements by Virginia law were discussed in the closed meeting to which this certification resolution applies, and (ii) only such public business matters as were identified in the motion convening the closed meeting were heard, discussed or considered by Council.

The motion was seconded by Councilmember Perrow, and Council by the following recorded vote adopted the motion:

Ayes:	Dolan, Helgeson, Nelson, Perrow, Tweedy, Wilder, Wright	7
Noes:		0

// The meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

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Clerk of Council