

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

**COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
505 E. 5<sup>TH</sup> STREET, SOUTH  
BIG STONE GAP, VA**

**August 4, 2020**

**6:30 PM**

**\*As a result of the State of Emergency declared by Virginia Governor Ralph Northam on March 12, 2020, 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, the public meeting on August 4, 2020, at 6:30 pm, is to be conducted electronically as authorized by Resolution 08-2020 adopted on April 7, 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. 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**

**PUBLIC HEARING – Budget Amendment FY2019-20**

Mayor Johnson recessed the Council Workshop and opened the Public Hearing for the amendment to the FY2019-20 Budget. Mayor Johnson called for comments and, hearing none, closed the Public Hearing and reconvened the Council Workshop.

**AGENDA ITEM 3**

**REVIEW OF MINUTES**

**Review of draft of minutes of the Council Workshop (Electronic Attendance) on July 7, 2020 and the Regular Council Meeting (Electronic Attendance) of July 14, 2020.**

No comments.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 4 TOWN ENGINEER'S REPORT**

Mr. Broskey officially assumed the role of Lane Engineering's representative for the Town upon Stephen McElroy's resignation.

#### **Greenbelt Phase V Project**

Mr. Broskey said that they have submitted the 90% plans to the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) for the Greenbelt Phase V Project. He said they have completed and submitted the required permits to VDOT as well.

#### **Rt. 610 & Shelby Avenue Phase II Waterline Replacement Project**

Mr. Broskey said that the water lines for Shelby Avenue Phase II have been completed as well as the paving. The only remaining item is the concrete v-ditch. He said that the weather has delayed the contractor a bit, but they anticipate completing this last item by the end of the week. Once completed, he said they will submit all the closing documents to VDH and wrap up this project.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 5 TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

##### **a. ServLine Utilities Protection**

Mr. Lawson introduced Ms. Jenna Haslett with ServLine Utilities Protection.

Ms. Haslett began by stating that the Town currently gives customers a leak adjustment when they have a leak in their water lines and show proof that they have had the leak fixed. She said this is very generous of the Town as the Town is not responsible for their customers' water lines. She added that offering an adjustment to customers' water bills causes a financial strain on the Town.

She said that ServLine offers a full-service customer leak protection program that will pay the high cost of waterline leaks for insured customers while handling the administrative side of the issue as well.

Ms. Haslett said that because the Town has customers that do not have both water and sewer service, they streamlined the program to offer leak protection in three categories: water lines, sewer lines, and water and sewer lines combined. A plus for the Town will be that ServLine will offer line protection thru individual billing directly from their offices so the premiums will not appear on water bills. Customers would file their claims to ServLine who would then assign an adjuster to handle the claim. Approved payments would be made directly to the Town to apply toward the customer's water bill.

She said that they will offer optional plans to our customers at a higher rate per month that will cover the repair/replacement of an external water or sewer service line using a local licensed contractor, the repair/replacement of interior plumbing, and will include a drainage plan as well.

Ms. Haslett thanked Council for allowing her to speak at the workshop this evening and said that if anyone has questions they may ask them now or pass them to her thru Ms. Hawkins. Mayor Johnson asked if there was a minimum of customers who need to sign up to provide coverage. Ms. Haslett replied that there was no minimum required – they would serve whatever customers opt in. She noted that all customers would be enrolled in the service initially and then have the option to keep the insurance or not. She said that the company's

national average of customers who keep the plan is around 96%. She emphasized that the number of customers who choose to keep the plan will not change the rates she quoted us.

**b. Roger Mullins – Peanut Football**

Mr. Lawson introduced Roger Mullins, who manages the Union Peanut Football League and who works very hard to make it a success each year.

Mr. Mullins said he grew up in Big Stone Gap and sports was an important part of his childhood. He asked Council to consider allowing the Peanut Football League to use the facilities at Bullitt Park to play their games. He reviewed the league's proposal for the upcoming season:

- Evaluate the COVID-19 situation after school starts on August 20<sup>th</sup> for a two week period.
- If there are no concerns, they will schedule one game per night on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from September 21<sup>st</sup> thru October 9<sup>th</sup>.
- All coaches, players, cheerleaders, and parents must sign a COVID-19 waiver releasing the Town from any and all liability.
- All persons entering the park will be required to sign a COVID-19 waiver.
- Coaches will take players' temperatures prior to any practice or game. Players with a temperature of 100.4 or above will be asked to return home.
- All persons entering the park will have their temperatures taken by the gatekeeper. Spectators with a temperature of 100.4 or above will be asked to return home.
- Hand sanitizers will be utilized by anyone entering the facility and will be utilized in the concession stand, team benches, and home and visitor benches.
- Attendees will be asked to utilize social distancing in the bleachers.
- During games teams will sanitize during change of possession.
- There will be no sharing of water bottles, cups, or thermos's. Coaches, players, and cheerleaders will be asked to bring their own water bottle or thermos. Water will be provided for anyone who does not bring their own.
- Teams will not share footballs – each team will use their own – and all footballs must be sanitized regularly.
- Teams will verbally congratulate one another at the end of the game and will avoid shaking hands.
- Anyone feeling sick will be asked to contact their coach and remain at home until symptoms subside.
- All parents/players will be asked to wash and sanitize equipment after each game or practice.

