



**TOWN OF INDEPENDENCE
REGULAR SCHEDULED COUNCIL MEETING
TUESDAY JUNE 13, 2023
INDEPENDENCE, VIRGINIA
6:00 PM
INDEPENDENCE VOLUNTEER 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, Roger Brooks, Town Attorney, Matthew Adams, Police Chief, Kim Farmer, Town Clerk, Terry Osborne, Utility Director, and Mary Ann Halsey, Special Events Coordinator.

CITIZENS & GUESTS: John Fant, Grayson County Supervisor.

- Public Hearings
 - None
- Call to Order
 - Welcome/Decorum-Mayor Sexton called the meeting to order this 13th day of June 2023, and declared a quorum present.
 - Approval of Agenda, Consent Agenda, Meeting Minutes-Mayor Sexton asked for approval as presented. Town Clerk Kim Farmer stated that there was an error with the previous minutes. Councilwoman Kit Marshall was inadvertently left off and closed session motions were left off. New minutes were given. **COUNCILMAN BUDDY HALSEY made a motion to approve the minutes with the amendments. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
- Reports, Presentations or Requests
 - John Fant, Grayson County Board of Supervisor, gave council an update of what Grayson County is doing. Mr. Fant stated that there was no tax levy increase for Grayson County residents. Mr. Fant stated that first the County is trying to figure out how to get more first responders involved. The average age of the responders is 60. One incentive the County is looking at is to give them two vehicle decals, and free trash pickup. Secondly, the County is progressing with the broadband project. US Cellular turned in a bid. The County is hoping to negotiate a contract in July with the project starting in August. Third is tourism. Grayson County Park employees Keith Weatherman and Dylan Morris are doing a fantastic job. The park along with the tourism department are working well together. On July 3rd there will be a concert at the park along with several new activities. Councilman Jason Cassell asked about the upgrade of lines for the Gigibeam project. Mr. Fant stated that they are making progress. Currently they are installing in Elk Creek, and Comers Rock. They are testing in Troutdale. They are struggling with the right of ways. Currently 270 customers have signed up within 18 months' time. Vice Mayor Jim Meier stated that in

future budgeting process if the Town can do anything working hand in hand with the County just to let council know. Vice Mayor Meier stated that it would be good to build synergy together.

- Town Beautification-Councilwoman Marshall
 - Councilwoman Marshall stated that she would like to have seating at the park and around Town. Town Manager Ratcliffe met with the owners of DUX who make residential and commercial benches and rockers in Grayson County. Councilwoman Marshall presented a power point of the memorial bench and rocker program. The goal is to have 15-20 benches within 3 years. If the Town is committed, DUX will have them done by July 4th. Town Manager Ratcliffe recommended using funds for the upcoming 23-24 budget to do 2 in memory of Jeff Miller to put in front of the 1908 Courthouse. Kelly Poe with Skyline National Bank stated the bank would be willing to do 2. Councilwoman Joan Collins stated that they can also make planters. The ones that the Town currently has are going away. **COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion to go forward with the Memorial Bench and Rocker Program as presented. COUNCILMAN MARK MILLER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
- Old Business
 - Motion to approve proposed 2023-2024 budget. A public hearing was held last week with no public comment. **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to approve the 2023-2024 budget as presented. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.** Mayor Ronald Sexton asked for a roll call vote. **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER, COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL, COUNCILMAN BUDDY HALSEY, COUNCILMAN MARK MILLER, COUNCILWOMAN JOAN COLLINS, and COUNCILWOMAN all certified approval of the 2023-2024 budget as presented.** Councilman Jason Cassell thanked Vice Mayor Meier and Town Manager Ratcliffe for all of their work on the budget.
- New Business
 - Motion to declare two police vehicle light bars as surplus and sell on Gov Deals.
 - Mayor Sexton stated that Chief Adams had surplus of two light bars that were not being used and asked for councils' approval for selling them. **COUNCILMAN BUDDY HALSEY made a motion to authorize Chief Adams to sell the surplus light bars on Gov-Deals. COUNCILMAN MARK MILLER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
 - Motion to approve Town Manager to take steps necessary to create new accounts, if necessary, for competitively price certificates of deposit.
 - Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that the Town cashed out the Town's CDs. Town Manager Ratcliffe asked for the council's approval to look into investing the money upon Town Attorney Roger Brooks clarification. **COUNCILWOMAN JOAN COLLINS made a motion to authorize Town Manager Ratcliffe to look into investing the money from the CDs. COUNCILMAN JASON CALLS and COUNCILWOMAN KIT MARSHALL both seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
- Town Staff Report
 - Town Clerk/Treasurer (Kim Farmer)
 - Bills & Payroll-Monthly payables were presented in the amount of \$97,620.39. Vice Mayor Meier stated that the bill from Core & Main seemed to be higher. Utility Supervisor Terry Osborne stated that some of the extra expense was due to the Penn Court water line replacement project. **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to approve payables in the amount of \$97,620.39. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
 - Police Report (Chief Matthew Adams)
 - Chief Adams stated he challenged all officers to have their in-service completed by the end of the fiscal year. All were completed by May. Chief Adams stated he was currently working with Mary Ann on the July 4th parade and Town Manager Ratcliffe with the fireworks. Chief Adams stated that his son, Cooper Adams, is working on the Christmas in July event that will be held on June 15th. The Grayson County Sheriff's office asked that the Independence Police Department

