A Special Meeting of the Hickory City Council was held in Hickory, North Carolina on Thursday, April 16, 2026, at Hickory Aviation Museum and CVCC Workforce Innovation Center, 821 21st St NW Hickory NC 28601

On Thursday, April 16, 2026 at approximately 8:12 a.m., a Special Council-Staff Retreat was convened.

The following members were present: Mayor Hank Guess, Alderman Tony Wood, Alderwoman Charlotte Williams, Alderman Danny Seaver, Alderman Anthony Freeman, Alderwoman Arnita Dula and Alderwoman Jill Patton. A quorum was present.

Staff present were: City Manager Warren Wood, Assistant City Manager Steve Miller, Deputy City Manager Rodney Miller, Assistant City Manager Yaidee Fox, Planning Director Brian Frazier, Director of Parks and Recreation and Sports Tourism Mark Seaman, Fire Chief Matt Hutchinson, Airport Manager Chad Hunsucker, Library Director Sarah Greene, Police Chief Bryan Adams, Communications and Marketing Manager Dana Kaminske, Senior Communications Specialist Sarah Killian, Human Resources Director Mitch Friar, Business and Community Development Manager Dave Leonetti, Transportation Planning Manager John Marshall, Finance Officer Kari Dunlap, Public Utilities Director Will Hamblin, Transportation and Engineering Manager Caroline Kone, Budget Analyst Matthew Dellinger, IT Director Darin Kiracofe, Infrastructure Grants Manager Karen Dickerson, Special Projects Manager for the City Manager Natalie Jackson, Senior Management Analyst Breanna Ikard, Management Analyst Kate Van Sickle, and City Clerk Debbie D. Miller

Others Present were Project Manager VHB, Jordan Powell, Hickory Daily Record Reporter Billy Chapman, Bob Post, and Bob Vollinger

I. Mayor Guess thanked all the coworkers for all their work. He mentioned that Council hears a lot of accolades about staff and they try to share those with the department heads. He congratulated the Communications Department on receiving five awards, which reflected on all of them. He advised that Ms. Holly Jones, Director for Governor Stein's Western North Carolina District would be coming by at lunch to say hello. He noted this was a public meeting and welcomed everyone in attendance.

II. FY25-26 City in Review

City Manager Warren Wood thanked City Council as he knew that this was a big time commitment for them. This was the City's 42nd retreat, the first one was held in 1984. The focus on today's retreat would be infrastructure. He asked Public Utilities Director Will Hamblin to address the current dry conditions.

Public Utilities Director Will Hamblin explained the stages of drought and the protocols that were in place for the various stages.

City Manager Warren Wood mentioned the IBT transfers, and a brief discussion was had about the rules that everyone follows during drought situations. He thanked staff Breanna Ikard, Kate Van Sickle, Sara Vera and Crystal Mundy for their efforts in putting together the retreat. He advised they would be focusing on 15 to 20 years in the future and the necessary means to achieve those goals. Council would act on three items. Hickory by Choice 2050, the Bicycle Pedestrian Plan, and Hickory Moving Forward: Safe Streets for All Plan. The topics of the retreat would include Water and Sewer Resiliency Projects, Hickory by Choice 2050, Pavement Preservation and Street Resurfacing, Multimodal Trails and Sidewalks, Safe Streets for All, Airport Infrastructure, and Leveraging Technology and Innovative Service Delivery. He referred to a PowerPoint and pointed out a QR Code that would take you to hickorync.gov/2050.

City Manager Warren Wood referred to the PowerPoint and discussed City Services and Department accomplishments. The Airport opened a 12,000 square foot group hangar and 12 new T-hangars. There were 5,894 flights to/from 45 states. Fire had 2,960 fire calls and 4,955 medical/EMS calls. Finance received the Triple Crown Award from the GFOA. The Library had 11,966 active library cards, 3,006 library cards were issued, 306,780 items were borrowed and 904 classes and programs were held. Parks, Recreation and Sports Tourism received 101,775 visits to recreation facilities, 1,570 classes and programs, and 1,586 sports participants. The police department had 114,020 calls dispatched. The Community Response unit handled 14,896 calls. Self-initiated calls were 13,961. Public Services repaired 213 potholes, collected 15,058 tons of residential refuse, and 14,548 tons of commercial refuse. Yard waste collected was 4,000 tons and leaf collection was also 4,000 tons. The City's water service in 2024 served 124,331 customers and in 2025, 130,346 customers were served. Wastewater services in 2024 served 52,901 customers and in 2025, 57,600 customers were served

City Manager Warren Wood commented they had done really well with grants awarded but noted currently there was not as much funding to go after as there had been previously. He referred to the PowerPoint which listed grant funding amounts for 2025 and 2026, which totaled $48,268,558.

City Manager Warren Wood discussed North Carolina Department of Transportation Project updates. There was approximately $900 million in total projects planned for Hickory.

Mayor Guess advised that he and Alderwoman Jill Patton served on the Transportation Advisory Council and that Valdese were having to give money back because they could not meet the conditions of the grant. City staff did a great job in putting those together.

City Manager Warren Wood mentioned that John Marshall does a great job. He continued the discussion with critical City infrastructure estimated replacement cost which totaled $6.3 billion. He advised that the Airport infrastructure was mostly Federally funded.

Deputy City Manager Rodney Miller discussed the EMAS project that was to begin in the summer. He explained the required footage of the safety area. He mentioned that they had been pursuing a Federal grant to help with attracting commercial services at the airport. He advised that the Avigation Project had started to evaluate the air rights of approximately 83 properties on the west end of the runway. They would extend the runway by 100 feet. He referred to the PowerPoint and noted the area where future development for the airport would occur.

Council and staff discussed the upcoming public opening of the Aviation Museum. Deputy City Manager Rodney Miller advised the City owned the structure which would have three different leases with outside entities. Catawba Valley Community College (CVCC) would hold their ribbon cutting on April 22nd, May 15th was the date for a private, invitation only, event by Hickory Aviation Museum, and May 16th was the date for the public grand opening by the Hickory Aviation Museum. They were in the process of recruiting an entity for the third floor of the complex. It was marketed by Commercial First Real Estate.

