

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

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

October 12, 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 L. Hawkins, Town Clerk/Treasurer
Mr. Charles Bledsoe, Town Attorney

Those Absent: Hon. Aaron McKinney, Councilman

Staff Absent: Mr. Steve Hamm, Chief of Police

AGENDA ITEM 2

INVOCATION by Rev. Bud Kilbourne of the Cornerstone House of Prayer

AGENDA ITEM 3

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

AGENDA ITEM 4

ADOPT OR AMEND THE AGENDA

Motion by Hughes, seconded by Lyke, that the Agenda for the Regular Council Meeting of October 12, 2021 be adopted as presented. Motion resulted as follows:

**Ayes: Bailey, Bloomer, Gilley, Hughes, Johnson, Lyke
Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: McKinney**

AGENDA ITEM 5

COMMENTS FROM CITIZENS

No comments.

AGENDA ITEM 6**GENERAL ORDER OF BUSINESS**

- a. **Approval of minutes of Council Workshop of September 7, 2021.**
Recommended Action: Approve as presented.
- b. **Approval of minutes of Regular Council Meeting of September 14, 2021.**
Recommended Action: Approve as presented.
- c. **Departmental Reports for the month of September, 2021.**
Recommended Action: Received and filed.
- d. **Treasurer’s Reports for the month of July, 2021.**
Recommended Action: Received and filed.

Motion by Bloomer, seconded by Gilley, that the General Order of Business be approved as presented. Motion resulted as follows:

Ayes: Bailey, Bloomer, Gilley, Hughes, Johnson, Lyke
Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: McKinney

AGENDA ITEM 7**TOWN ENGINEER’S REPORT****Greenbelt Phase V Project**

Mr. Broskey said they have completed all submissions to the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) for the Greenbelt Phase V Project and have requested authorization to advertise for bid. He said they hope to get that approval in the next few weeks.

Mr. Bloomer asked how much money was set aside by VDOT for Phase V. Mr. Broskey said it was roughly around \$500,000, but with the increase in supplies in the last couple of years, it will not be enough money to complete the project. Mr. Lawson said we will reach out to other agencies to try to supplement the funding.

System Wide Water Loss Project

Mr. Broskey said they have not been very successful in negotiating the railroad fees for the System Wide Water Loss Project but they are still working on it. In the meantime, they are working on the necessary easements that will need to be in place to proceed when everything is finalized.

Southern Sewer Project

Mr. Broskey said they have not received any further responses to the survey to show interest in the Town extending its sewer lines in the Southern Section of Town. He suggested the project be put on hold at this time.

Big Cherry/DCR Trails

Mr. Broskey said they are moving forward on the environmental side of the Big Cherry trails. He said they have sent letters and are awaiting a response.

AGENDA ITEM 8**TOWN MANAGER’S REPORT**

- a. **Proclamation – Huff Daddy BBQ**

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve this proclamation to welcome Huff Daddy BBQ as a new business in Town.

Motion by Hughes, seconded by Lyke, that Council approve a proclamation welcoming Huff Daddy BBQ owned by Larry Huff located at 10 E 5th Street S. Motion resulted as follows:

Ayes: Bailey, Bloomer, Gilley, Hughes, Johnson, Lyke
Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: McKinney

b. Resolution – Re-appoint Ronald Prewitt to Housing Authority Board

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve this resolution to re-appoint Ron Prewitt to the Housing Authority.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Bailey, that Council approve a Resolution 13-2021 being a resolution re-appointing Ronald Prewitt to the Big Stone Gap Redevelopment and Housing Authority Board of Commissioners for a four year term to expire on November 12, 2025. Motion resulted as follows:

Ayes: Bailey, Bloomer, Gilley, Hughes, Johnson, Lyke
Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: McKinney

c. Resolution – Re-appoint Charlie Beverly to Planning Commission

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve this resolution re-appointing Charlie Beverly to the Planning Commission.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Hughes, that Council approve Resolution 14-2021 being a resolution re-appointing Charlie Beverly to the Planning Commission for a four year term to expire on October 31, 2025. Motion resulted as follows:

Ayes: Bailey, Bloomer, Gilley, Hughes, Johnson, Lyke
Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: McKinney

d. Parade Permit – Veterans’ Day Parade

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve this permit for our annual Veterans’ Day Parade.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Bailey, that Council approve a Parade Permit for the Veterans’ Day parade on Saturday, November 13, 2021 beginning at 11:00 am. Motion resulted as follows:

Ayes: Bailey, Bloomer, Gilley, Hughes, Johnson, Lyke
Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: McKinney

e. Budget Amendment FY2021-22 – Budget Encumbrances & DMV Grants

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve this budget amendment to incorporate encumbrances and DMV Grants into the FY2021-22 Budget.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Bailey, that Council approve a Budget Amendment to the FY2021-2022 Budget increasing General Fund revenues and expenses by \$66,573.35, Water Fund revenues and expenses by \$7,637.52, and Sewer Fund revenues and expenses by \$25,923.95, for a total increase to revenues and expenses totaling \$100,134.82. Motion resulted as follows:

Ayes: Bailey, Bloomer, Gilley, Hughes, Johnson, Lyke
Nayes: None Abstain: None Absent: McKinney

f. Projects Update

Wise County Social Services Adult Assistance Program

Mr. Lawson said the Wise County Department of Social Services has requested a donation for their Adult Assistance Program. He noted we have donated \$250 to this program for the past two years and the donation is already in our budget for this year if Council is in agreement to releasing that donation at this time.

