

// A special meeting of the Council of the City of Lynchburg was held on the 20th day of April, 2021, at 4:00 P.M. in the Council Chamber, City Hall, MaryJane Dolan, President, presiding. The following Members were present:

Present: MaryJane Dolan, Beau Wright, Jeff Helgeson, Treney Tweedy, Sterling A. Wilder, Chris Faraldi 6

Absent: J. Randy Nelson 1

// In the matter of Budget, Agenda Item #1, Council continued to balance the budget by reviewing items on "The List".

Councilmember Helgeson originally asked for The List Item *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Strategist full-time position as well as oversight (\$87,500) and funding for DEI to support City-wide initiatives (\$12,500)* to be put on the list. Interim City Manager Dr. Reid Wodicka explained the importance of this position for the City of Lynchburg. Organizations with DEI initiatives are known to have increased job satisfaction, a lower turnover rate, better reflection of the community served, and cultural improvements. DEI is not about meeting hiring quotas or promoting unqualified individuals. It is not about a one-time training that occurs, this is about a cultural change that makes the organization an even better place than what it already is.

Councilmember Helgeson stated that this initiative seems like an overlap of what the Human Resources department should already be doing, what every department head should be doing, what every person should be doing, and what the City's Action for Change group is currently doing. He commented that Council should be tackling compression issues before tackling DEI issues. He explained that he has not heard from employees that there is a lack of inclusion within the organization. He does not agree with adding another position which will only serve to grow the government.

Councilmember Wilder stated that everyone has a different lens, a different background, a different perspective. A position like this is needed to assist employees with seeing outside of their lens. It's important that the organizations has a dedicated person that addresses these issues.

Councilmember Tweedy stated that bringing in diverse candidates should not be dependent solely on department directors. She explained that the goal is too big; fresh perspectives and holistic strategies are needed.

Councilmember Faraldi asked why the position is allocated to the City Manager's Office and not Human Resources. Assistant City Manager Mr. John Hughes, IV, replied, stating that this position will link to other departments and staff felt that the City Manager's Office was the best seat for someone imbued with those responsibilities. Councilmember Faraldi asked if \$12,000 is in fact enough to accomplish the needed initiatives. Mr. Hughes stated that this estimate is conservative due to this being the initial onset of DEI, but the funds would supplement some training as well as community activities. Councilmember Faraldi asked what this position will be doing on a day-to-day basis and what some of those initiatives will look like. Mr. Hughes stated this position will internally advance the organization's DEI initiatives by crafting the framework to which advances the strategic plan, standards, and associated policies. Councilmember Faraldi asked how these issues are being addressed currently from a Human Resources perspective. Mr. Hughes stated that there is a policy but the organization has not done a very good job adhering to the policy. Councilmember Faraldi asked what has prevented the organization from accomplishing that policy. Mr. Hughes responded, stating that this initiative is a lot of responsibility for the staff the city currently has. Councilmember Faraldi stated that he could understand adding a staff component to tackle policy issues from a different angle if that were in fact the problem. However, if the organization is already failing because of staff he does not see how adding another staff component will accomplish anything. He continued, stating that maybe staff should be exploring third party options to impart training. He asked how would this position allow individual rights to be expressed, from a First Amendment perspective. Mr. Hughes responded that staff is currently working with a third party to impart training (Virginia Center of Inclusive Communities). Mr. Hughes stated that DEI is about appreciating differences. Councilmember Faraldi stated that state code dictates that an employee cannot be discriminated against for being involved in political processes, protests, or engagement with political activity. He asked how this position will strike the balance of respecting that. Dr. Wodicka stated that staff are trying to create an environment that no matter the differences of perspectives, employees will have

the opportunity to express them but do so in a way that is respectful and appropriate for the workplace and appropriate for how the organization serves citizens.

Councilmember Tweedy stated that the City Attorney's office could help navigate the legalities of any infringement of First Amendment rights.

Councilmember Faraldi stated that he is not entirely opposed to the idea but does not think Council has enough insight as to what this position would do on a daily basis and how it truly combats the issue that it is trying to address. He commented on having reservations about the \$12,000 in training being enough to accomplish the needed programming.

Vice Mayor Wright stated that he sees this as a necessary position and also wonders if \$12,000 is enough funding to accomplish the task. He commented that he is ready to support this now but if Council is not, he would be curious to learn what could be offered by way of supplement.

Councilmember Wilder made the motion to remove the item from The List, effectively funding the item in the budget. Councilmember Tweedy seconded the motion.

Councilmember Helgeson asked if there was a qualifying event that led to the creation of this initiative. Dr. Wodicka responded that after the period of civil unrest that Lynchburg experienced, staff went on a fact-finding mission and received this feedback from the workforce.

Vice Mayor Wright called the question.

Councilmember Faraldi countered that Mayor Dolan publicly addressed the line of order for speakers and asked the Mayor for a chance to ask staff one last question. Mayor Dolan allowed Councilmember Faraldi the opportunity to speak; he asked staff if critical race theory will be implemented in this role in any way. Mr. Hughes replied that DEI does not pertain to that theory.

With the question called, the following vote on removing the DEI Strategist position and training funds from The List was recorded:

Ayes: Dolan, Wright, Tweedy, Wilder 4

Noes: Helgeson, Faraldi 2

Absent: Nelson

1

Dr. Wodicka asked for Council action on the Strategic Initiative #3 which is the implementation of the City-wide salary study, particularly the lowest paid employees, staff recommend striking that and implement a 5% wage increase to all employees.

Vice Mayor Wright made the motion to approve the 5% general wage increase, seconded by Councilmember Wilder.

Councilmember Helgeson asked Vice Mayor Wright to table to motion so that Councilmember Nelson is able to vote when he returns at the next meeting. Vice Mayor Wright agreed that it is fair to wait until Councilmember Nelson returns and withdrew the motion.

Dr. Wodicka requested Council action to increase the Debt Service Reserve from the \$200,000, presented in the budget, to \$400,000, and removing the item from The List.

Councilmember Helgeson, who originally asked for this item to be placed on The List, made the motion to remove the item and set the Debt Service Reserve to \$400,000. Councilmember Wilder seconded the motion.

With no other discussion from Council, the following vote was recorded:

Ayes: Dolan, Wright, Helgeson, Tweedy, Wilder, Faraldi 6

Noes: 0

Absent: Nelson 1

Interim Deputy City Manager Mr. Kent White continued reviewing the Capital Improvement Projects items on The List. These included the following: Crossroads Lot – Deck addition; Downtown Parking Deck Facility; Streetscape Improvements Downtown Phase II; City Stadium Football Field Turf Replacement; and Lynchburg Community Market Renovations. Council came to a consensus to remove all items from The List, effectively funding each item. Council decided to table the Sandbar Removal at Hollins Mill Road Trail Crossing until Councilmember Nelson was able to discuss the matter since he asked for it to be on The List.

April 20, 2021

CONSENT AGENDA ITEM: C

// The meeting adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

Clerk of Council