

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

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

October 11, 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. Kent Gilley, Councilman
 Hon. Crystal Lyke, Councilwoman
 Hon. Aaron McKinney, Councilman

Staff Present: Mr. Stephen Lawson, Town Manager
 Ms. Amanda L. Hawkins, Town Clerk/Treasurer
 Mr. Charles Bledsoe, Town Attorney
 Lt. Eddie Phillips, Police Department

Those Absent: Hon. Robert Bloomer, Councilman
 Hon. Tyler Hughes, Councilman

AGENDA ITEM 2

INVOCATION by Pastor Michael Sampson of Oak Grove Baptist Church

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 October 11, 2022 be adopted as presented. Motion resulted as follows:

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

AGENDA ITEM 5 COMMENTS FROM CITIZENS

Mike & Diane Abbott, 18 Wyandotte Ave, Big Stone Gap, VA

Mr. Abbott began by saying he was proud of his stepson, Councilman Kent Gilley, and his service to the community.

He said the Blue Highway Fest was a tremendous success. He read a letter being sent to local papers expressing appreciation for Stephen Lawson and his vision for the Town in bringing this festival to Big Stone Gap. He noted there were two volunteers – one from New Mexico and one from Michigan – who were pleased to volunteer. He said nearly everyone they talked to said they were coming back next year.

Diane Abbott said her brother George Roat, one of the organizers of the Fest, was very pleased with the event, commenting that Big Stone Gap delivered. She said she heard so many comments about how beautiful the Town is and how welcoming the people are. She also commented on how many hours the staff and volunteers put into the event and thanked everyone.

Kim Smith, Heart of Appalachia, Marketing Director

Ms. Smith said she was a volunteer at the information tent at the Blue Highway Fest and was absolutely blown away by what the Town did with the festival. She said the Heart of Appalachia goes every year to the International Bluegrass Music events in Raleigh, NC to hand out info on our region, mainly focusing on the Carter Family Fold and the Ralph Stanley Museum. This year she said they handed out info on the Blue Highway Fest and people were picking it up and were amazed that this was a first-year festival. Many said they didn't know about it this year but would certainly attend next year.

She said that Heart of Appalachia is working on a music video for the region and plan to do a breakout video of the Blue Highway Fest to help spread the word. She said that during an interview, Ralph Stanley II commented that it was hearing the music ringing off our beautiful mountains that made the festival so special.

Ms. Smith said the Town has created something special here and has fostered a sense of community that isn't found everywhere. She complimented Council on showing leadership in enabling Town Manager Stephen Lawson to carry this out. She said Heart of Appalachia is very proud of the Town.

AGENDA ITEM 6 GENERAL ORDER OF BUSINESS

- a. **Approval of minutes of Council Workshop of September 6, 2022.**
Recommended Action: Approve as presented.
- b. **Approval of minutes of Regular Council Meeting of September 13, 2022.**
Recommended Action: Approve as presented.
- c. **Departmental Reports for the month of September 2022.**
Recommended Action: Received and filed.

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

Ayes: Bailey, Gilley, Johnson, Lyke, McKinney

Nays: None

Abstain: None

Absent: Bloomer, Hughes

AGENDA ITEM 7 TOWN ENGINEER'S REPORT

DEQ Funding Applications

Mr. Broskey said a representative from the Richmond Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) office came down to review the two projects we had submitted funding applications for – Wastewater Treatment Plant Improvements and the Cadet and Italy Bottom Sewer Improvements. They indicated that DEQ will make an offer of funding at a 0-0.5% loan for 30 years. He said we will follow that up in the Spring with a request for principal forgiveness on a portion of the loan. He said we were fortunate to have them come by since they only chose a couple of Towns to visit.

Big Cherry Walking Trail

Mr. Broskey said the low bid for the Big Cherry Walking Trail came from Boyd's Construction. We forwarded the information to the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) for their approval, and with Council's approval this evening we can issue a Notice to Proceed to the contractor. He noted that this project came in under budget.

Greenbelt Phase V

Mr. Broskey said the low bid (King General Contractors - \$1,153,000) for the Greenbelt Phase V Project came in around \$500,000 over budget. At the same time, the Town received a confirmation letter from the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) regarding the approval of \$500,000 for the Powell River Trail & Greenbelt Interconnect Project. He said Mr. Lawson casually commented that it would be good if we could move that award to the current Greenbelt Phase V Project. After some discussion, everyone agreed it would be worth a try, so a letter is being drafted to send to VDOT asking that these funds (\$500,000 awarded to the Powell River Trail & Greenbelt Interconnect Project) be moved to the current Greenbelt Phase V Project to allow us to build the walking bridge across the river. He said VDOT has approved the bid documents so they will be asking Council this evening to approve the bid award to King General Contractors, pending approval by VDOT of the transfer of funds.

