

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

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

March 14, 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
 Hon. Aaron McKinney, Councilman

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

AGENDA ITEM 2

INVOCATION by Pastor Josh Tompkins of the West End 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 March 14, 2023 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

Adam Harris, 413 East River Street North, Big Stone Gap, VA 24219

Mr. Harris said there is a need at Italy Bottom Park for access to a water drinking fountain, preferably with a drink spout and a water bottle filling station. He said it would greatly benefit the

neighborhood, especially when the Greenbelt trail is completed. He noted Bullitt Park has two fountains and the Dog Park has access to water, but Italy Bottom Park has none. Mr. Harris said he canvassed the area and has more than 50 signatures on a petition if that carries any weight.

Mayor Johnson recalled speaking with Mr. Harris at a cookout about this, and said he checked with Steve Clark, Director of Public Works, and installing a water fountain would be no problem.

Mr. Lawson said we had a water source in that area a long time ago but had problems with it so it was removed. He said we will be glad to install a water fountain and water bottle fill-up at the park. He cautioned it may take a while to get it in as deliveries are still unreliable but we will get it ordered soon.

Mayor Johnson asked if the limbs have been removed from a tree in the park as requested a while back. Mr. Harris said they have not been removed and noted there's quite a bit of poison ivy on the tree. Mayor Johnson said we would take care of that.

Joshua Utzi, 1522 Holton Avenue East, Big Stone Gap, VA

Mr. Utzi thanked Council for considering the water issue at the park and asked that they also do a spigot to allow for attachment of a hose.

Bill Wireman, 922 Canonchet Avenue East, Big Stone Gap, VA

Mr. Wireman said he helped canvass the area for signatures for Italy Bottom Park, and everyone is in support of getting water in the park. He said it's a really good park for family get-togethers.

AGENDA ITEM 6

GENERAL ORDER OF BUSINESS

- a. **Approval of minutes of Regular Council Meeting of February 7, 2023.**
Recommended Action: Approve as presented.
- b. **Departmental Reports for the month of February 2023.**
Recommended Action: Received and filed.
- c. **Treasurer's Reports for the month of February 2023.**
Recommended Action: Received and filed.

Motion by Hughes, 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

Greenbelt Phase V

Mr. Broskey said the retaining walls and abutments are going in and the trail is mostly cleared. He said the contractors are doing an excellent job and are cleaning up as they move along. He said they are still reviewing shop drawings – the big one is for the bridge, which might cause some delay as it must be prefabricated and shipped to the site. He said we are seeing swift

movement now but it will slow down when they start on the bridge, which is scheduled to be done by November. He said it may take a bit longer than planned.

Councilman Bloomer asked if there would be lights on the bridge. Mr. Broskey said there would not. Mr. Lawson commented that we had discussed running conduit along the bridge but at that time we didn't know what kind of bridge would fit into the budget so it never got added in. Mr. Broskey said they can talk to the contractor to see if it would be feasible to put the mounts necessary for lights on as the bridge is installed so we could do lights later.

Mr. Lawson asked if we have moved the wires at the river level that were in our way. Mr. Broskey said we have talked to the utility companies and property owners and it has been taken care of.

Mr. Lawson asked how we have handled the NOAH device located underneath the bridge. Mr. Broskey replied that the contractor coordinated with them to run the conduit underneath the bridge.

Big Cherry Trail

Mr. Broskey said the contractor has the clearing done and the path laid out for the trail. He said they have selected locations for benches and trash cans and are looking at putting some gravel down. He said the contractor has done a really good job.

AGENDA ITEM 8

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

Mr. Lawson introduced Phil Robbins who asked to speak about the School Lunch Backpack Program.

Phil Robbins

Mr. Robbins said he inherited this program five years ago and up to this point they have been able to rely solely on donations to carry it out. Then COVID came along and funds began to run low. He said community churches contribute money or items based on church attendance so when COVID kept people home, contributions fell off. The only church now making a monthly contribution is Cedar Ridge Baptist Church. He said the Union Primary School (UPS) guidance and administration staff select the students who participate. He noted student participation fluctuates from year to year, but currently 105 students are enrolled in the program.

