

**TOWN OF INDEPENDENCE
REGULAR SCHEDULED COUNCIL MEETING
TUESDAY, APRIL 11, 2023
6:00 P.M.
INDEPENDENCE FIRE DEPARTMENT
329 DAVIS STREET; INDEPENDENCE, VA 24348**

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Ronald Sexton, Vice Mayor Jim Meier, Jason Cassell, Buddy Halsey, Mark Miller, Joan Collins, and Kit Marshall.

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT: None.

TOWN STAFF PRESENT: Laura Ratcliffe, Town Manager, Matthew Adams, Interim Police Chief, Kim Farmer, Town Clerk, and Terry Osborne, Utility Director.

CITIZENS & GUESTS: Scott Wickham, Robinson Farmer Cox Associates, Michelle Pridgen, Independence Farmer's Market, Steve Marshall, Mary Meier, Family Resource Center, Kayla Akers, Family Resource Center, Michael Worrell and Jessie Worrell.

CALL TO ORDER:

Mayor Ronald Sexton called the council meeting to order this 11th day of April 2023 and declared that a quorum was present.

Mayor Sexton asked the council for approval of the agenda and consent agenda. **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to approve the agenda and the consent agenda as presented. COUNCILWOMAN JOAN COLLINS seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

Ms. Mary Meier, and Kayla Akers, Family Resource Center, presented to council the services the Family Resource Center offers. Ms. Meier stated that the Independence Police Department is part of their LAP program which has the most partners in the state, which is 6. April is a special month for the center because it is child abuse and sexual awareness month. The Resource Center is funded by 95% grants with the other funds given by communities. The Town of Independence is one of the biggest funders with the ratio.

Scott Wickham, Robinson Farmer Cox Associates, presented the 2021-2022 audit. Mr. Wickham stated the Town was in good shape however Mr. Wickham recommended getting the water and sewer funds self-supporting. **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to accept the 2021-2022 audit as presented. COUNCILWOMAN JOAN COLLINS seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

OLD BUSINESS:

Town Manager, Laura Ratcliffe, presented the council with a chart for miscellaneous service rates for the Town. **COUNCILMAN BUDDY HASLEY made a motion to accept the service rates as presented. VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

Town Manager, Laura Ratcliffe, asked the council to make a selection for the I & I project engineer. **COUNCILMAN BUDDY HALSEY made a motion to hire Lane Engineering for this project. COUNCILMAN MARK MILLER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

Wade Ward Mural Refresh- EDA will look to see if they can help with this project.

Golf Carts in Town-Town Attorney Roger Brooks stated that the statue allows for golf carts in a 25mph zone. The council would need to decide what part of time this would apply too and who would implement this.

NEW BUSINESS:

Update EDA Membership-Mayor Sexton

-Steve Marshall is willing to take Mayor Ronald Sextons place on the EDA board. Councilman Jason Cassell asked Lance Hart to replace Reid Walters. **COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion to appoint Steve Marshall and Lance Hart to the EDA board as presented. COUNCILMAN BUDDY HALSEY seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

Keep Virginia Beautiful Grant-Councilwoman Kit Marshall stated that there is a grant opportunity for the Town to apply for. This grant is for \$750 which could go toward planting in the Tractor Garden. Paddleyaxs is doing a raffle for a kayak to raise money for the garden as well. **COUNCILMAN BUDDY HALSEY made a motion for the Town to apply for the \$750 grant with Keep Virginia Beautiful. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

TOWN STAFF REPORT:

MONTHLY FINANCES were presented in the amount of \$103,699.58. Town Clerk Kim Farmer stated that the payables were up this month due to the VRA payment along with the audit. Town Manager Laura Ratcliffe stated that she continues to cut the VCWA bill until some issues are worked out with the Authority. **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to approve the finances in the amount of \$103,699.58. COUNCILWOMAN KIT MARSHALL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

POLICE REPORT-Interim Police Chief Matthew Adams stated the police report was included in council packets. Interim Police Chief Adams stated that National Drug Take Back is from 9am to 1pm on April 22nd. The Police Department helped DSS with child abuse month. The new Ford Explorer is currently broken down. The department only has one vehicle with a cage in it.

UTILITY REPORT-Utility Supervisor, Terry Osborne, stated that his report was in council packets. Supervisor Osborne stated that public works put a new meter head on at the school and ordered one to put in at RPM.

SPECIAL EVENTS-Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that Special Events Coordinator, Mary Ann Halsey, is working on the Spring Bash event which will be on June 3rd. There will be a bank from 11 to 3. Town Manager Ratcliffe is working on the fireworks.

MANAGERS REPORT:

The Town Office had to be relocated due to the water issues. They are at the Police Department/Public Works Building for approximately 2 to 3 months.

1) Personnel Updates:

- a. Interviews are on-going for the Chief of Police position. Shane Allen tendered his resignation from the Public Works department. His last day with the Town is April 6th. Utility Supervisor Osborne will be out on extended leave.

2) Town Office Hours:

- a. The new hours are 9 to 4 to give employees time to catch up. Hours may change in the future.

3) Request for Proposal Lawn Care and Janitorial Services:

- a. Put out RFPs for lawn mowing and janitorial services. The bids are due May 3rd with services going into effect June 1, 2023, to June 30th, 2024.

