

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

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

February 7, 2023

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 *Arrived at 6:31 pm

Staff Present: Mr. Stephen Lawson, Town Manager
Ms. Amanda L. Hawkins, Town Clerk/Treasurer
Mr. Charles Bledsoe, Town Attorney
Mr. Steve Hamm, Chief of Police *Arrived at 6:33 pm

Those Absent: Hon. Aaron McKinney, Councilman

AGENDA ITEM 2

INVOCATION by Reverend Sandra Jones of Williams Chapel AME Zion Church.

AGENDA ITEM 3

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

AGENDA ITEM 4

ADOPT OR AMEND THE AGENDA

Motion by Hughes, seconded by Bloomer, that the Agenda for the Regular Council Meeting of February 7, 2023 be adopted as presented. Motion resulted as follows:

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

AGENDA ITEM 5**PUBLIC HEARING – VACATING PUBLIC RIGHT OF WAY – TERRACE AVENUE**

Mayor Johnson recessed the Regular Council Meeting and opened the Public Hearing on the matter of vacating a public right-of-way on or adjacent to Terrace Avenue. He called for comments from the public. Hearing no comments, Mayor Johnson closed the Public Hearing and reconvened the Regular Council Meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 6**COMMENTS FROM CITIZENS****Dathan Davis, 711 Third Avenue East, Big Stone Gap, VA 24219**

Mr. Davis asked for a timeline on the Big Cherry Project. Mr. Lawson replied that we have been approved for an AMLER Grant and are in the process of securing OSM – we have the first stage of the grant process approved but it will be a 2-3 year process before we receive the funds. He emphasized this doesn't mean anything negative, just a vetting process that everyone must go thru.

AGENDA ITEM 7**GENERAL ORDER OF BUSINESS**

- a. **Approval of minutes of Council Workshop of January 3, 2023.**
Recommended Action: Approve as presented.
- b. **Approval of minutes of Regular Council Meeting of January 10, 2023.**
Recommended Action: Approve as presented.
- c. **Departmental Reports for the month of January 2023.**
Recommended Action: Received and filed.
- d. **Treasurer's Reports for the month of January 2023.**
Recommended Action: Received and filed.

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

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

AGENDA ITEM 8**HIGH KNOB MUSIC FESTIVAL COMMITTEE**

Buddy Delp said the High Knob Music Festival is in need of assistance with funding this year. He noted this is the 9th year of the family-friendly, non-alcohol event that is free to the public. They want to make this festival a regional event and are asking all the towns in the area to contribute. He said they have built a new stage and installed a new electrical system at a cost of over \$10,000 and have exhausted all their money. He mentioned that they set up a vendor booth at the Blue Highway Fest selling coffee and hot chocolate, and while they didn't make any money, they learned a lot and thoroughly enjoyed the experience and will definitely be back this year.

Jane Branham said that 10-15 years ago the Forestry Service talked of closing the High Knob Recreational Area. She said her mother talked fondly of many memorable moments at the recreation area, and she wants to make it an even better place for families to come. She said they

have plans to make a handicapped observation area overlooking the stage area and develop handicap access to the lake. She said they have raised \$1,100 toward that goal so far.

Gordon Sandt outlined their entertainment lineup for this year – Rolling Thunder will perform, the Wardell Music School will bring kids to perform, Bill Hudson will be on hand to fix any instrument for free, and the Mama Said String Band and the High Knob Ramblers will be performing as well.

Councilman Hughes thanked Buddy, Jane, and Gordon for all the work they've put in on improvements at the High Knob Recreation Area. He asked what the overall cost is this year for the festival. Buddy said the total cost is estimated at \$11,500 for the entire event.

Mr. Lawson thanked them for coming this evening, and for their work on making the High Knob Music Festival such a great event. He thanked them for their support for the Town's Bluegrass festival last fall, adding that working together makes everything better for everyone.

AGENDA ITEM 9 TOWN ENGINEER'S REPORT

Greenbelt Phase V

Mr. Broskey said a Preconstruction Conference was held on the Greenbelt Phase V Project and a Notice to Proceed issued to King Construction to be effective February 20, 2023, at which time construction will begin on the trail.

Big Cherry Trails Project

Mr. Broskey said construction will begin next week on the Big Cherry Trails Project. Boyd's Construction will be doing the work there.

East Stone Gap Water/Sewer Project

Mr. Broskey said they have 28 completed surveys out of 67 homes in the projected project area of East Stone Gap. The good news is that 75% of the ones they have received are eligible for the program, but they will need 60-70% of the homes in the project area to be within the income range so they are going back next week to talk to more homeowners.

