

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

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

August 3, 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

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

Those Absent: Hon. Aaron McKinney, Councilman
 Mr. Charles Bledsoe, Town Attorney

AGENDA ITEM 2

PUBLIC HEARING - Ordinance 10-2021 – Sale of Armory Property to Ballad Health

Mayor Johnson recessed the Council Workshop and opened the Public Hearing for comments on the proposed sale of the Armory property to Ballad Health. Terran Young asked what will happen to the plaque with names that is outside the Armory building. Mr. Lawson said Ballad has agreed to incorporate the plaque into the plans for the building and property. Hearing no further 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 July 6, 2021, and the Regular Council Meeting of July 13, 2021.

No comments.

AGENDA ITEM 4

TOWN ENGINEER’S REPORT

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Greenbelt Phase V Project

Mr. Broskey said we are still waiting on The Army Corp of Engineers to approve the permit needed to proceed with the Greenbelt Phase V Project. He noted we are also waiting on the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) for the environmental permit. He said we are communicating with both organizations weekly in an effort to move things along.

System Wide Water Loss Project

Mr. Broskey said the plans for the System Wide Water Loss Project are finished. They are now working on specifications and bid forms that will be submitted to the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) for their review.

Sanitary Sewer Evaluation Study

Mr. Broskey said we have submitted a funding application to the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) for Phase I of the Sanitary Sewer Evaluation Study for approximately \$2.8 million. He noted that DEQ's first offer is almost always a 100% loan at 0% interest, but they will usually offer a partial loan/grant later as they determine exactly how much funding they have to work with.

Big Cherry Trails

Mr. Broskey said that Mr. Lawson will update you on the proposed Big Cherry Trails application for funding, but indicated the news is good, adding he was surprised to hear from them this soon.

Southern Section User Agreements

Mr. Broskey said they have received eleven signed user agreements out of an estimated 50 potential customers in the Southern Section of Town where they have been canvassing to determine interest in hooking up to the Town's water/sewer lines. He said they will revisit the area to try to garner more interest. He said they are specifically looking for LMI (low to moderate income) customers and, of the agreements they have received, eight are above the threshold and three are below, so the percentage is not where they want it to be but they will continue to work on it.

New Water/Sewer Service in Artesian Well Hollow

Councilwoman Bailey asked for an update on the Vaughn water line issue in Artesian Well Hollow that was brought before Council last month. Mr. Broskey said he met with Mr. Vaughn and they worked out an agreement and the taps are being set, so that issue has been resolved.

AGENDA ITEM 5**TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT****a. Proclamation – Appalachian Training Central Bland Alumni Association**

Mr. Lawson said this proclamation is to recognize the Appalachian Training Central Bland Alumni Association's 50th anniversary. He said the proclamation will be presented to the Alumni Association at their reunion banquet at Curklin's on August 14th along with a letter of appreciation for their efforts over the last 50 years.

b. October 5th Council Workshop

Mr. Lawson said that the October Council Workshop conflicts with the Virginia Municipal League's (VML) Annual Conference so the Workshop will need to be cancelled as most of Council has been scheduled to attend.

c. Preliminary Plan for ARPA Funds

Mr. Lawson said he will bring a preliminary plan to Council as they determine what the funds can be used for. The main requirement is that the funds must be spent to alleviate or prevent any effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

d. Ordinance 11-2021 – Designated Outdoor Refreshment Areas (DORA)

Mr. Lawson presented Council with a sample of this ordinance that will allow for an area to be designated for the consumption of alcohol during special events. He said he is going to run this by William Wampler, who is an advocate of this rule of law.

e. Projects Update**COVID-19**

Mr. Lawson said that COVID-19 numbers in Northern Virginia look about the same as they did last year during the pandemic peak and he expects it to drift across the rest of the state in the next 3-4 weeks as it did the last time. No mandates are in effect at this time but he said we will stay informed as things progress.

He said we may try to use some of the ARPA money to get the dressing rooms separated and finished at the new multi-use building at Bullitt Park before the first game of the season. He said we will need to check the plumbing to ensure it is ready to go, then pour concrete in the dressing rooms, restrooms, and the referee's room. After that is done, the electricians and drywall crew can get started. The concession stand will probably not be ready for a while and we won't demo the old dressing rooms until we are sure we can get the new building usable for the new season.

DORA

Mr. Lawson said this ordinance will allow patrons to move up and down the street during a special event, such as a block party, with alcoholic drinks purchased at local ABC licensed businesses such as The General Store and Curklin's so they can visit all the shops and restaurants in the area instead of being confined to one location during the event. The proposed area is centered around Wood Avenue at the Visitor Center and will extend up and down the street. This ordinance is based on a new law in the State of Virginia that was passed this year. He asked Council to review the draft ordinance and make suggestions.

New Sign at Visitor Center

Mr. Lawson said the Town has contracted with Quality Painting to clean and prep the Visitor Center chimney for new signs. He noted that water ran behind the current sign and is creating problems so we are taking steps to clean that up and prevent it from happening again. He distributed a variety of proposed logos for the new sign and asked Council to submit their favorite to Stephen as soon as possible.

Bland Reunion and Wise County Chamber of Commerce Gala

Mr. Lawson said we have purchased eight tickets to the Wise County Chamber of Commerce Gala for Council members and a guest. He asked them to let Amanda know if they wish to attend.