Mr. Robbins said they became involved with Feeding Southwest Virginia in October and received a grant from them in January giving them six cases of six items to fill backpacks. He commented that supply issues are hitting the program and they have found it is cheaper to purchase supplies through Feeding Southwest Virginia than through Food City or United Grocery Outlet.

Mr. Robbins said they have enough funds right now to do them through the end of this school year. He asked Council to add the School Lunch Backpack Program to their budget for an annual donation to be paid out in July of each year.

Councilman Hughes said he is a member of Christ Episcopal Church and will ask them to consider joining this program.

Mr. Robbins suggested he be allowed to contact area businesses that wish to advertise on the LED scoreboard at the stadium in Bullitt Park. He said if Council would agree to split the proceeds 50/50 between the School Lunch Backpack Program and the Town he would gladly contact the businesses for the Town.

a. Resolution 04-2023 – Vacate Public Right of Way

Mr. Lawson asked for approval to set a public hearing for this resolution to vacate an alley between East 5th Street North and East 4th Street North.

Motion by Hughes, seconded by Lyke, that Council authorize a public hearing on Tuesday, April 4, 2023, at 6:30 p.m. for the purpose of receiving public comment regarding the vacation of 2,665 square feet, more or less, of a section of public right of way between E 5th Street N and E 4th Street N. Motion resulted as follows:

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

Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: None

b. Budget Amendment – DTF/HIDTA Grant

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve this amendment to add revenues and expenses to the FY2022-23 Budget for a DTF/HIDTA Grant.

Motion by Bailey, seconded by Lyke, that Council approve a budget amendment to the FY 2022-2023 Budget increasing General Fund Revenues and Expenses by \$97,000 for additional spending for the Southwest Virginia Drug Task Force. Motion resulted as follows:

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

Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: None

c. Proclamation – Child Abuse Awareness Month

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve this proclamation declaring April as Child Abuse Awareness Month.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Bailey, that Council approve a proclamation designating April 2023 as Child Abuse Awareness Month in Big Stone Gap, Virginia.

Vice-Mayor Bailey mentioned that they would have their annual Planting of the Pinwheels at the Children’s Advocacy Center at Mountain Empire Older Citizens (MEOC) on April 5th at 9:30 am.

She said that a luncheon will be held on April 28th at MEOC in honor of all law enforcement officers.

Motion resulted as follows:

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

Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: None

d. Projects Update
Jasmine Cottage

Mr. Lawson said Jasmine Cottage has informed us that they will not be moving to the shopping center as stated at the Council Workshop so we have retracted that statement.

Guardians of the Gap Book

Mr. Lawson said Jim Palmer's book on the history of firefighters in Big Stone Gap was released locally to very good reviews. He noted we gave about 50 books to our local firemen and have helped sell the books to the public. He said the original publications cost \$1,902, of which \$1,762 was recouped through sales. He said we are out of copies and suggested we order another 50 for the reunion season.

Tree on Spring Street

Mr. Lawson said that during the recent flood a large tree fell across the road onto a house on Spring Street. He said our crews worked diligently to clean it up, but noted there is another very large tree close to the fallen tree that is in danger of coming down. He said the cost of renting a lift for a week is \$1,900 a day or \$4,500 a week but said it is necessary to remove this tree. He said the local tree-cutting service has agreed to take the tree down on March 27th.

Councilman Hughes said he has been approached by several citizens about some trees overhanging at Christ Church. Mr. Lawson said we had trimmed those trees once and was threatened with a lawsuit by a property owner who says the trees are on his property. He said we are planning to have that right-of-way surveyed before we do anything more. He noted we purchased a piece of property near the proposed Greenbelt trail that Scott County Telephone Coop has asked if they can put a device on to expand their service in this area so we will have both properties surveyed at the same time.

Italy Bottom Water Fountain

Mr. Lawson said we are planning to put a water fountain in Italy Bottom Park. He said it was just an oversight on our part that it wasn't put in when we upgraded the park. He said with Council's permission he will order the fountain and get it installed.

FY2023-2024 Budget

Mr. Lawson said he and Ms. Hawkins are working hard on getting a new budget ready for Council's review. He said it would probably be the middle of May before it is finished. He said the positive things happening in Town and some of the decisions Council made last year will certainly help the process. He said we are trying to keep employees happy and grant the requests from department heads while staying within budget. He said if anyone has any special requests for next year please let him know.