III. Water & Sewer Resiliency Projects – Update

City Manager Warren Wood discussed water and sewer resiliency projects. He advised they were doing a risk-based assessment of lines, and this would be scored and the system prioritized.

Alderwoman Patton asked how AMI (advanced metering infrastructure) tied into this.

Public Utilities Director Will Hamblin explained how the AMI system could identify line breaks and also where they may be having issues.

Council and staff discussed the process for hydrant flushing that was conducted by the Fire Department and the advantages of the AMI system being able to identify the velocity of water coming out. They discussed the technology of the AMI systems for customers who might want to track their usage. AMI implementation would start with a few installations this summer. Customers would be notified when installation would occur on their property through a press release and door hangars. There would be minimum disruption associated with the installation of the meter box. The existing meters would either be sold to other entities or may be sold for scrap.

City Manager Warren Wood discussed rate structure. He noted that the City was heavier on fixed fees than on volume. They were low on volume charges. They may consider reducing the fixed rate and increasing the volume rate. Residential customers may actually see a decrease in their bill if they consume less water. The more water used the more you pay. This was a conservation based rate structure and moving away from the fixed to volume charges.

Alderwoman Patton inquired how that would impact the data centers.

City Manager Warren Wood advised that Apple would pay more, it would impact them. This was weighed towards customers that demand more. He discussed the projection of being at 80 percent capacity at the water plant by 2050.

Council and Staff discussed the water used by the data center Apple. Apple's water source goes to the Maiden water plant. Public Utilities Director Will Hamblin explained the process.

City Manager Warren Wood continued the discussion regarding the rate structure. Currently one person's bill versus a family of five could be the same because of the fixed fees. The volume reflects more so the usage may cause fluctuations seasonally. He discussed the interconnectivity with the City of Lenoir. Lenoir had received a grant to connect with Valdese. It was $4 million for Valdese to be connected. He mentioned that the City of Hickory would want to connect to Lenoir and eventually to Morganton. Currently the City was only connected to Newton, but Newton could not help Hickory in a crisis situation. He discussed the system storage capacity and advised it was 24 hours. They were looking at the old Long View plant.

City Manager Warren Wood advised that the water intake was damaged during Hurricane Helene. He discussed the desire for a separate water intake, being the precursor for a second water plant. He noted the City had a temporary plan "B" if an emergency situation occurred with the water intake. He discussed flood mitigation for sewer, a 36" sewer line down the streambank of Henry Fork River. They have a grant to do stream bank restoration related to sewer infrastructure. He noted that the pump stations are located at the lowest points and they have grants for two pump stations currently. He discussed the project for additional water capacity by 2050; 80 percent would trigger additional capacity or no more growth. He referred to Charlotte's IBT request. IBT did not help with other jurisdictions.

Public Utilities Director Will Hamblin explained the alarms that were in place when levels were high and also the reason for sewer spells.

City Manager Warren Wood mentioned expanding the existing plant or building a new plant would be $10 million.

Council and Staff discussed Charlotte's IBT request. Currently, a moratorium was in place to do a year long study.

City Manager Warren Wood referred to the PowerPoint and advised what 15 million gallons per day looked like. The Lincoln Memorial reflecting pool was filled with approximately 6.75 million gallons of water. That meant the City produced 2.2 reflecting pools each day. The current plant capacity was 32 million gallons per day. He mentioned that Charlotte wanted four of these. He noted the last IBT fight was with Concord and Kannapolis, and their water comes from Charlotte's water system. The State needs to clean this up. There is a need for restrictions as well as paying into the system. There needs to be a plan in place to pay for these projects.

Deputy City Manager Rodney Miller discussed Hickory's Rating. He discussed the projection for funds over the next 20 plus years. He noted they had $7.5 million appropriated already. He explained the difference between general obligation (GO) bonds and revenue bonds. The City's general obligation bond rate with Moody's was Aa1 and with Standard & Poor's AA+. That was the second highest bond rating available. He mentioned that GO bonds were the least expensive and required a vote of the citizens. The Local Government Commission (LGC) had to approve revenue bonds. The City was not rated for revenue bonds currently. Rating determined the interest rate on bonds. Revenue bond rating was typically one notch below GO. He discussed the four rating agency options, Moody's, Standard & Poor's, Fitch, and Kroll. Only one was required. He explained the bases for each of the agency's rating processes. Moody's relied on economy and the City did not compare well with the rest of the country because income levels did not compete with the rest of the country. He advised the City was at 2.1 now with Moody's, noting that was still away from Moody's standard. He advised Fitch was an AA+, a low AAA, 9.95 today. Fitch only rated governments, and they were close with Fitch. He advised they had asked for a rating and could possibly get the highest rating from Fitch. He explained the bonds were secured by revenues generated from the enterprise fund (water and sewer revenues). They could raise taxes on GO bonds to pay for debt, but they do not have the flexibility to do that on water and sewer.

Council and staff discussed the challenge of economic growth at only 2 to 3 percent which did not move the needle that much and the income levels. They were not comparing apple to apples; it was more apples to oranges. Income levels and cost of living were less expensive here than in other States. The City needs a good rating for lower costs, fixed fees versus variable. Fixed fees would pay the debt first.

IV. Break

A break was taken at 9:11 a.m. and resumed at 9:27 a.m.

V. Hickory by Choice 2050

City Manager Warren Wood discussed Hickory by Choice 2050. They were currently growing at 1 to 2 percent, but they did not want to be at 10 percent. He mentioned that in 2010 the Hickory by Choice 2030 plan was developed. He recommended Council consider a request for qualification (RFQ) to hire a consultant to develop an updated plan.

Planning Director Brian Frazier mentioned that he started with the City in 2005. In 2010, Staff did an RFQ for a consultant to develop the Hickory by Choice 2030 plan. They hired a consultant out of Washington State to develop the plan. The plan was adopted in 2010. Additional information was needed to the plan, and the consultant ran out of money. Planning staff, Cal Overby, Dave Leonetti, and Brian Frazier completed the additions to the plan, which saved $150,000 to $250,000 being updated by City staff. Staff did a good job coordinating with other departments, however the Department of Transportation (DOT), did not plan for the expansion of the roadway infrastructure. He referred to the PowerPoint and discussed the Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan Themes: vision and community design, land use, housing, transportation, economic development, public facilities, recreation and parks, and implementation. The plan was a blueprint statement for growth and development. Revisions were made inhouse annually. He referred to the PowerPoint and displayed the Hickory by Choice 2030 Future Land Use Map.