AGENDA ITEM 8 TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

Mr. Lawson thanked everyone for their calls and prayers regarding his mother's illness. He said she is still in Lonesome Pine Hospital's emergency room being tested but is in good spirits.

a. Big Stone Gap Fire Department By-Laws Update

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve the updated Fire Department By-Laws that were voted on at the September 6th business meeting. He said the Fire Department will hold their election for officers at their regular meeting on October 30th. He encouraged as many members of Council to attend as possible to show their support.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Bailey, that Council approve the Big Stone Gap Fire Department Constitution & By Laws, with stated updates to Article IV, as adopted by the

Fire Department membership at the Business Meeting held on 09/06/2022. Motion resulted as follows:

Ayes: Bailey, Gilley, Johnson, Lyke, McKinney

Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: Bloomer, Hughes

b. DCR Trails – Big Cherry Straight Fork Ridge Trail

Mr. Lawson said the Straight Fork Ridge Trail will connect Big Cherry to the Devil's Bathtub. He said we received three bids for this project, with the low bidder being Boyd's Construction at \$86,300, which is under budget mainly due to the cost being mostly for labor, not construction materials. He said we will get started as soon as we receive approval of the bid documents from DCR. He noted that we have a narrow window thru December 31, 2022 to get the project done. He said we might have to shut down part of the road to the lake on the upper side but residents will still be able to get to the cabins while construction is ongoing.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Gilley, that Council award the Big Cherry Straight Fork Ridge Trail project to Boyd's Construction and Excavation Company, LLC in the amount of \$86,200, pending approval from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation – Recreational Trails Program. Motion resulted as follows:

Ayes: Bailey, Gilley, Johnson, Lyke, McKinney

Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: Bloomer, Hughes

c. VDOT UPC 121150 – Powell River Trail & Greenbelt Interconnect

Mr. Lawson said that the bid for the Greenbelt Phase V - Greenbelt Trail and Walking Tour Project came in so much over budget that our 20% match has gone from \$179,405 to \$304,405. He said the best solution is to temporarily cancel the Powell River Trail & Greenbelt Interconnect Project and move the \$500,000 award from the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) for that project to the Greenbelt Phase V - Greenbelt Trail and Walking Tour Project. He said this is a very good move for us to do because prices have increased so much that we are not likely to get a new bid under what we have already received. He noted that VDOT has projects scheduled 10 years ahead and it is very unusual for them to move money from one project to another, so we are very fortunate that they are willing to do this.

Mr. Lawson said that we will submit a new application for the Powell River Trail & Greenbelt Interconnect to VDOT and will request \$1,000,000 this time considering the increase in the price of construction materials. He recommended that Council approve the cancellation of the Powell River Trail & Greenbelt Interconnect Project and transfer that funding to the Greenbelt Phase V - Greenbelt Trail and Walking Tour Project.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Gilley, that Council approve the cancellation of the Powell River Trail & Greenbelt Interconnect Project (UPC# 121150) awarded \$500,000 by the Virginia Department of Transportation and transfer that funding award to the Greenbelt Trail and Walking Tour (UPC# 113427). Motion resulted as follows:

Ayes: Bailey, Gilley, Johnson, Lyke, McKinney

Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: Bloomer, Hughes

d. VDOT UPC 113427 – Greenbelt Trail & Walking Tour

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve the award of the contract for the Greenbelt Trail & Walking Tour (Greenbelt Phase V) to King General Contractors in the amount of \$1,153,873.56.

Motion by Bailey, seconded by Lyke, that Council award the Greenbelt Phase V – Greenbelt Trail & Walking Tour project to King General Contractors in the amount of \$1,153,873.56, pending additional funding and the approval by the Virginia Department of Transportation. Motion resulted as follows:

Ayes: Bailey, Gilley, Johnson, Lyke, McKinney

Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: Bloomer, Hughes

e. Parade Permit – Veteran’s Day Parade

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve this permit for a Veteran’s Day Parade to be held on Friday, November 11th, at 11:30 am.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by McKinney, that Council approve a parade permit for the Veteran’s Day Parade to be held on Friday, November 11th at 11:30 am. Motion resulted as follows:

Ayes: Bailey, Gilley, Johnson, Lyke, McKinney

Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: Bloomer, Hughes

f. Projects Update**Blue Highway Fest**

Mr. Lawson thanked the Abbotts – he said they have been involved with the Blue Highway Fest from the beginning, starting with a meeting in their basement with George Roat. He thanked Kim Smith for participating with the information tent at the Fest saying it was great to see a representative of Heart of Appalachia (HOA) lending their support.

He said he can’t say enough about the Town Departments and employees. He said there was someone who went around with a checklist to make sure everything was getting done and couldn’t find anything that wasn’t being taken care of - down to emptying trash cans before they overflowed.

Mr. Lawson said Mountain Empire Community College (MECC) was a wonderful partner hosting the concert Thursday evening at the Goodloe Center. He said the acoustics in the Center made it a very intimate setting for the music. The evening got off to a late start with an accident at the entrance to the college and held up traffic flow for a while.

