

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

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

February 11, 2025

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. Matt Russell, Chief of Police

AGENDA ITEM 2 - INVOCATION by Pastor Jacob Herron of East Stone Gap Methodist Church.

AGENDA ITEM 3 - PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

AGENDA ITEM 4 - ADOPT OR AMEND THE AGENDA

Motion by Hughes, seconded by Gilley, that the Agenda for the Regular Council Meeting of January 14, 2025 be approved as presented. Motion resulted as follows:

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

AGENDA ITEM 5 - COMMENTS FROM CITIZENS

Joe Collier, 213 East 10th Street, North, came regarding the closing of the Visitor Center music events. He brought pictures and testimonials to pass around to Council. He said these events gives local musicians a place to play since the Hanger in Wise closed. He said the events make great memories for bands and the attendees and some people come from 4 hours away which is great for the local economy. He said Ked Meade does a good job promoting the local businesses during the events.

Lori Gilliam, 2324 4th Avenue East, said she has been a Wise County resident all of her life and recently moved back to Big Stone Gap. She said she wants to share support for continuing the events at the Visitor Center because if youth are not involved in sports they are often involved in music. She said the town events draw more visitors, promotes the local restaurants, and people are spending money here. She said Ked Meade and Steve Lawson do good work for this town and should be applauded.

Tracy Holcomb, 1023 Main Avenue West, said she is a resident and business owner of Big Stone Gap. She came because she heard a rumor that the music would be stopping at the Visitor Center. She said she has a business at 309 Wood Avenue, and it is a great location adjacent to the Visitor Center. She said the “Be the Change” move Stephen Lawson had was a turning point in building a community we always dreamed of. She said businesses need to support each other rather than fight among themselves and should be showing support rather than asking for the event to be shut down.

Jonathan Hampton said he lives in Wise but is planning to move to Big Stone Gap. He said he is the owner of the production company organizing the music at the Visitor Center. He said he wanted to build the community and not tear anything down. He said these events promote all local businesses and events in the area. He said the bands and attendees come from all over the place and that Botch Boys Productions has made no money and all funds taken at the door is given to the bands.

Jennifer Jones, owner of Good Times, said she feels the music can play at other businesses. She said she has booked bands from Botch Boys Production and as a business owner we have to pay taxes, wages, other expenses that Botch Boys does not. She said it takes people out of her business not like a block party. She said this is the worst time for businesses and suggested to have it a night that there is no music scene going on at other businesses.

Ron Shortt said he wants to start a song writers circle on Wednesday nights at the Visitor Center. He said he talked to Ked Meade about it and Ked said to come to Council. He said he wanted to get approval before he announced it. He said he sang at the first Rhythm and Roots for no money but has done this all his life. He said he had lived in Big Stone Gap for thirty-seven years and has noticed more change in the last five years than the previous thirty-seven. He said cultural tourism is the future because of growth.

Tracy Jordan joint owner of Curklin’s and Big Cherry Brewery, said there were awesome performances at the Visitor Center, and they advertise all local businesses. She said there are new faces at the events and the local businesses benefit. She said she and Wayne feel these events are pulling people to our area that would not have come otherwise.

Nick Harris, 821 Laurel Avenue, Coeburn, said he was with Botch Boys and with a few of the bands in the area. He said as an artist this is the place for anyone to present their art, and that is really important for the community.

Brandon Maggard, 211 Railroad Avenue, said the events at the Visitor Center are so diverse and a great scene and reminds him of Asheville. He said it was good to see it growing and doesn’t want to see it end. He said the most exciting thing he has seen is his cousin has autism and does not come out much but has a song on Spotify and he came to one of these events.

Tracy Hall, 768 Wood Avenue East, said she speaks from the heart and owns Country Kitchen. She said they usually close at 7 pm on Fridays but has found since the musicians are coming to the Visitor Center they have to stay open to serve. She said they are extending hours and has hired two new employees. She said this has been a positive thing for the Country Kitchen and thanked Stephen Lawson for doing everything he does for the Town. She thanked Ked Meade for always being there for her business.

