

**TOWN OF BIG STONE GAP, VIRGINIA
COUNCIL WORKSHOP MEETING**

**COUNCIL CHAMBERS
505 E. 5TH STREET, SOUTH
BIG STONE GAP, VA**

March 2, 2021

6:30 PM

AGENDA ITEM 1

Call to Order and Roll Call

Mayor Johnson called the meeting to order.

Those Present: Hon. Gary Johnson, Mayor
 Hon. Nancy Bailey, Vice-Mayor
 Hon. Robert Bloomer, Councilman
 Hon. Kent Gilley, Councilman
 Hon. Tyler Hughes, Councilman
 Hon. Crystal Lyke, Councilwoman
 Hon. Aaron McKinney, Councilman

Staff Present: Mr. Stephen Lawson, Town Manager
 Ms. Amanda Hawkins, Town Clerk/Treasurer
 Mr. Charles Bledsoe, Town Attorney
 Mr. Steve Hamm, Chief of Police

AGENDA ITEM 2

AMEND THE AGENDA

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Bailey, that the Agenda for the Council Workshop Meeting of March 2, 2021 be amended to include a Closed Session under VA Code 2.2-3711(A)(1)(3)(5). Motion resulted as follows:

Ayes: Bailey, Bloomer, Gilley, Hughes, Johnson, Lyke, McKinney

Nayes: None Abstain: None Absent: None

AGENDA ITEM 3

REVIEW OF MINUTES

Review of draft of minutes of the Council Workshop (Electronic Attendance) of February 2, 2021, and the Regular Council Meeting (Electronic Attendance) of February 9, 2021.

No comments.

AGENDA ITEM 4

TOWN ENGINEER'S REPORT

Greenbelt Phase V

Mr. Broskey reported that the Town had received the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) permit for Phase V of the Greenbelt Project. He said they are coordinating with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) to obtain a Categorical Exclusion to submit to the Army Corps of Engineers for the bridge crossing permit.

Sanitary Sewer Evaluation Study

Mr. Broskey said they have completed most of the flow monitoring and are waiting on dry weather to do smoke testing. They are working with Mark Hollyfield on gathering information for the Asset Management Plan which is part of the funding requirements for this project.

System Wide Water Loss Project

Mr. Broskey said the preliminary plans are complete for the System-Wide Water Loss Project. He will meet with Steve Lawson and Steve Clark to do a field review to make sure everything is ready to move forward.

Questions and Comments

Mayor Johnson asked about the status of the plans for the micro-filtration plant. Mr. Broskey said that we had reached a temporary stale-mate with the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), but they have had a lot of staff changes, and he will revisit the issue with VDH shortly.

Mrs. Bailey congratulated Mr. Broskey on the 25th anniversary of The Lane Group.

AGENDA ITEM 5

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

a. Resolution 02-2021 – Authorizing Refunding Bonds VRA

Mr. Lawson said this resolution will authorize the Virginia Resources Authority (VRA) to review our present financial situation to see if we can save some money by refinancing.

b. COVID-19 & Projects Update

Mr. Lawson said some COVID-19 restrictions have been modified effective March 1st:

- the midnight to 5 am curfew has been lifted,
- alcohol sales 10 pm cutoff has been lifted – sales now allowed until midnight,
- indoor gatherings still have a 10 person limit,
- outdoor gatherings are still limited to 25 people,
- indoor entertainment is limited to 30% of capacity or 250 people,
- outdoor entertainment is limited to 30% capacity or 1,000 people,
- outdoor recreational sports are limited to 30% of capacity or 250 people per field

Mr. Lawson noted that the Virginia High School Sports League (VHSL) football is considered an outdoor recreational sport so they will continue to limit gatherings to 250 people.

He noted that while the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and most places are still on Phase 1-B of the vaccine immunizations, certain facilities have begun Phase 1-C. The only known local facility to step into Phase 1-C is Walgreens in Coeburn and Pennington Gap – they are now immunizing people between 16 and 64 who have underlying medical conditions.

