

D-27354

Summary of Minutes

August 23, 2007

A Special Meeting of the Winston-Salem City Council was held on Thursday, August 23, 2007 at 12:30 p.m. in the Council Committee Room at City Hall, Mayor Allen Joines presiding and the following members present:

Council Members	Molly Leight	Vivian H. Burke
	Robert C. Clark	Wanda Merschel
	Dan Besse	Evelyn A. Terry
	Joycelyn V. Johnson	

Member Absent: Nelson L. Malloy, Jr.

Secretaries: Renée P. Henderson, City Secretary and Melanie Johnson, Recording Secretary

Mayor Joines called the meeting to order and noted that Council Member Malloy was unable to attend today's meeting. He thanked Congressman Mel Watt for attending today's meeting to discuss the City's federal agenda, as well as his support for the City's various interest areas. He pointed out that City Council remained concerned about securing funding for the Airport Business Park and any additional assistance in that area is appreciated. The City recently received a \$100,000 reward for carrying out the Piedmont Triad Research Park (PTRP) project and he thanked Congressman Watt for his assistance in obtaining the funds and pointed out that Mr. Tom Ingram, PTRP, was in attendance today.

Council Member Terry thanked Congressman Watt for all of his support and congratulated him for his work with the House Financial Services Committee.

Council Member Johnson invited Congressman Watt to ride through Happy Hill Gardens on his way out of town and noted that there is a groundbreaking ceremony this afternoon for some of the single family developments. She noted that although there had been challenges with the HOPE VI Project, the residents should be happy with this development.

Council Member Burke mentioned that during the issues with the HOPE VI Project, Council Members approached representatives of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) with positive results for these developments.

Congressman Watt explained that a report was prepared as an update on the efforts of Congress and it details the amount of time spent on issues and those items that have been signed into law and those which are still be discussed. He noted that Congress is working to make the HOPE VI Project more protective of the residents being displaced and as a result, the 12th District of North Carolina may have benefited disproportionately from the program compared to some other areas of the Country and stated that other means may need to be pursued to revitalize public housing.

Council Member Johnson noted that the North Carolina Kids Care Program is in need of assistance and expressed concern that the current Administration is squalling efforts to support medical insurance assistance programs. There is a need to recapture funding from Medicare for medical education due to an increased need for training of medical students.

Congressman Watt indicated that universal healthcare has been a difficult task to address since earlier efforts were unsuccessful, and Congress has mainly concentrated on

providing additional funding for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). He noted that recently passed House and Senate Bills providing billions of dollars for healthcare will adversely affect the tobacco industry through substantial tax increases. He pointed out, however, that the President is expected to veto both of the Bills, but Congress will continue to work on various avenues for addressing the overall healthcare situation.

Council Member Besse noted that the North Carolina General Assembly had passed a Bill making approximately 38,000 additional children eligible to participate in the SCHIP program on a sliding fee scale; however, rulings from the Administration will make it impossible for approximately half of those children to qualify due to their poverty level qualifications. He asked that language be included in the final Bills to override the ruling and allow up to 300% of poverty level to be qualified.

Council Member Clark expressed concern that the problem with subprime lending is a pending disaster. He also expressed concern that federal officials should be more concerned with stormwater quantity as opposed to quality.

Congressman Watt indicated that the Water Resources Bill was recently reauthorized and substantially updated, and if the President signs the Bill, a new mentality about water, water resources and infrastructure will be realized. He noted that infrastructure deterioration is being realized throughout the entire Country and will have to be adequately addressed, although the President is threatening to veto this Bill as well. In response to the subprime lending issue, Congressman Watt stated that there will likely be a predatory lending Bill coming forward to address any future problems. However,

the process for assisting those homeowners who are currently experiencing problems will be more difficult to deal with and will take longer to address.

Council Member Burke commented that Winston-Salem has been lucky not to have experienced many of the subprime issues leading to foreclosures.

Congressman Watt explained to Council Member Burke that the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) is responsible for asking for federal funding for transportation needs and he has stressed to them the need for alternate transportation funding such as light rail systems and transit systems, as well as a critical need to update many of the state's infrastructure. He noted that he recently requested that the Yadkin River Bridge be added back on to their priority list since it had been removed. He explained that the process has typically been heavily weighted for funds going towards roads in Eastern North Carolina.

Council Member Leight stated that she feels the SCHIP program is tied to minimum wage rates and although the minimum wage was recently raised, it needs to be increased even more to address rising poverty levels and healthcare issues facing our Country. She inquired if there is any prospect of the universal healthcare issue being brought up again.

Congressman Watt indicated that the corporate community is actually pushing for universal healthcare since healthcare costs related to financing low income care are being shifted to employers.

Council Member Clark noted that employers who provide insurance to their employees are growing tired of subsidizing those employers who do not provide insurance.

Congressman Watt noted that the medical community will also need to become involved in the process as well.

Council Member Besse thanked Congressman Watt for his efforts regarding urban transportation issues. He commented that the City has recently approved a new Downtown Plan which includes a streetcar system and could be a major tool in revitalizing the Center City area. The federal transportation Bills should include language that is friendly to small starts and work on behalf of the Nationwide Streetcar Coalition. Council Member Besse also mentioned that the Piedmont Greenway and the extension of the Brushy Fork Creek are transportation funding needs that should be considered in the future. He noted there is some NCDOT funding available now for a key connector of the Brushy Fork Greenway from Winston Lake to the Salem Creek trail system, however, Norfolk Southern's bureaucratic sign-off process is interfering with the project.

Council Member Terry asked for support for a grant request for community health centers in the city that will be coming from the Department of Health and Human Services and will provide \$1 million to Winston-Salem for those needs. There are census tracks within the city that are medically underserved and in critical need of this assistance. In regards to previously discussed lending issues, she also expressed concern that banking institutions never consider the market for credit being extended to individuals who are in the minimum wage categories.

Council Member Merschel echoed her concerns regarding healthcare, stormwater management and infrastructure, but noted that as a banker, one of her primary concerns is the subprime lending issue. She asked if HUD restrictions and regulations could be

reviewed for allowing more flexibility for first time homebuyers who were victims of predatory lending, and perhaps review of the requirement that an individual be a first-time homebuyer or not have owned a home within the last three years. She also asked that critical repair needs of bridges and dams be shared on the federal level, noting the need to allow for future requirements streamlining the information process for first responders to be notified of potential risks.

ADJOURNMENT: 1:44 p.m.