



**AGENDA**  
**TOWN COUNCIL/PLANNING COMMISSION**  
**TUESDAY FEBRUARY 13, 2024**  
**INDEPENDENCE, VIRGINIA**  
**6:00 PM**  
**INDEPENDENCE VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT**  
**329 DAVIS STREET, INDEPENDENCE, VA 24346**

- Call to Order
  - Welcome/Decorum
  - Approval of Agenda, Consent Agenda, Meeting Minutes
- Reports, Presentations or Requests
  - Sudandra Ratnasamy, CEO Twin County Regional Health
    - Topic TCRH Physician Services in Independence
  - Scott Wickam, Robinson, Farmer & Cox
    - 2023 Audit Presentation
  - Ronald Sexton, Independence Rescue Squad Annual Presentation
  - Steve Marshall, EDA Update – 2024 Grant Program
- Old Business
  - Town Events Special Committee Update & Recommendation – See Town Manager Report for Details - Councilwoman Collins
  - Virginia Outdoor Foundation Grant – Motion to authorize Town Manager to execute required grant documents. – Councilwoman Kit Marshall
  - VRA Bond/Rural Development Parity Agreement – Motion to approve parity for Sewer I & I project Funding and for Mayor or Vice Mayor or Town Manager to execute agreement. – Councilman Jim Meier
- New Business
  - 2024 Rural Development Grant for New Police Vehicle – Motion to pass Resolution to accept grant funding for new outfitted vehicle and to allow the Town Manager to execute all necessary documents – Chief Adams
  - Town Council Meeting Remote Attendance – Mayor Sexton
  - Code of Ethics – Mayor Sexton
  - Prior years Utility Uncollectible Payments and Penalties Write off – Recommendation from Infrastructure Committee: Motion to approve writing off all uncollectible amounts incurred by the Town from 2014 and before for customers in a balance or inactive status. See Town Manager Report for Details– Councilman Jason Cassell
  - Lead Service Line Survey Questionnaire to Customers – Recommendation from Infrastructure Committee: Motion to approve a \$25 utility bill credit to all customers who return completed survey by due date (tbd) – Councilman Jason Cassell

- Town Staff Report
  - Town Clerk/Treasurer
    - Update on Credit/Debit Card Fees and Service Charge Fee
    - Update on Status of Online Bill Pay, Auto Draft and Email Utility Bills
  - Police Report
    - New Report Format and Report Trending
  - Utility Directors Report
  - Special Events Report
- Town Manager’s Report
  - Programs, Projects and Updates
- Mayor’s Report
- Town Attorney’s Report
- Committee Updates
  - Personnel Committee – Councilman Cassell
  - Finance Committee – Councilman Meier
  - Infrastructure – Councilman Cassell
  - Community Development Committee - Councilwoman Marshall
- Informational Items
- Community Matters – Registered Speakers and Public Comment
  - Michelle Pridgen – Independence Farmer’s Market
- Closed Session
  - Personnel
    - Jason Cassell - Town Manager Annual Review Process
  - Litigation
  - Contract Negotiation
  - Economic Development
    - Steve Marshall – Tourism Zone Program
- Adjourn

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**-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.



**TOWN OF INDEPENDENCE  
TOWN COUNCIL**

**Public Hearing to take public comments on amending the water and sewer code  
language**

**JANUARY 9, 2024**

**6:00pm**

**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, and Joan Collins.

**COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:** Kit Marshall.

**TOWN STAFF PRESENT:** Laura Ratcliffe, Town Manager, Roger Brooks, Town Attorney, Kim Farmer, Town Clerk, Matthew Adams, Police Chief, Terry Osborne, Project Manager, and Mary Ann Halsey, Special Events Coordinator.

**CITIZENS & GUESTS:** Shaina Stockton, Makayla Miller, Crystal Cureton, Jason Cureton, Jr., Jimmy Osborne, Jennifer Snow, and Gary Hash.

Mayor Sexton opened the public hearing to order this 9<sup>th</sup> day of January 2024. Mayor Sexton stated the public hearing was to take public comments on amending the water and sewer code language.

Town Manager Laura Ratcliffe stated that the current Independence Town Code has water rates from the 1990's. Town Manager Ratcliffe recommended the council to change the language so council could update the rates as necessary when prices increase over time.

Mayor Sexton pointed out that the Town was not to make money but to just break even.

Crystal Cureton, Powerhouse Road, asked if the new rates would affect current customers? Town Manager Ratcliffe stated the new rates would just apply to new service connections.

With no other public comments, Mayor Sexton closed the Public Hearing.





**TOWN OF INDEPENDENCE  
TOWN COUNCIL  
Public Hearing to take public comments on Town Events  
JANUARY 9, 2024  
6:00pm  
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, and Joan Collins.

**COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:** Kit Marshall.

**TOWN STAFF PRESENT:** Laura Ratcliffe, Town Manager, Roger Brooks, Town Attorney, Kim Farmer, Town Clerk, Matthew Adams, Police Chief, Terry Osborne, Project Manager, and Mary Ann Halsey, Special Events Coordinator.

**CITIZENS & GUESTS:** Shaina Stockton, Makayla Miller, Crystal Cureton, Jason Cureton, Jr., Jimmy Osborne, Jennifer Snow, and Gary Hash.

