



City of Richmond

900 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219
www.rva.gov/office-city-clerk

Draft Special Meeting Minutes

Friday, February 28, 2025

8:45 AM

Maymont Foundation
Banner Westover Meeting Room 1000
Westover Road Richmond, VA 23220

Council Retreat

Councilmembers Present

The Honorable Cynthia Newbille, President
The Honorable Katherine Jordan, Vice President
The Honorable Sarah Abubaker
The Honorable Andrew Breton
The Honorable Kenya Gibson (late arrival)
The Honorable Stephanie Lynch (late arrival)
The Honorable Ellen Robertson (early departure)
The Honorable Reva Trammell (late arrival)
The Honorable Nicole Jones

Others in Attendance

Danny Avula, Mayor
Ross Catrow, Office of Strategic Communications and Civic Engagement Interim Director
Laura Drewry, City Attorney
Sharon Ebert, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for Planning and Economic Development
Sabrina Joy-Hogg, Interim Chief Administrative Officer
Will Perkins, Council Senior Legislative Manager
Candice Reid, City Clerk
Matthew Slaats, Interim Council Chief of Staff
Daniel Wagner, Interim Deputy Council Chief of Staff
RJ Warren, Deputy City Clerk
Lawson Wijesooriya, Office of the Mayor, Chief of Staff
Thad Williamson, Office of the Mayor, Senior Policy Strategist

Welcome and Opening Reflections

The retreat was called to order at 9:09 a.m.

Mayor Danny Avula provided opening remarks that summarized the retreat agenda and intended outcomes.

Robert L. Dortch, Jr., Jordan/Syndor Innovation Group Principal, Retreat Facilitator, provided attendees with opening remarks. Mr. Dortch also addressed the retreat agenda and asked that attendees reflect on a one-word goal for the retreat.

A copy of all the material provided at the retreat has been filed.

[CD.2025.062](#) February 28, 2025 City Council and Mayor Retreat Documents

Councilor Kenya Gibson arrived at 9:32 a.m., and was seated.

Role Clarity and Responsibilities

John Martin, Southeastern Institute of Research (SIR) Chief Executive Officer and President, facilitated a presentation and discussion with attendees that addressed role clarity, efficient and effective governance, strategic planning, building trust, increasing collaboration in government, and behaviors to embrace moving forward.

Councilor Kenya Gibson stated that she agreed about the need to strengthen the trust between residents and city government.

Councilor Ellen Robertson noted that the city's current form of government is prone to confrontation within City Hall. Councilor Robertson addressed her desire that Council's standing committees do more on policy development instead of receiving presentations from city administration.

Thad Williamson, Office of the Mayor, Senior Policy Strategist, stated that the Mayor's Office was working to increase the amount of dashboards on the city's website to provide more information to the public for review.

Councilor Nicole Jones stated that some city administration staff are reluctant to speak with and provide information to Council.

Councilor Sarah Abubaker stated that Council standing committees should include more opportunities for questions from committee members and responses from city administration, rather than listening to a lengthy presentation.

Mayor Danny Avula stated that strained relationships between Council, city administration, and the media have impacted the transparency of City Hall operations. Mayor Avula also stated that the immediate reaction to not release information to the public or media needs to be corrected.

Councilor Gibson stated that the City Charter separated the branches of government for a reason and it's not expected that everyone will work together as one team. Councilor Gibson also stated that collaboration and trust can be promoted through policy, standards, and systems.

Sharon Ebert, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for Planning and Economic Development, stated that city government needs to hold its self accountable on goals, legislation and plans adopted by government.

The retreat recessed at 11:03 a.m.

The retreat reconvened at 11:12 a.m.

Trust-Building and Collaborative Leadership

John Martin and attendees continued discussions about how to increase trust and collaboration that will provide city residents with excellent customer service.

Councilor Stephanie Lynch arrived at 11:21 a.m., and was seated.

Councilor Sarah Abubaker stated that basic city services and public engagement needs to improve to help councilors that are continuously contacted by residents with basic service issues and questions.

Councilor Stephanie Lynch stated it was important that city leaders agree that the city needs to establish a culture of stellar customer service.

Councilor Gibson noted her concerns about including Councilmembers regarding meetings or issues in their districts. Councilor Gibson stated that she was not informed about a public meeting within her district that addressed the Fall Line Trail. Councilor Gibson also stated that Councilmembers can increase public participation and provide important information if they are aware of public meetings that occur within their districts.

John Martin discussed with attendees positive outcomes from the morning discussions between Council, mayor, city administration, and staff.

Councilor Reva Trammell arrived at 11:44 a.m., and was seated.

Robert L. Dortch, Jr., Jordan/Syndor Innovation Group Principal, Retreat Facilitator, lead attendees through a discussion and team exercise regarding trust building and collaborative leadership.

The retreat recessed for lunch at 12:21 p.m.

Attendees separated into groups during the working lunch to discuss barriers and methods to increase communication and collaboration.

The retreat reconvened at 1:02 p.m.

Vision for Communication

Representatives from the working groups summarized discussions about trust building held during the lunch break.

Robert L. Dortch, Jr., Jordan/Syndor Innovation Group Principal, Retreat Facilitator, lead additional discussions about creating a vision for communication.

Councilors Stephanie Lynch and Kenya Gibson requested that the retreat pivot and begin focusing on tangible goals and objectives that could be addressed by attendees.

The retreat recessed at 1:47 p.m.

The retreat reconvened at 2:13 p.m.

Shared Priorities and Action Planning

Robert L. Dortch, Jr., Jordan/Syndor Innovation Group Principal, Retreat Facilitator, lead attendees in a discussion about working on city priorities.

Councilor Kenya Gibson stated it was important that the city provide basic services before acting on shiny projects.

Councilor Reva Trammell stated her concerns about what she believed was a lack of investment in the city's Southside.

Attendees discussed needs and possible action to be taken to invest in the city's Southside.

Councilor Ellen Robertson left the retreat at 2:36 p.m.

Robert Dortch addressed infrastructure and had attendees discuss specific infrastructure improvements that were needed throughout the city.

Attendees discussed infrastructure issues and improvements to include: heat islands, improving safety, Southside growth, economic development, regional water and gas supplies, school buildings, and transportation.

Mayor Danny Avula stated that economic development was necessary to increase the city's revenue to address the issues raised by attendees.

Councilor Kenya Gibson stated it was important to analyze potential revenue losses from economic development incentives to determine if the cost of the development was too much.

Councilor Nicole Jones stated that the Land Use, Housing and Transportation Standing Committee would review economic development items, such as performance agreements.

Councilor Andrew Breton stated that economic development projects do not always have to be large construction projects. Councilor Breton also stated the construction of a small park might incentivize future development in certain areas of the city.

Councilor Stephanie Lynch addressed the use of tax increment financing (TIF) and the need to increase development on the city's canal walk.

Interim Chief Administrative Officer Sabrina Joy-Hogg stated that TIFs also impact the city's revenue and that city leaders should keep that in mind.

Attendees had additional discussion about development, infrastructure improvements, investments, growth, and the use of small area plans in the city's Southside.

Mayor Danny Avula stated he planned to address Southside development in the upcoming fiscal year proposed budget.

Closing Remarks

Robert L. Dortch, Jr., Jordan/Syndor Innovation Group Principal, Retreat Facilitator, Mayor Danny Avula, and President Cynthia Newbille provided closing remarks and reflections about the retreat.

Adjournment

There being no further businesses, the retreat adjourned at 4:28 p.m.

CITY CLERK