

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

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

June 11, 2024

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. 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

Absent: Hon. Nancy Bailey, Vice-Mayor

Staff Absent: Mr. Charles Bledsoe, Town Attorney

AGENDA ITEM 2

PUBLIC HEARING – Italy Bottom Planning Grant

Mayor Johnson recessed the Regular Council Meeting and opened the Public Hearing for the Italy Bottom Grant Application. Mayor Johnson asked for public comment.

Thomas Lawson of Lenowisco said the Town of Big Stone Gap proposes to seek Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding through the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) for the Italy Bottom Comprehensive Community Development Project. He said this funding is being sought to aid in the rehabilitation of residential structures and infrastructure improvements within an identified project area in the Italy Bottom neighborhood, which has been identified as a viable area for initial such improvements, with the potential for subsequent phases within the larger neighborhood. He said the Town is eligible to apply for up to \$1,750,000 for a three-activity CDBG project - in the Town's case, housing rehabilitation, water system improvements, and wastewater system improvements.

Mr. Thomas Lawson said LENOWISCO personnel have identified ten (10) residential

structures in the project area as viable candidates for rehabilitation or substantial reconstruction activities and one of the CDBG core objectives is benefit to low- and moderate-income (LMI) persons. He said based on income surveys to date, it is believed all 10 dwellings proposed for rehabilitation or substantial reconstruction are occupied by LMI persons, thus eligible. Mr. Thomas Lawson said the project area's overall LMI percentage meets the required 51% for water and wastewater improvements to be eligible as well. He said the Town has met CDBG public participation requirements through two duly advertised public hearings, conducted April 12th and June 11th. Mr. Thomas Lawson ended with the deadline for submission of the Town's CDBG proposal is June 12, 2024 and funding award announcements are expected in winter 2024.

Mayor Johnson closed the Public Hearing and reconvened the Regular Council Meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 3

INVOCATION by Pastor Kenneth Sturgill of Spirit and Truth Worship Center.

AGENDA ITEM 4

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

AGENDA ITEM 5

ADOPT OR AMEND THE AGENDA

Motion by Bloomer, seconded by Lyke, that the Agenda for the Regular Council Meeting of June 11, 2024 be adopted as presented. Motion resulted as follows:

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

Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: Bailey

AGENDA ITEM 6

COMMENTS FROM CITIZENS

None

AGENDA ITEM 7

GENERAL ORDER OF BUSINESS

- a. Approval of minutes of Council Workshop Meeting of May 7, 2024.
Recommended Action: Approve as presented.**
- b. Approval of minutes of Regular Council Meeting of May 14, 2024.
Recommended Action: Approve as presented.**
- c. Departmental Reports for the month of May 2024.
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: Bloomer, Gilley, Hughes, Johnson, Lyke, McKinney

Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: Bailey

AGENDA ITEM 8

TOWN ENGINEER'S REPORT

Mr. Broskey said there is progress with Greenbelt Phase V. The retaining wall was poured today so that section of the Greenbelt will be closed until construction of the wall is completed. He said the System Wide Water Loss Improvements Phase 1A, 1B & 2 contract has moved to the Shawnee Avenue. He said that regarding the Italy Bottom Project The Lane Group is working with Lenowisco to complete the Preliminary Engineering Report, but a compilation of water and sewer improvement needs for the Italy Bottom area is necessary to complete the report.

AGENDA ITEM 9

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

a. Proclamation – Blood Brothers Tattoo

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve a proclamation welcoming Kenneth Scarberry, owner of Blood Brothers Tattoo located at 307 Shawnee Avenue East in Big Stone Gap.

Motion by Hughes, seconded by Lyke, that Council approve a proclamation welcoming Kenneth Scarberry, owner of Blood Brothers Tattoo located at 307 Shawnee Avenue East in Big Stone Gap. Motion resulted as follows:

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

Nayes: None Abstain: None Absent: Bailey

b. Proclamation – Susan Vape Store

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve a proclamation welcoming Susan Roberts, owner of Susan Vape Store located at 920 East 5th Street South in Big Stone Gap.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Gilley, that Council approve a proclamation welcoming Susan Roberts, owner of Susan Vape Store located at 920 East 5th Street South in Big Stone Gap. Motion resulted as follows:

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

Nayes: None Abstain: None Absent: Bailey

c. Proclamation – Double D Tire

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve a proclamation welcoming Landon Hamilton, the new owner of Double D Tire located at 408 1st Avenue East in Big Stone Gap.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Bloomer, that Council approve a proclamation welcoming Landon Hamilton, the new owner of Double D Tire located at 408 1st Avenue East in Big Stone Gap. Motion resulted as follows:

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

Nayes: None Abstain: None Absent: Bailey

d. Proclamation – Foam Solutions

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve a proclamation welcoming Amy Hubbard, owner of Foam Solutions located at 512 Shawnee Avenue East in Big Stone Gap.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Gilley, that Council approve a proclamation welcoming Amy Hubbard, owner of Foam Solutions located at 512 Shawnee Avenue East in Big Stone Gap. Motion resulted as follows:

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

e. Ordinance 11-2024 – Inoperable Vehicles

Mr. Lawson asked Council to authorize a Joint Public Hearing with the Planning Commission on Tuesday, July 2, 2024 at 6:30 pm to receive public comment on the inoperable vehicle ordinance.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Gilley, that Council authorize a Joint Public Hearing with the Planning Commission on Tuesday, July 2, 2024 at 6:30 pm to receive public comment on the inoperable vehicle ordinance. Motion resulted as follows:

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

f. RESOLUTION 12-2024 – Section 125 Premium Only Plan

Mr. Lawson asked that Council approve Resolution 12-2024 being a resolution adopting the Section 125 Cafeteria Premium Only Plan for the plan year July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Bloomer, that Council approve Resolution 12-2024 being a resolution adopting the Section 125 Cafeteria Premium Only Plan for the plan year July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025. Motion resulted as follows:

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

g. RESOLUTION 13-2024 – Appoint Brian Jones to Planning Commission

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve Resolution 13-2024 being a resolution appointing Brian Jones to the Big Stone Gap Planning Commission to fulfill the remainder of Allan Morris's term which shall expire February 28, 2026.

Motion by Bloomer, seconded by Gilley, that Council approve Resolution 13-2024 being a resolution appointing Brian Jones to the Big Stone Gap Planning Commission to fulfill the remainder of Allan Morris's term which shall expire February 28, 2026. Motion resulted as follows:

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

h. RESOLUTION 14-2024 – Support CDBG Application for Italy Bottom

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve Resolution 14-2024 being a resolution of in support the \$1,750,000 Virginia Community Development Block Grant application for the Italy Bottom Comprehensive Improvements Phase I Project and authorizing the Town Manager to sign and submit any and all documents relevant to this VCDBG proposal.

Motion by Hughes, seconded by Bloomer, that Council approve Resolution 14-2024 being a resolution of in support the \$1,750,000 Virginia Community Development Block Grant application for the Italy Bottom Comprehensive Improvements Phase I Project and authorizing the Town Manager to sign and submit any and all documents relevant to this VCDBG proposal. Motion resulted as follows:

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

i. ORDINANCE 16-2024 – Budget FY 2024-2025

Mr. Lawson said Ordinance 16-2024 – Budget FY 2024-2025 would be voted on during the Committee Reports.

j. Parade Permit – July 4th

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve a parade permit for the 4th of July.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Hughes, that Council approve a parade permit for the July 4th parade to be held on Thursday, July 4, 2024 beginning at 4:00 pm. Motion resulted as follows:

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

k. Tour de Crackers Neck Donation

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve a donation of \$350, the same amount donated for the past two years to the Tour de Crackers Neck bike race.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Gilley, that Council approve a donation of \$350 to the Tour de Crackers Neck bike race. Motion resulted as follows:

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

l. GEM OF VIRGINIA – Marketing Agreement

Mr. Lawson asked Council to renew the annual Marketing Agreement for the Gem of Virginia with Creative Industry Ltd trading as Britalians TV.

Motion by Bloomer, seconded by Hughes, that Council renew the annual Marketing Agreement for the Gem of Virigina with Creative Industry Ltd trading as Britalians TV

Councilman Hughes said he felt hesitant about renewing, and still has a hard time believing the marketing they have done has had the impact their reports show, and how a two-year-old company has a worldwide impact. Councilman Bloomer said he understands where Councilman Hughes is coming from with it just being a two-year-old company but thinks it would be a mistake to drop out after one year, it is a risk but worth it. Ked Meade said the Town of Big Stone Gap was the first Gem of Virginia and he would caution not taking it into consideration after one year. He said the Britalians TV have been working in marketing for several years and branched out on their own. He said he had done some deep diving into their social media presence, and it was impressive with posts that are shared over 900 times, 2,000 likes and the videos are viewed 900 to 1,000 times. He said these are impressive numbers, and there will be directional changes this year with no in person interviews since they have enough footage for another year and to focus more pressure on social media. Ked Meade said the Britalians TV will be working with he and Stephen Lawson on the sister cities to get overseas investors in, put more light on moving phases 3 and 4 to get actual boots on the ground here. Councilman Hughes said he cannot vote for this; he wants it to be successful but has not seen the proof that it will.