Mr. Mullins acknowledged that the local high schools have postponed their football season until the spring. He said the disadvantage to waiting until spring for Peanut Football is that the local Little League will be playing their season then and their schedules may conflict. He said they are open to any suggestions.

Mayor Johnson said he knows that Roger has the love of these kids at heart, and that everyone has the best interest of the kids foremost in their minds. He said that football is a full contact sport more so than softball and causes bodily fluids to be exchanged during practice and games. He said he would like to see the schedule postponed until the spring. He said he's sure something could be worked out with Little League.

Mr. Mullins said he would rather look at this again in another 60 days after school has started than wait until spring.

Mr. Bloomer said he agrees with Mayor Johnson that the season should be postponed for a while. He added he thinks that masks should be required for all spectators. Mr. Mullins said they can make that a requirement.

Mrs. Bailey said she agrees that we should look at this again maybe at the end of September after school gets started and we see how it goes.

Mr. McKinney said he has two boys who play Peanut Football and he has coached for the League in the past so he is very supportive of the program. But he added that with VHSL rescheduling all their sports programs he thinks they need to wait a while.

Ms. Lyke agreed with Mayor Johnson that football is a much higher contact sport than softball and we need to postpone the season for a while.

Mr. Mullins said he is willing to revisit the issue in September or October if Council will agree.

Mr. Lawson proposed to Council that Mr. Mullins be invited back to the Council Workshop on October 6<sup>th</sup>. He agreed with Council that it's too soon to start the season at this time.

### **c. Projects Update**

Mr. Lawson said that the Big Stone Gap Redevelopment and Housing Authority has received funding approval and release of \$190,000 for the renovations on the third floor of the Mutual Building where Curklin's is now. That's good news for us because those funds are used as the Town's matching funds for the Co-Work Space so the contractor can proceed with that project. He said he has a couple of people ready to move into the new space as soon as its finished.

Mr. Lawson said that on July 18<sup>th</sup> we introduced a five week program in travel softball that would have five tournaments across different age groups to see what kind of involvement we could draw from teams in the area to play here. The weekend of the 18<sup>th</sup> was the first tournament and was for the 14-and-under age group. We had three teams competing and charged a \$25 team participation fee for a total of \$75, and we made \$625 in gate fees. Expenses included \$30 per umpire per game totaling \$500 (we have six certified umpires) and \$75.50 for two plaques for the winning teams. Overall we netted a little over \$150. The weekend of August 25<sup>th</sup> was the 14-and-under teams and the 12-and-under teams. He said that we netted \$125 that weekend. We had eight teams lined up for the August 1<sup>st</sup> weekend but because of rain the fields were not usable. However, the four teams that came to play used a local church lot and made around \$400, which they donated to the church. For the weekend of August 8<sup>th</sup>, which is coming up next, there are four teams scheduled to play in the 18-year-old division: one from Wise, one from Lee County, a combo team of Big Stone Gap and Tri-City players, and the Greeneville Wildcats. This tournament was originally set up to be a showcase for college coaches, but with the COVID-19 pandemic guidelines the coaches cannot be in contact with students or athletes, so the team leaders will be evaluating the players. He said our biggest tournament will be on August 15<sup>th</sup>, where there will be six teams of 10-year-olds and eight teams of 12-year-olds playing. The Town will do the concession stand and will make this a dry-run of how it will work with the Town hosting these tournaments. Our goal is to have tournaments set up for next year by the end of next month.

Mr. Lawson said that the National Fitness Campaign (NFC) has contacted us about the planned outdoor fitness court at Bullitt Park. We had been looking for Ballard Health to contribute the additional funds the Town will need to provide. NFC has contributed \$30,000 and the Town is matching those funds, leaving us to find another \$60,000 to \$70,000. The problem is that Ballard has frozen their capital expenditures and grants for the present so we can't count on them to help with this project. NFC has made some suggestions as to our options: 1) to close out the partnership and roll the \$30,000 grant reserved for us back into their program or 2) transfer the \$30,000 into 2021 allowing us more time to generate the funds, 3) explore the new deferral program and try to raise \$50,000 to complete the project this year and find the remaining funds next year. Mr. Lawson said he is reluctant to give up on the project so he favors Option 2 which will give us time to talk to partners. He said he would check to see if the CARES Act funds can help with this project as well.

Mr. Lawson said he and Amanda Hawkins were invited by Keith Harless to join a call with the Governor's office. He said we asked the government office for permission to use CARES funds to help pay past due utility accounts. At this time, we have about 80 customers who are delinquent that we cannot disconnect and most of whom are not paying on their accounts. If things continue on this course, the Town will have to absorb about \$45,000 in lost revenue. He said the State Corporation Commission (SCC) is expected to extend the moratorium on utility disconnections throughout the pandemic so the amount of loss can be expected to rise. He said we continue to work with customers to make sure that we are not creating a hardship on them.

