

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

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

July 6, 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. 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

Those Absent: Hon. Robert Bloomer, Councilman

AGENDA ITEM 2

REVIEW OF MINUTES

Review of draft of minutes of the Council Workshop (Electronic Attendance) of June 1, 2021, the Regular Council Meeting (Electronic Attendance) of June 8, 2021, and the Special Council Meeting (Electronic Attendance) of June 15, 2021.

AGENDA ITEM 3

TOWN ENGINEER'S REPORT

Greenbelt Phase V

Mr. Broskey said we are still waiting on the Army Corps of Engineers to issue a bridge crossing permit and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) to issue an environmental permit before we can proceed with the Greenbelt Phase V Project.

System Wide Water Loss Project

Mr. Broskey said they are in the process of drafting new plans to include new lines to be replaced on the System Wide Water Loss Project. He said the updated plans will then be submitted to the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) for their approval.

Sanitary Sewer Evaluation Study

Mr. Broskey distributed a packet to Council members summarizing the Sanitary Sewer Evaluation Study that has been submitted to the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). He reviewed the areas identified – Artesian Well Hollow, Beamantown, Cadet, Downtown, and Lonesome Pine Hospital.

One of the first topics in the packets was inspections – they performed 264 manhole inspections. He provided maps of the location of all the manholes in the system that included detailed conditions of those manholes. While doing the field work they thought Cadet and Italy Bottom would be the main problem areas because they are on an old part of the system and need a lot of work, but they concluded it is not a major influence to the storm water.

On final review, the East 9th Street area was identified as a big problem area: not enough manholes, undersized lines, and some lines that are not sloped correctly. They recommend this area as our Phase I project and will submit an application to the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) on the Town's behalf for funding. They're hoping for a 50/50 grant/loan with 0% interest for 20 years. He noted that bids are running very high right now because of the high cost of construction materials, but they expect prices to start coming down soon.

DCR Trails – Big Cherry

Mr. Broskey said they submitted an application to the Department of Conservation and Recreation's (DCR) Recreational Trails Program for a walking trail to connect Big Cherry to the Devil's Loop. The one-mile trail is estimated at \$94,000. He said there are \$300-400,000 in funds available for allocation overall.

AGENDA ITEM 4

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

a. Resolution 09-2021 – Rescind Resolution 02-2021

Mr. Lawson said this resolution will rescind Resolution 02-2021 that permitted the Town to hold virtual meetings during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

b. Ordinance 10-2021 – Sale of Armory Property to Ballad Health

Mr. Lawson said Council will need to set a public hearing for this ordinance to record the sale of the Armory Building to Ballad Health.

c. COVID-19 & Projects Update

Mr. Lawson commended everyone who helped out with the Fourth of July festivities. He said we had record numbers at the Friday night Luau, complete with a giant sandbox. He noted we had a lot of events going on all week and we learned what works as well as gained a lot of new ideas.

Travel Ball

Mr. Lawson said the travel ball tournaments were a great success with a lot of people attending and a lot of good feedback. He said we have a couple more weekends of games scheduled.

4th of July

The Trail of the Lonesome Pine Drama held a stringed instrument event on the same night the Town held a Block Party and the music was somewhat conflicting. Mr. Lawson said our event had been scheduled and advertised for several weeks before they planned their event but added that we will make a special effort to ensure that doesn't happen again.

Mr. Lawson said the July 4th activities at Bullitt Park drew huge crowds. We sold \$5,963 at the beer garden and 2,300 adult tickets at \$5 per ticket. Kids 12 and under got in free and most adults had 2-3 kids with them, so we had a lot of people - so many that we are looking at expanding the food court next year. He complimented Town staff on doing a great job of keeping everything running smoothly. He said total receipts were \$17,102 with expenses around \$19,000 but he said we never expect to break even.

Federal American Rescue Plan

Mr. Lawson said the governor announced that he has released the Federal American Rescue Plan funds that have been passed down from the federal government thru the states to the counties and towns. As Big Stone Gap is the largest town in Wise County our allotment is the largest of the towns - \$5,324,536. He said that \$2,662,268 of that total was deposited into our bank account on June 30th so the budget will have to be amended to incorporate those funds.

He reviewed the list of items that we will be allowed to spend it on – all expenses related to supporting Public Health - such as COVID-19 mitigation efforts, medical expenses, behavioral healthcare, certain public health and safety staff, addressing economic impacts caused by the public health emergency, replacing lost public sector revenue, investments in water/sewer and broadband, and providing premium pay for essential workers. He commented on that last item noting that care must be taken in boosting salaries with these funds because once the money is gone we will still have to maintain those salaries with our normal revenue. He said we cannot use it to mitigate lost revenue from delinquent utility bills but noted we still have funds from the CARES Act money to assist customers with that. He said the problem is getting the customers to apply for that assistance.

He said he and Amanda Hawkins are working hard to make sure we use the money for only those things that are covered so we don't end up having to pay some of the money back because the expenditure wasn't an eligible item.