Nathan Smith said everyone knows me as Buzz. He said at first when he heard about these events it made him nervous and concerned but wants competition to allow choice and growth. He said he lives in Wise and there is nothing in Wise and it is a dying community. He said Big Stone Gap can be a destination point because you draw in more people and different people. He said when you look at the Town bands do not get a venue they get a chance to be recognized and it's amazing. He said everyone is thriving and thinks it is a wonderful thing.

AGENDA ITEM 6 - GENERAL ORDER OF BUSINESS

- a. Approval of minutes of Council Workshop Meeting of January 9, 2025.
Recommended Action: Approve as presented.**
- b. Approval of minutes of Regular Council Meeting of January 14, 2025.
Recommended Action: Approve as presented.**
- c. Departmental Reports for the month of January 2025.
Recommended Action: Received and filed.**

Motion by Bloomer, 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
Nayes: None Abstain: None Absent: None

AGENDA ITEM 7 - TOWN ENGINEER'S REPORT

In absence of Mr. Broskey, Stephen Lawson gave the Town Engineer's Report. Mr. Lawson said there were no new updates and that the weather has slowed down the Italy Bottom Project. He said there would be a Skate Park meeting tomorrow at 3:00 pm to discuss some things and how it will coincide with VDOT's project. He said there was a Big Cherry zoom call with Amler and there were no changes.

AGENDA ITEM 8 - TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

a. Resolution 06-2025 – Appropriate \$700,000 ARC Funds

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve Resolution 06-2025 being a resolution appropriating \$700,000 in ARC Funds for the Big Cherry Regional Recreation Enhanced Infrastructure Project.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Bloomer, that Council approve Resolution 06-2025 being a resolution appropriating \$700,000 in ARC Funds for the Big Cherry Regional Recreation Enhanced Infrastructure Project. Motion resulted as follows:

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

b. Ordinance 17-2024 – Tiny Houses Ordinance

Mr. Lawson asked Council to authorize a Joint Public Hearing to be held on Tuesday, March 4, 2025 at 6:30 pm to receive public comment on the proposed ordinance.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Bloomer, that Council authorize a Joint Public Hearing to be held on Tuesday, March 4, 2025 at 6:30 pm to receive public comment on the proposed ordinance. Motion resulted as follows:

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

c. Parade Permit – Union Little League Opening Day Parade

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve a parade permit for the Union Little League to be held on Saturday, March 22, 2025 at 10 am.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Hughes, that Council approve a parade permit for the Union Little League to be held on March 22, 2025 at 10 am. Motion resulted as follows:

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

d. Resolution 07-2025 – Fair Housing

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve Resolution 07-2025 being a resolution endorsing the concept of Fair Housing.

Motion by Lyke, seconded by Bloomer, that Council approve Resolution 07-2025 being a resolution endorsing the concept of Fair Housing. Motion resulted as follows:

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

e. Union Wrestling Club Donation

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve a donation of \$300 to the Union Wrestling Club to assist with the building of a practice facility.

Motion by Hughes, seconded by Lyke, that Council approve a donation of \$300 to the Union Wrestling Club to assist with the building of a practice facility. Motion resulted as follows:

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

f. Friends of the Museum Donation

Mr. Lawson asked Council to approve a donation of \$400 to the Friends of the Museum for a stage.

Motion by Hughes, seconded by Lyke, that Council approve a donation of \$400 to the Friends of the Museum for a stage. Motion resulted as follows:

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

Nays: None Abstain: None Absent: None

g. Projects Update

Mr. Lawson said we have a room full in attendance and change and growth is like families with different opinions getting together to talk about it and to let your leaders know how you feel. He said we need to keep growing and he is proud of Big Stone Gap. He said we do our best to continue to grow and be great and he meant “Be the Change” when he got here. He said that Council approves the events and other things at the Town but that does not include employees. He said the hiring and firing falls on his shoulders, and he knows he picked the team, and he decides how the team goes when public voices their opinion. He said he takes everything into consideration and is very proud of our team and proud of my Council and Town. He said we will grow together so we have to continue to communicate and to work through the growing pains and he was happy for all the input.

