

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

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

July 07, 2026

6:30 PM

**AGENDA ITEM 1
Call to Order and Roll Call**

Mayor Johnson called the meeting to order:

Council Present: Hon. Gary Johnson, Mayor
 Hon. Kent Gilley, Vice-Mayor
 Hon. Robert Bloomer, Councilman
 Hon. Adam Harris, Councilman
 Hon. W. Turk Hollinger, Councilman
 Hon. Tyler Hughes, Councilman
 Hon. Crystal Lyke, Councilwoman

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

Planning Commission Present: Ms. Amy Hubbard, Chairwoman
 Mrs. Freda Bishop, Member
 Mr. Shawn Eldridge, Member
 Mr. Kent Gilley, Council Rep.
 Mr. Tyler McFarland, Member
 Mr. John Morrissey, Member
 Mr. Lorenzo Rodriquez, Member
 Mr. Matthew Bright, Administrator

Planning Commission Absent: Mr. Brian Jones, Member
 Mr. Greg Kress, Vice-Chair

Mayor Johnson recessed the Council Workshop Meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 2 – SPECIAL USE PERMIT – Holding Funeral Home Crematorium

Mayor Johnson opened the Public Hearing – Special Use Permit – Holding Funeral Home Crematorium and asked for Public Comment.

AGENDA ITEM 2 – SPECIAL USE PERMIT (Continued):

Brian Hill, 202 Shawnee Avenue East, spoke in opposition to the proposed permit. He stated that the proposed use would be inappropriate for the neighborhood and the surrounding main thoroughfare. Mr. Hill expressed concerns that the project could negatively impact nearby property values, create potential health hazards, and would not be compatible with the character of the downtown area.

Jarod Glass spoke in support of the proposed crematorium expansion. He stated that the project would help meet the needs of the community by allowing families to receive services locally in a more timely manner. He noted that Holding Funeral Home already operates a business in the Town of Big Stone Gap and emphasized that their request is simply to allow the expansion of their services. Mr. Glass stated that the request should be evaluated fairly and consistently, without special treatment, and under the same standards as other permitted uses.

Jennifer Parsons, Pennington Gap, an operator of crematories, also spoke in favor of the proposal. She explained that properly operated crematories do not produce smoke, odors, or other nuisances that are commonly associated with public concerns.

Hope from Powell Valley expressed support for the project, stating that it would benefit both the community and local residents by allowing families to remain close to home during difficult times while receiving trusted care. She also noted that similar facilities operate successfully near restaurants and other commercial businesses without issue.

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

AGENDA ITEM 3 - REVIEW OF DRAFT MINUTES

Review of Draft Minutes of the Council Workshop Meeting of June 02, 2026 and the Regular Council Meeting of June 09, 2026.

AGENDA ITEM 4 - TOWN ENGINEER'S REPORT

No report.

AGENDA ITEM 5 – TOWN MANAGERS REPORT**AGENDA ITEM 5a – FY2023 Audit Report**

Mr. Lawson stated that this item is a Resolution requesting Council's approval of the FY2023 Audit Report, which will be presented at the Council Meeting July 14, 2026.

AGENDA ITEM 5b – Resolution 15-2026 Section 125 Plan

Mr. Lawson stated this is a Resolution 15-2026 adopting the Section 125 Cafeteria Premium Only Plan for the plan year July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027.

AGENDA ITEM 5c – Special Use Permit – Holding Funeral Home Crematorium

Mr. Lawson stated that this item will be a resolution requesting Council's approval of the Special Use Permit for the Holding Funeral Home Crematorium.