He said we are still crunching numbers, but at this point it looks like we lost about \$60,000 on the event, but he said he considers that an investment in the future of the Town. He said Kim Smith with HOA can attest that when we apply for grants or do marketing for the Town, the marketing aspect alone would have cost us more than \$60,000. He noted how many people came from multiple states, even one couple from Norway, who will return home with compliments about the Fest and the Town.

Mr. Lawson said we sold \$6,100 in banjo raffle tickets, with \$3,050 to the Mountain Empire Community College Mountain Music School and the ETSU Bluegrass School each. He

said we sold \$10,500 in Blue Highway merchandise, \$2,500 in Big Stone Gap merchandise, and the rest of the bands sold around \$2,500 in merchandise. We received \$23,800 cash from gate sales and the beer garden.

He said the next item we need to talk about is the schedule for next year's event. He said he would like the Fest to be on Columbus Day weekend from this point forward. This enables the staff, some of whom worked almost around the clock, to have a day or two of rest before coming back to work on Tuesday. One of the issues to be resolved is the Union High School (UHS) football game scheduled for Friday, October 6th, 2023. He said we need to move that game to another night or another location, but he doesn't really want to move it out of town. He said he is very pro-football, but we have started this ball rolling and need to keep it going. He said he is in discussion with UHS to come up with a resolution to suit everyone.

He said that the sound stage company indicated they brought extra equipment this year because they weren't sure we'd have the setup they needed. They now realize they can bring less equipment next year, which will save us money. Councilman Gilley asked if we could get the stage set up after the football game if it was held on Thursday night. Mr. Lawson said our staff is experienced enough that he believes we can pull it off. Everyone agreed that is the most desirable option. Mr. Lawson said that football schedules are made three years in advance, so we hope UHS will work with us and schedule around the festival weekend in the future. He also said he has heard that the Wise Fall Fling had a record attendance this year, so our festival did not have an adverse effect on that event as was predicted.

Mr. Lawson said he hopes everyone knows what an impact the festival has had. There is even talk of the Town being nominated for an award by the International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA). He read a few positive messages from Paxton Algyer's facebook page as well as a review from bluegrasstoday.com.

He said he has heard a few comments from local restaurants that would have liked to have had more customers over the weekend. He said we will brainstorm on how to set the schedule next year to perhaps give the attendees more breaks to browse around Town.

Water Bills

Mr. Lawson said we are thinking about changing the company that mail our water bills. This move will save us about \$3,500 per year. The current company has to be paid up front for an estimated cost then give a credit for what they didn't mail. The new company will pay for the mailings up front then bill us for the exact amount.

AGENDA ITEM 9

COMMITTEE REPORTS

a. Planning Commission

Councilman and Planning Commission Representative Kent Gilley said there is someone who wants to construct two Tiny Houses and a couple of Yurts on a property near the new Greenbelt bridge that is going in and has applied to the Planning Commission for permission. He said the Commission is still waiting for detailed plans for each structure before making a decision but is confident that a Special Use Permit will be required with some stipulations made in the permit because of the Yurts. Rentals of the units will be made thru an Airbnb service – the structures will not be for permanent residents. Councilman Gilley emphasized that the Tiny Houses would have to meet building codes before a Special Use Permit will be considered.

Mr. Lawson added that if there was a negative comment to be made about the festival it was the quality of the hotels in the area – Quality Inn got good reviews but some of the others were not as good. He said we need to look at all avenues for housing to accommodate everyone.

Mayor Johnson said that Shawn Eldridge has expressed interest in the vacant position on the Planning Commission.

Councilman Gilley mentioned that Old Dominion Power has not responded to the last request by the Town, which was about three months ago.

AGENDA ITEM 10 COUNCIL COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

Councilman Gilley thanked all the Town employees who worked the festival. He said it was unbelievable how well it went and how hard they worked. He gave a shout-out to David Long and his crew for fixing a water line break at the multi-purpose building within an hour. He noted that he is not a giant bluegrass fan, but it was a great event that he really enjoyed. He said he didn't attend Thursday night's concert by Tommy Emmanuel but he heard it was really great.

Councilwoman Lyke said several local people said how happy they were with the event. She said there were some complaints about how late the program ran. She said she attended Country Thunder the week before with about 40,000 people. She said she is impressed with how well we did with our festival in comparison and thinks the ticket pricing is comparable also. She added that she heard the downtown businesses had a great weekend.

Councilman McKinney said it is good to hear all the positive feedback and thanked everyone involved.

Vice-Mayor Bailey echoed all the kudos to employees and all the positive comments. She thanked Larry Roberts and George Roat for their belief in us by wanting to bring their festival here.

Mayor Johnson said the music was great, and the camping was great with really nice people. He thanked Jessie Lea RV Park for their assistance. He noted there wasn't a request made from either the campers or the attendees of the festival that wasn't met. He mentioned that he went to the Virginia Municipal League Conference and attended some really good classes.

AGENDA ITEM 11 ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Bailey, 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 8::10 pm.

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