Motion resulted as follows:

Ayes: Bloomer, Gilley, Johnson, Lyke, McKinney

Nayes: Hughes Abstain: None Absent: Bailey

m. Projects Update

Mr. Lawson said the Federal Building was on schedule to be totally vacated by Fall 2025 and he is learning what the Town would have to do to obtain the building when available.

Mr. Lawson said the Town Department's budgets were finalized and there was some discussion on the 3% merit raise for the employees.

Mr. Lawson said the outdoor fitness court would start installation on June 24th.

Mr. Lawson said that the Small Town's conference was attended by Ked Meade, Director of Tourism and Mayor Johnson.

Mr. Lawson said he met with Gary Lawson and an electrical contractor on Monday about LED Lights for the football field.

Mr. Lawson said they are still working with the Lee Collier property. He said they were cleaning up where two houses were demoed.

Mr. Lawson said Jenn with Friends of Southwest Virginia was here today and had a pre-designed meeting with Mattern and Craig leading the meeting regarding the ARC money that's running through the Friends of Southwest Virginia. He said there were six different pump track and skate companies that were showing interest in the project. They had seen the site and are in the process of creating designs for the site. He said there will be a preliminary meeting June 24th to discuss those designs.

Mr. Lawson said there were many incidents that had happened in Town recently and he will keep Council informed on what is going on as soon as there is anything to report.

Mr. Lawson said that J. M. Bishop has been moved to investigation while Eddie Phillips has returned to patrol.

Gary Johnson said he feels that Council needs to be informed more because they hear from the public first rather than the Town Manger.

AGENDA ITEM 10

COMMITTEE REPORTS

a. PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMITTEE

Committee Chair Hughes said the Public Utilities Committee met on June 11th to discuss the proposed utility rate increases for the FY 2024-25 budget and made the following recommendation.

The Public Utilities Committee unanimously recommends to Council a water rate increase of 2% for in-town and out-of-town water and a sewer rate increase of \$0.80 cents to the over 1,000 gallons rate for in-town and out-of-town as part of the FY2023-24 budget to be included in the public hearing advertisement for Ordinance 16-2024.

The recommendation by the Public Utilities Committee constitutes a motion and a second.

ROLL CALL VOTE:

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

Nayes: None Abstain: None Absent: Bailey

b. BUDGET/FINANCE/AUDIT COMMITTEE

Committee Chair Bloomer said the Budget/Finance/Audit Committee met on June 11th to review the proposed FY2024-25 Budget and made the following recommendation.

The Budget/Finance/Audit Committee unanimously recommends that Council authorize a Public Hearing on Ordinance 16-2024 on June 17, 2024, at 6:00 pm for the purpose of receiving public comment regarding the proposed FY2024-25 Budget which contains (1) a water rate increase of 2% for in-town and out-of-town water and (2) a sewer rate increase of \$0.80 cents to the over 1,000 gallons rate for in-town and out-of-town.

The recommendation by the Budget/Finance/Audit Committee constitutes a motion and a second.

ROLL CALL VOTE:

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

Nayes: None Abstain: None Absent: Bailey

c. SPECIAL MEETING TO ADOPT ORDINANCE 15-2024

Motion by Hughes, seconded by Gilley, that Council have a Special Meeting Monday, June 24, 2024 at 6 pm to adopt Ordinance 16-2024 for the fiscal year 2024-25 budget. Motion resulted as follows:

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

Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: Bailey

AGENDA ITEM 11**COUNCIL COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION**

Councilman Gilley asked for a reminder for all the upcoming meetings.

Councilman Hughes said thanks to all and especially to the Police Department of late, they have had a lot to deal with and he appreciates their service and all town employees. He said that Ked and the Tourism department were doing great along with Gary and the Parks and Rec crew. He said summer is a busy time, but it is exciting to drive through town and see everyone visiting us, restaurants are filled up, all the parking spaces are filled. He said the Trail of the Lonesome Pine season started this past weekend and that Senator Wampler will be in town Saturday night to see the play.

Mayor Johnson said Councilwoman Bailey was out due to health concerns and asked Council to keep her in their thoughts. He said he enjoyed the Small Town's Conference. He thanked everyone for the job they do.

AGENDA ITEM 12**ADJOURNMENT**

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

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

Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: Bailey

Meeting adjourned at 7:13 pm.

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