Mutual Building Project

The Co-Workspace construction is scheduled to finish tomorrow. We are waiting on the copier to come in, and the furniture has been put together. Dr. Allred will be the first to utilize the conference room for training sessions for his staff. The only problem with the space so far is a rock that got stuck in the sump pump causing it to overheat and shut down. We have changed the notification system to flashing lights and phone calls to the restaurant owners and Town employees. We now have permission from the Federal Post Office to install a drain between the federal building and the Mutual Building to direct water away from the area.

Special Events

Mr. Lawson said the Town is sponsoring (\$500) the Bullock Slow & Low Steak Cook-Off team at a competition in Texas. We will provide them with pamphlets and promotional materials to help advertise our September 27th Steak Cook-Off event here in Town.

The Union High School Bears basketball team won State Championships and a member of the Bears wrestling team won the individual State Championship in wrestling. Mr. Lawson suggested we think of some way to acknowledge their accomplishments since with electronic Council meetings we can't invite them in to congratulate them in person.

Town Crews

Mr. Lawson said we have had major problems with water line breaks in the East Stone Gap and Baum Hollow areas. Our water crews worked around the clock on a line break in Baum Hollow, but once the line was repaired customers still had issues with too much pressure causing pop-off valves to go off all thru the area. The problem turned out to be a pressure relief valve malfunction on the main line. That valve has been repaired and the issue resolved.

He said that with all the rain that was forecasted, we only experienced minimal flood damage. Our crews had cleared sewer lines that cross the rivers before the rain event happened, which certainly helped, but now we have more debris to remove as well.

Websites and Facebook Updates

Mr. Lawson said Ked Meade is working for the Town on a temporary basis to help with our websites and Facebook pages. He is the one who developed the Valentine's Day advertisements for all our businesses on Facebook as well as promoted the video by Henry Keuling-Stout. That video had about 50 views before February and now has had over 2,500 views worldwide. He noted that we have had very good results from the video he helped Stephen make to help recruit potential business owners.

Mr. Lawson commented on the Council chamber upgrades, such as TV monitors and microphones at Council stations. He noted that everyone is being recorded at their stations now so they can be heard easier when they have comments.

Upcoming Events

Mr. Lawson said we are planning on holding the Soapbox Derby in May.

He said we are exploring different ideas on how to proceed with Easter events for the kids. One possibility is to have three different locations for different age groups. He is working with the Parks and Recreation Department to figure out the details.

He said the Little League board members met to discuss the upcoming season. They learned that the Pennington Gap league is not playing this year, but their charter allows their players to come to the closest town to play, which would be Big Stone Gap, so we may have a full

lineup this year. He noted it is a work in progress, but we are planning on having events and will cancel only if we have to.

AGENDA ITEM 6 COMMITTEE REPORTS

a. Planning Commission – ODP Special Use Permit

Mr. Lawson put the new Council Chamber equipment to use, with Matthew Bright's assistance, by using the enhanced features of the large screens to display Google Earth to explain Old Dominion Power's (ODP) request for a Special Use Permit to install high-voltage lines through Town. He walked thru the route proposed by ODP as it appeared on the TV screens as he recited key points.

- The plan is to link substations in East Stone Gap and the Southern Section of Town
- The beginning of the route is mostly property owned by the Town and the Heritage Church of God
- ODP's purpose is to provide service to customers and keep their power active during storms and extreme weather.
- The upgrade will not affect Mountain Empire Older Citizens or the PACE Center

Some of the questions raised were:

- Concerns expressed by property owners about the environmental impact on the R-O-W
- Concerns expressed by property owners about spraying the vegetation to keep it contained
- Will ODP buy property from owners so they can move elsewhere
- How long will it take for the construction area to recover
- Is there another benefit to Town citizens in addition to having a back-up power source
- Will it hamper the development of future homestead sites or Parks & Rec overlook sites
- Mr. Bledsoe said the only recourse for property owners is to file a reverse condemnation suit. He suggested there should be some way to preclude the use of pesticides close to property owners homes and livestock
- Will it deter tourism considering all the investments the Town has made to draw people to Big Stone Gap

Mr. Lawson urged Council to submit any questions they want answered by ODP and he will see they are forwarded to them. He noted that any questions the public may have will be addressed at a public hearing that will be held before Council votes on the issue.