Mayor Sexton opened the public hearing to order this 9<sup>th</sup> day of January 2024. Mayor Sexton stated the public hearing was to take public comments on Town Events.

Jimmy Osborne, Grayson Parkway Independence Virginia, stated that he was not in the Town but lived in Grayson County. Mr. Osborne had concerns about the Mountain Fall Foliage. Mr. Osborne stated that the event was supposed to be family orientated. At the festival this year he saw people on the 1908 Courthouse lawn with alcohol which he thought was unacceptable. Mr. Osborne stated that if people want to party, go somewhere else, not at a family event. Mr. Osborne stated that it was a disgrace to him to have alcohol at Town events and if this continued, he or his family would not be attending any more events.

Jennifer Snow, Town Business Owner, stated that she was for the Town Events. It is a good time for the community to come together. Ms. Snow asked the council to get with other Towns such as Town of Sparta and Town of Hillsville. Both have excellent events and good turnout. The Town maybe the Town could get the information regarding the events out better and have volunteers to help.

Crystal Cureton, Powerhouse Road, stated that she was very displeased with where the 4<sup>th</sup> of July fireworks were set off. She lives right next to Independence Elementary School where they were set off. She stated communication for the Town is very low. Ms. Cureton recommended more marketing for the events, and she was willing to help with this and anything else she could to make the events better.

Mayor Sexton stated that he has been here since the start of the Mountain Fall Foliage Event (privy race). Mayor Sexton stated that in order for the Town to keep the event there needs to be more volunteers and to have at least 8 privy racers. This past year there were no participants for the pie contest. At the event there used to be a potty princess contest. Due to lack of participation this was done away with. The Town pays employees overtime to help at the events.

Jennifer Snow recommended council to contact organizations such as Churches, Boy/Girl Scout troops, River North Correctional Center to see if they might help.

Mayor Sexton stated that the council is here to get input from the community for the last year. Town Manager Ratcliffe holds a meeting for the community and businesses. Only a few attendees with 3 or 4 people attending regularly.

Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that Grayson County Parks and Recreation Department would like to help the Town with the 4<sup>th</sup> of July events.

With no other public comments, Mayor Sexton closed the Public Hearing.



**TOWN OF INDEPENDENCE  
REGULAR SCHEDULED COUNCIL MEETING  
TUESDAY JANUARY 9, 2024  
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, and Joan Collins.

**COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:** Kit Marshall.

**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:** Shaina Stockton, The Declaration, Makayla Miller, Crystal Cureton, Jason Cureton, Jr., Jennifer Snow, Jimmy Osborne, and Gary Hash.

- Public Hearings
  - Public Hearing for Town Code (water/sewer rates) and Town Events/Festivals. (minutes attached)
- Call to Order
  - Welcome/Decorum-Mayor Sexton called the meeting to order this 9<sup>th</sup> day of January 2024, and declared a quorum present.
  - Approval of Agenda, Consent Agenda, Meeting Minutes-Mayor Sexton asked for approval as presented. **COUNCILMAN BUDDY HALSEY made a motion to approve the agenda, consent agenda, and minutes as presented. COUNCILMAN MARK MILLER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
- Reports, Presentations or Requests
  - Gary Hash, Independence Volunteer Fire Department Chief, presented the council with a list of officers for the Fire Department. Chief Hash stated that per the bylaws of the department council is required to approve the officers. Chief-Gary Hash, Assistant Chief, Brad Nester, Captain, Justin Wooten, 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant, Mike Dunford, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, Justin Cook, 3<sup>rd</sup> Lieutenant John Zukoski, President/Treasurer, Roger Hash, Secretary/PIO, Jason Harris, Chaplin, Roger Hash, Joe Reeves, and Matthew Adams. Chief Hash stated that the department had 103 calls and had 28 active members for 2023. In 2023 the department achieved a lot along with the Town's help. They were able to pay for the building and a truck. They purchased a new fire truck for \$410,000 and only owe \$221,000. The fundraisers have done well. The major goal for 2024 is to update/replace extrication equipment which the rescue squad gave them several years ago and is outdated. Mayor Ronald Sexton asked the council for a motion for the 2024 Independence Volunteer Fire Department officers. **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to accept the officers for the IVFD as presented. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.** Vice Mayor Jim Meier asked if the department was having any problem with getting volunteers? Chief Hash stated not as much as other agencies. They just had seven individuals

to complete fire training and a couple more ready to start. The cost to furnish one member is 5k to 7k which includes the turnout gear, radios, etc. The department would only be able to accommodate around 35 volunteers.

- Old Business

- Police Department Roof-Capital Request- (Town Manager Ratcliffe):

- The estimated cost for the roof repair at the Police Department is \$33,000. The council agreed to use the CAP-X money from the pole barn at the public works shop to be used to fixing the roofs. The amount left after repairing the roof at the well houses and public works shop is approximately \$22,000. The other options are to do 1) cover the existing EPDM and cut/patch alongside the eaves and up the walls \$24,000 2) TPO and spray adhesive on the eaves with termination bar going up the walls \$ 19,600. Both of these options would not be warranted and are suggested to last 5-7 years. Councilman Mark Miller asked what the life of the new roof was? Town Manager Ratcliffe stated 15 years. Councilman Jason Cassell stated that you have to maintain your property. If you have a problem, it needs to be fixed. Council asked Utility Director Terry Osborne and Police Chief Matthew Adams to check on the building to see if upstairs was leaking with the heavy rain we are having. Town Manager Ratcliffe will look at the CAP X accounts and see what amount is actually left over that can be used toward the roof.

