

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

**ELECTRONIC ATTENDANCE
VIA GO TO MEETING PLATFORM
BIG STONE GAP, VA**

April 6, 2021

6:30 PM

***As a result of the State of Emergency declared by Virginia Governor Ralph Northam on March 12, 2020 by Executive Order No. 51, by Wise County Virginia Executive Michael Hatfield on March 19, 2020 and by the Council of the Town of Big Stone Gap Virginia effective March 20, 2020, due to the public health emergency resulting from the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the public meeting scheduled for April 6, 2021 at 6:30 pm, is to be conducted electronically as authorized by Resolution 16-2020 adopted on September 8, 2020.**

***This Electronic Meeting was conducted via the GO TO MEETING platform and was made available to Council Members, Town Staff, and the public by conference call.**

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. Crystal Lyke, Councilwoman *Arrived at 6:42 pm

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

Those Absent: Hon. Tyler Hughes, Councilman
Hon. Aaron McKinney, Councilman

AGENDA ITEM 2

PUBLIC HEARING – FY2020-21 Budget Amendment

Mayor Johnson recessed the Council Workshop and opened the Public Hearing for comments from citizens regarding an amendment to the FY2020-21 Budget. Hearing no comments, Mayor Johnson closed the Public Hearing and reconvened the Council Workshop.

AGENDA ITEM 3**REVIEW OF MINUTES**

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

No comments.

AGENDA ITEM 4**TOWN ENGINEER'S REPORT****Greenbelt Phase V**

Mr. Broskey said the comments on the plans and specifications from the Virginia Department of Transportation's (VDOT) have been answered and were submitted to VDOT today. The Environmental Report and the report from the Army Corps of Engineers are still outstanding. If everything goes as planned, Mr. Broskey said we hope to advertise for bid by mid-summer of this year.

Sanitary Sewer Evaluation Study

Mr. Broskey said the weather has been good and hopes to do more smoke testing in the next couple weeks. He said they are working on the Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) and the Asset Management Plan, both of which are due in June. Once those are approved, we can review potential funding opportunities with the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).

System Wide Water Loss Project

Mr. Broskey said his field review with Steve Lawson and Steve Clark had to be rescheduled but they will meet shortly to review the PER and make sure everything is ready to submit to the Virginia Department of Health (VDH).

AGENDA ITEM 5**TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT****a. Parade Permit – Union Little League**

Mr. Lawson said the Union Little League parade will be Saturday at 10 am. The T-Ball kids will ride together on a truck while the older players will walk down the street. There will be a full slate of games Saturday.

b. Resolution 02-2021 – Effectuate Temporary Changes COVID-19

Mr. Lawson said this resolution will allow Council to continue with electronic meetings through October 2021.

c. Proclamation – Designate April 2021 as Fair Housing Month

Mr. Lawson said this proclamation will designate April as Fair Housing Month.

d. Proclamation – Thomas Potter State Wrestling Championship

Mr. Lawson said this proclamation is to acknowledge Thomas Potter's accomplishment in winning the State Wrestling Championship.

e. Proclamation – UHS Boys’ Basketball State Championship

Mr. Lawson said this proclamation is to acknowledge the accomplishment of the Union High School Boys’ Basketball Team in winning the State Championship.

Mr. Lawson said he would like to wait until the Town hosts an outdoor party this summer to present these proclamations to the UHS students to prevent crowding the Council room at this time.

f. Proclamation – The Jasmine Cottage

Mr. Lawson said this proclamation is to recognize The Jasmine Cottage as a new business in Town. A Grand Opening was held yesterday with several Council members in attendance.

g. COVID-19 & Projects Update

Mr. Lawson said he will be going to Big Cherry in the morning with Gary Harris and Jon Broskey to map out a trail for a possible grant. He noted we are looking at the Big Cherry Trail that connects to the Devil’s Bathtub loop. We will need to add a couple of bridges and widen the trail a bit. It will also need to be accessible with trail markings – basically everything needed to be part of the Norton Cloud-Splitter event.

He said COVID-19 numbers are creeping back up in Wise County. They got as low as 8% positivity but are now back up to 14%. He asked everyone to please encourage people to still wear a mask and to be vaccinated.

Mr. Lawson said our Public Works crews finally found and fixed a leak in Baum Hollow that was causing a loss of 150,000 gallons of water.

He said the asphalt plant is scheduled to open next week. We have estimates on all road cuts done during the winter and large patches that need to be fixed. We have already spent the money in this fiscal year’s budget for paving so no new roads will be paved this spring.

Mr. Lawson said at the monthly managers’ meeting he learned that most offices are planning to open back up to the public following April meetings. He suggested we open our offices to the public next Monday, April 12, 2021.

