

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

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

March 8, 2022

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
 Hon. Aaron McKinney, Councilman

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

Those Absent: Mr. Charles Bledsoe, Town Attorney

AGENDA ITEM 2

INVOCATION by Pastor Kenneth Sturgill of Spirit & Truth Worship Center

AGENDA ITEM 3

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

AGENDA ITEM 4

ADOPT OR AMEND THE AGENDA

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Bailey, that the Agenda for the Regular Council Meeting of March 8, 2022 be adopted as presented. Motion resulted as follows:

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

AGENDA ITEM 5
COMMENTS FROM CITIZENS
Saundra Jones, Big Stone Gap, VA

Ms. Jones brought documents signed by people who have relatives buried in Oakview Cemetery who are in favor of changing the name of the cemetery to honor Joe Long, Sr.'s dedication and service as caretaker of the cemetery. She said so far she has had only two people who were not in support of the name change. Ms. Alberta Mitchell mentioned that Joseph Long, Jr. was her uncle and she remembers him and his father digging graves with a shovel and pitchfork, which says a lot about their dedication to their job.

AGENDA ITEM 6
GENERAL ORDER OF BUSINESS

- a. **Approval of minutes of Council Workshop of February 1, 2022.**
Recommended Action: Approve as presented.
- b. **Approval of minutes of Regular Council Meeting of February 8, 2022.**
Recommended Action: Approve as presented.
- c. **Departmental Reports for the month of February 2022.**
Recommended Action: Received and filed.

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

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

AGENDA ITEM 7
TOWN ENGINEER'S REPORT
Big Cherry

Mr. Broskey said the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) approved our environmental submission for the Big Cherry Trail Project and has forwarded it on to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for their review.

Greenbelt Phase V

Mr. Broskey said the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) asked for an official letter of request for additional funding for the increase in the cost estimate of the Greenbelt Phase V Project. He noted this is a very promising move on their part.

Frog Level Drainage

Mr. Broskey said that Lane Engineering plans to do the surveying of the drainage areas at Frog Level Park themselves. Mr. Lawson offered assistance from Town crews if they need it.

AGENDA ITEM 8**TOWN MANAGER’S REPORT****a. Proclamation – Sweet Winks**

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve this proclamation welcoming Sarah Mullins and Sweet Winks as a new business in Town.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Hughes, that Council approve a proclamation welcoming Sarah Mullins, owner of Sweet Winks located at 18 East 5th Street S in Big Stone Gap.

Motion resulted as follows:

Ayes: Bailey, Bloomer, Gilley, Hughes, Johnson, Lyke, McKinney

Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: None

b. Parade Permit – Little League

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve this permit for the annual Union Little League Opening Day Parade on Saturday, April 9th at 10 am.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Gilley, that Council approve a parade permit for the Union Little League Opening Day Ceremonies to be held on April 9, 2022 at 10am. Motion resulted as follows:

Ayes: Bailey, Bloomer, Gilley, Hughes, Johnson, Lyke, McKinney

Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: None

c. Projects Update**Water Bills**

Mr. Lawson said water bills have been slow to get to customers but we believe it is mainly caused by slow mail delivery. He said to offset this problem we are looking to make changes to get the information to the printers 3-4 days earlier than we normally do.

Restructuring of Administration Dept.

Mr. Lawson said he and Amanda Hawkins have been discussing restructuring job descriptions within the Administrative Department. He noted it has been difficult to find an accountant who has governmental accounting experience and can handle the audit prep work. The new structure would have Amanda Hawkins doing the audit part of the accounting and distribute the rest among the other job classes.

He said that in discussions with Paymerang as a prospective tenant in the old Walmart Shopping Center that is now under new ownership, Mr. Lawson said we have decided to contract them to manage our accounts payables. He said our staff will continue to review, code, and approve the invoices as they come in then forward them to Paymerang for them to process and pay. The cost will be roughly \$300 per month for up to 300 invoices and \$1.00 per invoice over that, noting that this is a really good deal. He said this would enable us to hire one full-time person who is qualified to do human resources, which would lighten Amanda’s workload and free her up for the extra audit prep work as well as her usual financial management responsibilities. We could then hire one or two part-time employees to keep the office work manageable. He said

this would also enable us to even out the pay scale for the employees who have been here for a while and have worked really hard to keep up with the extra workload caused by staff shortages.

