

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

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

December 7, 2021

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 Hawkins, Town Clerk/Treasurer
 Mr. Charles Bledsoe, Town Attorney
 Mr. Steve Hamm, Chief of Police

AGENDA ITEM 2

REVIEW OF MINUTES

Review of draft of minutes of the Regular Council Meeting of November 9, 2021.

AGENDA ITEM 3

TOWN ENGINEER'S REPORT

Greenbelt Phase V

Mr. Broskey was out with emergency appendix surgery. Mr. Lawson gave an update in his absence. Mr. Lawson said the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) sent five comments for the Town to address before they give final approval to move on to the bid phase of the Greenbelt Phase V project.

AGENDA ITEM 4

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

a. Resolution 19-2021 – 2022 National Fitness Campaign

Mr. Lawson said this resolution states the Town will participate in the National Fitness Campaign facility at Bullitt Park. He said we've put this off for a couple of years but we are now able to move forward.

b. Resolution 20-2021 – Reappoint David Gibson to Planning Commission

Mr. Lawson said he has spoken with David Gibson and he is willing to continue to serve on the Planning Commission for another term.

c. Nominations for filling Wendy Dillon’s unexpired term on the Planning Commission

Mr. Lawson said that Ms. Dillon indicated she is no longer able to serve on the Planning Commission due to family circumstances. He asked Council to consider who they might want to appoint to take her place as we need to fill that position as soon as possible.

d. Projects Update**Employee Christmas Events**

Mr. Lawson said the Employee Christmas Lunch will be on December 14th in Carnes Gym and everyone is welcome to attend.

He said we will have a Santa Plate painting event for the Administration staff and Council members who wish to participate at the Visitor Center on December 13th at 6 pm. The event is free and all participants will receive a voucher for a half dozen cookies from the Jasmine Cottage.

Council Events

Mr. Lawson reminded Council that an Organizational Meeting is scheduled for December 16th at 6:30.

He said that a ribbon-cutting ceremony is scheduled for Gigi’s Clothing & More on December 15th at 1:00 pm at Cloverleaf Square, Suite E-2.

Police Department

Mr. Lawson said this is the first formal meeting of Council since the death of Officer Michael Chandler, a Patrolman in our Police Department. He said that, along with dealing with the tragedy and loss of our employee and co-worker, we are also coping with our Police Department suffering a deficit of four police officers. He said we are reaching out to Wise County for assistance while we try to get officers fully trained and on the road, noting that if we get new officers into the Academy in January it will be October before they complete their Academy training followed by field training. He said a closed session will be scheduled for next week’s meeting to discuss Police Department salaries and related subjects. He said we have a couple of 5K runs coming up that will require assistance with traffic control.

ARPA Funds

Mr. Lawson said we have been coordinating with other towns in the area about the use of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. One of the approved uses is premium pay for employees who have worked throughout the pandemic. He said we have discussed paying a certain rate for every hour worked for a 65 week period from 4/01/2020 to 6/30/2021. He said we’ve tried to be as equal and fair as possible for all employees including those who were not here during the entire time. He said our volunteer firemen do not log hours and are paid per call, so their rate will be determined by participation.

Multi-Use Building – Bullitt Park

Mr. Lawson said the plumbing and toilets are installed for both restrooms at the Multi-Use Building at Bullitt Park. Once stalls are up they will move on to the concession area. He said we hope to finish those sections by the start of Little League season. He said we will probably begin

demolition the first of the year on the home team dressing room with the intention of having the space ready for the start of football season next year. Following that, fencing will be the next project in line.

Christmas Parade

Mr. Lawson said the Christmas Parade drew a great crowd. He noted it took both the Parks & Recreation and Public Works Departments to clean up the streets the next morning – a good indication of the number of people in attendance.

Greenbelt-in-Lights

He said the Greenbelt-in-Lights rides have begun with about 400 people going around already. He thanked everyone for their participation in displays. He said the wind has already damaged some displays but they are back in service now.

Bluegrass Festival

Mr. Lawson introduced Larry Roberts and George Roat who were here to discuss a proposed Bluegrass Festival in Big Stone Gap.

George Roat:

Mr. Roat said the bluegrass music group Blue Highway has been looking for the last four to five years to find the right place to hold an annual festival and was very impressed with how Big Stone Gap has not only survived the dwindling coal industry but is thriving without it.

Larry Roberts:

Mr. Roberts said he grew up here and loves Southwest Virginia. He noted this region has a tradition of bluegrass music and Blue Highway is looking for a place to call home. He thinks Big Stone Gap could be that place, and an annual festival could become the biggest bluegrass event nationwide. They are looking at the dates of October 7 & 8, 2022 to kick off the event.

George Roat:

Mr. Roat mentioned that Bullitt Park is a great setting and has a strong infrastructure – the location is centralized but is designed to allow everything to flow. He said they are looking for a moderate size crowd for the first year of the event but expects to see it grow larger each year. He commented this event will help the area to continue its growth from coal to something more.

