

The Special Called Closed Session Meeting of the Petersburg City Council was held on Wednesday, February 10, 2021, on live stream. Council Member Parham called the Special Called Closed Session Meeting to order at 9:05a.m.

1. ROLL CALL:

Present:

Council Member Charles H. Cuthbert, Jr
Council Member Treska Wilson-Smith
Council Member W. Howard Myers
Council Member Darrin Hill
Vice Mayor Annette Smith-Lee
Mayor Samuel Parham

Absent: Council Member Charles H. Cuthbert, Jr
Council Member John A. Hart, Sr.

Present from City Administration:

City Manager Aretha R. Ferrell-Benavides
City Attorney Anthony Williams
Clerk of Council Nykesha D. Jackson

2. UPDATES AND DISCUSSION:

a. COVID-19 Update from the State Senator Joseph Morrissey

Mayor Parham stated, "Mr. Morrissey thank you for joining us again. We thank you for giving us a little bit of your time this morning just to have discussion on all your efforts that you have going on to help us down here in Petersburg in the Crater Health District. So, I turn everything over to you now Senator Morrissey."

Senator Morrissey stated, "Thank you, Mr. Mayor. First of all, it is an honor to join you this and all the members of City Council good morning to each one of you. I want to particularly compliment Council Member Hill for his double tasking this morning. Taking care of business and listening to us at the same time. Congratulations Councilman Hill. Let me give you an update on where we are with COVID-19. First of all, and if some of this is a refresher, I will skip over it. The total number of cases in Petersburg of COVID-19 is 2,807, hospitalization is 123 and you have 39 deaths. Now let's get into the more important part and that is dealing with the vaccinations in Petersburg. I do not see Councilman Cuthbert on the phone but back in January I had a conversation with Councilman Cuthbert about vaccinations. And I sent a letter to Dr. Danny Avula and the Governor regarding vaccinations for Petersburg school employees. Additionally, on February 8th I sent another letter to Dr. Avula and Craig Fifer regarding the vaccination of my request. Does City Council have both of those letters? I did not hear everyone. So, I will go over them so that we are all operating together, and every council person has the same thing. I will go over with you. On January 14th, I sent a letter to Dr. Avula and Governor Northam. And I said to both that I am writing to you regarding a matter of utmost importance. I just got off the phone with Ken Pritchett, the Chairman of the Petersburg City School Board. He had advised me that no vaccinations had been made available to any of the 607 employees within the Petersburg Public School System through the administrators, teachers, and support staff. He furthered informed me that vaccinations were distributed to Dinwiddie County Public School Systems this very day. Mr. Pritchett further informed me that the teachers are ready and willing to return to the schools and educate Petersburg students so long as they can be vaccinated in short order. We all realize how critical important to return to teach the students in the classroom and we want to do it in a safe manner. Accordingly, vaccinating teachers and doing it at warp speed is crucial. That letter was sent on January 14th requesting 608 vaccinations. That letter was then followed up on February 8th and it was a result from a conversation that I had with Councilman Cuthbert and

*Audio available upon request.

Petersburg Deputy City Manager, Darnetta Tyus. That was letter was dated February 8th and send to Dr. Avula and Craig Fifer. Mr. Mayor, does everybody on council have that letter?"

Council Member Wilson-Smith stated, "Yes, I have that one."

Mayor Parham stated, "Yes."

Council Member Myers stated, "Yes."

Senator Morrissey stated, "Okay. In that letter, I discussed what must be done to complete Phase 1A and Phase 1B. I am happy to drill down in the numbers if you want me to, but it is set forth in that letter. Do you want me to drill down Mr. Mayor?"

Mayor Parham stated, "Yes, please."

Senator Morrissey stated, "Okay. In that letter, I again explained the urgency in getting these things done. To complete Phase 1A with the first vaccination with the Crater Health District, I told Avula and Fifer that we needed the following 10,140 COVID-19 vaccines either the Moderna or Pfizer for first injection only. I said that we needed assistance with ultracold storage for the Pfizer vaccine. Five locations to conduct the 2,000 person point of dispensing to be identified by respective localities and 400 volunteers between 150 to 200 vaccinators. This was the result again a follow-up to my conversation with Councilman Cuthbert and City Manager Darnetta Tyus who did the heavy lifting. In the same letter, I said to address Phase 1B and that's individuals who are 65 and older. The Crater Health District would need to follow, 25,700 COVID-19 vaccines. Again, Moderna or Pfizer for first injection only. And I estimated that following and the first is applicable to Petersburg. We needed 5,300 doses for Petersburg, 3,500 for Hopewell, 5,500 for Prince George and then Dinwiddie for 5,100 and Emporia, Greenville and Sussex I gave them the numbers. I told both parties that we needed assistance with ultracold storage, and I gave them the number if volunteers that we need. And its February 10th right now and we are waiting for a response. But I want to thank Councilman Cuthbert and Deputy City Manager Darnetta Tyus for providing with me that information which I in turn provided to Craig Fifer and Danny Avula. I am going to pause for a moment to see if you need me to answer any questions about that. We can also take up questions at the end if you have it."

