

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

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

December 1, 2020

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 December 1, 2020 at 6:30 pm, is to be conducted electronically as authorized by Resolution 16-2020 adopted on September 8, 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 – FY2020-21 Budget Amendment

Mayor Johnson recessed the Council Workshop and opened the Public Hearing. He called for comments on the proposed amendment to revise the FY2020-21 Budget to include a Virginia TRRC Grant for the Mutual Building Co-Workspace Project. Hearing no comments from the public, 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 (Electronic Attendance) of November 3, 2020 and the Regular Council Meeting) (Electronic Attendance) of November 10, 2020.

No comments.

AGENDA ITEM 4
TOWN ENGINEER'S REPORT
Greenbelt Phase V Project

Mr. Broskey said we are still waiting on the permit applications. He said we expect responses from the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) very soon.

DEQ Sanitary Sewer Evaluation Study Program

Mr. Broskey said they completed smoke-testing in Italy Bottom, Cadet, East Stone Gap and Beamantown. They also completed evaluations of over 100 manholes and installed flow-monitoring devices. He said they have accumulated good data for dry weather and are waiting on some rainfall to do some wet weather testing which will give them good overall data. Mr. Broskey thanked Town crews for their assistance in cleaning out manholes for their flow-monitoring installations.

Mayor Johnson asked if, during the smoke-testing, they found a lot of downspouts and drains running into our sewer. Mr. Broskey replied that they did indeed find downspouts, broken cleanout caps, storm drains, and normal manhole issues. He said that Cadet and Italy Bottom seemed to have the most issues, and once we compile the flow-monitoring data we can better determine how much inflow and infiltration (I&I) is coming into our system during wet weather events. He noted that there were over 100 points of direct connections found in Cadet and Italy Bottom.

System-Wide Water Loss Study Project

Mr. Broskey said they are still working on preliminary plans for this project.

AGENDA ITEM 5
TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

a. Budget Amendment – VA TRRC Grant for Mutual Co-Workspace

Mr. Lawson said a public hearing for this proposed amendment was just held at the beginning of this Workshop needed to add this grant for the Mutual Co-Workspace to our FY2020-21 Budget. He said this project is about 85% finished. He noted that we are currently waiting on equipment for the HVAC system. In the meantime, the restrooms will be finished by end of the week, leaving some trim work and the floors to be finished up and some work on the stairwell. He said this project is going well – all the glass is in, the offices look really good, and once the floor is finished the furniture will go in. He said that anyone wanting a tour of the space should call him and he will arrange it.

b. COVID-19 & Projects Update

COVID-19

Mr. Lawson said that Wise County has 1,241 COVID-19 cases, with 70 hospitalizations, and 49 deaths. He said that at the end of last week Heritage Hall had 211 positive cases, and their facility accounts for 27 of the 49 deaths in Wise County. He said that Lee County has reported 952 cases, 46 hospitalizations, and 14 deaths; the City of Norton reported 85 cases, 5 hospitalizations, and 0 deaths; and Scott County reported 784 cases, 55 hospitalizations, and 14 deaths. He said Ballad COVID-19 facilities are at capacity for almost all of their areas – as soon as beds empty they fill up again. He encouraged everyone to keep up all the safety precautions for a while longer.

Christmas Events

Mr. Lawson thanked everyone who attended the Tree Lighting Ceremony in Miners Park. He said we will be posting a video Saturday of the virtual tree-lighting.

He said that we will begin taking reservations this Saturday for the Greenbelt In Lights tours. Reservations need to be made at the Visitor Center for family units or groups of people who are normally around each other, but all participants will be required to wear a mask and social distance from other groups. He said we have 80 light displays reserved so far and still have another 24 spots available. He said that the Town will decorate any empty spaces so the entire route will be in lights. Mr. Lawson thanked Gary Harris and the Parks and Recreation crew for their hard work to make this possible.

Violations of Town Code

Mr. Lawson said we sent out three nuisance violations to property owners: one to an address on Holton Avenue, one to an address on Valley View Drive, and one on an address in the west end of Town. The notices were to inform the property owners that they are in violation of our Town Code regarding unkempt and poorly maintained property.

Voucher Program

Mr. Lawson said the school voucher program we have been working with to provide meals to families is in its final week. He noted that on week 16 there were 251 vouchers used in our restaurants in Wise County, putting \$10,041 into our economy; on week 17 there were 338 vouchers totaling \$13,520; on week 18 there were 355 vouchers totaling \$14,200; and on week 19 there were 316 vouchers totaling \$12,640. We are now in week 20 and will end the program for this year. He said the program has already put over \$50,000 into local restaurants this year. He thanked the Lunch Box Group, Lenowisco, and Wise County for making this program possible.