He said he and Mayor Johnson will each be attending either the Gala or the Bland Reunion that evening so the Town is represented at both events.

Big Cherry Trails Project

Mr. Lawson said our application to the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) for the construction of trails on Big Cherry has made it thru the preliminary stage. He said he and John Broskey will meet with DCR representatives on August 11th where they will go over the grant terms and process. The grant amount will be \$99,500 which will complete the slightly more than one-mile trail around the lake to connect to the Devil's Loop.

He said they will also meet with another group tomorrow that has some insight into another tourism grant for which Big Cherry may be a possible recipient.

Shawnee Avenue Bridge

Mr. Lawson said the Shawnee Avenue Bridge is out and has been removed to Robinette Steel, noting it had lead issues and could not be used anywhere else. He said we saved the decking boards and will use those in our improvements at Big Cherry, and we will save any stones that can be reused.

Local Events

Mr. Lawson said there will be a Slingshot Storm the Mountain Event this Friday along with a block party. We're keeping it small because Appalachia is hosting the Railroad Days Festival and he encouraged everyone to visit that event that will run thru Saturday.

He said the High Knob Outdoor Festival will take place August 16th thru the 20th. He encouraged everyone to support that event as well.

Propagation Study

Mr. Lawson distributed materials pertaining to a propagation study that shows six antennas placed on water towers that will send a signal to a computer base to read meters. He said we would still have to install another 2,500 water meters to make this system work so we are still a bit away from switching to this protocol. Also, these six towers would cost about \$60,000 each but we believe this project would be within the scope of the ARPA funds. He noted that one of our two meter readers will retire next year, and the other may retire soon after that. He said we are trying to look to the future and be ready to move forward.

Delinquent Utility Customers

Mr. Lawson said letters have gone out to all of our utility customers who are delinquent on their water/sewer bills. He said we have had 12 responses so far from customers who have requested a payment plan to bring their account up-to-date. He said there is talk about other relief methods of helping Towns recoup losses – we are still around the \$90,000 range of lost revenue from utility bills. September 1st is the deadline for disconnections. He said all the Towns and the Wise County PSA are in agreement with this plan of action so there will be

uniformity in executing this plan. He noted that there are several ways for people to get help who have been affected by COVID-19.

Ms. Hawkins emphasized that we must have a signed agreement by the customer to avoid a disconnection. Once the payment plan is in effect, the customer must keep their bills current and pay the designated payment for arrearages to avoid future disconnections. If they fail to do either – not pay their current bill or fail to pay the payment plan amount – the agreement becomes void and the service will be disconnected. She emphasized that this is the only option available for customers who are more than 30 days past due.

Water Taps

Mr. Lawson said the Town has come to an agreement with the Vaughn family. We will do a 2” road bore to run two 1” lines from our main line to connect to ¾” lines running to the Vaughn property. He said we chose to do it this way because we can’t do a larger bore than 2” without it costing the customer a huge amount. We can go back later as houses are added to the area to do another 2” road bore. We can add up to five connections by doing it this way.

Wells Fargo Building

Mr. Lawson said the renovations are done at the old Wells Fargo Building and we are waiting on the glass partitions to be installed. Some of the computers and IT work will not be received, moved, and/or completed until mid-September. We are getting bids on pressure-washing the building and putting up signs. He commented that it’s difficult getting people to give us bids because of the employment issues caused by COVID-19.

AGENDA ITEM 6 COMMITTEE REPORTS

No reports.

AGENDA ITEM 7 COUNCIL COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

Mr. Hughes thanked all Town employees. He said he has been asked about putting ADA picnic tables in the pavilions at Bullitt Park. Mr. Bloomer added that James Hamilton, with the Union Middle School woodworking program, could build the tables for the cost of materials only.

Mr. Bloomer said he has been approached by citizens who commented that the Greenbelt crosswalks are not safe – traffic is not stopping for pedestrians. He mentioned that Clearwater installed solar-powered caution lights that would draw attention to pedestrians in the crosswalk. Ms. Lyke mentioned that some states in New England have what they call “speed cushions” to slow traffic. Mayor Johnson mentioned that Abingdon has signs up at their crossings but Chief Hamm said Wise had those signs also and they were constantly being knocked down. Matthew Bright noted that the Commonwealth of Virginia code gives precedence to vehicles and pedestrians are to yield to vehicle traffic. Mr. Lawson added that Greenbelt crossings are not a crosswalk as defined by VDOT. A discussion ensued as to measures that would alleviate the situation while following state guidelines.

Mrs. Bailey thanked all the employees of the Town. She mentioned that she saw a lot of fancy cars in Town last Thursday and asked if there was an event going on. Mr. Lawson said they were part of Backroads of Appalachia and were scouting out the Town for a possible future location for an event. He said Big Stone Gap is getting a reputation as a place to come for great events. He added that there is a Jeep Rally planned for fall with over 80 participants for Jeep routes – Thunderstruck, Lovelady, etc. He noted that the Spearhead Trails Director resigned and we are very interested in who will be filling that position as we received a WanderLOVE Grant that we used to partner with Spearhead Trails to develop the jeep trails in Big Stone Gap.

Mayor Johnson thanked Mr. Lawson for the good job he is doing and the work force that the Town has. He complimented the Police Department and Parks and Recreation for the wonderful job they are doing.

**AGENDA ITEM 8
ADJOURNMENT**

Meeting adjourned 7:30 pm.

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