Council and staff discussed approval of something that was not consistent with the plan. Brian Frazier gave examples of scenarios where that might be the issue. A tract of land that was zoned residential but backed up to and OI and there was no way to get residential into the tract anymore due to the surrounding area being developed as OI.

Planning Director Brian Frazier referred to the map on the PowerPoint and noted an area they had cut back 30 to 40 percent because it was not going to be industrial anymore. Tate Boulevard had

more medical/profession types of facilities. He mentioned they had spent a million dollars over 10 years to clean up brownfield sites, and making some of those former sites' residential areas as long as no contamination existed. He advised the third draft of the Hickory by Choice 2050 was ready to go. The RFQ would be sent widely. He advised the City would hire a consulting firm to assist in a new comprehensive planning process with focus on the following objectives: engage citizens, organizations, and businesses; hold stakeholder and community meetings; prepare a final comprehensive plan that outlined visions and strategies for accomplishing goals; prepare a Land Development Code (LDC) as an ordinance to implement the comprehensive plan; and evaluate the current zoning map to identify any needed changes. The proposed RFQ would be posted in May/June. Following the selection of a firm, the plan would take approximately 18-24 months to develop.

Council and staff discussed growth, trying to get economic footing. Brian Frazier advised they were still at approximately 28 percent. Alderman Wood wanted a unified theme to their growth. Who are they going to be? What would they like that vision to be?

Council and staff discussed the focus of the Hickory by Choice 2050 plan. It should be a community effort, not a consulting firm to come up with a vision for the next 20 years. There were concerns balancing the quality of life. Growth will come at the expense of the quality of life. A consultant needed to be selected that would be willing to consider the City's focus. They discussed the possibility of City Council members interviewing the consultants. Council could always modify or amend the plan as circumstances changed. The suggestion was made that perhaps the Planning Board could interview the consultants that applied.

Alderman Wood questioned the requests that did not conform with the Hickory by Choice 2030 plan.

Planning Director Brian Frazier explained that a lot of those were handled at the administrative level. They only sent the ones to the Planning Commission or City Council that complied.

Council and staff discussed the requests that were rejected at staff level. The suggestion was made of letting Council know about the ones that were rejected. Staff could come up with criteria and details to let Council know. City Council could not control the open market as long as it complied.

Alderman Wood commented that there was more to this than zoning. He questioned how economic development fit into the comprehensive plan. He wanted to see what the City looks like.

Discussions continued regarding the consideration of certain types of projects that may not be desired and Council's desire to be notified when requests were rejected.

Alderman Seaver moved, seconded by Alderwoman Williams approval to pursue a Request for Qualifications to update Hickory by Choice 2050 and come back with a defined process for City Council. The motion carried unanimously.

VI. Pavement Preservation & Street Resurfacing

City Manager Warren Wood referred to the PowerPoint and discussed PCS Findings for 2025. Hickory's network condition was fair, 240 centerline miles, PCI = 68.7. He advised resurfacing was 1½" thick.

Assistant City Manager Steve Miller advised the City's bidding for resurfacing was done annually. He noted the main ingredient of asphalt being petroleum, which made the price fluctuate on asphalt. The contract was fluid due to the costs of asphalt fluctuating. Depending on the costs the amount of resurfacing could vary. If costs were up they would not be able to asphalt as much. There was no guarantee on exactly how much they could complete in a year due to the unknown factor of the costs.

City Manager Warren Wood referred to the PowerPoint and discussed Hickory's street resurfacing paving budget. In 1996 the cost per ton for asphalt in-place was $26.50 in 2025, it was $120 which was a 353% increase in cost. In FY 95-96 the paving budget was $300,000 in FY 25-26 $1,000,000, that was a 233% funding increase from FY96 to FY26. He advised at 1½" thick, on ton of asphalt was 81 square feet, or 9 x 9 feet. One ton of asphalt in 2026 = $120 x 580 tons = 1 lane mile = $69,600 compared to 1996 at $15,370. That was a 352.8% increase in 30 years. He gave a street resurfacing example: 480 lane miles, 28 feet wide = 876,088 9 x 9 square, $120 per square = $105 million. Redoing the entire roadway every 25 years = $4.2 million per year needed.

Assistant City Manager Steve Miller discussed new "all treatments" approach. He explained the mill and fill approach. He mentioned they do not want to lose the gutter pan, and they want to keep the profile when doing this type of treatment. He advised over the years they did not want to mill it because milling was expensive. He noted it was $7 to $12 a square yard. He explained slurry sealing; this technology had came a long way. It was catching it before failure and could extend the life 6 to 8 years. The cost was $1.20 per square yard. It was not used on high traffic areas, more suitable for neighborhoods.

City Manager Warren Wood advised on 1st Avenue on the east side of City Hall they could see the remnants of slurry seal on the roadway. He mentioned the recent changes to the Land Development Code regarding the repair of utility cuts. He discussed the pavement condition study recommendation. The current budget was $1 million per year. The two funding options being recommended: $4 million per year (all treatments) – maintains current PCI, and $10 million one-time allocation then $4 million per year (all treatments). He referred to a graph on the PowerPoint and noted where the City was at currently. Going up $8 to $10 million a year was just maintaining. In FY26 the current street resurfacing budget was $1 million. FY27 recommendation was $2 million, $1 million increase from fund balance. FY28 recommendation was $4 million, funding through property tax revaluation, earmark 2 cent for street resurfacing/pavement management, and use $1 million of Microsoft property taxes.

Assistant City Manager Steve Miller mentioned that they lose 4 months in the winter as they cannot pave in the winter. He also noted that the City had do get in line with everybody else when in came to asphalt, concrete, etc.