- New Business

- Approval 2024 Fire Department Officers: (Town Manager Ratcliffe):

- Approved as presented by council.

- Adopt Ordinance Changing Water and Sewer Connection Fees: (Town Manager Ratcliffe):

- Changing section 51.02 application for connection; construction of service pipe to read fee as set forth by Town Council from time to time. Town Attorney Roger Brooks stated this language would simplify council to adjust the rates at budget time. **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to adopt the new water/sewer ordinance as presented. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

- Adoption of Water/Sewer Connection Fees: (Town Manager Ratcliffe):

- Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that commercial/industrial business would vary depending on what materials are needed for that specific business. As of today \$1,125, for materials, \$360 for 6 hours labor, and \$490 for 6 equipment for a total of \$1,975 for water and \$950 for sewer installations. **COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion to approve the new water/sewer connection fees as presented. COUNCILMAN MARK MILLER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

- New Committee for Special Events: (Joan Collins)

- Councilwoman Joan Collins suggested making a citizens committee with volunteers to help with the special events. Councilman Jason Cassell stated the committee does not need to be limited to just Town residents/businesses. It needs include anyone willing to help. **COUNCILWOMAN JOAN COLLINS made a motion to move forward with forming this committee. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.** Mayor Ronald Sexton ask Town Manager Laura Ratcliffe to present this at the business meeting on Thursday.

#### Town Staff Report

- Town Manager (Laura Ratcliffe)

- Introduction to new reporting format. Town Manager Ratcliffe presented the new reporting format which consisted of a power point that shows information in a graphical format and trends. Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that the Town consists of three funds, 1) General Administration, Office, DMV, Police, and Public Works 2) Water 3) Sewer. The largest expense for the Town is payroll. Power point was included in the packets. In December the percentage rate for expenses was Sewer at 33%, Water at 31%, Town Hall & DMV 15%, Police 12%, Public Works 8%, and Community Development 1%.

- Town Clerk/Treasurer (Kim Farmer)



- Town Clerk, Kim Farmer, stated Town Manager Ratcliffe reported on this. Town Clerk Farmer thanked Town Manager Ratcliffe for stepping up and helping at the Town office with taking in payments and waiting on customers when short staffed in December.
    - Police Report (Chief Matthew Adams)
      - Chief Adams stated that his written report was included in council packets. Chief Adams stated his department spent 12 hours this past month at the crosswalk with only 2 traffic citations given. Chief Adams stated the 2018 Ford EcoSport sold to a dealership in Texas, 5 of 6 of the police officers are due for in service this year. The new bullet proof vest purchased with ARPA funding arrived today. And the handheld radar is in service.
    - Utility Directors Report- (Terry Osborne)
      - Utility Director Terry Osborne stated that there were 30 cutoffs in December, one water leak on Powerhouse Street due to the line being on a rock bed and the old clamp came loose. The water usage is going down. Three of the twenty test required by Virginia Department of Health are complete at the water plant. We have two years to complete. The test have to be completed when the turbidity is up to 30. The safety equipment is being purchased and implemented. A non-potable pump is out at the WWTP. The new ones last around three years. Communication at the Pioneer Lane location has been changed over. Since the Town implemented the 811-system due to people breaking the Towns water/sewer lines we have done 33 locates since May. Boggs got the supplies needed to fix the air leak at the WWTP.
    - Special Events Report- (Mary Ann Halsey):
      - Mary Ann did not have anything to report on.
  - Town Manager's Report- (Laura Ratcliffe):
    - Programs, Projects, and Updates
      - Town Manager Laura Ratcliffe stated her written report was included in the council packets.
      - Mayor Ronald Sexton asked her to do a look back for 2023. In review the Town had accomplished a lot for the year. Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that Vice Mayor Jim Meier asked for a theme during the budget process. They came up with a Foundation for growth. Town Manager Ratcliffe did a power point presentation. Major points were reorganizing the Town's structure, such as reducing the number of committees. Hosting strategic plan meetings for businesses and residence to provide feedback to council. New job descriptions, new personnel policies, filled vacancies, hired part time clerk for DMV. Still remaining on budget with these changes. Mayor Sexton did tours for the council to go to all the different Town buildings. The Penn Court water line project is completed. The Town Park plans have been revised twice. The rocker/bench program implemented.
  - Mayor's Report
    - Mayor Sexton gave an update on Independence Cares. Mayor Sexton stated that this past year the program helped 198 kids in Grayson County. The program was not able to help all kids due to low funding this year. Independence Cares has started fund raising for a kayak for this year. Mayor Sexton attended a virtual Mayors meeting. At the meeting Mayor Sexton wants to meet with all the departments to see what the needs are for each one. Mayor Sexton asked to get a list of all of the Town's inventory to determine what the Town has and what will be expiring, etc. This way the Town can project a better budget as to what equipment/supplies will need to be replaced. Mayor Sexton encourages people to attend the Towns meetings.
  - Town Attorney's Report:
    - Town Attorney Roger Brooks stated that COIA training needs to be completed by February 1<sup>st</sup>. The training is online.
  - Committee Updates
    - Personnel Committee – Councilman Cassell nothing for open session.
    - Finance Committee – Vice Mayor Meier nothing for open session.

