



City of Jonesboro

Municipal Center
300 S. Church Street
Jonesboro, AR 72401

Meeting Minutes Public Services Council Committee

Tuesday, January 16, 2024

4:30 PM

Municipal Center, 300 S. Church

1. CALL TO ORDER

2. ROLL CALL (ELECTRONIC ATTENDANCE) CONFIRMED BY CITY CLERK APRIL LEGGETT

Present 6 - Chris Gibson; Joe Hafner; Ann Williams; Brian Emison; Anthony Coleman and Janice Porter

Absent 1 - LJ Bryant

ELECTION OF A CHAIR

A motion was made by Ann Williams, seconded by Joe Hafner, that Chris Gibson be nominated as Chair of the Public Services Committee. All voted aye.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

[MIN-23:123](#)

Minutes for the Public Services Committee Meeting on Tuesday, December 19, 2023

Attachments: [Minutes](#)

A motion was made by Brian Emison, seconded by Anthony Coleman, that this matter be Passed . The motion PASSED with the following vote.

Aye: 5 - Joe Hafner; Ann Williams; Brian Emison; Anthony Coleman and Janice Porter

Absent: 1 - LJ Bryant

4. NEW BUSINESS

RESOLUTIONS TO BE INTRODUCED

[RES-24:001](#)

RESOLUTION EXPRESSING THE WILLINGNESS OF THE CITY OF JONESBORO TO SUBMIT AN APPLICATION TO THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION FOR THE FY2024 REBUILDING AMERICAN INFRASTRUCTURE WITH SUSTAINABILITY AND EQUITY (RAISE) GRANT

Attachments: [RAISE Handout1](#)
[RAISE Map Handout](#)

Grants Director Jeremy Biggs approached the podium and said, before you, you have a resolution asking for approval for City of Jonesboro to once again apply for

RAISE funding through the U.S. Department of Transportation. This funding will be used to provide sustainable and equitable alternative transportation throughout the city of Jonesboro. We have listened to public input. So far we are in the middle of more public meetings, adjusting the trail corridor through census tracts that are heavy with low to moderate income, areas of persistent poverty, and through historically disadvantaged communities, census tracts identified by the U.S. Department of Transportation and their own mapping tools. It fits well into the RAISE grant of what they would like to fund and projects they would like to fund. We feel that it will be very beneficial to improve infrastructure in most places where infrastructure is lacking throughout the city of Jonesboro that has been identified in the new trail corridor. And, once again, the city of Jonesboro will be partnering, you will see in the resolution, with the city of Paragould to apply for RAISE funding to create hopefully the foundation for a future regional system of alternative active transportation for pedestrians across the region.

The deadline to apply is February 28th. This will be the third year the city of Jonesboro has applied. It will be the second year that it has gone into partnership to apply for that. As you will recall, last year Craighead County, Greene County, and city of Brookland were involved. After visiting with our neighbors in Russellville and Conway and talking to numerous other organizations and cities across the nation, we realized that we needed to readjust the trail corridor and go through those historically disadvantaged areas of the community and provide infrastructure where it is most needed to where it will be most effective to the citizens of Jonesboro.

Chairman Chris Gibson said, was that the reasoning behind us not being awarded last year? Mr. Biggs said, Chris, that is a great question, and I wish I knew all the answers. Last time, our application didn't get past the first phase. So, to get to the second phase of extensive review and budgeting and the financial side, we didn't get to that phase. They did give a great debrief based on there are eight different merit criteria in this grant that you need to hit on from safety to economy to connectivity and partnership and collaboration. And if we would have gotten one more high out of any of those eight categories, we would have moved on. So we were very close last year, and I feel very confident we are going to put a very strong application forward this year.

Councilmember Joe Hafner said, Jeremy, I know I sat in the meeting with the RAISE grant committee last week. I know you all have done a lot of work on this. But even though we may not know the exact reason why we didn't make it past the first round or the second round last year, you feel more confident that this grant application is more in line with what they want, these types of trails to service, right? Mr. Biggs said, yes sir. Yes, that is why we looked at the census tracts. We looked at the persistent poverty census tracts, the historically disadvantaged and rerouted those trails. We actually drove around town and saw where the foot paths are, where people are walking already. And that is where it makes sense. You've got the map all in front of you, so you can see that we have rerouted it up through the northern sections of Patrick to Magnolia to connect Allen Park, or Parker Park and Northside Park, some schools that are connected through there. Also a big portion down Race Street. There is no infrastructure existing down Race Street to connect the end of the greenway trail at Nettleton's campus all the way to the future sports complex down Race Street. And then also out north on Prospect to connect the fully funded University Heights link. That will go to construction hopefully soon, we all hope. But take that all the way out to Prospect to the bypass, the Martin Luther King, the bypass from 555 to Farville curve, and then we will also link up to NEA Baptist Hospital's campus as well. So we are connecting hospitals. We are connecting schools. We are connecting seven city parks, I believe, and adding that much needed safety infrastructure down Race Street to the future sports complex as well.