Mr. Lawson suggested a town hall meeting at the Taylor-Lewis Community Center to help spread the word. Mr. Broskey agreed it might help, but he noted that in cases of community meetings, the first one is effective but you tend to get the same people if you hold more than one. He said he would check into scheduling a meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 10 TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

a. Resolution 01-2023 – Terrace Park Alley

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve this resolution to vacate an alley that was part of Terrace Avenue property that the Town gave to the Friends of the Southwest Virginia Museum last year.

Motion by Hughes, seconded by Lyke, that Council approve Resolution 01-2023 being a resolution vacating a section of Terrace Avenue situated at the Northeast of W 1st Street N and passing through Parcel Id# 043042 (Tract #1) already transferred by Instrument #

201702162, and 3,425 square feet, more or less, of Parcel Id# 021245 (Tract #2) authorized to be transferred by Ordinance 09-2022 to The Friends of The Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park Inc. Motion resulted as follows:

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

b. Resolution 03-2023 – Reappointing John Morrissey to Planning Commission

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve this resolution to re-appoint John Morrissey to the Planning Commission for a four-year term to expire on August 31, 2026.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Bailey, that Council approve Resolution 03-2023 being a resolution re-appointing John Morrissey to the Big Stone Gap Planning Commission for a term of four years to expire on August 31, 2026. Motion resulted as follows:

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

c. Budget Amendment – HIDTA Grant & Bullet Proof Vest Grant

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve this amendment to the FY2022-23 Budget to increase HIDTA Grant revenue and to allocate the Bullet Proof Vests award to the budget.

Motion by Hughes, seconded by Lyke, that Council approve a budget amendment to the FY 2022-2023 Budget increasing General Fund Revenues and Expenses by \$6,820 for the 2023 HIDTA Grant Award and the 2022 Bullet Proof Vest Grant Award. Motion resulted as follows:

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

d. Parade Permit – Union Little League Opening Day Parade

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve a permit for the Union Little League Opening Day Parade to be held on Saturday, March 25th, at 10 am.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Bailey, that Council approve a parade permit for the Union Little League Opening Day festivities to be held on Saturday, March 25, 2023 at 10:00 am. Motion resulted as follows:

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

e. Projects Update

Proposed East Stone Gap Water/Sewer Project

Mr. Lawson said Lane Engineering and Lenowisco will have people out doing more surveys on Monday and Tuesday for the East Stone Gap Water/Sewer Project.

Municipal Complex Roof

Mr. Lawson said we had a leak at the Municipal Building – apparently there is a plant that has grown through the drainage holes on the rubberized roof infiltrating the entire drainage system for the roof. We have a quote of \$57,300-\$59,400 from LaFerney Commercial Roofing to repair the roof. We are trying to get a couple more quotes before deciding.

Fitness Court

Mr. Lawson said we have chosen a picture of the overlook with the bridge for the wrap on the Fitness Court wall. The court will sit next to the Girl Scout Cabin facing the road and he thinks we will have room to put some playground equipment on the grounds. He said we have had trouble getting a contractor to look at the cabin remodel because it's such a small project. The plan is to have it open inside and a deck outside so parents can watch their children play on the playground. He said we have money set aside for the building renovation.

Ms. Hawkins said all the components for the Fitness Court are in and waiting on the concrete pad to be poured. The pad will be approximately 40' by 60'.

Councilman Bloomer expressed concern that this is not the best spot for the Fitness Court because it won't get as much traffic as it would at Bullitt Park, for example. Mr. Lawson said there is more traffic in this area than most people think, plus it would get foot traffic from the Greenbelt users. Councilwoman Lyke said she thinks this is the best place for the Fitness Court because there would be less vandalism.

Britalinas TV

Mr. Lawson said we have just received the contract for marketing from Britalinas TV and have asked for a price of deliverables. He asked Council to please review the documents and let him know what questions they have. Councilman Hughes asked where they got their growth data from. Mr. Lawson said he had posed the same question to them but hasn't received an answer yet.

Drug Arrest

Mr. Lawson said it is public knowledge of the drug bust made at Country Inn, where two Detroit Michigan residents were arrested for drug trafficking.

WTP – Water Withdrawal Permit

Mr. Lawson said we have received a response from the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) regarding the water withdrawal permit but he hasn't had an opportunity to review it yet. He said we have 14 days to respond.

Citizen Request to Vacate an Alley and Remove Drain Pipe

Mr. Lawson said he, John Broskey, and Gary Hampton examined the area on Aviation Road to Orr Street where a drain pipe is located. He said we have received a request from the property owners to remove that drain pipe in order to do construction on that site. He said there is no feasible way to move the pipe, which spans approximately 38-40 feet and is buried deep, because it drains the whole area. He said we had no choice but to deny that request.

A second request by the property was to abandon an alley between the old Honeybee store and the old Town Hall. Part of the alley was vacated by the Town some years ago, but part of it is closed to thru traffic. Mr. Lawson said we have decided to keep that alley open as is because there would not be the turn radius needed to get to the property and abandoning that alley would make the Honeybee property lose its value.

