

ROME CITY COMMISSION

Monday, February 27, 2023

The Rome City Commission met at 6:35 p.m. this date in the City Commission Chambers of City Hall, 601 Broad Street. Mayor Stevenson presided with Mayor Pro Tem Cochran, and Commissioners Bojo, Beeman, Doss, Quick, Askew, Collins, and McDaniel present. Commissioner Askew deferred tonight's prayer to Dr. McLure and Commissioner Askew led in the salute to the flag.

Minutes – February 13, 2023

The Minutes of the February 13, 2023, meeting, as submitted in writing by the Secretary, were approved by unanimous consent.

Charles Love – North Rome Parks

Mr. Charles Love, 304 Kingston Ave, addressed the City Commission concerning parks in North Rome. Mr. Love stated that in the previous SPLOST referendum, \$600,000 was allocated for recreation renovations at the North Rome youth center. The intention was to spend this money on the property that housed the former Jennings Funeral Home. Since that designation, plans for this property have changed and this youth center will no longer continue, and the Parks and Recreation funds allocated through the SPLOST referendum will not be spent at that location. Mr. Love encouraged the City Commission to consider spending some or all of this money at the existing Eagle Park in North Rome. Mr. Love would like the City to do something beneficial at Eagle Park and give it the same consideration that other parks in Rome have received. Mr. Love added that the existing basketball courts at Eagle Park are not fully utilized. He suggested that a walking track could be one of the amenities added at Eagle Park.

The Commission thanked Mr. Love for his comments and stated that this matter will be discussed in more depth at the March 1st Community Redevelopment Committee meeting.

Steve Smith – Small Bar Ordinance

Mr. Steve Smith, 26 Spring Circle, Lindale, and General Manager of the Harvest Moon and Vogue, addressed the City Commission concerning the proposed small bar ordinance. This alcohol amendment will be placed on first reading later tonight. Mr. Smith expressed his opposition to the proposal to create a new category of alcohol pouring establishments. The small bars would be exempt from Rome's food/drink ratio but carry restrictions that would not apply to other pouring establishments. Mr. Smith reviewed the following comments that were previously sent to the City Commissioners via email.

“I strongly encourage the commission to defeat the proposal.

I believe that the proposal potentially harms full service restaurant operations. Many restaurants depend upon the full service of alcohol for the survival of their business. Downtown's Full Service operators (those that provide food and beverage alcohol) carry challenging overhead and provide for the income of hundreds of families by way of considerable employment that they require. These businesses are the foundation of the success of the downtown area.

Indeed in the case of our business at Harvest Moon, we may not have survived the first year of the pandemic had it not been for the income and traffic generated by our alcohol service. I do believe currently that there are some full service restaurant operators downtown that are struggling to make

ends meet and to add to add to their financial burden by dilution of the existing bar business could bring about their demise. For us at Harvest Moon, we do already struggle to keep adequate traffic to provide for the investment in live music at The Moon Roof Bar. The potential for unlevel competition and further dilution of traffic.

The proposal referring to “small bars” is in itself improperly defined by the 1800 to 2200 square feet mentioned. In my professional experience, I would describe that as a very large bar. For perspective consider The Dark Side of The Moon Bar which is barely 1100 sq feet. These size definitions need to be clarified in the least.

The type of “small bar” business as defined would likely employ less than 5 employees, and by definition would carry a very low overhead allowing the potential for aggressive competition, Great for consumers but very harmful to more valuable downtown full service restaurant operators and their hundreds of employees.

The proposal to provide these “small bar” operators additional competitive leverage by the way of reduced license fees is absurd, and not very thoughtful.

If anything these fees should be made significantly higher for these bar-only operations to even be considered.

I believe we already have a bar only type operation that seems to successfully evade the law by limited and misrepresenting its food service operations. This establishment is most definitely harming the appeal of our downtown. I speak regularly with tourists that have been drawn to Rome by an entertainment venue that reflects very poorly on our community. I fear this proposal opens the door to operators who may detract from the growth and appeal of our downtown, and likely have unintended consequences to existing operators.

I’ve spoken with several other downtown restaurant operators and I hope that they will have their voices heard as well. In my opinion this proposal is a bad idea and will add nothing of value to the appeal of downtown, and potentially jeopardizes businesses that do add value. We should do some research on the value of downtown full service restaurants to better understand the risk such a proposal places on them.”