Chairman Chris Gibson said, Dr. Coleman, you had a question as well?

Councilmember Dr. Anthony Coleman said, yes sir. Thank you, Chairman. You answered one of them. I had a couple, but you answered one of them already. But the other one was, do we know of any cities in the state that did receive this grant this past year; and if so, are you collaborating with them in discussion, just kind of see what they did and how they did it and whatnot? I know you are kind of new on the job. Mr. Biggs said, yes, great question. So the city of Russellville was awarded a RAISE grant. They were the only ones that were awarded a RAISE grant this last cycle. And myself, two of my coworkers and the chamber of commerce director from Paragould, we all traveled to Russellville and met with them for about three hours a month ago. And we really brainstormed, asked them a long list of questions since they have been awarded a grant, what gives them hesitation, and there was a lot of it. But they talked us through some great strategies they developed; and that is when we came back and said we really need to tighten our focus in a lot on these areas that can be most beneficial and this project would be most impactful for. Then we have also had some conversations with the city of Conway, who was awarded a RAISE grant the previous cycle. So we have reached out to both cities that have been awarded RAISE funds in Arkansas.

Councilmember Dr. Anthony Coleman said, so follow up on that. I do know a little bit about grants in that many of them are on a point system, right? So do we know what ours were, and I heard you say a little bit about a debriefing. So could you elaborate a little bit more on that? Mr. Biggs said, sure. There is no point system that I am aware of. The D.O.T. keeps it pretty close to the vest regarding this funding. And they even bring in new reviewers every grant cycle, so you can't have connection with a previous known grant reviewer for any outside influence or anything like that. So it is pretty close to the vest and pretty straightforward. All we know is we needed one more mark of high. So they score you low, medium, or high on this grant review. And if you get two highs, you get moved on. If you get five, you get highly recommended. I'm sorry. If you get two, you get recommended. If you get five, you get highly recommended to the next round. So we were just short one to moving on to the next round.

Councilmember Dr. Anthony Coleman said, do you feel confident about the city's involvement? Because, I know many of us either wrote letters or signed whatever list or that type of thing. Do you feel pretty confident with the city's response according to this grant and request? Mr. Biggs said, so far, we have held two public meetings at Parker Park last Thursday, and we had about two dozen people stop by and talk to us about it. It was all positive, and some people gave some really good input and made us change ways, think about some routes, especially through Northside Park and up Patrick for safety issues. So we've got another public meeting scheduled for Thursday at Journey Campus where the trail will route right through Disciple Lane and future Disciple Park. And then we've got another meeting scheduled at El Centro Hispano right down the street next week. So we feel the public gave some really good input. We also had a survey that was online and available for up to four weeks that we got 1600 responses from citizens of Jonesboro. That was really good input as well. As far as letters of support, you will all be contacted pretty soon with letters of support. We are working on some kind of template designs to help everybody get started. We have also been working very closely with our congressional delegation, Congressman Crawford's office, both senators, their field reps and their project directors. We are meeting with them in person here in a couple of weeks to kind of let them know exactly what this project is, how it has changed, and answer any questions they have because we will need that support as well.