Tour de Crackers Neck

Mr. Lawson said he, Mayor Johnson, Chief Hamm, Ked Meade, and Gary Harris met with Margaret on Monday to discuss this year's bicycle race. The race will be on May 20th at 9:00 am. As with last year, the race will begin at Bullitt Park, go through East Stone Gap to Crackers Neck, then loop around to ride the course again, ending up in Town. He commented that last year's race ended in an exciting photo finish. He said Margaret asked us to co-sponsor the event with a donation of \$350.

Middle School Softball Tournament

Mr. Lawson said the middle school softball tournament last weekend was very successful.

Highway Report

Mr. Lawson said a lot of work has gone into getting this year's Highway Report ready to submit to the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). Mr. Lawson said he, Ms. Hawkins, Steve Clark, and David Long have been poring through past reports to ensure we have all the information needed on work orders and invoices.

Water Loss

Mr. Lawson said we are down about 500,000 gallons of water – he hopes it will settle back down to normal in summer.

Blue Highway Fest

Mr. Lawson said we are sending the Blue Highway Fest (BHF) staff and others in the community to work a tent at other bluegrass festivals to promote our BHF this fall. He said Mountain Empire Community College (MECC) will help promote the Fest with a kickoff event on July 15th, but he cautioned that date is not firm yet. He said this year's BHF will have music venues set up in Town for two days and in Bullitt Park for two days.

Tree Planting

Mr. Lawson said when walking along the newly prepared trail route along the river he and Mr. Broskey noticed that there is a guide wire and other wires across the river that will have to be moved out of the way. They also noticed that we would need some trees as a screen along the riverbank, preferably something like cypress. He noted that we were informed that the trail took someone's garden spot along the river and they were not happy with us.

Wise County Chamber of Commerce Gala

Mr. Lawson said we have reserved a table for eight at the Gala this year. Ms. Hawkins said she has reservations for Councilman Bloomer and Elise, Stephen Lawson and Tiffany, and Crystal Lyke and a guest, with room for two more if anyone else wants to attend.

AGENDA ITEM 9**COMMITTEE REPORTS****a. Public Art & Beautification Committee**

Councilman Hughes said the Art Committee met at the Visitor Center. Among the things discussed was putting a new LOVE sign in Miners Park. He said they have some exciting ideas for the Town and discussed a new mural. Mayor Johnson commented that the Fire Department said they would like a mural on their building.

AGENDA ITEM 10**COUNCIL COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION**

Councilwoman Lyke said the Wise County Chamber of Commerce Gala begins at 6 pm. She welcomed guests attending the Council meeting – the local Boy Scouts troop who came to see how our local government works.

Councilman Hughes thanked our guests this evening. He said the John Fox, Jr. Literary Festival will begin tomorrow at 10:00 am at the Mountain Empire Community College (MECC) with Silas House as the guest speaker. He mentioned that Wise County has an Adopt the Road program to help combat the litter problem. He said the Governor announced \$12,000,000 allocated throughout the state to address homelessness – Wise County will get some of that money for our area. He thanked all the employees and Amanda Hawkins in particular for her hard work on the budget and audit. He asked if the donation we made to the Tour de Crackers Neck was from discretionary funds. Mr. Lawson replied that it was.

Councilman Bloomer thanked the Boy Scouts for attending this evening, adding he had two boys in the scouts, and encouraged them to learn as much as they can because time goes by fast.

Vice-Mayor Bailey said it is good to see young people like the Boy Scouts willing to listen and participate. She said having a water fountain at Italy Bottom will be a big help at the Juneteenth Celebration held in the park annually. She thanked all the employees, especially Ms. Hawkins and Mr. Lawson for their work on the budget.

Mayor Johnson said he also had two sons in the Scouts and thanked them for their participation. He noted that only 2% of scouts nationwide achieve Eagle Scout status. He said that designation will mean a lot for their future employment and in life in general. He thanked all the employees, adding Steve Lawson and Amanda Hawkins have their work cut out for them in preparing a budget.

AGENDA ITEM 11 ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Hughes, 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 7:37 pm.

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