AGENDA ITEM 5d - Projects Update

Mr. Lawson gave the following updates:

- The 4th of July Extravaganza was reported that overall attendance was approximately 1,000 lower than the previous year. The gate receipts and the beer garden remained about the same down approximately \$1,060 from last year. The event received positive public feedback.
- The Budget Audit Finance Committee meeting is scheduled for July 09, 2026 at 4PM at Town Hall to discuss the FY23 Audit Report and will be presented to Council next week at the Regular Council Meeting.
- The October 6th and October 13th meetings were discussed, with consideration given to canceling one of the meetings due to the VML Conference and Blue Highway Festival.
- The Virginia Municipal League (VML) 2026 Annual Conference & Mayors Institute, will be held October 10–13 in Norfolk, VA. He asked Council if they were wanting to attend either of the events to let him know.
- Bland High School will host the Historic Marker dedication on August 8th at Carnes Gym, with light refreshments to be served prior to the presentation.
- The Italy Bottom Housing Rehab Project met today with no new updates except they are doing rebids for general contractors.
- The Post Office relocation remains scheduled for July 13th. The General Services Administration (GSA) will be conducting the final walkthrough for the Federal Building during the week of July 20th and then the escrow paperwork can be started to get the Building in the Town's name.
- A flyer was passed around for the Dewey's Back-to-School Shuffle for July 30th at the fairgrounds in Wise.
- Natalie Chapman was introduced as the newest member of the town staff and will assist with finance and audit responsibilities.

AGENDA ITEM 6 – COMMITTEE REPORTS

None

AGENDA ITEM 7 - COUNCIL COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

Councilwoman Lyke stated that Dewey's Shuffle continues to have a tremendous impact on the community. She noted that more than 1,000 backpacks were distributed last year with no residency restrictions, and food trucks will once again be available during the event. She announced that the M7 Event will be held July 10–11. Dental, vision, and medical services will be provided by the Health Wagon beginning at 7:00 a.m., while veterinary services will be available at the Fairgrounds on the same dates. She thanked all Town employees for their hard work during the Fourth of July celebration, acknowledging the many hours required to make the event successful. She shared that, for the first time in ten years, she was unable to attend because she was out of town, but she had received very positive feedback from those who attended.

AGENDA ITEM 7 - COUNCIL COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION (Continued):

Councilman Hughes thanked Town staff and employees for their work in making the Fourth of July celebration a success. He also thanked everyone who attended the meeting and participated in the public hearing, stating that it is always encouraging to see citizens become involved in the local governmental process. He welcomed Natalie to the Town staff and said the Council is excited to have her join the team.

Councilman Hollinger expressed his appreciation to everyone who worked hard throughout the week to prepare for and conduct the Fourth of July festivities. He also thanked those who attended the meeting and shared their opinions during the public hearing. He concluded by thanking Amanda and Steve for their continued dedication and service to the Town.

Councilman Harris welcomed Natalie to the Town staff, stating that he is confident she will do an excellent job and will be a valuable addition in helping address important projects and responsibilities. He thanked everyone who attended the meeting to voice their concerns and assured citizens that their comments and concerns were heard. He also commented that the Juneteenth celebration at Italy Bottom Park was a successful event. He noted that additional electrical service is needed at the park. He shared that the Band Boosters and Band President have requested improvements to the concession entrance gates to create a more welcoming appearance. He mentioned that the sign on the fieldhouse is fading and suggested that, in the future, it could become the site of a mural recognizing local athletes who have achieved success beyond Big Stone Gap. He concluded by thanking Town employees for their work during the Fourth of July celebration and thanked the Chief of Police for issuing his recent public statement, and he hopes that it would help bring peace to the community.

Councilman Bloomer thanked Town employees for all of their hard work before, during, and after the Fourth of July celebration. He also expressed appreciation to the Planning Commission and the citizens who attended the meeting and welcomed Natalie to the Town staff.

Vice Mayor Gilley thanked everyone for attending the meeting and noted the strong public turnout. He expressed his appreciation to all Town employees, recognizing that every department worked long hours in the summer heat to ensure the success of the Fourth of July festivities. He added that the fireworks display was well received and thanked everyone who contributed to the event.

Mayor Johnson welcomed Natalie to the Town staff and thanked all Town crews for their work in making the Fourth of July celebration a success. He stated that everyone does an outstanding job serving the Town. He commented that the sand pit and inflatable slides were especially popular with children during the celebration. He also visited the skate park and, despite the hot weather, was pleased to see many people enjoying the facility by skateboarding and riding bicycles. He further noted that the Little League fields, football field, basketball courts, and pickleball courts were all actively being used, demonstrating the community's continued enjoyment of the Town's recreational amenities.

AGENDA ITEM 9
ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned 6:55 pm.

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