Councilmember Ann Williams said, question. We have talked about needing

sidewalks, a pedestrian safety on North Patrick between Johnson and Magnolia Road for a long time; but the big hold up, I understood, was because of those big ditches there and what is going to be involved with cost. I know it has gone up quite a bit over the years since we first started talking about it; but it is really needed because there is a lot of pedestrian foot traffic up and down there and a very narrow shoulder, and it is very scary. It is much needed, but I am wondering about the cost. How prohibitive is it going to be as far as providing that? Mr. Biggs said, well, as far as design work, we are about 10% designed. We are not fully designed. Most RAISE applicants are between 10 and 20% designed when they apply. So they know that you are not going to spend a million dollars on design and not be funded, because that cost will be covered in this grant, the design, the right-of-way acquisition, anything to go along with that. So I am not the person to answer those engineering questions for design as far as drainage, but I know those will be addressed in that. But we know that Patrick, north to the city limits down Magnolia and around the park and the schools is a much needed area for infrastructure improvements. But we also trimmed our original mileage down from just over 18 miles to just 10.7 miles to take a conservative approach for funding. So we know that we are not going to be able to fund as many miles as we would like to because costs are going to go up in the future. We have already figured in for an inflation of 3.5%, and you have five years to allocate these funds. So we are asking for 18% contingency. So we feel we are very protective and conservative in our budgeting approach so far for this grant.

Councilmember Joe Hafner said, Jeremy, isn't another thing that you are trying to do to improve our application is get the letter of intents for the matching for the private funds? Mr. Biggs said, yes, that is something we have been working on. So Joe sits on our select committee made up of some citizens of Jonesboro and Paragould for this grant, and we have had discussions. There are some community leaders trying to get some private equity, some private buy-in because in the NOFO from the Department of Transportation that says if you have formal private financial partnerships, you automatically go to the high score in the partnership and collaboration. So we are investigating that and making a lot of really good efforts and progress. We don't have anything secured at this point where we are looking for letters of intent to financially support when funded. So it's not like they have to write a check to the city of Jonesboro now, but we are giving them a timeline that if we are awarded, they will support at this monetary value and we feel that will really increase our chances because it's going to bump us up to a high automatically according to their guidelines.

Councilmember Ann Williams said, there is one particular thing that I have brought up quite a bit that I think is a small thing as far as a small length of sidewalk that is needed, but would be so crucial for overall transportation for someone as far as getting to a light and being able to go further. It's on that stretch of Johnson, the south side of Johnson between Melrose and the Marion Berry traffic signal there. There is no sidewalk, and it is a very steep slope. It is not navigable by anyone in a wheelchair to get to that traffic light, which is a crucial light for crossing Johnson because there is not any other traffic signal until Patrick as far as a major traffic signal. And for that reason, I think we might have an ADA issue unless we start to kind of address that. But I think it is a small length and overall traffic pedestrian plan that is very crucial for the sake of somebody who is walking back and forth across Johnson to campus or to the north part of Johnson. It's a crucial thing to be able to provide completion of that. It is something that I have been pressing for for some time; and I know that ARDOT has given permission for the city of Jonesboro to go ahead and do that. Chairman Chris Gibson said, I believe Brian has a comment on that if you want to come on up, Brian.

Chief Administrative Officer Brian Richardson approached the podium and said, I

have talked to the city engineer Craig Light last week about this, and he was going to check in and see the status of the conditional adjustment with ARDOT and they are working on some drawings for that. Councilmember Ann Williams said, I had understood that they had given permission. Mr. Richardson said, well, we have to submit an actual drawing that shows some engineering behind how we are going to manage that slope. But yes you are right. That is a project that needs to be, it's a short length but it's a very important link. And I think in between that and the recent grant we secured for lighting, and the permission for the HAWK signal, I would like to thank you and other councilmembers for supporting all those efforts because Johnson has been a pedestrian challenge for a long time. And I think with all the new lighting and then in addition to this RAISE grant route, our great grants team was able to secure a Safe Streets for All grant that is also going to put some pedestrian accommodations down Main Street to Parker Park. So, you know, if we are able to lay in this RAISE grant in addition to some of the other grants we have received recently, with a little bit more hard work, Jonesboro will be a completely different city as far as pedestrian infrastructure is concerned three or four years from now. And we are looking forward to that.

Councilmember Ann Williams said, I appreciate that because this has been a bone of contention for me for some time because it is so frustrating when you see how impossible it is for somebody to walk to the traffic light to cross Johnson. And also, when the pedestrians are criticized sometimes for jaywalking, and I am like, what option do they have if they can't get to the light, you know? Mr. Richardson said, we just have to continue foraging forward together to make pedestrian access and safety better. Councilmember Ann Williams said, and I have said this before, I think what really dramatizes it, if everyone would go and look at this slope I am talking about and just to see how impossible it is for somebody in a wheelchair and for anyone on a rainy day because it is a slippery slope. I think once you see it, you realize how frustrating it is, someone observing this to understand why this isn't hurried along. And we really do need to hurry it along. It's a pedestrian issue and it's an ADA issue, I think too. Mr. Richardson said, I will get a further update on that and I will get with you. Councilmember Ann Williams said, and I will keep bringing it up.