Lenowisco

Mr. Lawson asked Councilman Bobby Bloomer if he is agreeable to remaining on the Lenowisco Board of Directors as the Town's representative. Mr. Bloomer agreed.

ODP Rate Increase

Mr. Lawson said that Old Dominion Power is requesting a rate increase of 19.63% to be effective October 1, 2021. He noted the last ODP rate increase was in 2017 for 12.16%. At that time, Council passed a resolution opposing the rate increase. He said if Council wishes, the Town can pass a new resolution opposing this proposed increase at the November Council meeting. Council unanimously agreed to the resolution.

Early Voting

Mr. Lawson said that early voting for all Wise County residents (excluding residents of the City of Norton) is taking place now in Carnes Gym. The gym will be open 9-5 daily thru Friday of this week, then 9-5 Mon-Sat thru October 30th. He said there are no restrictions on who can vote early.

Paving

Mr. Lawson said the paving of Town streets is underway. He noted there was a huge discrepancy in the two bids we received and we went with the lowest bid. He said Council is welcome to review those bids. He said after the roads on the original list are paved and they have funds left they will re-evaluate areas that may be able to be added to the schedule. He said if anyone has received any requests from citizens about roads in need of paving to please let him know.

Lenowisco Small Business Recovery Assistance Program

Mr. Lawson said this program has closed with some funds left in their budget, so if anyone knows of businesses in Town who can benefit from rental or mortgage payment assistance let him know. He mentioned that it is a one-time benefit so if they received assistance once before they will not be eligible again. He noted we have advertised on our social media sites and appreciate help in getting the word out.

Bullitt Park

Mr. Lawson said the Town received an email addressing some issues in Bullitt Park regarding football games.

- When the Police Department escorts the buses into the park to continue using the sirens until the buses are parked.
- When the Fire Department escorts the cheerleader bus into the park to continue to use their sirens until their bus is parked.
- The time clock that is used for the 40 second countdown is remote controlled and the remote has been sent for repair/replacement. That order is on a ship sitting in the California Bay waiting to be unloaded so it may not be repaired and available for use by the end of this football season.
- Question as to why only advertising is on the big screen during games. They would like to see football comments such as “DEFENSE” and similar comments and photos during the game. Mr. Lawson said that has not been done since he has been Town Manager. He said that UHS was given a laptop set up by Matthew Bright that could control those graphics but the person at Union who knew how to operate that feature has since left and they have no one who knows how to do it now. Union said they will do more things to the scoreboard if we can provide someone to do the work. He noted we do not have anyone on staff to do that, but Matthew will re-program the laptop when the school finds someone to operate it.
- Complaints about the train horn. He said that the horn was used quite heavily in the first half of the last game – to the extent that the referee informed the coach that the team would be assessed a penalty if it continued. Mr. Lawson said there are specific rules on how to use the train horn, one being it can be used only until the ball is in the snapper’s hands. UHS has reached out to the owner of the horn to ask that it be used within the established guidelines or he will be asked to leave the park. The owner replied that if asked to leave the park, he will simply go outside the fence and continue to use it at his discretion. The school has asked the Town to support them if the owner is asked to leave. Council agreed to support the school if they needed to take that action.

Holiday Employee Luncheons

Mr. Lawson said the annual employee Thanksgiving lunch will be held in the gym on November 9th at 11:30 am.

The annual employee Christmas lunch will be held in the gym on December 14th at 11:30 am. Mr. Lawson said all Council members are welcome and suggested it would be a great time to come and thank the employees for their hard work during the year.

Council Organizational Meeting

Mr. Lawson said that after the election in November, in which four Council seats will be decided, an organization meeting will be needed to elect the mayor and vice-mayor and appoint Council Committee members and Town staff. He said we would like that meeting to be set for December 16th.

Soccer

Mr. Lawson noted that fall soccer is under way with fewer participants than usual mainly due to COVID-19. He said in looking thru all the capital requests in the budget he found that lights for the Carnes Park were among the capital items. He noted the early bid was around \$35,000 to install lights for the whole field. He said they will get an updated bid with the idea of using some of our own poles that will have outlets available to use for the Greenbelt-in-Lights to get the most use

out of the them. He said we are checking to see if we can use some of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) money for this project. He noted that the guidelines for using ARPA funds are confusing but having more facilities where you can get less people crowded together is one of the allowable uses.