- Infrastructure- Councilman Cassell stated the next meeting will be next Tuesday, 6:00pm, at 136 East Main Street.
  - Community Development-Councilwoman Marshall was absent. Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that a meeting is scheduled for February 20<sup>th</sup> to discuss projects and events.
  - Community Matters – Registered Speakers and Public Comment-
    - None.
  - Tow Manager Ratcliffe stated that she would be out of the office February 1<sup>st</sup> through 15<sup>th</sup>. She will be working remotely.
  - Adjourn
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**-Meeting Decorum-**

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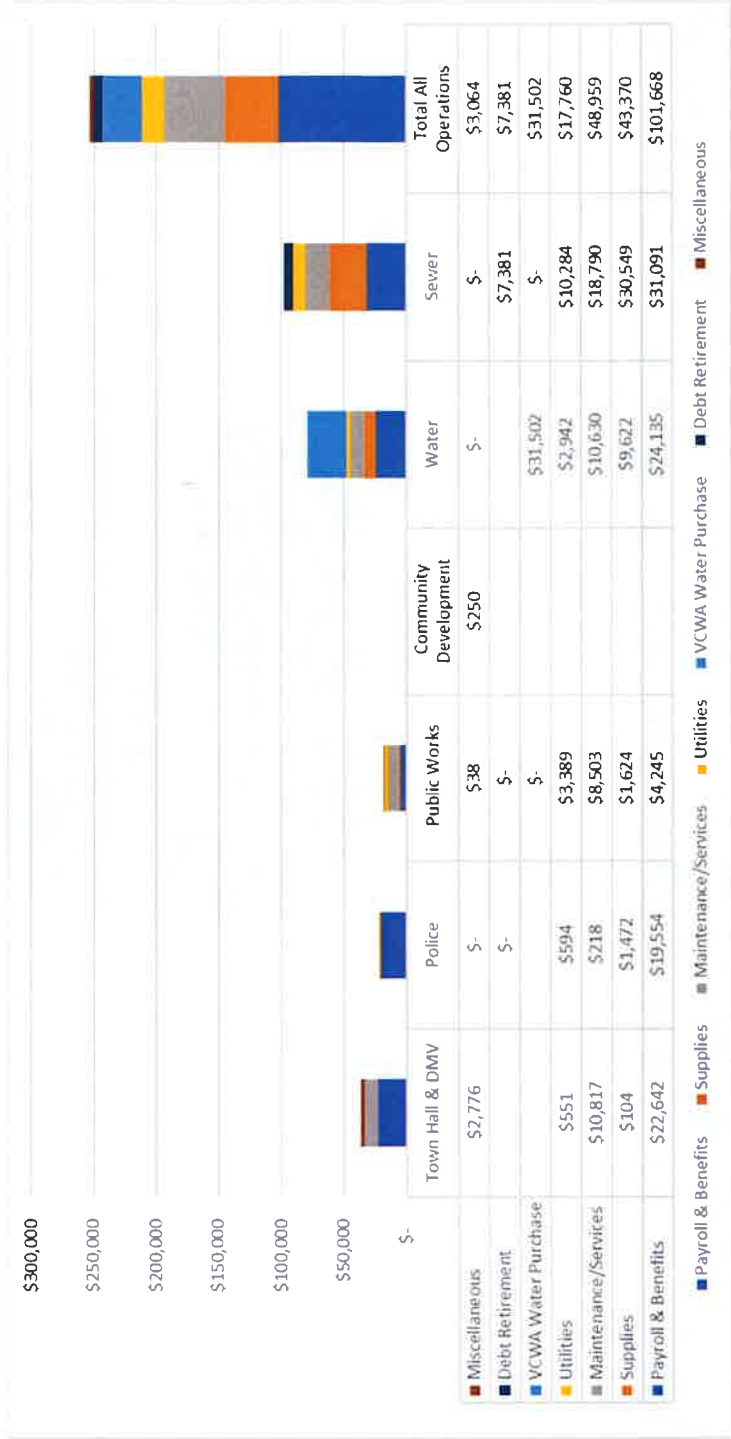
# Trended Data February 2024