VII. Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan – Update

City Manager Warren Wood discussed how new sidewalks were added in Hickory. Sidewalks were done through the City's annual budget allocation, MPO funding, new subdivisions were required to add sidewalks, NCDOT adds sidewalks to their road widening project if they were included in the plan, new businesses were typically required to add sidewalks, and the sidewalk petition process. He referred to the PowerPoint and showed maps of the funded sidewalk projects: Springs Road sidewalk, a $3 million dollar project, containing 7,900 linear feet, and the Kenworth/Kiwanis Park connector, a $3.5 million dollar project, containing 3,600 linear feet.

Assistant City Manager Steve Miller advised the City rarely received sidewalk petitions. He explained the process, basically the citizen would pay ½ of the cost and give up the right of way or an easement. The City does the labor. He probably had only seen a few of these in the 30 plus years he had been at the City. They do a lot of curb and gutter petitions, not sidewalk.

City Manager Warren Wood continued the discussion with funded sidewalk projects. The sidewalk project at 4th Street and Main Avenue NW crosswalk was a $250,000 project, 50 linear feet; 17th Street NW extension, $4.8 million project, 940 linear feet; and 29th Avenue NE widening a $193 million project, 15,576 linear feet.

Assistant City Manager Steve Miller advised from 2021 to present inhouse projects and repairs were made to 27,000 plus linear feet. He gave examples of project that had been done noting the connection from Highway 70 to the Ridgeview Walk. He mentioned that they also upgrade handicap ramps four or five times a year.

City Manager Warren Wood continued the discussion on funded sidewalk projects. The aviation walk connector was a $2 million project, 1,640 linear feet; Aviation Museum connector, a $3 million project, 1,320 linear feet; Duckwalk rehabilitation (Glenn Hilton Park), a $965,000 project, 700 linear feet; Lenoir-Rhyne and Hickory High intersection improvements, $2.3 million project (pending approval) and 540 linear feet; 13th Avenue SE connection to McDonald Parkway, $5 million project (pending approval), 1,450 linear feet. He discussed the cost of concrete, $19.50 per cubic yard in 1996, $162 per cubic yard in 2026, a 730.8% increase in cost. There was approximately 150 miles of sidewalk in the City. New sidewalk construction budget for FY26 was $200,000. The $5 vehicle fee was the source of this cost. A potential funding source was interest earnings from the Capital Reserve Fund, which would appropriate $300,000. The recommended budget would be $500,000 in the sidewalk budget.

Deputy City Manager Rodney Miller advised a budget revision would be done in the July/August timeframe.

City Manager Warren Wood discussed the bike and pedestrian plan recommendation. He recommended City Council move forward with updating the bike and pedestrian plan. He asked Council for approval of an RFQ to update the plan's 10 year road map. A new plan would determine areas of focus in the City for the next ten years. Some suggestions made six years ago may not make as much sense now, given new residential and commercial growth and construction. Council could make appointments for a citizen based committee group (taskforce) for the plan. A taskforce would go away once the plan was adopted. They were applying for a grant to pay for the plan.

Council and staff discussed the need to coincide the Hickory by Choice 2050 Plan and the Bike and Pedestrian Plan. It was noted that the bike/pedestrian plan would not take as long to complete. They may need to marry up the two consultants on those plans. The bike/pedestrian plan needed to be a living, breathing plan. The suggestion was made to have the RFQ state that coordination in the beginning. Each plan affects the other. There would be coordination between the two consultants.

Alderwoman Patton moved, seconded by Alderman Seaver approval to pursue a Request for Qualifications to update the Bike and Pedestrian Plan.

City Council members requested an interview process. Staff advised that NCDOT assigns a consultant off a list, but they would have some input into who they could select. All of the consultants were prequalified.

Alderwoman Williams asked if the grant would cover the actual costs.

City Manager Warren Wood advised it was approximately $55,000.

The vote was taken and the motion carried unanimously.

VIII. Break

A break was taken at 10:43 a.m. and resumed at 11:00 a.m.

IX. Hickory Moving Forward: Safe Streets for All – Presented by Jordan Powell

City Manager Warren Wood advised Council they had a lot of discussion thus far on Hickory by Choice 2050 plan and the Bike and Pedestrian Plan, but this plan was complete. He introduced Mr. Jordan Powell, Project Manager with VHB.

VHB Project Manager, Jordan Powell gave a PowerPoint presentation. He advised what he would discuss: project overview; safety planning; data; goals; safety strategies; and next steps. He discussed the project origin. The US Department of Transportation's Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) was established with $5 billion in appropriate funds through the Infrastructure and Jobs Act (IIJA) to be awarded between 2022-2026. The program funded regional, local, and Tribal initiatives through Planning and Demonstration Grants and Implementation Grants. Planning and Demonstration Grants were used to develop, complete, or supplement an Action Plan. Implementation Grants were used to implement projects or strategies that were consistent with an existing Action Plan to address roadway safety problems like infrastructural, behavioral, and/or operational activities. He mentioned they were in the final years of the SS4A program.

Mr. Powell discussed the project oversight. The project team consisted of City staff and the consultant. The Steering Committee included: City Departments, Planning, Public Works, Fire, and Police; Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization; Public Health; NCDOT, Traffic Safety Unit, Division 12; Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and Transit. The City would appoint the implementation committee.

Mr. Powell discussed safety planning. Why plan for road safety? He advised in Hickory between 2016 and 2024, 11,727 crashes occurred on roadways in the City of Hickory, 148 of these crashes resulted in fatalities or serious injuries, 49 people were killed in these crashes, and 115 people were seriously injured in these crashes. Crashes were increasing. Population was growing. He noted for this plan 2024 data was used.

Mr. Powell discussed the safe system approach. Safer People: Promote safe and responsible driving habits among road users while prioritizing conditions that ensure their safe arrival at destinations. Safer Vehicles: Increase the number of vehicle systems and features that prevent crashes and reduce the impact on people inside and outside the vehicle. Safer Speeds: Encourage safer driving speeds on all roadways by using a combination of smart road design, setting speed limits, educating drivers, spreading awareness, and enforcing rules. Safer Roads: Design roads that help reduce human errors and consider injury tolerances. This encourages safer behavior and facilitates easier travel for the most vulnerable people. Post-Crash Care: Enhance crash survivability through access to medical care, keep first responders safe, and prevent secondary crashes through traffic incident management practices. He referred to the PowerPoint and pointed out a graph of the framework for safety planning.