Council Member Wilson-Smith stated, "I wanted to know, you are asking for the ultracold storage for Petersburg's Health Department or for one in each area?"

Senator Morrissey stated, "One in each area."

Council Member Wilson-Smith stated, "Are you aware that Petersburg has one?"

Senator Morrissey stated, "I did not know that. But I wanted to make sure in my letter to cover all my bases."

Council Member Wilson-Smith stated, "And the conversations that you are having with people, did you have one at all with our Health Department in reference to any of this?"

Senator Morrissey stated, "My conversations were strictly with Councilman Cuthbert and with the Deputy City Manager."

Ms. Tyus stated, "If I can clarify. All of the information contained in the letter that was given to Senator came from consulting with the health department. So, we consulted directly with the health department before

*Audio available upon request.

we provided the information to the Senator. So, yes the health department has been consulted.”

Council Member Wilson-Smith stated, “So, you knew that the health department does have a cold storage?”

Ms. Tyus stated, “At the point when they did this they will need more. So, it could be that they have one, but this document was generated with details. We did not create the details. We asked the health department to assist us. So, yes.”

Council Member Wilson-Smith asked, “Has Delegate Aird been included in any of these conversations?”

Ms. Tyus stated, “There are conversations. Delegate Aird has also been very gracious in working on initiative to help Petersburg and the region with vaccination events.”

Council Member Wilson-Smith stated, “I am asking because we have all these conversation between us about what we are going to do, and I am asking has she been included in any of this. Or is it a complete circle of people of Aird, Morrissey, Health Department, and yourself Ms. Tyus. Or is it Ms. Tyus, Cuthbert, and Morrissey? Or is it Delegate Aird and Tyus? I just see such a divide. I do not see us all working together on the same page.”

Ms. Tyus stated, “I cannot speak to that. I know that everybody is having conversations. I can only speak to this one in terms of this information that we provided for Senator Morrissey.”

Senator Morrissey stated, “Let me address that. That is a very good question Councilwoman Smith. My conversation with Councilman Cuthbert was an early Saturday morning conversation and it could have been around 7am or it could have been earlier. He then tied in Darnetta Tyus. We talked for a good 45 minutes to an hour. And then during the course of that day, Ms. Tyus was getting additional information. And once I was provided with all of that information I then drafted my letter on February 8th to Fifer and Avula. And I do not believe that it is a situation of keeping Aird out of the loop, but I took this in the since of an emergency when I spoke with Councilman Cuthbert and Deputy City Manager. And I acted on it within 24hrs.”

Ms. Tyus stated, “Thank you.”

Mayor Parham stated, “Thank you.”

Senator Morrissey stated, “Let me go over a couple of other things. Questions that have come up. The Crater Health District official’s will continue to hold their vaccination clinic every Saturday from 9am to 4pm. By the way, some of the information that I am giving you I am going to have my LA send it down to the City Manager’s Office or the Clerk’s Office for distribution. So, that the facts that I am giving you, you will have at your quick disposal. Currently, some of you know or all of you know that Crater Health District is still vaccinating individuals in 1A and 1B. 1A includes your healthcare workers, emergency medical technicians and individuals residing in assistant living facilities. 1B includes the police, firemen, individuals 65 years or older, teachers, grocery store workers, correction officers, mail carriers and officials needed to maintain the continuity of government. So, Crater is going 1A and 1B right now. If somebody needs to sign up for vaccination, I have the number here. It is 804-863-1652, and simply select option 1. I will send this down to you. They will have to do some prescreening and questions. And there is also an email address if you want to do it directly there. I will stop again and pause before I end with my talking about the Petersburg Public School Personnel vaccination.”

Council Member Hill stated, “First of all I want to thank all who are on the call and Senator Morrissey for

*Audio available upon request.

giving us an update. At our last City Council meeting one of the individuals spoke strongly about what is the plan and things of that nature. And I am glad that Senator Morrissey and those who are involved got together to come up with a plan. Our Deputy City Manager, Darnetta Tyus, she has been working hard with keeping us informed of the levels and different outbreaks in the City. And just keeping us on top of those things. I do not want it to be on this call that there is a division. Because there is no division. Just like we were all saying at the last meeting that our constituents are calling us and asking us when they can get their shot. So, one of our council members took it upon his self to seize the moment to talk to our Senator. I do not think anybody is intentionally keeping out Delegate out of the loop. Just like we all know that some people are not getting their shot. I am pretty sure Delegate Aird knows the same thing. So, that is to not cast anybody in any type of light. But I do not want this call to be said that Aird does not know what is going on. Because at the end of the day we are getting calls. So, one of our City Council Members took it upon himself to call our Senator. Senator Morrissey came into my shop and dropped off his calendar and we were looking forward to this call on today. We have the public on this call. So, we must be careful about what we say to form people's opinions. Because at the end of the day people need their shots. I could care less if they came from Kalamazoo or what have you. I just need our people to be vaccinated. With that being said, Senator Morrissey what is the actual plan and how many shots are in Petersburg right now? Do we have those numbers? Or Ms. Tyus do we have those numbers. If it is in, your presentation than you can go ahead with your presentation. But I appreciate that."