Mr. Lawson said that the signs are up for the Dog Park and they look good.

He said the windstorm that came thru Friday night took down about 11 or 12 trees throughout Town. During cleanup, a piece broke on the boom truck that will cost about \$3,500 to replace. The part has been ordered but this will cause a delay in getting everything cleaned up but we will get everything back to normal as soon as we can.

Mr. Lawson said that LED lights have been installed at the Harry Meador Coal Museum and it looks much better inside.

#### **d. COVID-19 Update**

Mr. Lawson said that COVID-19 numbers are climbing. Wise County currently has 102 cases, 15 hospitalizations, and 3 deaths; Lee County has 101 cases, 7 hospitalizations, and 4 deaths, City of Norton has 14 cases, 2 hospitalizations, and 0 deaths.

The Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI) adopted temporary standards related to the COVID crisis that goes into effect July 27<sup>th</sup>. All employers are required to assess their workplace for hazards and job tasks that could potentially expose employees to the COVID-19 virus and ensure compliance with regulations that we set forth. Jobs will be sorted into four categories: very high risk, high risk, medium risk, and low risk. First responders would be in the high risk category, correctional facilities would be in the medium risk category, and municipal employees would be in the low risk category because of our ability to social distance in the offices.

The County Administrator held a conference call Monday with town managers and asked everyone to work on a county-wide plan so we'll all have the same policy. Mr. Lawson said we are working on developing a policy to show that we have assessed the risks and trained our employees. The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) has asked us to close all non-essential offices and to promote telework. He noted that some towns have stayed closed since

the pandemic began while others have never closed. He said we will probably close the lobby in the coming week and allow teleworking on an individual basis. We will also have a written return-to-work policy outlining procedures for employees.

Mrs. Bailey commented that the virus is hitting home and we need to be very diligent.

## **AGENDA ITEM 6 COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Mayor Johnson said the committee on developing fishing piers has not been able to meet yet but assured everyone that the issue has not been forgotten. He said they will try to set a meeting soon.

### **Planning Commission**

Matthew Bright, Building and Zoning Official, said the Planning Commission held a meeting on August 3<sup>rd</sup> and entertained two requests for the issuance of a Special Use Permit:

- 1) Savida Health is seeking a permit to open an outpatient drug treatment facility in Cloverleaf Square, and
- 2) Holding Funeral Home is seeking a permit to install and operate a crematorium on the their property downtown.

Mr. Bright explained that the Special Use Permit process is put in place to ensure the avoidance of adverse impacts on a neighborhood. The process includes an initial application to the Planning Commission for the permit, an opinion by the Planning Commission, and a final report and decision by Town Council.

He said that Andy Ward, Vice-President of Savida Health, presented a proposal to the Planning Commission for an outpatient drug treatment facility in Cloverleaf Square. He explained that the clinic will be a suboxone clinic that offers multi-level treatment options that will include counselors and social workers. He emphasized that they do not handle methadone or keep any medications on site – treatment is thru prescriptions only.

Michael Riebe submitted a request to install and operate a crematorium at Holding Funeral Home. He did not have a site plan ready to submit at Monday's meeting so the Commission could not review his request. Mr. Bright said that Council could request additional information from Mr. Riebe if they so wished. Mrs. Bailey said they would definitely need more information from him before proceeding. Mr. Bright said that a Special Meeting has been set for August 10<sup>th</sup> for the Planning Commission to further discuss both permit requests.

Mr. Lawson added that Andy Ward of Savida Health offered a tour of their clinic in Abingdon should any Planning Commission or Council members wish to participate. He said that Southwest Virginia certainly has a need for help for people who suffer from addiction. Mrs. Bailey commented that she worked for Frontier Health for 19 years and has experience with this type of facility.

Mr. Lawson suggested that, when they get to the point of needing a public hearing, that the Planning Commission and Council hold a separate meeting for each request because of the potential of large crowds.

## **AGENDA ITEM 7 COUNCIL COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION**

Mr. Hughes thanked the people who presented tonight as well as the Town Staff.

Mr. Gilley and Mr. Bloomer encouraged everyone to stay safe.

Mrs. Bailey thanked those who made presentations tonight and Matthew Bright for helping with the issues discussed tonight.

Mayor Johnson read an excerpt from an article from the Appalachian Substantial Developers (ASD) about Jim Vernon. The article talked about how Mr. Vernon works to help ASD to connect local and regional farmers' produce with those in need thru the ASD/ Appalachian Harvest hub. He helps deliver fresh produce and vegetables to local food banks, often using his own vehicle, and without his assistance, food banks would be unable to provide these things to as many people as they do. He also works for Life Care Ambulance Service, is as an Auxiliary Deputy with the Sheriff's Department, and volunteers for the local fire department. Mayor Johnson added that Jim is a standout person in the community.

**AGENDA ITEM 8  
ADJOURNMENT**

**Meeting adjourned 8:12 pm.**

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