Councilmember Dr. Anthony Coleman said, Mr. Chairman, I have a question for Brian. They brought this up, and I just thought about something, because obviously I don't want a three-strikes-and-you're-out deal with this grant. But she brought up a good point with infrastructure and sidewalks and so on and so forth. But my question is, we are talking grants, but what is on paper that shows that the city is actually investing in some of these trails and so on and so forth? Mr. Richardson said, well, two-part. You know, over the last three years, along with the city council's approval, the administration has dramatically increased funding for pedestrian safety, sidewalks, and trail access. We have recently completed some soft trails out at Craighead Forest. We are in the process and have made a lot of progress on a shared use path on Culberhouse. Councilmember Dr. Anthony Coleman said, I know in general. I am speaking this. This plan specifically. Mr. Richardson said, well that plan, naturally you don't spend money on exact footage that you're applying for a grant for. So what that grant connects to, say, on Aggie Road, the extension portion that Mr. Biggs discussed about extending the portion on Aggie Road out to the new potential Disciple Park. The city is funding the connection up to that point. What the RAISE grant does, is it allows us to extend our current either planned or under construction, or already built pedestrian infrastructure. A lot of this was originally laid out in the One Jonesboro Connectivity Plan, and there are certain areas of that plan that we are having to fund, because they are just quite frankly not attractive from a grants-writing perspective, because that really does target more on historically disadvantaged areas. So there are some areas of the plan that the city is going to have to fund one way or the other or are funding through different grants. So in part

of the debriefing, what was discussed is how important it is that the city shows that they not only have the capabilities of putting together managing a large grant, but that we also believe in their project enough to invest in pedestrian infrastructure throughout the city. And I think the increased efforts over the past three years have helped with that; and also the planned investment that has been discussed in this council chambers about allocating additional ARPA funding and future budgeting cycles for continuing to invest in pedestrian infrastructure both for recreational and for functional use for those in need. Those are received well by the committee, so we are going to continue putting forth those proposals to help invest in some of these areas that we just quite frankly lagged behind on for years now. Councilmember Dr. Anthony Coleman said, thank you, and I asked that specifically. I thought it would be good to be put on record that we are doing that. And I think even with the actual submission of that grant should show that. I'm sure it is, but just make a point. Thank you.

Grants Director Jeremy Biggs approached the podium and said, if I could just add one more thing. Brian was right. We will (and you're right, Dr. Coleman) we will list out what investments have been made in the past five years by the city's general fund, what other grants we managed successfully, like the Tiger Grant for the overpass that was built over the railroad track. We will brag on ourselves about how that was a success. But also, you will notice there is no match in this grant. There is no match required. We are a rural community, so Jonesboro doesn't have to match anything. Our partners up north in Paragould are required a zero match. So we will be asking for the full amount and hopefully it will all go towards the construction. There is no required match. We all know how things change in the future, and construction costs go up. So I mean, we've all got that in the back of our minds that some things might change down the road as far as costs go, but we are not required to put in any money into this grant application.

After the vote:

Chairman Chris Gibson said, next item of business is adjournment, but before we do that, I just want to task this group. I want this committee to be more relevant in 2024, and I think tonight was a very good example of that. I don't want us to just get reports on Parks and JETS every month. I think we need to come up with some creative ideas to move the city forward, and I am going to want to depend on you guys to do that. So with that comment, I will entertain a motion to adjourn.

A motion was made by Brian Emison, seconded by Joe Hafner, that this matter be Recommended to Council . The motion PASSED with the following vote.

Aye: 5 - Joe Hafner; Ann Williams; Brian Emison; Anthony Coleman and Janice Porter

Absent: 1 - LJ Bryant

5. PENDING ITEMS

6. OTHER BUSINESS

[COM-24:002](#)

PRESENTATION AND PUBLIC INPUT REGARDING THE FY2024 RAISE GRANT PROJECT

Attachments: [RAISE Handout1](#)
[RAISE Map Handout](#)

Filed

7. PUBLIC COMMENTS

8. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Brian Emison, seconded by Joe Hafner, that this meeting be Adjourned. The motion PASSED with the following vote.

Aye: 5 - Joe Hafner; Ann Williams; Brian Emison; Anthony Coleman and Janice Porter

Absent: 1 - LJ Bryant