A third request by the same property owner was to abandon an alley on the back side of the Gilliam Funeral Home Crematorium between that building and the storage buildings. He said we are happy to grant that request and will abandon that alley.

Water Tank Road

Mr. Lawson said Paul Carter came to Town Hall to discuss his property by the Irondale water tank road. Apparently there is a fence on Mr. Carter's side of the property that has some erosion that he believes is the result of the water tank overflow. Mr. Lawson said that upon examination of the area, the overflow path was covered with a thick layer of dry leaves so it obviously hasn't overflowed recently and is most likely not the cause of the erosion. He has asked Gary Hampton to check the SCADA records to see how many times the tank has overflowed during the last year.

AGENDA ITEM 11 COMMITTEE REPORTS

a. Planning Commission

Councilman Gilley said the Planning Commission met last night. A representative of Old Dominion Power (ODP) was there to discuss the routes of their proposed high-voltage line upgrades. Mr. Gilley said the commission did not like the first route and requested new routes.

Mr. Lawson added that the Study Area Map has been adjusted to explore those new routes. He said our attorney is in contact with ODP's attorneys to work out some issues as well.

b. Public Art & Beautification Committee

Councilman Hughes said the Public Art Committee met this evening. Stephen Lawson, Ked Meade, Malia Seals, Ray Moore, Michael McNulty (ProArts), Lisa Davis (UHS Art Department), and Maurice Vanhook (Mountain Woodcarvers) were all in attendance.

He said they discussed possible renovations to Miners Park with the money raised by the Jordan Barnette fundraiser with an eye on the aesthetics of the park. They also talked about a new permanent LOVE sign for the Town. He said they hope the old 101 Car site at the foot of Country Boy hill will be available for that. He said they had some great ideas on some temporary and permanent sculptures around Town. They also talked about how to improve the "PR" for local artisans.

He said it was a really great group and they welcome all ideas. He noted they will not meet every month but will meet again in March.

AGENDA ITEM 12 COUNCIL COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

Councilman Hughes said he would like to enroll in the Forward Wise County class. He mentioned the passing of Pennington Gap Councilwoman Jill Carson, saying she did wonderful things in the county, our region, and the whole State. She also served as a member of the Virginia

Municipal League. He suggested the Town make a donation to the Appalachian African American Cultural Center (AAACC) that she helped establish as an acknowledgement of her service to the community.

Councilman Hughes also suggested a donation to the High Knob Music Festival. He asked how much money we have left in our discretionary funds account. Ms. Hawkins said we have \$2,700 left that is not earmarked for any other donation.

Motion by Hughes, seconded by Bailey, that the Town make a donation of \$500 to the Appalachian African American Cultural Center in Pennington Gap, Virginia in memory of Councilwoman Jill Carson. Motion resulted as follows:

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

Motion by Hughes, seconded by Bailey, that the Town make a donation of \$1,000 to the High Knob Music Festival for their 2023 Festival. Motion resulted as follows:

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

Councilman Hughes also asked to go to Big Cherry with Stephen to look at the trails that are under construction.

Councilman Gilley mentioned the Backpack Program at Union High School (UHS). Mayor Johnson said he spoke with Phil Robbins who is very involved in the program and Phil expressed interest in speaking to Council about it. Ms. Hawkins commented that the Town has participated in the program in different ways but has not made a monetary donation. After some discussion, Council agreed that Phil may come to Council to talk about the program. One suggestion was to make this donation a line item in the next fiscal year budget.

Mr. Lawson mentioned that Jim Vernon sent his thanks to Council for their donation to the Food Bank. He said it made a huge difference and the Food Bank is now restocked.

Councilman Gilley commented on the 1st Annual Wing Walk that occurred recently wherein a group of people purchased tickets to judge the wings in various restaurants downtown as they walked from one restaurant to another.

Mr. Lawson said he had a meeting with some downtown businesses about the Blue Highway Fest this year to discuss strategy to entice attendees of the festival to their stores. He mentioned that the schedule has been changed this year to bring more music venues downtown that weekend and hopes to have a popular band that will bring more locals out. He said ticket sales will also be adjusted to allow people to attend events by the day rather than the weekend.

Vice-Mayor Bailey thanked everyone for their concern about her health. She mentioned that Jill Carson is on the cover of Virginia Town & County magazine. She thanked the Police Department of keeping us safe.

Mayor Johnson thanked everyone of their prayers and thanked all the Town employees for their hard work. He mentioned that he and Kathy won the Chilly Chili Cook-Off and Cathy was enjoying her spoon and apron.

**AGENDA ITEM 13
ADJOURNMENT**

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

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

Meeting adjourned at 7:49 pm.

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