He said we are preparing to open the pool and splash pad the first week of May. There are some leaks at the pool to repair. He noted that last year St. Paul opened for pool parties only to be more COVID-19 safe. The COVID-19 rules limits us to 75% capacity (250 total for a limit of 187) and there are nowhere near that many people at the pool on a normal day, so we can open as usual. He noted we will sell only pre-packaged items at the concession stand.

Mr. Lawson said that interviews for an Administrative Assistant are ongoing and they hope to make a decision by April 15th.

He said Town Staff continues to work on the FY2021-22 Budget. Department managers are looking at how they can rework their staff to be more productive.

He said our Easter celebrations went well. He thanked Crystal for being there and helping with the kids.

He said Little League will kick off opening day on April 10th with a parade and a full slate of games Saturday.

Mr. Lawson said we are working with Lenowisco to remove some chemicals left behind in the lab in the Westmoreland Minor Building. We now have a plan to safely dispose of those items and will be applying for a \$25,000 grant to help with the disposal.

He said we have been waiting for some time to find partners to develop a bike pump track that will go in both Pound and Big Stone Gap as well as river access points in both Lee and Wise Counties. The Friends of Southwest Virginia chose Mattern & Craig as engineers to develop these sites. We have provided them with preliminary site plans for our location at Frog Level Park.

Mr. Lawson reviewed the Davenport Refinancing Plan - we will be refinancing three loans with Powell Valley National Bank (PVNB) at an interest rate of 1.875% (down from 3.2%) at a savings of \$435,000, and we were granted a rate reset from 3.0% to 1.6% from the Virginia Resources Authority (VRA) for a savings of \$50,000.

Mr. Lawson reminded Council members who are running for re-election in November that election packets are due at the Registrar's Office by 7:00 pm on June 8, 2021. Mrs. Bailey asked if they are to return the packets to Town Hall. Ms. Hawkins said she is allowed to notarize the forms but they must be returned to the Registrar's Office.

He said that next week's Regular Council Meeting will be in person to allow for a closed session regarding the Wells Fargo property.

Mr. Lawson said the Town received a request from Gayle Shorter Judson with the Bland High School group, which has been very active for years in Big Stone Gap. They are asking for our support in the establishment of an African American Heritage Trail throughout Wise County to commemorate the migration of blacks from southern states to the Appalachian region to work in the coal mines. They seek support for the trail itself, for promoting information about Oakview Cemetery and its potential qualification for a Virginia state highway marker, and support for a Virginia state highway marker for the James A. Bland High School which is now Big Stone Gap Town Hall/Carnes Middle School. Mr. Lawson suggested this request be given to Council's Public Property Committee to determine the group's plans including the location of the signs, where the funding will come from, and so forth.

AGENDA ITEM 6 COMMITTEE REPORTS

No reports.

AGENDA ITEM 7 COUNCIL COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

Ms. Lyke said it was great to see the kids at the Easter celebration outside and enjoying the great weather. She complimented Parks & Recreation for doing a great job. She said she would like to see the pool open for the kids as well. She also mentioned Derby Day that is coming up in May.

Mr. Gilley thanked Town employees for doing their jobs well with a lot of things going on.

Mr. Bloomer said he is glad to see kids at the park but would like to see tournaments happening at the softball fields considering how much money was spent on developing them. He said it's great that the Little League is using them, but noted that tournaments draw a lot of people and money and he thinks we're missing the boat on not having them scheduled already for this year. He mentioned that Wise has tournaments scheduled this year and we have none. Mr. Lawson said we met with several tournament coordinators in the fall to try to schedule events but they would not commit. He noted that we are not equipped to handle all the teams

that Wise can with our two fields compared to their six, plus other locations already have contracts in place.

Mrs. Bailey said that April is Child Abuse Awareness month. The Lonesome Pine Office on Youth provided the pinwheels this year that you are seeing throughout Town as a reminder of that. She thanked Parks & Recreation for the Easter events and Crystal Lyke for her participation. She also thanked the Public Works crew for fixing the leaks.

Mayor Johnson thanked Crystal for her help with the Easter events. He said the Grand Opening at Jasmine's was great and mentioned that another business will be going in shortly near the old Coughlin building. He agreed that we need to organize the softball fields more efficiently. He thanked Ked Meade for a great job with our media posts. He mentioned that Becky Rogers is doing a wonderful job with the flowers around Town. He said he is looking forward to meeting with Mrs. Shorter to promote Big Stone Gap. He said our Greenbelt is a great feature and draws a lot of people traveling thru Town. He mentioned that Patty Cornett passed away. He commented that COVID-19 is real and we need to continue to wear masks and take precautions to stay safe.

AGENDA ITEM 8 ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned 7:26 pm.

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