AGENDA ITEM 9 COMMITTEE REPORTS

a. Planning Commission

Councilman Gilley asked Matthew Bright to update Council on the Planning Commission's meeting with a representative of Old Dominion Power (ODP) regarding ODP's request for a Special Use Permit to install a high-voltage power line thru Town.

Mr. Bright noted that a copy of the questions submitted to ODP prior to the meeting and their responses were given to Council this evening for their review. He reported that there were four representatives from ODP in attendance at the Planning Commission (PC) meeting on October 4th who answered questions the PC had submitted to them.

The first question at the meeting was why ODP is requesting this Special Use Permit. The ODP representative replied that any power outage is unacceptable and having a redundancy plan in place is necessary to keeping customers in power. Mr. Bright noted that 69,000 volts will be the lowest voltage used on the new lines. He added that there are federal standards addressing redundant systems that ODP is required to adhere to. He emphasized that ODP has expressed their willingness to work with the Town and property owners to everyone's satisfaction.

Mr. Bright said that the PC tabled their discussion to give Council an opportunity to review the questions/answers provided to them this evening and submit any further questions they may have. He noted that a joint public hearing with the PC will be required before any decision can be made on this request.

Mayor Johnson asked if Matthew has a list of property owners ODP has spoken to. Mr. Bright said he did not but he can ask ODP for the status on the right-of-way acquisition.

Councilman Hughes asked if this is part of a grid resiliency program or is it a part of a plan to slowly move away from fossil fuels. Mr. Bright said he would pass that question on to ODP. He said that vegetation control is a big concern for property owners and ODP has said they are working with various agencies to ensure they are in compliance.

Councilman Bloomer asked what the backup plan is if they run into protected species or plants, and can they go underground with the wires. He also mentioned that one property owner bought his property for privacy so he will lose his reason for the purchase.

Mr. Lawson mentioned that he asked ODP why they can't use their existing poles and was told they need the 150 right-of-way for the new lines and they wouldn't have that with existing poles. Mr. Bright added that once the right-of-way is constructed there can be no development or construction within that right-of-way by anyone.

Mr. Lawson noted that the joint public hearing is the perfect time for Council members to talk to ODP representatives about their concerns.

Councilman Hughes submitted another question about whether, as part of their vegetation mitigation plan, they have any type of river buffer requirements and if they currently plan to sub-contract the vegetation management.

Mayor Johnson asked that we provide the ODP responses to all the property owners affected by this project.

Ms. Hawkins asked what the timeline is from this point forward. Mr. Bright said that at the next PC meeting they can continue the discussion and submit questions and again table the matter until the joint public hearing is scheduled to hear public comments.

AGENDA ITEM 10 COUNCIL COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

Ms. Lyke welcomed a student to the meeting who said he was here as part of his Eagle Scout Badge requirements.

Mrs. Bailey expressed her appreciation for a good job by Ked Meade in reporting all the activity for the Visitor Center in his monthly report. She reminded everyone of the Jeepers Creepers Block Party this weekend. Mr. Lawson added there will be road closures in connection with that block party that will be announced on our social media sites.

Mr. Hughes said the new sign at the Visitor Center looks great and the streets as well. He thanked all the employee “gardeners and landscapers” for making it look good. He welcomed the Eagle Scout to the meeting. He reminded everyone of Home Craft Days at MECC this weekend. He said the Southwest Virginia Museum will host their annual Hoots N Haints Family Festival on October 31st from 5-8 pm and invited everyone to bring their kids for a scary time.

Mayor Johnson said he would like to name the Shawnee Avenue Bridge after John Cubine in recognition of his contributions to the Town. Mr. Lawson asked to clarify one point - he said that while the bridge is in the Town limits, the Town does not actually own the bridge – it is owned by VDOT. So the Town would need to pass a resolution requesting VDOT to name it after John Cubine. He said he spoke with local VDOT employees who said they see no problem with the Town making that request.

Mayor Johnson said the Virginal Municipal League (VML) Conference was very informative and he enjoyed the classes. He thanked the Police and Parks & Recreation Departments as well as Stephen Lawson for their hard work. He asked for the status of the Greenbelt-in-Lights event. Mr. Lawson said we are reaching out to prior participants to see if they want their same spots then we’ll advertise for new participants. Mayor Johnson added that the Big Stone Gap General Store and Café is now serving sandwiches.

AGENDA ITEM 11 ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Bloomer, that the meeting be adjourned. Motion resulted as follows:

Ayes: Bailey, Bloomer, Gilley, Hughes, Johnson, Lyke
Nayes: None Abstain: None Absent: McKinney

Meeting adjourned at 7:36 pm.

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