# Finance



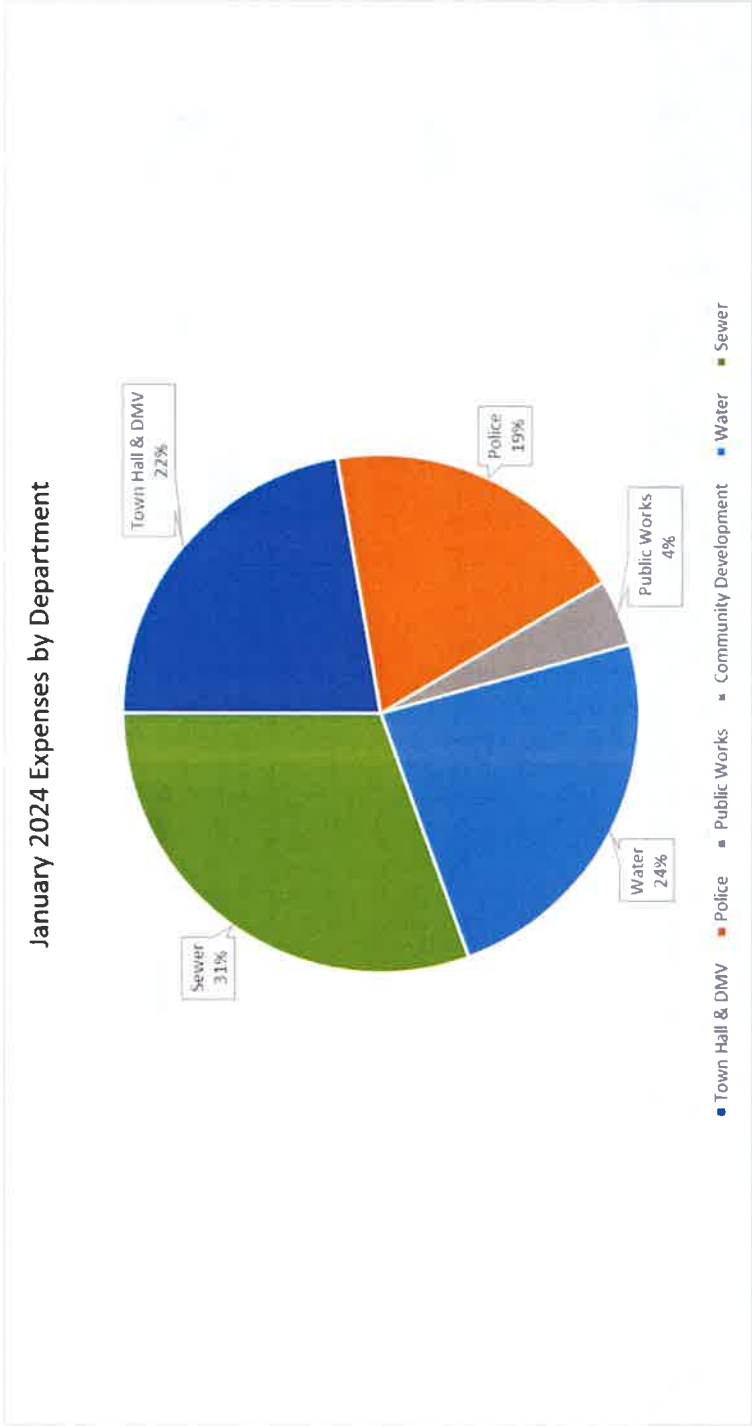
# January 2024 Expenses



■ Payroll & Benefits  
 ■ Supplies  
 ■ Maintenance/Services  
 ■ Utilities  
 ■ VCWA Water Purchase  
 ■ Debt Retirement  
 ■ Miscellaneous



# January 2024 Expenses by Department



# December 2023 v. January 2024 Expenses Large Single Costs



December 2023 Expenses were \$214,933  
January 2024 Expenses were \$253,704

The difference of \$38,771 is attributed to 3 invoices paid in January which are not monthly recurring expenses:

- 1) Annual Audit \$22,500
- 2) Tax Billing Expenses \$2,776
- 3) FY2023 VCWA Water Payment Due \$18,000



# General Administration 2024 YTD







# Water 2024 YTD





# Sewer 2024 YTD



**Revised Capital Budget 2024**

Revenue	YTD 2023 Actual	YTD 2024 Actual	2024 Budget	% to Budget
Rural Development Grant	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 175,000.00	0%
Unallocated from Savings/ ARPA Money	\$ 33,000.00	\$ 249,018.49	\$ 350,215.00	71%
Miscellaneous Gifts	\$ 29,358.54	\$ 29,358.54	\$ 29,358.54	50%
Total	\$ 278,377.03	\$ 278,377.03	\$ 554,573.54	50%
Grants Returned	\$ -	\$ -	\$ (175,000.00)	73%
<b>Revised Capital Budget</b>	<b>\$ 278,377.03</b>	<b>\$ 278,377.03</b>	<b>\$ 379,573.54</b>	<b>73%</b>

**Expenses**

Capital Project Costs - General Admin	YTD 2023 Actual	YTD 2024 Actual	2024 Budget	% to Budget	Items
General Administration/DMV	\$ -	\$ 7,247.00	\$ 7,247.00	100%	Server
Public Works	\$ 20,908.93	\$ 26,631.66	\$ 64,755.00	41%	Excavator, Line Detector, Public Works Bldg Roof Repair
Police	\$ -	\$ 52,276.03	\$ 54,000.00	97%	Police Car
Community Development - Town Park	\$ -	\$ 31,800.46	\$ 79,358.54	40%	Town Park Design
Water Capital Expenditures	\$ -	\$ 37,431.97	\$ 44,182.85	85%	Excavator, Line Detector, Well House
Sewer Planned Capital Expenditures	\$ 7,381.00	\$ 93,631.37	\$ 130,030.50	72%	Roof Replacement, Public Works Roof Repair
Total	\$ 28,289.93	\$ 249,018.49	\$ 379,573.89	66%	Projects/purchases pending/not included- 3 six inch meters, Gorman Rupp Pump, PLC, Composite Sampler

