

CITY OF NORTHPORT-MIDTERM REVIEW

October 2, 2023

John Hinton, Mayor

A person recently commented, "I'm glad to see that y'all are moving forward with your plans. Northport has never done anything! Just sits here"! I don't believe that can be said any longer!

I first would like to commend our Council for the fine work they have done during this term. The Council has chosen to attack issues and problems and not each other, resulting in great team work. They are progressive, yet contemplative and conservative. We each discharge our responsibilities in the City and try to accomplish things together. Tremendous progress has been made during these years with the excellent leadership of Ms. Glenda Webb, City Administrator, our Council and the wonderful staff of the City.

I also, thank Ms. Webb, Ms. Tubbs, Ms. Nelson, and Mr. McGee and the financial staff, Ms. Ramm and Mr. Rose for their help in the preparation of this Review.

FINANCIAL STATUS

The City indebtedness from prior years has been substantially reduced. Required reserves are over \$6,500,000.00 or 15% of the operating budget for General Fund and over \$1,600,000.00 or 15% for the Water/Sewer Fund.

The General Fund Budget was \$35,250,000.00 in 20-21. In 2024 the budget is \$44,289,375.00, an increase of approximately \$9,000,000.00 or 25%. The Northport First Funds over the last four fiscal years have exceeded \$27,000,000.00-\$7,000,000.00 more than initially expected. Sales tax collections have increased from \$17,379,809.00 in 2020 to \$21,942,348.00 in 2022.

The Water/Sewer Department paid off bond issue #2011 in December, 2022. Federal funds (American Rescue) of \$5,000,000.00 are being used for water/sewer upgrades. Additional Federal funds may be received by the City and these funds will be applied, in part, to Water/Sewer capacity and water/sewer expansion projects. The Water/Sewer Department indebtedness now is approximately \$16,500,000.00- a substantial reduction from the past. The indebtedness of the General Fund to the Water/Sewer Department was paid in full, costing \$825,000.00 recently.

The City now has an AA+ bond rating given by Finch-up from AA rating. This improved rating will save thousands of dollars on interest in money bonded for the Recreational Parks.

The City was issued \$45,700,000.00 in bonds to fund the Recreational Projects which include the water park, sports complex and adventure park. Debt service for this issue will be just under \$2.8 million per year for 30 years, which has a total interest cost of 4.2%. The Current Debt Service for the General Fund in 2024 is \$4,838,788.00, and \$2,337,559.00 for the Water/Sewer Department.

We are pleased with the salary improvements made for our employees. The salary schedule for all employees has been revised, step raises increased and guaranteed, and raises given to all employees, making us competitive with other governmental entities. Salary increases for the 2024 year of 5% COLA and 3.75 for employee step raises will help to keep us competitive and combat inflation. Hundreds of thousands of dollars has been saved on Workers Compensation insurance and payouts for claims since

2020, due, in part, to policy changes by the Council and the purchase of garbage carts. Employee health insurance premiums have remained the same during this time where many places have seen major increases. Our employees have been appreciative and cooperative in efforts to keep medical costs down.

GRANTS

Thanks to our grants writer, Savannah Nelson, the following information gives us the current status of grants received or applied for in Northport.

Fifty four (54) grants have been applied for during the time period of August 2021 until the present.

Thirty-one (31) have been awarded, 9 are pending and 15 have not been awarded.

The City has received \$3,856,403.00 in grant funding since 2021. The City has provided required matching funds of \$705,806.00 through cash or in-kind. Grants have been awarded from 18 different agencies-a mixture of private and governmental agencies. Grants pending total \$2,504,583.00, requiring up to \$447,990.00 local funds.

INFRASTRUCTURE-TRANSPORTATION (PAVING)

Improvements in infrastructure are unequaled in this short time span in Northport. Street paving, sinkhole repairs, corrugated metal pipe replacements, water/sewer department upgrades and other structural needs are being met. During the 20-21 budget year \$2,500,000.00 was spent on paving streets in the City. During the 21-22 budget year \$1,500,000.00 was spent on paving streets. For the 23-24 year planned expenditures for paving is approximately \$780,000.00. The total paving expenditures from 20 through 23 is \$5,962,851.00 coming from Northport First Funds and gasoline taxes. Years 21-23 has seen 16.37 miles of streets paved in the City of Northport. This Council has committed \$120 million dollars to infrastructure projects of which \$64.4 million of this total is for transportation projects. Seventy-six (76%) of this amount comes from other funding sources such as State and Federal funds and grants. This amount does not include water/sewage projects. A large portion of the Northport First funds is used to meet the 80/20 match required by MPO and TCRIC State and Federal funds. Soon the Engineering Department will pass the "catch -up" phase and will be able to rotate street paving based strictly on evaluation and need each year.

