

Work Session of the Sandy Springs City Council was held on Tuesday, January 19, 2021 at 6:00 p.m., Mayor Rusty Paul presiding.

I. **Invocation** – Rabbi Brad Levenberg, Temple Sinai

II. **Staff Discussion Items**

A. **2021-012** Fulton County Schools Update

Dr. Mike Looney, Superintendent, Fulton County Schools, presented information about the Sandy Springs, Fulton County area schools. The school system audits continue to be clear and without negativity. The schools in Sandy Springs are diverse, both in ethnicity and diverse as it relates to family income. Across the school system, student enrollment is gradually declining, although stable. The two high schools in Sandy Springs are high performing and competitive schools, with active parent participation. For the North Springs cluster, 2020 highlights include that 85% of graduates have been accepted in a technical college or university and graduates have been accepted into 61 different colleges. Two North Springs students have accepted commissions at the US Naval Academy and West Point. The North Springs Robotics Team placed second in the region. Five North Springs students were named National Merit Scholar semifinalists. Riverwood 2020 highlights include the football team had a perfect 10-0 season and Region Title. Their overall Athletic Program placed third in the GADA Directors Cup. Ms. Kate Bedingfield, an alumna of Sandy Springs Middle School and Riverwood High School, was selected to serve as President Biden's White House Communications Director. Thanks to the intergovernmental agreement with Lake Forest Elementary and the City of Sandy Springs, the school has a revamped play space, two play structures, a basketball court, and a mini-soccer field. On Saturday, January 16, Fulton County Schools hosted a vaccination event, in conjunction with the Fulton County Board of Health, at Mercedes Benz Stadium, where over 696 people were vaccinated.

Julia Bernath, President, Fulton County School Board, stated Dr. Looney, the school board, teachers, parents, and students have worked together throughout the past year facing the COVID pandemic crisis. Politics had not come into play during this crisis. The City of Sandy Springs has helped to mitigate the crisis, modeling measures to help slow the spread of COVID. Dr. Looney continues to lobby that teachers and staff are front line workers and should be able to get the vaccine.

Council Member Jody Reichel asked about the next Fulton County SPLOST vote and when it might happen, and what is an updated about the new North Springs building. What will this building be like, i.e., a traditional, STEM school or a combination of both?

Superintendent Dr. Looney replied Fulton County Schools are in the very early stages of SPLOST. If SPLOST moves forward in November, the North Springs replacement will be included. Any high school will need to include a STEM component, whether a traditional high school or otherwise.

School Board President Bernath stated currently in the fifth SPLOST, 1998 was the last time the School Board entered into any bond indebtedness, which was made off this month with SPLOST funds. The School Board does not want a gap between when this SPLOST ends and the next begins. One consideration is Fulton County Schools is co-joined with Atlanta Public Schools, who has a new superintendent; DeKalb County schools, who has a new superintendent; and City Schools of Decatur. The decision has to be made across all of these school districts as to when to bring forward a new SPLOST.

Council Member Andy Bauman stated this presentation is something that unites constituents, and should be done everyone year. Is the Fulton County Schools committed to a timeline for North Springs? The north end community deserves first class facilities.

School Board President Bernath replied if Fulton County Schools goes forward with the SPLOST, there will have to be a list of specific targets or projects. It may say there will be a replacement school for North Springs, or include a certain amount of specificity.

Council Member Bauman asked how declining enrollment impact school planning does.

Superintendent Dr. Looney replied one impact is there are underutilized elementary schools. The School Board may consider adding K-8 schools to its school portfolio.

Council Member John Paulson encouraged Dr. Looney and the School Board to communicate to the community about the successes of these schools. What steps is the School Board taking to engage with struggling kids in terms of online learning?

Superintendent Dr. Looney stated if a student is not engaged, schools are calling and being dogmatic to see why they are not engaged. The School Board's support in giving families a choice of in school or online learning has been helpful to parents.

B. 2021-013 Fulton County Arts & Culture – Contracts for Services

Shaun Albrechtson, Create Sandy Springs Director presented a Fulton County Arts and Culture grant opportunity for up to \$50K. Staff proposes requesting support for the Arts in School virtual program. This is a program that is currently funded by the Sandy Springs Arts Foundation. It was adapted this year to create an online virtual experience because all school field trips have been eliminated due to the pandemic. The request is for year two funding, which is the 2021-2022 season that is due to complete in October. Performances will be recorded at the performing arts center. A package will be distributed to the schools inclusive of the recorded performance, accompanying lesson plan, and some artist outreach for the schools. If approved by the Fulton County grant program then this will be fully funded next year.

COUNCIL CONSENSUS: Proceed with the application.