Mr. Powell discussed how to plan for road safety. The safety planning process was multidisciplinary, data-driven, and involved robust community engagement. Transportation safety planning focuses on proactive safety, in addition to reactive safety. He referred to the PowerPoint and displayed the safety planning process: establish partners and process; analyze safety data and input; determine safety problems and emphasis areas; identify strategies and projects, implement plan, and evaluate and update plan.

Mr. Powell discussed data, qualitative and quantitative. Community and stakeholder engagement. Focus groups helped identify the safety culture, community organizations, employers, and public health. An online survey and in-person conversations highlighted key concerns and locations. Local events and conversations highlighted the importance of safety for all modes to people throughout the City. The Project Steering Committee guided the development of safety strategies. He mentioned the four unsafe road user behaviors: 1) speeding, 2) distracted driving, 3) driver did not stop or yield, and 4) driver running red lights. He referred to the PowerPoint and displayed photos from events held at the Science Museum, Oktoberfest and the Ridgeveiw Community meeting. He discussed data-driven analysis and planning: High Injury Network (HIN), Bike/Ped

HIN; High Injury Intersections (HII), Bike/Ped HII; five focus crash types were angle, head-on, left-turn, ran off the road, and vulnerable road user; four focus crash conditions were intersection, speed, impaired driver, and occupant protection; risk analysis, proactive safety that identifies locations where crashes might not have historically occurred with a high frequency. He discussed the percentages of angle crashes, basically a T-bone crash 15%, head-on 10%, left turn 18%, ran off the road 12%, vulnerable road use 60%. Intersections were 1/3 of the crashes, speed was 9% and impaired driving was 18%. He referred to the PowerPoint and displayed a map of City of Hickory high injury network.

Mr. Powell discussed the Hickory Moving Forward goal. The City was committed to reducing fatal and serious injury crashes on streets and roads serving residents and visitors by 50% by 2035, working to zero by 2050.

Mr. Powell discussed Hickory Moving Forward (HMF) safety strategies. To achieve this goal, Hickory Moving Forward identified 29 strategic actions across 4 key safety strategies to be carried out by various local, regional, state, and community partners. These strategies represented a range of programs and policies designed to address the safety concerns identified during the HMF planning process: 1. reduce vulnerable road user crashes 2. address high risk locations, 3. reduce speeding and red light running and 4. safety culture: advance data-driven and systemic projects. He noted that motorcycles were included as vehicles in this data.

Alderman Wood was surprised by the ratings. He thought distracted driving would have been there.

Mr. Powell explained that it was not a ranked order, all was equally important. Distracting driving was critically important. It was very difficult to identify what the cause of a crash was.

Council and staff discussed distracted driving. Police Chief Bryan Adams explained how investigating crashes worked. It was normal to have multiple circumstances that could have contributed to a crash event. Education was a key component to target distracted driving. Changing people's behavior. Writing tickets was not the answer. New technology in vehicles could help with distracted drivers.

Mr. Powell discussed strategy 1, reducing vulnerable road user crashes. There were eight actions suggested: close sidewalk gaps, prioritizing sections with high risk for pedestrian crashes. As new development occurs and constructs new sidewalk, prioritize connecting into network. Provide or improve pedestrian crossings at or near all transit stops, prioritizing the HIN and areas with high proportions of zero vehicle households. Distribute safety educations materials and reflective gear for nighttime visibility. Evaluate and implement Right Turn on Red Restriction (RTORR). Hold "open streets" events and local traffic safety conversations to increase awareness of bicycle and pedestrian safety. Improve all signalized intersections in developed areas with pedestrian countdown signal heads and LPI, prioritizing high volume corridors. Install lighting near areas with high-pedestrian activity and un-housed populations, prioritizing arterial roads and areas near transit stops. Where warranted, add marked crosswalks and visibility improvements at midblock locations with sidewalk, prioritizing locations more than 800 feet from protected crossings.

Alderman Wood noted that he sees a lot of pedestrian/cyclist who choose not to obey the law or who do not obey the law. Education of pedestrians and cyclist was part of that.

Mr. Powell discussed strategy 2, addressing high risk locations. He noted seven actions: conduct RSAs on US Routes and multi-lane arterials on High Injury Network or high risk for angle, head-on, and bicycle/pedestrian crashes; evaluate intersection geometry and corner radii at locations high risk for angle crashes; Review all MTP and STIP projects in Hickory for inclusion of medians and access management treatments to address segment risk for head on, left turn, and angle crashes; evaluate signal timing and phases to adjust cycle lengths, add protected left-turn phases at intersections high risk for left turn crashes; conduct a Corridor Study on US-70; implement lighting improvements along locations high risk for run-off road and pedestrian/bicycle related crashes to address night-time crash patterns; and evaluate intersections for roundabout and neighborhood traffic circles.

Mr. Powell discussed strategy 3, reducing speed and red light running. He discussed seven actions. Deploy speed management treatments along corridors with documented speed-related crash patterns or high risk for run off road crashes. Review posted speed limits in urban areas based on context and potential bicycle and pedestrian activity. Deploy targeted education and awareness campaigns at high schools, colleges, and community centers focused on speeding, distraction, and impaired driving. Evaluate new signal treatments, policies, and enforcement strategies including Rest on Red, extended all-red intervals, Targeted Enforcement, and Automated Enforcement. Conduct targeted enforcement campaigns in areas with speed-related crash patterns and to collect data to support reduced speed limits. Leverage neighborhood traffic calming program to prioritize streets identified on the HIN for pedestrians and cyclists. Increase support for public education and enforcement campaign (P.A.C.T.- Pay Attention in City Traffic) program about distracted and aggressive driving.

Council and staff discussed red light ticketing cameras as part of that action. Special legislation for Hickory would be required to do that. Council heard about certain red lights being run. The cameras take pictures of the tag, and the registered owner would be issued a civil citation.