participate with them in a camp on July 17th through July 19th. The department got felony charges this month due to vehicle damage at Mi Casa Restaurant.

- Utility Directors Report- (Terry Osborne)
 - The water unaccountability went from 38% to 25%. Testing is being done at the Virginia Carolina Water Plant. Eighty tests, which take 8 hours a piece, have to be completed by August 12th. The river has to be muddy to complete 20 of the 80 tests. Utility Supervisor Osborne has to be involved with 40 of them.
 - 811 system is very time consuming. Public works have had to locate 6 places since the first of the month. Vice Mayor Meier asked who was making the request. Supervisor Osborne stated that AEP, and Comcast.
 - Penn Court Project is coming along well. The subcontractor is really good. They got the major line put in, tested yesterday, and flushed today. They hope to have completed within 3 to 4 weeks.
 - WWTP had trouble with one of the pumps. The dump truck that hauls the sludge had to get worked on. Advantage in Sparta stated that the problem was the tires. New tires were put on and it's running well. The plant wasted 112,000 gallons. No violations or overflow.
 - Public Works done 5 or 6 water leaks on 21 North.
 - Councilman Mark Miller asked about getting the tree moved on 21. The council asked Town Manager Ratcliffe to check with the lawn mower contractor to get a price and if reasonable get it done.
 - Vice Mayor Jim Meier asked if there were more cutoffs. Supervisor Osborne stated there was 74.
- Special Events Report- (Mary Ann Halsey)
 - The Spring Bash on June 3rd was successful. There were 55 participants with Eddie and Darlene Hensdell receiving the People's Choice Award.
 - Sixteen vendors are signed up so far to be here on July 4th.
 - The Grand Marshall is James Wagoner. Councilman Jason Cassell stated that Grayson County Parks and Recreation is having a free concert on July 3rd. This will be a nice event to go along with the 4th of July. The horses for the parade will be at the lot across from the library.
- Town Manager's Report
 - Programs, Projects, and Updates
 - 2022 Audit Recommendation Response. Response is included in packets. Several new processes will be put in place.
 - 2023 Audit- Pre-Audit work has been started.
 - 4th of July Parade and Fireworks-Fireworks will be at the Elementary School this year. Chief Adams delivered letters to residents that will be affected.
 - Lawn Care and Janitorial Services-received positive feedback from both residents and town employees.
 - Businessowners Meeting-Meetings will start in August.
 - Planning Commission-Rezoning request received met with Chairman Tim Cooper to move forward with the request.
 - EDA-new members Steve Marshall and Lance Hart got sworn in. The group will meet within the next couple of weeks.
 - Town Hall-The office will be closed the week of July 24th and reopen on July 31st. The project is coming under budget.
 - Penn Court-Utility Supervisor Osborne gave the council an update.
 - Sewer I & I-Project documents received from the Lane Group. Hopefully have these executed within the next two weeks.
 - ARPA Law Enforcement Equipment and Technology Grant Grant-The Town was awarded \$10,000.
 - Personnel Handbook-Town Manager Ratcliffe is currently working on a new handbook along with new job descriptions.