Police Department Cameras/Equipment

Mr. Lawson said the estimates for the cost of purchasing and installing body cameras and in-car cameras for nine patrol officers came in at \$76,246 with an annual fee of \$8,500. To add cameras to the administrative staff and investigators would cost an additional \$20,000 and increase the annual cost to \$9,680. But he commented that the investigators would not necessarily need body cameras as it would prevent a lot of people from speaking freely during an investigation, and anyone being questioned in an interrogation room would be recorded automatically by the fixed camera inside the room. He asked Council to consider if they want to go this route.

Chief Hamm cautioned that if they go this route the upgrades will be done as they get new vehicles so it won't be an immediate change. He noted also that there are still delays in getting equipment after ordering, one instance being the Tasers that were purchased last August as part of a grant award that we still have not received. Once we receive the Tasers, he said we will schedule training for our officers, then work on getting one of our officers qualified to teach the classes in-house.

Mr. Lawson mentioned that we have three candidates to send to the police academy in April.

Grant Applications

Mr. Lawson said we have four grant applications going out this week:

- SARIS Bike Park Grant – this is the 3rd phase of this grant application that we've been working on for about six months.
- Virginia Tobacco Commission Grant for various plans at Big Cherry.
- Virginia Recovery Marketing Leverage Program - a \$10,000 grant to mitigate loss due to tourism factors.
- Virginia DMO Marketing Grant – a \$20,000 grant for marketing expenses that show positive and significant impact on tourism. A ticketed event will qualify so we will use the Blue Highway Fest as our basis for applying.

Parks & Recreation

Mr. Lawson said we just learned about a Game Time Playground Grant for \$50,000 (no match) for a health and wellness course for 5-12 year-old kids that uses rope bridges, etc. that we would likely install at the Cadet Park, Aviation Road Park, or Italy Bottom Park should we be fortunate enough to be awarded the grant.

Mr. Lawson said he does not have an update on the Archery Range Pool.

Local Events

Mr. Lawson said the Mardi Gras event held in the basement of Curklin's had about 120 people in attendance throughout the evening.

He said the Wise County Chamber of Commerce Gala will be held on Saturday April 9th at 5:30 pm at the UVA Wise Convocation Center. The theme will be "Murder on the Orient Express" and guests may dress in 1930's attire if they wish. He said there are six tickets still open for our eight-person table that we reserved.

AGENDA ITEM 9 COMMITTEE REPORTS

a. Planning Commission

Councilman Gilley said the Planning Commission met last night to continue the discussion of Old Dominion Power's request for a Special Use Permit to install a high-voltage power line thru Town. He said there were about 20 people in attendance, most of whom spoke in opposition to the idea. He said the Planning Commission asked Matthew Bright to draft a letter to ODP asking for more information.

Vice-Mayor Bailey asked if there is any hope of ODP using an alternate route such as their Plan E, which would seem to have a lower environmental impact. Mr. Lawson said he spoke with Stewart Spradlin with ODP who said they are open to considering one of the alternate routes in the study.

Councilwoman Lyke commented that her power has went out once in the last several years.

AGENDA ITEM 10 COUNCIL COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

Councilman Bloomer commented that Council has not yet discussed renaming Oakview Cemetery. Councilman Gilley said he has spoken with only one person who is against the name change. Councilwoman Lyke said one person with family buried there said they were not against it but suggested adding Mr. Hutchinson's name to it as well. Councilman Hughes commented that Ms. Jones is very passionate about acknowledging contributions to the community by the African/American population throughout the years and works hard to bring awareness to the general public. Mr. Lawson added that when you have someone who is willing to put in the work that she has needs to be listened to because it is obviously important to them. Ms. Hawkins suggested that Mr. Bledsoe check into the legalities of the proposed name change to make sure there are no legal ramifications of moving forward with the proposal.

Councilman Hughes thanked the Town staff and mentioned that the Gathering in the Gap is on track for their event on May 28th.

Councilman Gilley said he wasn't sure who provided the hats and shirts but was thankful for them. Mr. Lawson said the Town provided them to all employees and Council members to commemorate Michael Chandler. Chief Hamm said there was a 4x4x48 event (alternating four hours of walking/exercise with four hours of rest) at Bays Mountain to fundraise for Michael Chandler's family.

Vice-Mayor Bailey commented that she traveled to Richmond this past week and witnessed no trucker shortage on Hwy 81. She thanked all the staff for all their work.

Mayor Johnson thanked everyone for all they do, and Amanda Hawkins and Stephen Lawson in particular for all the extra work they've put in lately.

**AGENDA ITEM 11
ADJOURNMENT**

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

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

Meeting adjourned at 7:27 pm.

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