C. 2021-014 TSPLOST 2022 Renewal

Andrea Surratt, City Manager presented current options for a potential TSPLOST 2. In his December 2020 letter to the City Council, Kevin King, the City's T-SPLOST Citizens Oversight Council representative, shared different options on continuing the T-SPLOST. The current collection is \$65M, with possible collection totals at \$90M depending on the economy and collections throughout the year. The Fulton County Board of Commissioners asks for feedback from Fulton cities regarding what path to take. Fulton County cities are asked to consider when to take TSPLOST to voters, 2021 or 2022, and under which of the three options:

- 3a. 0.75% T-SPLOST with no transit option (this is the current status quo);
- 3b. 0.75% with transit; +/- \$200M for transit, +/- \$300M distributed to cities by population; and,
- 3c. 1% T-SPLOST with transit, +/- \$200M for transit, +/- \$500M distributed to cities by population.*

Mayor Rusty Paul stated there does not appear to be support among the mayors, either north or south, to include transit in the next T-SPLOST. The state has put \$100M in to prepare the managed lanes on 400 for the exits and on-ramps leading to proposed stations. We will not lose the opportunity but we lose time. Feedback from the other mayors suggests only other than 3a is an option. The Sandy Springs Council should go on record with what is in the best interest of the Sandy Springs community.

Council Member Tibby DeJulio asked what type of transit projects are being discussed and what does the \$200M included.

Mayor Paul responded that it is all bus rapid-transit (BRT). In north Fulton County, it includes a connection that would begin at Windward Parkway to the North Springs MARTA Station. On the south side there would be a similar project along North Fulton Parkway that would lead to the airport station that would connect that part into transit. All the other studies for planned transit in the future involves BRT because it is largely the most cost effective way to deliver transit, which could include a train but with rubber wheels. The \$200M includes all the capital required to build the BRT projects on the north and south sides of the Fulton County. The modifications to handle BRT in the north would be done as part of the SR 400 managed lanes project. They will prepare the spurs that will be needed to connect stations where they have been identified.

Council Member Jody Reichel asked what the objections of the other mayors was to the options that include transit.

Mayor Paul stated generally they do not believe people will ride it. There is mostly unanimity about continuing the T-SPLOST, but the only question is will it be November 2021 or November of 2022. Some are also concerned with municipal elections being this year, elections could turn into a discussion about transportation funding instead of the issues that local communities are facing.

Council Member John Paulson stated that the governor has committed \$100M for transit. Then this \$200M from the T-SPLOST, which would be \$300M would get the stations built? If transportation does not go on TSPLOST, would the County lose the \$100M from the governor?

Mayor Paul replied the \$300M would get the station built and the capital for the BRTs. Mayor Paul stated that the governor's \$100M is committed. Without the transportation options, cities may lose the opportunity to leverage local TSPLOST dollars with federal funds.

Council Member Paulson stated it seems too early to dismiss 3b.

Mayor Paul stated with 3b you lock the funds for the transit projects, and mayors argue the funds could otherwise be used for local transportation projects. That is the reason that 3c is an option, as it keeps the cities whole. There are trade-offs in each option. One other issue is that if the referendum does not occur until November of 2022, then the cities lose a year of funding.

Council Member Chris Burnett commented with traffic being so light because of COVID, and as we do not know the impact of work-at-home because of COVID, it may be a tough sell for an off-season election cycle. What percentage of this first round of Sandy Springs TSPLOST funds have been spent so far?

Mayor Paul replied we have invested a lot of money into sidewalks and trails that people working from home will be able to utilize. Of course, it will depend on which project list we come forward with but it will be able to fund our trail network, as well as additional sidewalks, so it is not just roads. The City has not collected all that was predicted it would collect.

Council Member Andy Bauman asked if this information could be reviewed at the City Council Retreat. A report is owed to the citizens as to how successful has this first TSPLOST been. Many of the City's projects are still in planning and design. The transit is a hard sale. The City should go for 3a.

Council Member Reichel stated she supported 3a as well. The City should finish the projects it has already started, and possibly reevaluate the bus situation after COVID.

Council Member DeJulio stated he agreed with 3a.

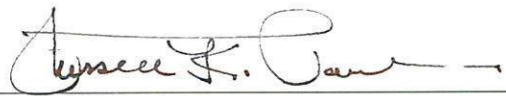
Mayor Paul stated the collection of funds for each City is based on population, and the population is based on the Census results. Sandy Springs should expect to receive about 20% of the collections. This excludes Atlanta, so Sandy Springs is the largest of the cities. If the TSPLOST were to fail in November 2021, it could not be brought back to the voters in 2022. There needs to be a certain amount of time that passes. Every city in Fulton will have municipal elections. Sandy Springs citizens understand the need to invest in the city's infrastructure, and they voted for it last time because they had trust in this body to do things right.

Council Member Paulson stated 3a.

COUNCIL CONSENSUS: Option 3a in November 2021

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 6:59 p.m.

Date approved: February 2, 2021.



Russell K. Paul, Mayor



Raquel D. González, City Clerk