Mr. Lawson said that April 5th was the Chamber Gala “Phantom of the Opera” and that four tickets had been claimed, and the Town has four more available to let him know who wants them.

Mr. Lawson said he and Matthew Bright have a meeting tomorrow with Jed Potter from the Park Service about acquiring the Slemp Federal building.

Mr. Lawson said he met last Friday with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation and Friends of Southwest Virginia about the Big Cherry project regarding their grant that expires in July 2025. He said we have not been able to spend that money because of the hoops we are having to jump through for the Amler funding and it will be extended. He said this money is for the boat dock and pier funds.

Mr. Lawson said that Italy Bottom announcement of the one million dollars does not include the current ongoing water project. He said Adam Harris had called and asked questions about this matter and will meet with anyone else who has questions.

Mr. Lawson said he met with Gary Lawson about the LED lights at Bullitt Park. He said the lights that we had settled on started having problems in other areas, so we went with Musco lighting to do the lights with the Town doing the monitoring. He said the power had been moved lower on the poles so it can be reached from the bucket truck instead of employees climbing poles.

Mr. Lawson said there will be additional items in Council’s department updates and that Ked Meade was the first one to revise his report so that it gives Council events that are coming up. He said if Council had any suggestions for changes like this to let him know.

Mr. Lawson said there is not a limit on the number of alcohol licenses that a town can get but there is a limit for business licenses.

Mr. Lawson said the Chili Cookoff complaint to the Virginia Department of Health has been taken care of and the Town is in compliance.

Mr. Lawson said that Public Works had two employees quit since the Workshop.

Mr. Lawson thanked the Police Department for their investigation into a burglary that recently happened, and they had got those responsible.

Mr. Lawson said he has a meeting tomorrow regarding temporary weather shelters for flood victims with Carnes Gym being the first shelter opened then the schools second, if needed.

Mr. Lawson said Union little League wants to find a site for a batting building. He said they asked about the availability of the property where Gap Golf was formerly located, and they have the funds saved for this building.

AGENDA ITEM 9 - COMMITTEE REPORTS

Councilman Gilley said the Planning Commission meets on March 3, 2025 and the Members will attend the Joint Public Hearing on March 4, 2025.

AGENDA ITEM 10 - COUNCIL COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

Councilman Bloomer said he appreciates the responses and there was no discussion of shutting down the events at the Visitor's Center just changing how it operates. He said he challenges Botch Brothers to get other bands to come to other venues in Big Stone Gap.

Councilman Gilley said thanks to all that came out and Council will discuss how to continue the events at the Visitor Center but may have some changes. He thanked all the Town employees.

Councilman Hughes thanked everyone that came to the meeting to voice their opinions. He said he hopes the business owners know how much they are valued and how much they contribute to our community. He said thanks to Matt and the PD, EMS and all employees.

Councilman McKinney thanked everyone that came out to the meeting. He said thanks to all town employees and commented they do a great job.

Councilwoman Lyke thanked everyone, and she believes in our employees and Council does not go over their heads. She said we do not come in and step on our employees and we do believe and trust our employees to do their job. She asked Botch Brothers to come to Gathering in the Gap. She said she welcomes new entertainment and is proud of our town and that the businesses have made Big Stone Gap thrive. She said she was glad to see everyone coming together. She said thanks to all town employees.

Vice-Mayor Bailey thanked everyone for coming and that Council may look at how things operate at the Visitor Center but that it would be Ked Meade and Stephen Lawson's call. She said thanks to all the employees.

Mayor Johnson thanked everyone, and said he wants to know what the citizens are feeling about topics. He thanked all the town employees for what they do.

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 7:33 pm.

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