- VCWA-RFP was not successful in identifying a plant manager/operator. The Town of Sparta Manager and Town Manager Ratcliffe have discussed alternative staffing plans that will be discussed with the Authority.
 - Sewer Plant Roof-Town Manager Ratcliffe is getting quotes on the roof repair.
 - Business Licenses-Town Manager Ratcliffe is going to do a business licenses audit this fall.
 - Solid Waste Billing for Apartment Units Subject to the Commercial Code-The 2022 and 2023 billing will be issued by the Town to the owners of these units the week of June 12th.
 - Reminders:
 - Historic 1908 picnic will be on June 21st.
 - Christmas in July-Making Grayson Glow is having its first ever Festival July 25th at the 1908 Courthouse.
 - Take a Break from the Interstate- Is July 28th through July 31st.
 - Art & Ag Tour-September 9th and 10th will be all throughout Grayson County. The Town is a sponsor this year.
 - Councilman Buddy Halsey asked if the streets would be cleaned before the 4th. Town employees will check on this.
 - Mr. John Fant stated that Grayson County is running a bus for the Art & Ag Tour in hopes of getting more people involved.
- Mayor's Report
 - Mayor Sexton stated that himself along with Town Manager Ratcliffe and Vice Mayor Meier are going to start meeting quarterly.
- Town Attorney's Report-Nothing for open session.
- Committee Updates
 - Town Park Special Committee – Councilwoman Collins-Split rail fence will hopefully be put up soon. Waiting on Hurt & Proffitt to get updated design work done.
 - Personnel Committee – Councilman Cassell-Nothing for open session.
 - Finance Committee – Councilman Meier-Asked council to think about how they would like to see things graphically. What trends they would like to see and let him know.
 - Sewer Committee – Councilman Halsey-Introduction to Microsoft office this will help to enhance reporting.
 - Water Committee - Councilman Halsey-Need to keep a close eye on VCWA to make sure everything is running smoothly.
 - Beautification Committee – Councilwoman Collins and Councilwoman Marshall are tag teaming to water plants. Exploring other communities to see what they have. Get prices and come up with a plan.
 - Traffic & Safety Committee – Councilwoman Collins-Waiting on VDOT.
 - Streets, Sidewalks, and Lights Committee – Councilman Miller-Contractors are grinding down the high places in the sidewalks. The lawn mower contractor is not edging properly. This needs to be addressed.
 - Solid Waste Committee – Councilman Miller-Met with Jonathan Luper yesterday to get a feeling out of what the future holds.
 - Broadband Special Committee – Councilman Halsey-stated he did not have any news beside what information Vice Mayor Jim Meier gave after he attended the conference.
- Informational Items
- Community Matters – Registered Speakers and Public Comment-
 - None
- Closed Session
 - Personnel
 - Litigation
 - Contract Negotiation
 - Economic Development

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, Town Manager Laura Ratcliffe, Town Clerk Kim Farmer, Chief of Police Adams and Utility Director Terry Osborne 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
Buddy Halsey-I So Certify
Joan Collins-I So Certify**

**Jason Cassell-I So Certify
Mark Miller-I So Certify
Kit Marshall-I So Certify**

COUNCILMAN BUDDY HALSEY made motion to approve police officer pay scale presented of 19.11 (certified)/18.11 (non-certified) to 27.54 with 22.93 being the mid-point. COUNCILWOMAN Joan seconded; motion carried with all ayes.

No other business, Mayor Sexton adjourned the meeting.

- Adjourn

-Meeting Decorum-

All official meetings are to be observed by the following decorum:

- Behavior during all official meetings shall be consistent with the behavior exercised in any court or legislative room found within the Commonwealth of Virginia; and,
- There shall be no outbursts, heckling or other forms of disrespectful behavior by any individuals present within these chambers; and,
- Persons wishing to speak shall do so respectfully and in accordance with the applicable Rules of Procedures and/or at the specific direction of the presiding official; and,
- Out of respect for the official business being conducted, for those conducting the official business and for those present for same purpose, there shall be no private conversations taking place in the audience or other forms of distractive behavior or nuisance; and
- Please turn off cell phones and other such devices before entering the meeting room.