Senator Morrissey stated, "As I mentioned at the top of the program, on January 14th I had a conversation with ken Pritchett about the urgency in getting 609 people vaccinated that were associated with the schools. And so that is what prompted me to send a letter to the Governor and Avula that we needed those vaccinations. Earlier this week I spoke with Secretary Atif Qarni, Secretary of Education, about getting not only your teachers vaccinated but the bus drivers, the custodians, the maintenance workers, and the people that keep the infrastructure going. And right now, that is being done. My conversation with Secretary Qarni, I can advise City Council that teachers and school personnel began receiving their first round of vaccine doses on February 1, 2021. There are between 600 and 650 employees. I am not saying that because I wrote the letter on January 14th that they started getting vaccinated on February 1st, but I do know this. I subscribe to the theory that the squeaky wheel gets the most grease and I advocated the urgency in getting those teachers and support staff vaccinated. So, all school officials should be vaccinated by the end of February. Et me just repeat myself. All 609 school officials should be vaccinated by the end of February. That is a good thing. Once all first doses are administered to all school employees, health officials expect to begin administering second doses on February 27th to the beginning of March. Usually there is a 21-day period between the first and second dose. So, it is getting done. Councilman Hill I am an advocate for more shots and more arms as quickly as possible. I am on it."

Council Member Hill stated, "Thank you."

Vice Mayor Smith-Lee stated, "I just wanted to make a statement from what I gathered. Thank you, Senator Joe Morrissey, for your leadership in trying to help with the City of Petersburg. Because we are in dire need here. I constantly get phone calls every day. And I have one young man, and he is disabled. He is 65 years old and he is on oxygen and he wants to take the shot. But he is not able to be mobilized to move. And he wanted to know if someone can administer that shot to him. Can they come to his house because he is on oxygen?"

Senator Morrissey stated, "Thank you for that. During a recent, Senate Caucus meeting, I explained that each Senator, we need a liaison with the health department for emergencies just like this. We have a liaison. When we get offline if you will call Matthew at 737-1626 and give him the individuals names and the specifics that he is immobile and that he is on oxygen and we will try to do that. I am assuming that this person is in the 1A or 1B category. Is that right?"

Vice Mayor Smith-Lee stated, "Yes, sir. He is over 65."

*Audio available upon request.

Senator Morrissey stated, "Call Matt and we will get it done."

Vice Mayor Smith-Lee stated, "Also, I want to thank you and Lashrecse Aird too. From what I gather she was instrumental in getting at least 2,000 doses here in the City of Petersburg also. So, I believe that both of you all are working very hard to make sure that Petersburg is taken care of. Thank you."

Senator Morrissey stated, "We all have the same agenda of getting this done as quickly as possible. That is a given."

Council Member Cuthbert stated, "Senator Morrissey, we are all grateful to you for your leadership on this issue and your dedication to Petersburg. You have shown both once again. We are indebted to you. I want to echo what Senator Morrissey said. And that is that we all have the same agenda, and we all are working towards the same goal of trying to get as many shots into as many arms as possible here in Petersburg. And we all have different approaches that will be most effective. Delegate Aird has made a tremendous contribution be seeing that a significant number of doses of the vaccines made available in Petersburg. That is a huge step forward and we are all grateful to her. Likewise, we are grateful to Senator Morrissey for the achievements that he has made on our behalf to help make us all healthier. So, I am indebted to both of them and it is not a question of choosing one Delegate over one Senator. But asking each to do exactly what each is doing and that is to maximize the opportunities to improve the health of citizens of Petersburg. So, Senator Morrissey I thank you and if Delegate Aird were on this call I would thanking her as well. Mr. Mayor thank you very much."

Senator Morrissey stated, "Mr. Mayor, thank you for making this available today. If I can just end by making a shoutout to your City Manager. Aretha, I do not know how much longer you are going to be with us, but it has been a pleasure working with you. I know that wherever you go and whatever you do Petersburg will be a big part of your heart and thank you for working with me over the last 12 plus months. I also want to give a shoutout to your Deputy Darnetta. I hope that you leave Darnetta here because Ms. Tyus and I worked tirelessly over that weekend to facilitate that letter to Governor Northam and Dr. Avula. She did a great job. With that I am going to head down to our mobile capitol at the Science Museum and I look forward to crossing paths with all of you very soon."

Mayor Parham stated, "Thank you Senator. I appreciate it. So, we are going to close out this meeting and get ready for the next one. And I will see everybody again shortly."

3. ADJOURNMENT:

City Council adjourned at 9:38 a.m.

Clerk of City Council

APPROVED:

Mayor