Mr. Powell continued his presentation with strategy 4, safety culture: advance data-driven and systemic projects. He discussed 7 actions: create screening guidance for local capital and development projects to describe crash history and risks; update signal inventory to include information about protected left turn and pedestrian phasing; update land development to include full range of safety countermeasures and road design guidance; pilot a community ambassador program focused on trust-building, outreach, engagement, and education in neighborhoods with high crash risks and vulnerable users; convene the Technical Steering Committee (TSC) annually to review annual safety performance, track progress of safety improvements and review strategies; publish annual safety performance report and track progress of safety improvements; and secure funding for traffic safety programming, to include potential staffing, digital message campaigns, saturated enforcement, education programming.

Mr. Powell discussed priority location action plans. Focus on high injury, high risk locations. This should be targeted for programming within the first five years of the Action Plan adoption. Cut sheets summarize key data and potential safety countermeasures for each location. This should be further assessed for development of safety projects. The process can be replicated, updated. He noted priority locations: NC-127 between 3rd Avenue and 29th Avenue. The safety problem, angle and left turn crashes at high volume intersections; distance between protected crossings exceed 1,000 feet in sections. The recommended improvements: raised center medians; pedestrian refuge islands and Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon (PHB) crossings; LPI, protected left turns, and signal head updates. Estimated cost for construction, $4.7 million. The location of McDonald Parkway NE/24th Street NE at Springs Road NE. The safety problems left turn crash pattern; nighttime crashes; rear end crashes due to queuing. Recommended improvements, implement U-2307B project, including protected left turns, added turn lanes, lighting and medians; Add pedestrian crossings and countdown signal heads across 3 legs. Cost $175,000* (not including U-2307B improvements). The third location was downtown intersections. The safety problems were high pedestrian exposure at intersections. Recommended improvements were crosswalks; curb ramps, pedestrian countdown signal heads and LPI. The cost was $2.9 million.

Staff discussed several locations where no signalization was involved in the projects.

Mr. Powell discussed the safe streets and roads for all discretionary grant program (SS4A). He highlighted components of the program: Leadership Commitment and Goal Setting, Planning Structure, Engagement and Collaboration, Safety Analysis, Policy and Process Changes, Strategy and Project Selections, and Progress and Transparency. Other initiatives were Toward Zero Deaths (TZD), Road to Zero and NC Vision Zero. He advised the comprehensive safety plan met Federal levels and qualified to receive funding. An actionable plan that could be through Federal discretional funding. The funding doors were open with the adoption of this plan.

Mr. Powell advised that Council's next steps would be adoption of the plan and begin implementation.

City Manager Warren Wood asked if the data comparison was done with other cities Hickory's size.

Mr. Powell advised not in this plan, but they could look at the numbers. Many communities were adopting these plans.

City Manager Warren Wood noted that the funding ends this year.

Mr. Powell mentioned it was $995 million, but it was unclear if they were making all of it available. It was allocation in this fiscal year, 2/3 of available funds for implementation.

Council and staff discussed the timeline for the release and implementation of the grants. Depending on the number of grants received it could be a 2-3 month process. Notification and award of the grant could also be lengthy.

Mayor Guess moved, seconded by Alderwoman Patton approval to accept the Hickory Moving Forward: Safe Streets for All Plan. The motion carried unanimously.

X. Lunch

Mayor Guess welcomed Ms. Holly Jones, Director for Governor Stein's Western North Carolina District. She was meeting with Catawba County later in the day.

Director for Governor Stein, Ms. Holly Jones commented that it was an amazing opportunity for her to tour the facility. She was excited to come back with her family. She had been in North Carolina for 30 years growing up in Anson and Randolph Counties. She noted that she had local elected official background. She worked in the Intergovernmental Division for the 26 most western counties. Governor Stein understood the vital nature of the partnerships to do the work of the people and the relationships needed. She mentioned that the recovery of Western North Carolina was a number one priority with Governor Stein, along with public education, safety, and access to

health services. She commended Hickory for their efforts to partner, support and build on each other. They have the ability to collaborate and work together. They need more Hickory's that shine in that regard. She advised that the General Assembly would be back in Raleigh next week, and she was optimistic about that. The Governor was ready to get back to work to advance the goals. They were watching the conversations around property tax. She noted there were items on the ballot that the Governor did not have veto power on. She was optimistic about all things North Carolina.

Mayor Guess welcomed Ms. Jones and the Governor to Hickory anytime.

A break was taken at 11:53 a.m. and resumed at 12:37 p.m.

XI. Leveraging Technology & Innovative Service Delivery

City Manager Warren Wood advised they would discuss leveraging technology and innovative service delivery, where they were in the process, and what was on the horizon. The discussion began with current and planned innovative strategies.

Hickory Fire Chief Matt Hutchinson discussed the fire station alerting system. He explained how the system integrated with the computer-aided dispatch system (CAD) and was able to automatically and instantaneously deliver incident details in a way that was tailored to the needs of fire and rescue personnel. He explained the VIPER system which Hickory Police Department was also on. He mentioned the old analogy system and noted that it decreased response time. The average response time was 2 minutes and 20 seconds. They would like that to be 1 minute 20 seconds. The goal was to decrease response time and enhance communication.

Council and staff discussed traffic light prioritization for emergency vehicles. Chief Hutchinson explained how the system worked. Some of the trucks had those but they were antiquated.

Police Chief Bryan Adams discussed the flock license plate readers (LPRs). These were cameras that captured license plates and vehicle characteristics (make, model, color, unique features) to create a searchable database to help solve crimes. It has the capability of real-time alerts, 24/7 monitoring, and the national LPR network. He noted that they work with other cities, counties, and private entities to have access to these cameras. He referred to a traffic fatality accident on Highway 70 SE where they were able to use the cameras to identify the model and color of the car. Using the cameras they found a car that matched the description and showed damage after the accident occurred. This was a great tool used for investigative services. Currently there were 10 of these available.