**Penn Court Project**

Miscellaneous Grant - Rural Development/ MRPDC	YTD 2023 Actual	YTD 2024 Actual	2024 Budget
Penn Court Repair - 2024 Expenses	\$ 156,250.00	\$ 112,685.70	\$ -
<b>Town Funds Used - Not Budgeted in 2024</b>	\$ 381,754.01	\$ 112,818.31	

**Town Park Project**

Original Budget for 2024	\$ 225,000.00
Less Rural Development Grant Returned	\$ (175,000.00)
Town Funds	\$ 50,000.00
Gift Funds	\$ 29,358.54
Total Funds in 2024	\$ 79,358.54
Funds Used as of 1/31/24	\$ 31,800.46
<b>Funds Remaining</b>	<b>\$ 47,558.08</b>

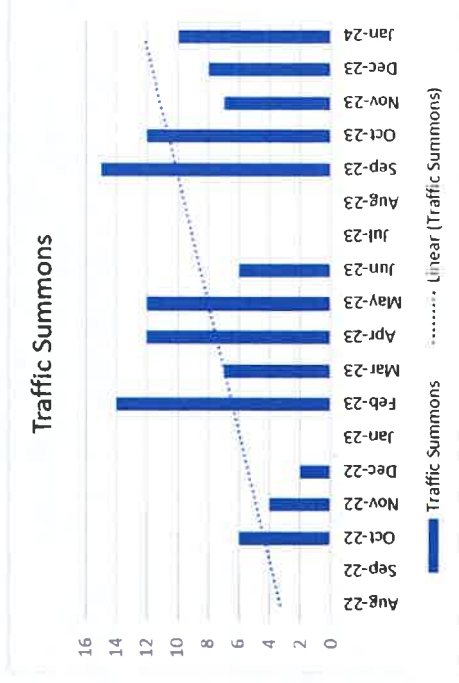
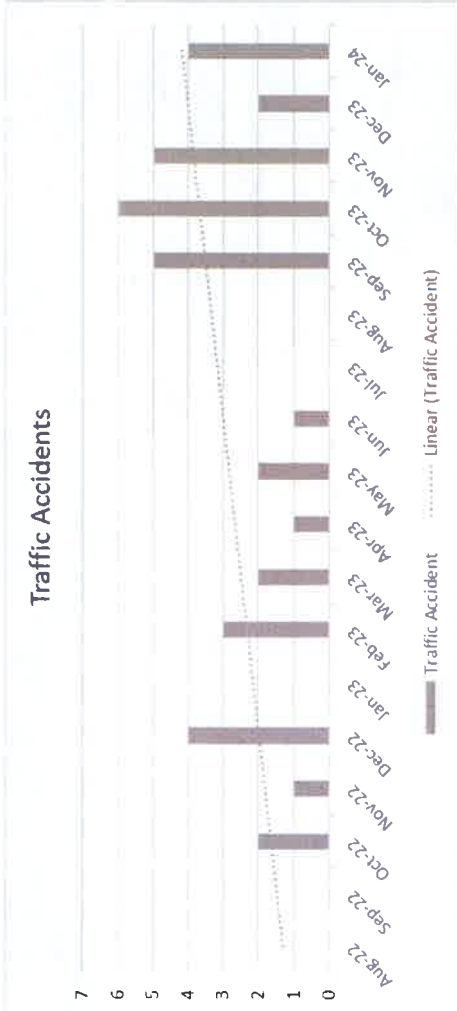
VOF Grant funds for Landscaping/Furnishing \$ 65,000.00