Wise County Chamber of Commerce Events

Mr. Lawson said that the Wise County Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) has two decorating contests going on during the Christmas season. One is a Christmas Storefront competition for businesses who want to decorate their storefronts. The theme is Hope in the Mountains and judging will be done on December 9th. The businesses need to call the Chamber and let them know they are participating in the contest. The second contest is called Christmas from the Car and is for a residential holiday lights and driving tour contest. Residents who want to compete need to register their home with the Chamber by December 4th. The Chamber will then publish a list of all homes participating throughout the county so folks can do a drive-by tour of holiday lights in lieu of the usual Christmas parades.

The Wise County Chamber of Commerce is also sponsoring a Small Business Bingo contest. Anyone can participate by making a minimum \$10 purchase from at least 5 different participating businesses. The contestant lists the businesses on the bingo card and sends it (along with receipts for the purchases) to the Chamber to be put into a drawing (for each town) for gift cards to all the participating businesses. The drawings will be held on December 28th. Participating businesses in Big Stone Gap are the Appalachian Artisan, Ball's TV, Bob's Market, The Blossom Box, Country Kitchen on Main, Four Seasons Farm & Produce, Iron Works Cycling, L. J. Horton Florist, Sisterly Chic Boutique, Tracy's Salon on Main and The Ugly Mug. He said we will distribute flyers on all our social media pages for these contests.

Miscellaneous

Mr. Lawson said that all of the paperwork has been completed, the permit fee of \$25,000 paid, and the permit approved for the intake at the Water Treatment Plant.

Mr. Lawson said that we received an email from Andy Ward thanking us for our help with the permitting process and informing us that Savida Health has opened their doors to patients. He said that as of today they have served 11 patients for substance abuse problems. He said the clinic takes Medicare, Medicaid, and commercial insurance plans and are accepting new patients.

Mr. Lawson said that our primary cemetery attendant resigned his position to take employment elsewhere and we will be posting that job opening this week.

He said that he drove by the Food Bank last week and was impressed by the need in the community for their services. He said that cars were parked on both sides of the road. In light of the current circumstances, he asked Council to consider doubling the Town's annual contribution to the Food Bank (\$1,000), drawing money from our cultural enrichment fund, to make a donation of \$2,000 this year.

Mr. Lawson asked Charles Bledsoe if he has reviewed the letter that the Police Department took to him for an opinion regarding a vagrant at Bullitt Park. He said that he did look at it but would like to talk to Mr. Lawson and Chief Hamm together about it. Mr. Lawson said he would make that happen.

**AGENDA ITEM 6
COMMITTEE REPORTS**

No reports.

**AGENDA ITEM 7
COUNCIL COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION**

Mrs. Bailey said she was glad she got to participate in the Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony this evening. She said that Rev. Sandra Jones sent her thanks for paving the Oakview Cemetery and also mentioned that she was approached by an Eagle Scout who asked about building benches for the cemetery as his community project. Mr. Lawson said that our Cemeteries Rules and Regulations have specific restrictions on placing benches in the cemeteries, but he said he would be glad to meet with Rev. Jones and Nancy to discuss the proposal. Mrs. Bailey said that she would like to have a tour of the Mutual Co-Workspace when Mr. Lawson was available.

Mr. Bloomer said that he made the circuit around the Greenbelt In Lights a couple of times this week and that it was crowded with people walking the trail. He said that a lot of people were walking from Bullitt Park to Frog Level and back so he would like to see more decorations around that area. He encouraged everyone to stay safe.

Mr. Gilley said he was sorry he missed the tree-lighting ceremony this evening and hoped everyone had a good holiday. He asked everyone to stay safe.

Mr. Hughes said he enjoyed the tree-lighting this evening and sent his thanks to the Parks & Recreation crews for all the hard work they do. He said there have been people in Miners Park every night for the last week and half since the lights went up and it's good to watch people enjoying themselves. He thanked all the Town crews and encouraged everyone to stay safe, warm, and healthy.

Ms. Lyke said she talked to Gary Harris about where to put Council's light display and they decided on the Visitor Center. She and Mayor Johnson are working on that display. She said she was sorry she missed the tree-lighting ceremony due to work.

Mr. McKinney said he was also sorry to miss the tree-lighting ceremony but he and his family have walked the Greenbelt In Lights and enjoyed all the decorations.

Mayor Johnson thanked everyone for their hard work, especially Stephen Lawson who does an excellent job of getting things moving. He asked everyone to continue to wear masks and practice social distancing, and to stay safe. He said he looks forward to helping with the Greenbelt In Lights.

Mrs. Bailey added that she is in support of making the extra donation to the Food Bank. She said she was told that they recently served 70 people in one hour and the extra money will certainly help.

Mr. Bloomer also added that when he was walking the Greenbelt a few nights ago that an ATV was driving on the Greenbelt, which is not allowed. He said it was not a Town employee who would have had authorization to be on the trail with a vehicle but was apparently a family with children.

Mayor Johnson mentioned Mr. Lawson's comment about the cars parked at the Food Bank and said he has concerns about the traffic there and the risk of accidents. He asked if there is anything we can do to help improve the situation. Mr. Lawson said we have told the Food Bank staff that if they have a crowd they can call us and we will try to help with traffic.

AGENDA ITEM 8 ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned 7:12 pm.

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