AGENDA ITEM 7 COUNCIL COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

Mr. McKinney thanked all the Town workers.

Ms. Lyke said we need to really work on having an Easter event for the kids. She said a lot of people are ready to get back out there and do things.

Mrs. Bailey said she appreciates all our Town crews do. She mentioned that she has been approached by a resident who commented that people are still speeding on Wood Avenue and wondered if we need more signs. Chief Hamm said that all entrances to Town have signs specifying the speed limit of 25 mph unless otherwise posted.

Mr. Hughes thanked employees as well as rescue and fire personnel. He said he received a message about the recent championships won by the Union Bears teams asking if the Town could display public signs like Pound does. He asked the best way to submit his questions about the ODP project. Ms. Hawkins suggest he e-mail them to her.

Mr. Gilley thanked all the Town employees who worked through the recent difficult weather.

Mr. Bloomer mentioned that a Town he visited recently in North Carolina had a mural listing titles that their local teams had won. He noted that the COVID-19 vaccine site at Norton has people that don't show up for their appointments and will take walk-ins at the end of the day if they have vaccines left over. He suggested people might want to take advantage of that situation. He mentioned that we might want to put out a video showing what the end result of the ODP right-of-way will look after its finished to make sure the public is informed.

Mayor Johnson said a resident of Egan Road gave a pat on the back to the water crews who worked on the water line break in Baum Hollow. He said the weather was bad and the crews worked very diligently through it all. Mayor Johnson thanked everyone who sent condolences to his sons over the loss of their mother. He encouraged everyone to stay safe.

AGENDA ITEM 8

CLOSED SESSION in accordance with VA Code 2.2-3711(A)(1)(3)(5) for the discussion, consideration, or interviews of prospective candidate(s) for employment; assignment, appointment, promotion, performance, demotion, salaries, disciplining, or resignation of specific public officers, appointees, or employees of any public body, and for the discussion or consideration of the acquisition of real property for a public purpose, or of the disposition of publicly held property, where discussion in an open meeting would adversely affect the bargaining position or negotiating strategy of the public body, and discussion concerning a prospective business or industry or the expansion of an existing business or industry where no previous announcement has been made of the business' or industry's interest in locating or expanding its facilities in the community.

Motion by Hughes, seconded by Bailey, that Council enter a Closed Session in accordance with VA Code 2.2-3711(A)(1)(3)(5) for the discussion, consideration, or interviews of prospective candidate(s) for employment; assignment, appointment, promotion, performance, demotion, salaries, disciplining, or resignation of specific public officers, appointees, or employees of any public body, and for the discussion or consideration of the acquisition of real property for a public purpose, or of the disposition of publicly held property, where discussion in an open meeting would adversely affect the bargaining position or negotiating strategy of the public body, and discussion concerning a prospective business or industry or the expansion of an existing business or industry where no previous announcement has been made of the business' or industry's interest in locating or expanding its facilities in the community. Motion resulted as follows:

ROLL CALL VOTE:

Ayes: Bailey, Bloomer, Gilley, Hughes, Johnson, Lyke, McKinney

Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: None

Motion by Hughes, seconded by Bailey, that Council re-convene into Open Session. Motion resulted as follows:

ROLL CALL VOTE:

Ayes: Bailey, Bloomer, Gilley, Hughes, Johnson, Lyke, McKinney

Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: None

Ms. Hawkins read the Certification of Closed Meeting. Roll call vote resulted as follows:

Ayes: Bailey, Bloomer, Gilley, Hughes, Johnson, Lyke, McKinney

Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: None

AGENDA ITEM 9

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned 8:00 pm.

Minutes Recorded & Transcribed by
Amanda L. Hawkins – Town Clerk/Treasurer