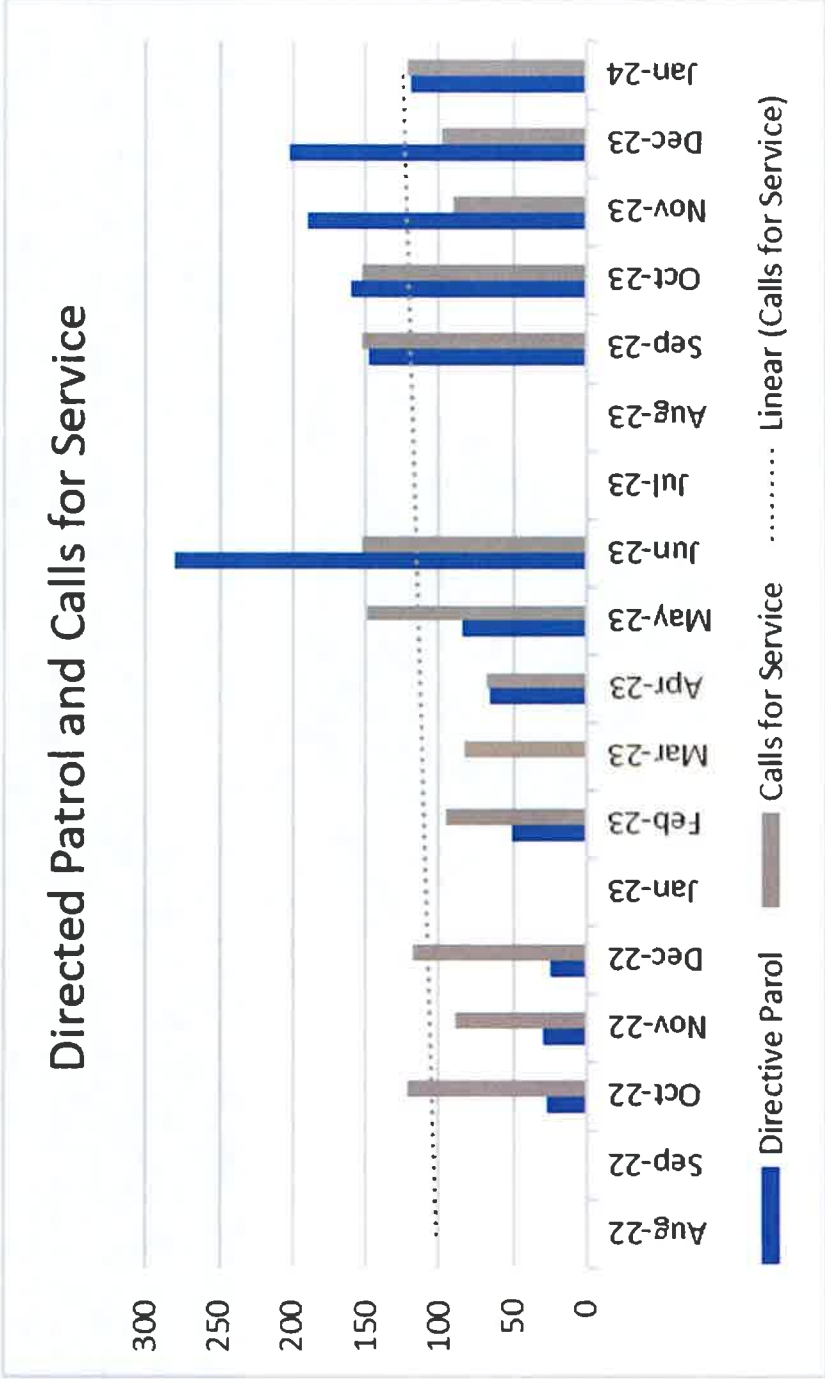
# Police Department

# January 2024 Traffic Stats





# January 2024 Service Stats