The City Commission thanked Mr. Smith for his comments.

Opioid Settlement Resolution

Assistant City Attorney Frank Beacham explained that a resolution has been prepared regarding the ongoing opioid lawsuit. This resolution would authorize the City Manager to sign necessary documents in the future regarding settlements for those defendants in the opioid lawsuit. Four defendants have already settled. Mr. Beacham emphasized that this matter is ongoing, and tonight’s resolution is just one additional step in our process.

Mayor Pro Tem Cochran moved to approve the opioid settlement resolution. Commissioner Collins seconded, and the vote was unanimously in favor.

Alcohol Ordinance Amendment – Small Bars

Secretary Smith announced that an alcohol ordinance amendment was being placed on first reading tonight. This ordinance amendment, as recommended by the Alcohol Control Commission, would create a new category of pouring establishments known as small bars. These bars would be exempt from Rome’s food/drink ratio, but have restrictions that would not apply to other pouring establishments. This matter will be scheduled for second reading and a vote on March 13th.

General Electric Property Transfer

Commissioner Bojo moved to authorize the transfer of 12.6 acres of City property located on the northwest corner of the former General Electric Transformer Plant site. The City of Rome has owned this property for several years, and this transfer would be to the Rome/Floyd Development Authority to be used for economic development purposes. Commissioner McDaniel seconded the motion, and the vote was unanimously in favor.

Executive Session

Mayor Stevenson announced that an executive session was held prior to the beginning of tonight's meeting, on a motion of Commissioner Doss and a second of Commissioner Collins and the unanimous vote. Two real estate matters were discussed, no votes were taken. This meeting was adjourned on the motion of Mayor Pro Tem Cochran, seconded by Commissioner Quick, and a unanimous vote.

Health Board

Mayor Pro Tem Cochran announced that the Health Board will meet on Thursday, March 9th at 12:00 p.m. at the Floyd County Health Department.

Community Redevelopment Committee

Commissioner Bojo announced that the Community Redevelopment Committee will meet on Wednesday, March 1st at 2:30 p.m. in the Sam King Room.

Public Works/Traffic/Transit Committee

Commissioner Beeman announced that the Public Works/Traffic/Transit Committee will meet on Wednesday, March 8th at 10:00 a.m. in the Sam King Room.

Downtown Development Authority

Commissioner Quick announced that the Downtown Development Authority will meet on Thursday, March 9th at 8:30 a.m. in the Carnegie Training Room.

Rome/Floyd County Planning Commission

Commissioner Quick announced that the Rome/Floyd County Planning Commission will meet on Thursday, March 2nd at 2:30 p.m. in the Same King Room.

Committee Appointment Nominations

Commissioner Collins made the following committee appointment nominations:

- SPLOST Committee – Appoint Bob Berry as Chairman
- Transportation Citizen's Advisory Committee – Appoint Sarah Williams, Tonia Clayton, Ben Harrison, and Tom Couch
- Downtown Development Authority – Appoint DJ Rickman
- Rome/Floyd Planning Commission – Appoint Jake Hager and Heath Rogers
- Landmarking Committee – Appoint David Mitchell (Rome Area History Center Representative)

A vote on these nominations will take place at the March 13, 2023, City Commission Meeting.

Commissioner Collins also noted that the Committee on Committees is evaluating recommendations for appointments to the 2023 Citizen's SPLOST Committee.

Food/Drink Ratio Variance Request – Combat Market and Steel N Spirits

Commissioner McDaniel reported that the Alcohol Control Commission had evaluated two food/drink ratio variance requests at their February 20th meeting. These two requests were seeking permission to use products other than food to comply with Rome's 50/50 food/drink ratio as it applies to distilled spirit sales. Both requests were approved by the ACC.

Mr. Brandon Pledger, owner of Combat Market, 214 Broad Street, requested that items he sells in the Combat Market such as general merchandise, coffee, and firearms be used to comply with the food/drink ratio. Mr. Pledger was present and made a brief presentation to the City Commission. He stated that firearm sales would not take place during bar hours, and that the Federal Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Agency and the State of Georgia do not prohibit this activity.