QUALITY OF LIFE PROJECTS

Many residents have requested more quality of life opportunities in Northport for them and their families. The new parks are the answer, in part, to this request.

RECREATIONAL PARKS

The Council has approved the development of three recreational parks and these parks are currently in the developmental stages with engineers and architects. Ms. Webb and Ms. Tubbs have been the driving force in moving these projects forward.

WARRIOR SPORTS COMPLEX

This 300 acre park is located downtown Northport between 5th Street and the Black Warrior River. Plans include 15 tournament ready ball fields for baseball and softball teams.

Traveling teams will be recruited for play. In addition, tennis courts, pickleball courts, and an indoor facility, which will be added later for basketball and other indoor sports, are planned. Work has already begun on this Park.

WATER PARK

The Water Park will be located beside Highway 82 and near Big Lots store. This park is expected to have businesses and other attractions to make it a year around place of interest.

The Park will include the traditional water slides, lazy river and other amenities. Work should begin within the next few months on this project.

ADVENTURE PARK

The Adventure Park will be located beside Rose Boulevard on the 151 acres purchased by the City from the Solid Waste Authority two years ago.

Bike trails, zip lines, walking trails and other similar adventure sports will be included. Cabins and possibly an Event Center will be included later.

CENSUS

The Census results between 2010 and 2020 show an INCREASE OF 33% IN POPULATION, WITH A TOTAL OF 31,125 current residents living in Northport.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The purpose of the plan is to create a vision for growth and improvement over the next 20 years to guide decisions on zoning, annexation, public investment in roads, infrastructure, facilities, and services. The Comprehensive Plan will be adopted soon. This plan will be a great addition and help in our City. The City can choose how it will grow. Our desire is to increase quality residential locations with affordable housing, quality businesses and quality residents to make our City great! The Comprehensive Plan will give specific direction for sub-division growth, lot size, types of acceptable homes, types of acceptable and desirable businesses for growth, and other factors.

EDUCATION

Quality educational programs for students will positively affect the type of residents who choose to live in Northport. Because the County citizens chose not to support the tax hike for the Tuscaloosa County School System, the City is developing a partnership with the Tuscaloosa County Board of Education. In addition to the annual grant the City has provided the schools in Northport for the last four years, the City is meeting with School Board officials and the Superintendent to seek ways to help improve the facilities of some schools in Northport and provide funds to enhance the educational program for students. Quality education for our Northport students is a priority regardless of how it's accomplished. The schools in Northport have received grants from Northport City First Funds totaling \$1,350,000.00 over the last four years.

HEALTH CARE

Quality health care institutions in the City and the Tuscaloosa County area will determine the type of residents who choose to live in Northport. The appointment of Dr. David Albright as Trustee on the Board of DCH

Has helped stimulate many positive changes in the health care field. Changes have been made, and others are in the discussion stage that should improve the health care for our citizens in the future.

Dr. Albright, Ms. Janet Teer and Dr. David Brown serve together as a Health Care-sub-committee for the City.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Northport ranks 16th out of 461 cities, as safest City in Alabama. We are proud of our Police and Fire Departments in the City and appreciate the great job they do.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT-NEW BUSINESSES

President Hogg has spent untold hours recruiting businesses to Northport. Many have come and others will be coming. The number of business licenses issued by the City is an indication of the extent of our economic development. During the current term of Council and Mayor, the issuance of business licenses have increased by 21% since 2021.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Veteran's Day Parade
Memorial Day Program
Bunny Trail-Downtown
Groove and Grub activity
Northport Police Fall Festival
Spring Touch-A-Truck (Library Emphasis)

PLANS FOR REMAINDER OF THE TERM INFRA-STRUCTURE AND OTHER

The three recreational parks should have construction underway and moving towards completion. We expect Phase 1 of the Water Park, Phase 1 of the Sports Complex, and Phase 1 of the Adventure Part to be complete by October, 2025.

We expect to see many new homes built, population increases and new businesses coming to Northport in the next two years.

Drainage upgrades for Two-Mile Creek will be completed when grants are accepted and approved.

Water/sewer lines will be extended to meet the need for development as funding becomes available.

The following corridors and intersections are expected to be under construction or complete by October, 2025.

Watermelon Road
MLK Boulevard Bridge and streets
Main Avenue
Fifth Street
Downtown Street Scape-Phase 2
Intersection 82/43
Mitt Lary Road and Highway 43 Intersection
Charlie Shirley Road/Highway 69 Intersection
Annual resurfacing projects

We are proud of the tremendous progress made in the City since the 2020 election, and for the plans as they develop for the remainder of the term.

Northport City should experience tremendous growth in the future and will be positively changed in many ways to make the City great!