Police Chief Bryan Adams discussed the Community Navigator Casey McCall, who had been employed with them since 2019. He acts as a liaison between Hickory Police Department and the homeless community in the City. Since 2019, 506 homeless individuals had been referred to the Community Navigator. Of those referred, Mr. McCall provided some level of support to 266 individuals. Of those, 90 individuals were successfully housed or relocated with friends or family. He would follow up with these people three or four times not just once. He also did a lot of education.

City Manager Warren Wood advised they had larger cities looking at their program.

Police Chief Bryan Adams stressed the education component that Mr. McCall did to educate the public about supporting the nonprofits rather than handing out to these individuals.

Police Chief Bryan Adams continued his presentation with discussion about the Community Response Units. He mentioned how the unit was started by the 911 Catawba County Center. They started an apprentice program. He referred to the PowerPoint and displayed a photo of two individuals that started out on the Community Response Unit and now they were officers. He explained the units handled low-level incidents reported to 911 that would typically be routed to officers. Community Response Unit's had high-call volumes and a broad range of responsibilities had reduced the number of calls requiring sworn officer response. Since 2024, the Community Response Units had supported patrol operations by responding to 22,303 calls for service. They respond to traffic crashes, motorist assistance, traffic directing, foot patrols, found property, home watches, property checks, and locked-out motorist calls. He mentioned their partnership with Catawba Valley Community College and Lenoir-Rhyne University to recruit individuals for this unit. They could assist a locked out motorist and they directed traffic during accidents too.

Deputy City Manager Rodney Miller discussed City security upgrades. He noted there were over 300 cameras all around the City. There was a need to add security at City Hall. He referred to the First Amendment Auditors that visited City Hall in the past. There was a plan to establish a vestibule between the Collections counter and the Planning Department to restrict access. There was also the potential for metal detectors in the future. They had identified areas along the Aviation Walk behind the old Clement Center where blind spots were and felt there was a need for blue light

cameras. Hickory Police Department walked through that area and made recommendations for the cameras. That would be coming in the summer.

Alderwoman Patton suggested putting that out on social media when that occurred.

Police Chief Bryan Adams discussed a real time crime center (RTCC). He advised the RTCC would protect citizens better and prevent crime. He explained how the center worked. He advised they were currently accessing the area behind the communications center to locate the RTCC. He discussed the use of drones as first responders. They had clearance with the FAA to use these drones. They could be on a scene in 90 seconds with information transmitted to officers' phones. The drones also had the capability of giving commands to suspects.

Council and staff discussed camera sharing with homes and businesses as well as face recognition capability. Other municipalities were using this type of technology.

Police Chief Bryan Admas continued his discussion about drones. He mentioned during natural disasters, like Helene, they could be used to assess damage. The drone could send the images straight to their phones. It was also a great tool for mass gatherings. They were proposing four of these, docked strategically in the City. He noted that the flock cameras have video capability now. With this technology they could track live throughout the City. Social media could send out the message that it was a hard city to commit a crime in.

Council and staff discussed the legality of the data.

Police Chief Bryan Adams advised the information would be kept for 30 days and then deleted. If videos contained information related to a crime it would be downloaded. For example, they may have a known drug dealer and could put a tag number in the system and track where they were going. The camera sees the tag number and notifies them.

IT Director Darin Kiracofe referenced a crime in the public with multiple shooters; they could possibly have their location for the last two hours prior to the crime.

Alderman Wood questioned the network storage.

IT Director Darin Kiracofe that was provided by whoever the camera provider had their platform with.

Police Chief Bryan Adams noted the spike of people in the City during the day, and it drops at night. They would consider the calls for service, and use at large scale events, i.e. Oktoberfest.

Deputy City Manager Rodney Miller noted they were currently looking at space configuration.

Police Chief Bryan Adams mentioned a Grade "D" could fly a radius around the airport. The drone would be programmed to fly at a certain level.

Council and staff continued the discussion regarding a metal detector at City Hall, Council Chambers specifically. They could not see what people bring inside; they need to explore that. There were cameras located on City Hall property. It would add protection. With the increasing number of mentally ill people, that needed to be addressed. If nothing else it may serve as a deterrent at the entryway of Council Chambers.

IT Director Darin Kiracofe discussed FirstNet Authority. He referred to the 9-11 event and mentioned during disasters first responders may not get connection to a network. He noted currently there were 224 phones on the City's satellite services that could be used as backup. Starlink was currently deployed to City Hall, Hickory Police Department and the Henry Fork Plant and also at places that do not have services. He noted that FirstNet had priority over all cell phone traffic in emergencies. They were large mobile units for posting signals across "X" number miles.

City Manager Warren Wood noted that during Helene Hendersonville only had their old radio systems. They would like to have redundancy in communications.

Business and Community Development Manager Dave Leonetti discussed Placer.ai. He explained that Placer.ai data was used to tell the story. This tool assists with supporting business recruitment, as well as benchmarking against other jurisdictions. Placer captures mobile device data, foot traffic analysis for events, properties, demographics, and retail recruitment. They use it to support local businesses. They could tell when people are traveling downtown. He advised that the Highway 70 commercial area was the 8th busiest in North Carolina. They use this data for benchmarking against other cities. People are coming into Hickory to work, shop, play, etc. On average 140,000 people pass through Hickory spending an average of 10-15 minutes. Hickory is considered the regional hub for the area. The data could tell where we live/work, etc. It could tell how many traveled "X" miles for an event like the Oktoberfest. They could look at the data by dates.

Assistant City Manager Yaidee Fox discussed Citibot. She advised this technology was a way to communicate with City residents and improve engagement with the citizens. It allows citizens to submit service requests in over 75 languages. It was a closed ai system and only would allow

things the City applied to it. It had ai voice capability, if a citizen has a question to which department they may need to talk to. It has a 24 hour text alert. She advised that Code Red Emergency was managed through Catawba County, and it would not replace that. Citizens had the option of opting in or out. Citizens may want to know about an event, a street closure, etc. The technology was compliant with ADA digital guidelines. It would have website accessibility. It was not perfect; staff would train it. It would help provide an additional way for citizens to get the information they need.

Council and staff discussed the launching of this technology. Staff have just started engaging with the company. If implemented it would be in approximately 2 months. It was noted that Council would like to keep voice communications front and center.