Commissioner McDaniel moved to approve the food/drink ratio variance request as approved by the Alcohol Control Commission. Commissioner Cochran seconded. Commissioner Beeman moved to table this matter. Commissioner Doss seconded, and the motion to table was approved by the following vote:

YES: Bojo, Beeman, Doss, Quick, and Askew
NO: Cochran, Collins, and McDaniel

Mr. Nathan Roberts addressed the City Commission concerning his food/drink ratio variance request for his proposed business that will be known as Steel N Spirits, 409 Broad Street. Mr. Roberts explained that he would like to comply with Rome's food/drink ratio through the sale of reclaimed steel and ornamental iron items. After a brief discussion regarding Mr. Roberts's request, Commissioner McDaniel moved to approve the variance request as recommended by the Alcohol Control Commission, and Commissioner Cochran seconded.

Commissioner Beeman moved to table this matter and Commissioner Doss seconded and the motion to approve the tabling of this item was approved by the following vote:

YES: Bojo, Beeman, Doss, Quick, and Askew
NO: Cochran, Collins, and McDaniel

Both applicants were told that the majority of the Commissioners feel it is best to not act on these requests until the small bar ordinance proposal has been resolved. That ordinance is scheduled for action at the March 13th meeting.

Black History Month

At approximately 7:05 p.m. Mayor Stevenson announced that the City Commission will now conduct their Black History Month program. Mayor Stevenson turned the floor over to Commissioner Collins and Commissioner Beeman.

Commissioners Collins and Beeman welcomed the large crowd in attendance at tonight's meeting for the Black History Month ceremony. It was announced that there will be several honorees and trailblazers

recognized at tonight's meeting. The first comments were regarding former Rome City Commissioner Napoleon Fielder. Mr. Fielder was the first African American City Commissioner being appointed on May 19, 1980, and serving until his resignation on September 30, 2002. Mr. Fielder and his wife are both deceased, however Napoleon Fielder Jr. and his wife were present at tonight's meeting.

Commissioner Beeman spoke regarding Rome's current and former African American City Commissioners. There have been eight African American's serve as City Commissioner and seven of the eight were present at tonight's meeting. While Mr. Fielder is deceased, current Commissioners Bonnie Askew, Bill Collins, Sundai Stevenson and Elaina Beeman were on hand to welcome former City Commissioners Duane Reed, Milton Slack III, and Detrick Redding. All seven Commissioners were recognized and photographed as a group. Along with these current and former Commissioners, there were several youth leaders present who stood with the Commissioners and were passed the trailblazing baton.

Commissioner Askew offered a prayer for Rome's trailblazers.

Reverend Carey Ingram enthusiastically recited Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech.

Proclamations were presented to these following trailblazers:

- Greg Shropshire, former President of the 100 Black Men of Rome. This proclamation was presented by Commissioner Askew. Mr. Shropshire is deceased, and the proclamation was presented to Alvin Jackson, Larry Morrow, and James Lee, the current President of the 100 Black Men and Rome.
- Commissioner Quick presented a proclamation to Grace and Joseph Oh. The Oh's have operated businesses on Broad Street since 1997 and have operated Koman's department store since 1982. Koman's caters to the African American community and Commissioner Beeman is a former employee of Koman's. Grace Oh spoke briefly and thanked the City of Rome for this recognition.
- A video created by Mr. Eddie Sublett was shown. This video featured highlights from various events around Rome, such as the Martin Luther King Jr. parade, and other African American activities. A proclamation was presented to Mr. Sublett by Commissioner Quick recognizing him for his extensive video production work in the African American community.
- Commissioner Quick presented a proclamation to Mr. Curtis Reid. Mr. Reid was recognized for his involvement with the GT's band, becoming the first integrated band in the southeast. Mr. Reid continues to perform. This proclamation was presented to Mr. Reid and his wife.
- The last proclamation tonight was presented by Commissioner Quick regarding former Commissioner Napoleon Fielder. This proclamation was presented to Napoleon Fielder Jr. and his wife.

Commissioner Collins thanked City staff members Kelley Parker, Sammy Rich, Meredith Ulmer, and Deena Adams for their assistance with tonight's program. Mayor Stevenson also offered her thanks for a large crowd in attendance for tonight's meeting and for everyone else involved with this program.

Adjourn

With there being no further business, Mayor Stevenson adjourned the meeting at 8:12 p.m.

Joseph F. Smith
City Clerk