4) ARPA Funding:

- a. The Town needs to choose how they are going to expend the funds. Town Manager Ratcliffe suggested electing the revenue loss option using the standard allowance of up to \$10m in aggregate, not to exceed our award amount.

5) Town Park:

- a. Last month Town Manager Ratcliffe and Michelle Pridgen did a walk through with Hurt & Proffitt at the Park. Hope that plumbing can be done in the future. The Town Park Committee recommends the council to approve putting up a split rail fence. The estimated cost is \$5,000. **COUNCILWOMAN JOAN COLLINS made a motion to approve \$5,000 for the purchase of supplies for the split rail fence. COUNCILMAN MARK MILLER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.** Town Manager Ratcliffe moved \$33,000 from G & A capital to Community Development to cover this.

6) Penn Court:

- a. The grant with Rural Development has been closed on. The project is expected to take around two months to finish. The estimated cost of the project is \$401,337. The Tow will be responsible for \$76,337. Town Manager Ratcliffe is looking into other funding agencies to help cover the cost.

7) Sewer I & I project:

- a. Councilman Buddy Halsey will report on regarding selection of the project manager. Mayor Sexton went to tour the wastewater treatment plant.

8) DEQ Non-Competitive Litter Prevention and Recycling Grant:

- a. Councilwoman Joan Collins will report on how the Town will expend these funds.

9) ARPA Law Enforcement Equipment and Technology Grant Program:

- a. This grant is for \$10,000 which can be used toward bullet proof vest and rifles for the vehicles.

10) VCWA:

- a. Town Manager Ratcliffe was on a conference call with the Sparta Town Manager, the attorney who drafted the original contract and the engineering firm to discuss certain details of the original contract. This will be discussed in closed session.

11) 2023-24 Budget:

- a. The draft budget is ready for review at the first budget meeting on April 6th.

12) Property & Casualty Insurance Renewal:

- a. The renewal information has been submitted to the VRSA for our upcoming July 1st renewal. The renewal information was updated to increase the property values for multiple locations based on the current replacement cost.

13) Solid Waste:

- a. Town Manager Ratcliffe and Solid Waste Chairman Mark Miller attended a meeting with the County Administration regarding the current solid waste contract. The Town will bill for the prior two years garbage pickup next month. Additional discussion is needed regarding this topic.

14) DMV Audit:

- a. The audit was successful with no noted issues. Our office is one of the two busiest offices in the State (there are 60).

15) County/Town Meet & Greet with the Public:

- a. This event is tentatively scheduled for May 26th 4-6pm at the Independence Fire Hall.

MAYORS REPORT:

Mayor Sexton stated he received notification from Comcast that they are changing some of the TV channels.

TOWN ATTORNEY:

Town Attorney Roger Brooks stated he did not have any matters for open session.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Vice Mayor Jim Meier stated that the Budget/Finance Committee is working on the budget.

Councilman Jason Cassell, Personnel Committee, already reported by Town Manager.

Councilman Buddy Halsey, Water Committee, nothing to report on in open session.

Councilman Buddy Halsey, Sewer Committee, nothing to report on in open session.

Councilwoman Joan Collins, Beautification, the committee is putting dirt in the barrels. Councilwoman Kit Marshall suggested moving some of the barrels to make it easier to water and take care of.

Councilwoman Joan Collins, Town Park committee, already reported on.

Councilwoman Joan Collins, Traffic and Safety, a crosswalk needs to be put up for people turning right on 21. Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that the Police Department has been issuing tickets for wrong way parking.

Councilman Mark Miller, Street and Sidewalks, waiting on VDOT. The tree in the way of the sidewalk at Dr. Miniclier's office has been taken down. The sidewalk will be replaced there.

Councilman Mark Miller, Solid Waste, 18 months left in the contract with the County. Some issues need to be worked through.

Councilman Buddy Halsey, Broadband, nothing to report in open session.

Committee Matters:

Michelle Pridgen, Independence Farmer's Market, thanked Laura, Joan and Terry for getting things back in progress at the market. Ms. Pridgen thanked council for trying to get a temporary permit to open the market this Spring. Virginia Farmer's Market has an emergency plan. The plan will be discussed at the pre session vendor meeting Friday. Utility Supervisor Osborne will get the two washing stations for the market to use.

COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion for Council to go into closed session citing VAFOIA Section 2.2-3711, to discuss personnel and contract negotiation asking the Town Attorney Roger Brooks and Town Manager Laura Ratcliffe to stay. COUNCILMAN MARK MILLER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.

Councilman Jason Cassell made a motion for Council to go into open session citing VAFOIA Section 2.2-3712 that only matters in closed session were convened for and permitted under was discussed. Mayor Sexton asked for a roll call vote:

**Jim Meier-I So Certify
Jason Cassell-I So Certify
Joan Collins-I So Certify**

**Buddy Halsey-I So Certify
Mark Miller-I So Certify
Kit Marshall-I So Certify**

VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to pay Shane Allen accrued vacation plus worked hours/sick time (16hours) during notice period of 03/27/2023 to 04/06/2023 but to not pay sick accrued time because Shane did not work a full schedule during the notice period. COUNCILWOMAN KIT MARSHALL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.

No other business, Mayor Sexton adjourned the meeting.