

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

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

August 05, 2025

6:30 PM

AGENDA ITEM 1

Call to Order and Roll Call

Mayor Johnson called the August 05, 2025 meeting to order.

Council Present: Hon. Gary Johnson, Mayor
 Hon. Nancy Bailey, Vice-Mayor
 Hon. Robert Bloomer, Councilman *
 Hon. Kent Gilley, Councilman
 Hon. Crystal Lyke, Councilwoman
 Hon. Aaron McKinney, Councilman

*Hon. Robert Bloomer, Councilman arrived at 6:31PM

Council Absent: Hon. Tyler Hughes, Councilman

Staff Present: Mr. Stephen Lawson, Town Manager
 Ms. Amanda Hawkins, Town Clerk/Treasurer
 Mr. Matt Russell, Chief of Police

Staff Absent: Mr. Charles Bledsoe, Town Attorney

AGENDA ITEM 2 - REVIEW OF DRAFT MINUTES

Review of draft of minutes of the Council Workshop of July 01, 2025 and the Regular Council Meeting of July 08, 2025.

AGENDA ITEM 3 – BALLAD HEALTH

Cindy Elkins, Administrator at Lonesome Pine Hospital, came to the meeting to give the following updates on the hospital plans. Stacy Ely, government relations liaison for Ballad was also in attendance.

- The Armory building is down, and the cleanup is complete. It is Ballad's intention to do a memorial for veterans, and all plaques are stored in a secure and safe location.
- Construction for the hospital was advertised for bidding and Quesenberry received the bid and will begin December 2025 and finish in the Spring of 2027. A Fitness Center will be located on the first floor and will be like the Norton Health Plex with a walking track where the Armory stood with hopes to connect the Greenbelt to that.
- Physical Therapy and Sports Medicine will be moving to the Hospital.
- Pain and Spine Rehab facilities will also be at the Hospital.

Council asked questions regarding the new facilities.

Stephen Lawson said Cindy is very accessible to meet with and gave the following updates:

- This is a \$12 million venture.
- Comments were based on what came out in Lee County in relation to Big Beautiful Bill.
- The Hospital is in good standing here, along with Norton and Lee County.
- The Plaque for the Veterans will be kept at Armory location.
- After completion of the new construction the Town will look at connecting the Green Belt through the Southern section and to the hospital.

Cindy concurred with Mr. Lawson stating the Hospital is in good financial standing, but no one can make any guarantees or promises about the future of the hospital. She concluded answering more questions and said that her door was always open. Members of Council thanked her for coming.

AGENDA ITEM 4

TOWN ENGINEER'S REPORT

Mr. Broskey was not present as there were no updates.

AGENDA ITEM 5

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

a. Small Business Development Centers – Helene Business Recovery

Small Business Development Centers at Mountain Empire Community College is applying for a grant from GO Virginia. They are asking all the communities to contribute \$5,000. He said he is asking Council to approve a call to the Small Business Development Center and ask what the grant funds will be spent on then he can get back to Council to see if they want to vote on giving them the \$5,000.

b. Projects Update

Mr. Lawson gave the following updates to Council:

- Had a conversation with Jerry Fraley and Nature Conservancy about the property adjacent to us at Big Cherry still waiting for a new assessment which will be different from the original assessment due to damage from Helene. Will need to wait on the assessed value to determine what needs to be done to purchase the property.
- City of Norton is retiring their Ladder Truck, and it is for sale. We have notified them of our interest in purchasing the truck. A Mutual Aide agreement may allow us to purchase the truck rather than go to bid. He said he had spoken to Ballard about building a 2-bay building to house the truck either at armory parking lot or the parking lot below.
- LED lighting is complete at Bullitt Park. There will be a complete test at 9PM tonight. Adjustments may need to be made but will see what needs to be done after the completed test.
- Wise County and Wise County Schools are looking for funding to go in with the Town to resurface the track at Bullitt Park.
- We had an officer leave full-time employment and is wanting to stay on part-time and are looking for a policy for part-time workers. We have hired his replacement that has all his credentials.
- Mural at the bus station is complete and it looks great.