Police Department

Mr. Lawson said we hired two police officers today that will attend the Police Academy next week. They will complete the training in January.

Trail of the Lonesome Pine Drama

Mr. Lawson said the Drama will run from July 9th thru August 21st on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights. The Box Office will open at 7 pm and the play will start at 8 pm. Adult tickets are \$15, senior, military, and under 12 tickets are \$10, and all tickets on Thursday nights are \$8.

bigstonegap.com website

Mr. Lawson encouraged everyone to visit the bigstonegap.com website where all upcoming events are listed. He said Ked Meade has done a wonderful job in getting

information out there to the public. The calendar lists events in other towns as well – if something isn't listed it's because we haven't received any information about it.

Some of the upcoming events in Town include the Junior Rangers Program at the Museum from the 12th thru the 16th for ages 7-12. The Mini-Cooper Car Show is the next big event coming up in Big Stone Gap complete with a Block Party and street closings. There is also a 'slingshot' automobile show coming up soon.

Greenbelt Trail

Mr. Lawson said we completed the FY2023-24 application to the Virginia Department of Transportation for another phase of the Greenbelt Trail. This section will be to construct a bridge to connect the Town to the Powell River Trail running from Big Stone Gap to Appalachia beginning at the north end of Town. We're applying for funds for this section because of rumors that VDOT funding for projects of this type will end with the FY2023-24 budget. He said we are still hoping for funds in VDOT's FY2024-25 budget to finish the trail but noted that if funding does cease, it will be easier for us to complete the trail between Iron Works Fitness and the bridge than it would be to build a bridge across the road.

Mr. Lawson said we have had numerous reports of a male following and intimidating females on the Greenbelt Trail, with some reporting him committing sexual acts in front of them. The man has been identified but disappears by the time police arrive. Mr. Lawson said the only way the Town can do anything is for people to report any incidents immediately to the Police Department, to take photos if possible, and to be prepared to go to court as a witness.

VML Conference

Mr. Lawson said that rooms have been booked for all Council members for the Virginia Municipal League (VML) Conference this year. It will be an in-person conference on October 3-5 at the Lansdowne Resort in Leesburg, VA. He said we pre-booked because the last conference we attended in person sold out of rooms quickly. He asked Council members to let him or Amanda know as soon as possible if they will be attending so we can cancel any rooms that are not needed so other attendees can reserve rooms. He asked Council for their thoughts on whether or not we should rent a booth at the conference this year.

Ms. Hawkins said there is a ribbon-cutting ceremony scheduled for Saturday, July 10th, at 2 pm at the Lonesome Pine School & Heritage Center to celebrate the addition that was constructed last year. All Council members are invited to attend. She said Ked will be there to take photos.

AGENDA ITEM 5 COMMITTEE REPORTS

No reports.

AGENDA ITEM 6 COUNCIL COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

Mr. Gilley thanked employees for an unbelievable 4th of July event. He said the new brochures look really great.

Mr. Hughes said he is glad the Greenbelt issue is being addressed. He said the whole week of the 4th was great. He said he attended the Juneteenth celebration at Italy Bottom and met Ashley York, a lady who produced a documentary entitled “Hillbilly” currently airing on HULU. Ms. York is currently doing a three-minute documentary piece for the Smithsonian Institute on the future of Appalachia and was doing the filming at the Juneteenth celebration and the Episcopal Church in Big Stone Gap. He said the new website is great thanks to Ked Meade.

Mr. Hughes said on July 12th thru the 16th the Southwest Virginia Museum will host a Junior Ranger Program where kids will learn about being a Park Ranger. Sessions will be from 9-2 daily and will include trips to the Powell River and Greenbelt Trail as well as lessons about conservation and the importance of the environment. During a Day of History they will walk thru the museum and learn about our culture and the role it has played in history. He said that Carrie Beck, the director of The Crooked Road, delivered an electronic kiosk to the Visitor Center that will identify all of the adventures The Crooked Road offers in Big Stone Gap and throughout our entire region.

Mr. McKinney said he has heard a lot of good comments about the 4th of July events, particularly the fireworks.

Ms. Lyke said she attended all of the week-long events for the 4th of July and complimented the Parks and Recreation crew for an amazing job as well as the Police Department. She praised Sonic for providing food for our crews after midnight on the 4th. She said she is glad to see our Town growing.

Mrs. Bailey said she attended the Juneteenth celebration in Italy Bottom and said it was very well attended, with some people visiting from all over the country. She said they hope to expand it next year. She said she also attended most of the 4th of July events and heard so many comments from people outside the Town who said Big Stone Gap has the best events. She thanked Stephen Lawson for his efforts in making that happen.

Mayor Johnson also thanked Stephen Lawson for all his efforts. He said all the events were great but he particularly enjoyed watching the kids burying each other in the giant sandbox at the Luau. He added the DJ on the Roof was fantastic. He thanked Council for working together as a team to make things happen.

AGENDA ITEM 7 ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned 7:46 pm.

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