Assistant City Manager Yaidee Fox advised staff were working towards ADA compliance with the technology.

Transportation and Engineering Manager Caroline Kone discussed red-light cameras. She advised that the North Carolina General Assembly must pass a local act to install red-light cameras. She explained how the cameras worked. The system takes two photos: the vehicle at the white stop line while the light is red, and the vehicle moving through the intersection during the red light. The information included date, time, speed, and how long the light had been red when the car entered the intersection. Officers manually review footage to verify the license plate and that the vehicle ran the light. She advised that warning signs must be placed within 300 feet of the intersection. She mentioned that Greensboro had installed five of these at a cost of $100 million dollars and an operating cost of $330,000 per year. It was a $50 fine. She noted that the City of Wilmington got rid of them in 2025.

Alderwoman Patton asked how much they received in fines.

Transportation and Engineering Manager Caroline Kone did not know the amount, but she could reach out to them and see if she could get the information.

Alderwoman Williams thought that Charlotte was looking at doing that as well.

City Manager Warren Wood discussed the downtown parking management structure. They were having a parking study done this year to get some recommendations on where parking was needed and the optimum place for a parking deck. They could start at Union Square and work their way out overtime. There was a suggestion of implementation of an automated system, a smart meter system. He noted that people would complain about walking and paying for parking. They may also look into an addition on the existing parking deck located downtown.

Assistant City Manager Steve Miller advised they could find parking two blocks from Union Square. They could not put a parking deck in front of the buildings on Union Square. The cost was approximately $30,000 per spaces; 100 spaces would be $300,000 million.

City Manager Warren Wood was not convinced that they need a parking deck.

Alderman Wood thought that it needed to be a data driven decision.

City Manager Warren Wood advised they could find a parking space; people do not use it.

Mayor Guess questioned a parking area behind City Hall.

City Manager Warren Wood advised that was to replace spaces that were lost.

Alderman Wood questioned the use of technology to charge users by weight on trash pickup that would correspond to the address.

City Manager Warren Wood said that technology was available.

Assistant City Manager Steve Miller explained there was technology for readers on the cans, there was a cost for that option. The landfill fees go up 2.5 to 3% CPI per year. It was not static but did not jump 10-15% at a time.

XII. Break

A break was taken at 1:56 p.m.

XIII. Bus Tour: Beginning at the Aviation Museum, Airport Hangar (South Ramp), 9th Avenue Drive, 17th Street, Aviation Museum Connector, Aviation Walk Connector, OLLE Art Walk, Hickory Optimist Dog Park, Ridgeview Splashpad, 4th Street/Highway 70, Microsoft Plant, Trivium and Trivium East, Fairgrove Business Park, Sandy Pines Park, and 4th Street/Main Avenue NW Crosswalk, Tour of the Museum (optional)

The bus tour began at 2:10 p.m. leaving the Hickory Aviation Museum. During the route the bus passed by the former Long View Water Plant that the City had acquired. The bus traveled to the south ramp of the Hickory Regional Airport to what was formerly known as the CommScope hangar. The Nest had purchased the CommScope plane. Deputy City Manager Rodney Miller pointed out an area where a 32,000 square foot hangar would be located. Shurtape had a Challenger valued at $5 million. The Nest could be bringing in additional aircraft which would bring their tax value to $160 million. He noted airplane repair clientele would be relocated to the north ramp. Council and staff discussed the aesthetics around the airport. Deputy City Manager Rodney Miller pointed out the privately owned hangar, owned by Frank Drendel, who had a lease with the City for $18,000. Once the lease term expired the hangar would revert back to the City. Mr. Drendel's cost was different because he built the hangar, and typical hangar leases were approximately $98,000. He pointed out on the west ramp the area where there would be future hangar development and the area where avigation easements would be occurring. They have hired a surveyor and an appraiser to conduct the service in the area. There were approximately 120 plus properties that they would have to buy avigation easements from. That would give them the ability to go on their properties to cut trees down. There was a formula that the appraiser would use, or they could condemn those air-rights. They must do these steps before the runway.

Leaving the Airport the bus drove by 9th Avenue Drive and the 17th Street extension. Deputy City Manager Rodney Miller advised the location of the Aviation Museum connector walk, which would be the next phase. By mid-May, the Olle Art Walk should be 95% complete. There was substantial retaining walls located there. He noted a green space area, near Highway 321, where they may place a plane. He also mentioned there was a mound on the other side of the museum and a third location to help identify the museum's location. The bus traveled down Old Lenoir Road which would be going to a 3 lane road. The location of where an aviation sculpture would be located was noted.

The bus proceeded to Main Avenue and 4th Street where pedestrian improvements would be made. The City has received approval from the railroad. The area would go to 2 lanes instead of four, and would bulb out with additional parallel parking on the outside lanes of 4th Street. The bus road by the Ridgeview Splash pad and restroom facility that were under construction. They were revitalizing the bathrooms from the old pool. The bus drove through the area located at 4th Street and Highway 70 where a pedestrian crossing would be at the Walmart Market. They were working with Greenway for a bus stop there. On Highway 70 the Hickory Hop location was pointed out.

The bus proceeded to the Microsoft facility, which was under construction. The bulk of the facility should be on the tax base by January 1, 2028. The bus left the Microsoft facility and proceeded to the Trivium Corporate Center and Trivium East which was being marketed by Catawba County Economic Development Corporation Scott Millar. Leaving the Trivium Center the bus traveled to Fairgrove Business Park. The Features building, a spec building and the old bio sludge facilities were pointed out. The bus proceeded on to Tate Boulevard, where another site for Microsoft was noted.

The bus passed by the area which would be the future Sandy Pine Park. The park should be under construction by this summer. The bus traveled by the Hampton Heights Subdivision, and the location of the second entrance was noted. The bus traveled near Lenoir-Rhyne University and an area was noted where they were applying for money to extend the sidewalk to complete a missing gap of the sidewalk.

XIV. Wrap-up/Adjourn

At approximately 4:21 p.m. Council and Staff returned to the Hickory Aviation Museum and the meeting was adjourned.

_____
Mayor

_____
City Clerk