- Blue Highway Festival preparation is going well. Our biggest concerns is how to display the scoreboard on the stage and securing the stage area for the Thursday night game that is being played at Bullitt Park. Also, for Wednesday night how to block off more of Town for Rhonda Vincent.
- The Cross was out due to lightning in the area; it is fixed now.
- New traffic light boxes will be \$27,000 to replace, still looking for replacements.
- The Town has ordered and purchased an arm cut tractor. The Public Works Crew went to Abingdon to see tractor in operation.
- The Town received a Tourism award, Best Rack Card in Southwest Virginia at the Celebrate Tourism Summit held today in Wytheville.
- The Slingshot event was great with a great response around town. The event raised \$3,018 for Jim Holdway where he lost his home to a fire.
- Saturday, September 20, will be the Leigh Ann Bolinskey Memorial 5K Run/Walk in Big Stone Gap. The event starts at 9 a.m. at the Big Stone Gap Visitor Center and raises money for MEOC's Mountain Laurel Cancer Support and Resource Center, which helps individuals in far Southwest Virginia as they battle cancer.
- Roy Coomer property – His property is near the former Put-Put course needs water. The Town is going to use the line we installed for the former Put-Put Golf location to get Mr. Coomer water to his residence.
- Bullitt Park will get a new 4" line to improve water and control access to the apartment complex and the park itself.
- Councilman Bloomer asked if there was update on the cabin. Stephen Lawson said we were behind on demo due to the weather but will begin demolition and preservation soon and will try to keep as many logs intact as possible.

AGENDA ITEM 6 – COMMITTEE REPORTS

Stephen Lawson reviewed the Planning Commission Report:

- Special Use Permit – Special Use Permits for home occupation is solely the Town Manager's decision. The Town has lawyers, CPA's, Lobbyist' etc. that have businesses in their homes. Mr. Lawson said that Stephen and Wendy Murray with the Pottery Shop are asking to have their business in their home, but they have not given him a specific plan. He said their specialized equipment will have to be approved through Building and Zoning first and when that is approved a decision will be made.
- Temporary signs – change is being made to Zoning and Sign Ordinance to clarify that Political and other temporary signs can be put on Town right of way 14 days prior to the polling date. The change will also address signs on personal property being exempt from any regulations. This does not change the regulations for temporary signs on Business property.
- Parking– there was a request from Planning Commission to reinstate parallel parking along the North side of East 5th Street from Wood Avenue to the corporate limits, Amy Hubbard obtained from the vote. Mr. Lawson said he will look into this but not sure how this would work and VDOT and Lane Engineering would need to be consulted. There was discussion on new traffic patterns and traffic control where the Post Office is moving.
- Italy Bottom Parking – there was a request from the Planning Commission to get more parking and mark the parking spots with paint, this will need to be further evaluated and investigated.

- Camping on public property – This is to deal with the homeless camping on public property and how to legally prevent the camping and removing them from the property. There has been instances of homeless camping near the Greenbelt in Italy Bottom Area and on Business Property equipment.
- RFP – The Planning Commission is working on the Request for Proposals advertisement for the Comprehensive Plan to send to Council.
- ARB Ordinance – Mr. Lawson said he met with the Planning Commission Chair and Vice-Chair to discuss the Ordinance to simplify and streamline the process.

AGENDA ITEM 7 - COUNCIL COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

Councilwoman Bailey spoke with couple that were for the Slingshot event from Ohio and said they were thrilled and would be back again.

Mayor Johnson said he attend the flag presentation with Ked, and the flag was crafted by her husband, and it was great for them to help the community with Holdway fire.

AGENDA ITEM 7 - ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:42PM.

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