

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

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

**May 4, 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 May 4, 2021 at 6:30 pm, is to be conducted electronically as authorized by Resolution 02-2021 adopted on April 13th, 2021.**

**\*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. 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

Those Absent:           Mr. Steve Hamm, Chief of Police

**AGENDA ITEM 2**

**REVIEW OF MINUTES**

**Review of draft of minutes of the Council Workshop (Electronic Attendance) of April 6, 2021, the Regular Council Meeting (In-Person Attendance) of April 13, 2021, and the Special Council Meeting (Electronic Attendance) of April 20, 2021.**

**AGENDA ITEM 3**  
**TOWN ENGINEER'S REPORT**  
**Greenbelt Phase V**

Mr. Broskey said the Virginia Department of Transportation has the final environmental documents needed for the proposed Greenbelt Phase V bridge construction and we are waiting on their approval to move forward with the project.

**Sanitary Sewer Evaluation Study**

Mr. Broskey said they have more smoke testing scheduled for Monday in the East 9<sup>th</sup> Street area. Rain held them up a bit, but he said they hope to finish soon. They are still working on the Asset Management Plan and the Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) that is due in June, but noted the project is on schedule.

**System Wide Water Loss Project**

Mr. Broskey said he met today with the Town Manager and the Public Works Director to review the System Wide Water Loss Project. He said they made a few revisions and will submit the updated plan to the Virginia Department of Health within the next few months.

**AGENDA ITEM 4**  
**TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

**a. COVID-19 & Projects Update**

Mr. Lawson did not have an update on COVID-19 data, but he updated Council on events and activities in Town and proposed changes to the Town's utility billing policies.

**Soapbox Derby**

Mr. Lawson said we held the Soapbox Derby on May 1<sup>st</sup> with 17 participants. All the kids raced at least three times or more, and every kid that raced received a trophy. Mr. Lawson thanked the Town of Pennington for putting a car in the race. They indicated they plan to return next year with more participants from Lee County. Mr. Lawson said he is looking forward to a lot more participation from everyone next year.

**Travel Ball**

Mr. Lawson said we have both softball and baseball tournaments scheduled for June 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> at Bullitt Park, and a tentative date for July 3<sup>rd</sup> for a girls softball tournament. He said we are in talks with other teams for additional tournaments.

**4<sup>th</sup> of July Festivities**

He said that the fireworks are scheduled and the bands have been reserved for our 4<sup>th</sup> of July festivities on Sunday July 4<sup>th</sup>. He said we will probably move the 5K Race to Saturday to draw more participants and we will talk to Gap Partnership about when they want to do their Pancake Breakfast.

**E-Mail Updates**

Mr. Lawson said we are in the process of initiating an e-mail migration to accommodate the Town's new computer set-up. He said that each of the Council members will need to set up their e-mails in the new program before they can use them.

**Ballad Health**

He said that a Memorandum of Understanding for the 340B Drug Pricing Program has been prepared between the Town of Big Stone Gap and Ballad Health as part of their obligation to have a contract with a state or local government in which they commit to provide health care services to low income individuals who are not eligible for Medicare or Medicaid.

**Archery Range Pool**

Mr. Lawson said he and Gary Harris are scheduled to meet with a pool company about a major leak at the Town swimming pool. He asked Bobby Bloomer to join the meeting tomorrow.

**Frog Level**

He said we will be doing a lot of cleanup in the Frog Level area over the next couple of weeks in preparation for a pump track. He said he asked the Fire Department to have a couple of firemen assist as we clean ditches and burn debris to help clear drainage.

**Utilities**

*Penalty Change.* Mr. Lawson said we are proposing some changes in how we assess penalties on utility accounts. In reviewing our process, Mr. Lawson and Ms. Hawkins discovered that we are inadvertently charging a penalty on a previously charged penalty. To avoid this, they are proposing to revise the policy to only apply the 10% penalty on accounts 30 days past due. If the delinquent accounts goes to 60 days or more, we (usually) disconnect for unpaid balances and charge a \$40 service fee for those customers, which can be considered a penalty. Then any unpaid balance that is 90+ days past due will accrue interest at 10% annually, or 0.83% per month.

*Budget Billing.* Mr. Lawson said we are also proposing the Town offer budget billing to our customers as ODP and other companies do. The calculation would be based on the prior 12 months of bills, and the budget period would begin with the June bill with a settlement month of July. The customers would see the actual usage and billed amount on the bills, but the payment due would be the calculated budget amount. This option requires we change our bills to a full 8.5 x 11 page. The back of the statement would be used for advertisement of events or announcements to the customers. Printing would still be outsourced to BMS Direct at a slight cost increase of approximately \$200 per month.

*Payargo.* Mr. Lawson said another service we would like to offer is electronic acceptance of online banking payments. Currently when a customer pays the Town using their online banking app the Town receives a physical check in the mail. This can be a problem for our customers if they initiate the payment on time but we receive the check after the 15<sup>th</sup> and penalties are automatically applied to the accounts. By using a company called Payargo, the Town would be able to accept online payments electronically the same day the customer initiates the payment and sets the payment date. There is a \$0.17 fee per transaction to the Town and a one-time setup fee of \$995.

*PayStar.* Mr. Lawson said the cost for PayStar and our current credit card processor Municipay is the same but PayStar goes a bit further by allowing customers to call an automated payment line rather than just calling Town Hall to make a payment by phone. They also offer outbound calling for notification to customers for whatever we wish, i.e. notifying customers that their bill is past due with the option of "making a payment now", or notifying

customers of water issues or road closures. The Town would receive 500 calls per month at no cost, then billed at \$0.15/call above that number. By using PayStar we could eliminate 2<sup>nd</sup> notices, thereby saving the Town approximately \$101 per month, which would help offset the cost of the budget billing option.

**AGENDA ITEM 5  
COMMITTEE REPORTS**

No report.

**AGENDA ITEM 6  
COUNCIL COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION**

Mr. Hughes thanked the Town staff for all the info on the utilities. He said all of the proposals will be a good change. He thanked the Parks & Recreation employees for their hard work on the Soapbox Derby as well as all the Town employees.

Mr. Gilley said the Soapbox Derby was great. He said the billing changes are all good and likes the option to call in payments to an automated system.

Mr. Bloomer said the billing changes are a good idea. He said Parks & Recreation did a good job with the Derby. He thanked everyone for their hard work.

Mrs. Bailey agreed with all the comments on the Derby. She said two friends from out-of-state came and entered two cars in the competition and the kids loved it. She thanked everyone involved in the event. She said it's a good idea to go to a full page bill to have room for announcements and information customers would not normally get.

Mayor Johnson liked the idea of all the billing options. He thanked the Parks & Recreation Department, noting that they do a lot of work and make us look good. He said our Town employees do a great job, and is glad to see Town Hall open again for customers to do business in person.

**AGENDA ITEM 7  
ADJOURNMENT**

**Meeting adjourned 7:35 pm.**

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