He said Blue Highway is a traditional bluegrass group but has merged with a more modern Americana style to give their music a new sound grounded in traditional roots.

He said he has had a great response to this idea from bluegrass musicians. He said the desire and response is positive and the timing is good and he is confident they can get a good lineup for a two-day event.

Stephen Lawson:

Mr. Lawson commented that a large number of attendees of bluegrass festivals come in RV's and are big camping/outdoor enthusiasts. He noted that our Greenbelt is ideal for an event of this type. He said several people who attended a meeting at the park earlier today were already several steps ahead with ideas on how to pull this event together. He said Alan Maggard has already worked with Blue Highway previously on an album and everyone is confident that he can handle the sound setup. In regard to marketing, Ked Meade has talked with the High Road Agency and we've contacted Rhythm & Roots and Friends of Southwest Virginia to help get the

word out. He said we have asked Union High School to move the McChesney Band Festival to another weekend so the two events will not conflict. He noted also that UHS's football game is an away game that weekend in 2022.

Mr. Lawson thanked Larry and George for coming tonight to make this presentation and thanked Council members for their participation in organizing and promoting this event – Councilman Bobby Bloomer and Lorenzo Rodriguez said they will have extra bicycles on hand at Iron Works Cycling to rent that weekend, Councilman Kent Gilley has offered to arrange for the lake/river to be stocked with trout prior to the event, and Councilman Tyler Hughes will be playing music in various downtown locations during the weekend. He also mentioned that Town Attorney Charles Bledsoe has agreed to the use of his parking lot during the event.

AGENDA ITEM 5 COMMITTEE REPORTS

No reports.

AGENDA ITEM 6 COUNCIL COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

Councilman McKinney said the Town looks good with all the Christmas decorations and thanked Town employees. He said the festival sounds great.

Councilwoman Lyke said she is excited about the festival and will work to help make it a great experience. She thanked Town employees and agreed the Town looks good. She added the Christmas parade was great.

Councilman Hughes thanked Mr. Roberts and Mr. Roat for their presentation and said he will help in any way he can with the festival. He said the Town looks great and noted that Miners Park is always full. He expressed condolences to the Police Department, adding it's been a trying time for them and the Town. He commented that it's a very humbling experience to attend the funeral of a fallen officer and felt privileged to do so. Larry Roberts commented that he received an email from Tim Stafford of Blue Highway who suggested the festival stage be named for Michael Chandler.

Councilman Gilley thanked Mr. Roberts and Mr. Roat for coming tonight. He agreed the Town looks great and is moving in the right direction.

Councilman Bloomer thanked the visitors for coming and Town employees for a job well done.

Vice-Mayor Bailey said she is excited about the bluegrass festival and complimented the great work done by Town employees during this Christmas season. She thanked Stephen Lawson for all he has done.

Mayor Johnson said the Town suffered a terrible loss with the death of Michael Chandler, adding he will always be remembered. He said the Greenbelt is looking better and better and mentioned that the Greenbelt-in-Lights will do tours for groups – just contact the Visitor Center to schedule that. He said the upcoming Employee Lunch next week is a great time to show support for all the employees do – plus it's great food.

Mr. Lawson said on a final note he and Chief Hamm talked to Michael's family about dedicating a bridge in his honor. Michael's wife, Natasha, said Michael had a love/hate relationship with the Beamantown bridge and thought it would be suitable to do something there – it would evoke a memory and a chuckle every time she crossed it. Mr. Lawson said he has reached out to Michael Hatfield, Wise County Administrator, who is talking with the Virginia

Department of Transportation (VDOT) to see about dedicating that bridge in Michael's honor. He said the Administrative staff is helping to get the paperwork done for that.

Mayor Johnson commented that the new Municipal Complex at the old Wells Fargo Bank building that now houses the Water Department and other offices looks really great. Mr. Lawson said the only complaint he's received is that there are no signs up yet but assured everyone they are in the works.

Mr. Lawson said Vice-Mayor Bailey passed him an application for a Virginia Wildlife Grant in the amount of \$5,000-\$10,000 that has a deadline of December 15, 2021. The grant is to assist in connecting youths between the ages of 5 and 21 to the outdoors thru outdoor activities such as archery, boating, hunting, fishing, recreational shooting including firearms, and wildlife viewing. He asked Council to decide the best kind of activity to promote. He mentioned that the Fire Department sponsored an event not long ago in which they stocked trout at the Jessie Lea RV Park & Campground for an event for disabled kids.

Mr. Hughes mentioned that Union High School's (UHS) art teacher Lisa Davis will be here next week to discuss future art projects by her students for the Town. He said the UHS coaches have suggested a project at Bullitt Park to honor the school's state championships. Mr. Lawson said a small art project may be painting the Town's logo on the inside wall at the new Municipal Complex on Wood Avenue.

AGENDA ITEM 7 ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned 7:24 pm.

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