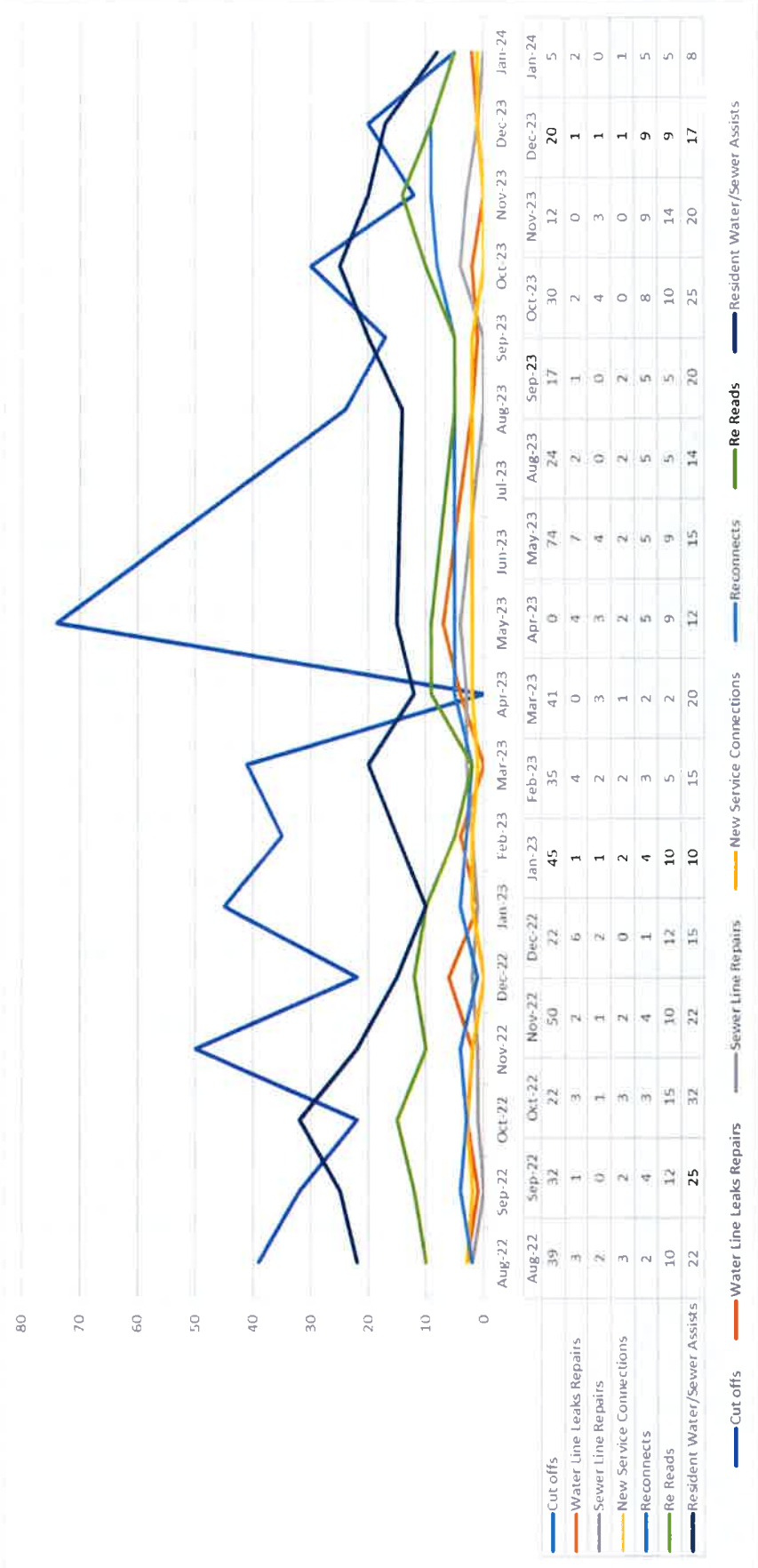


## Public Works



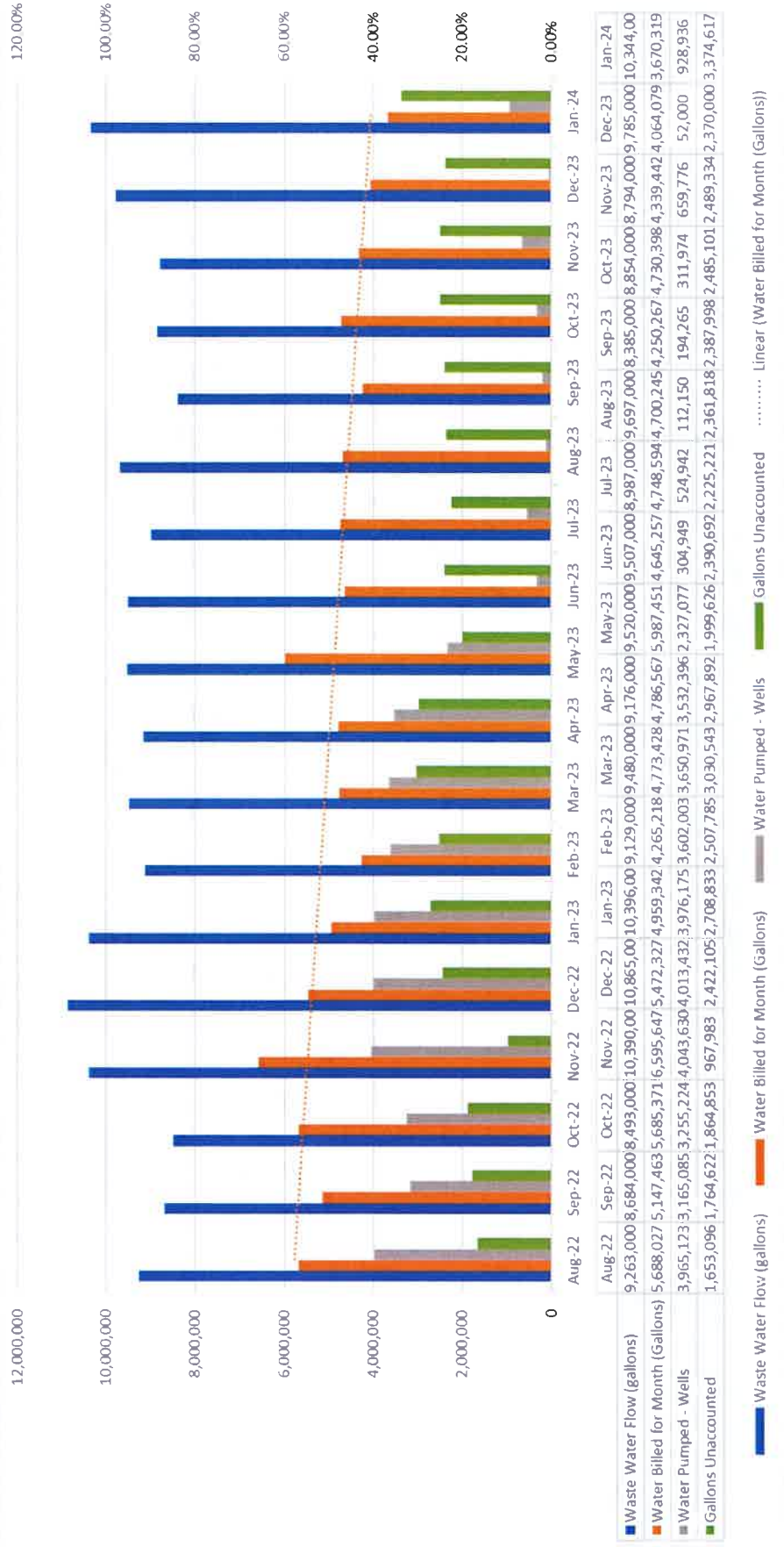


# Public Works Service Data



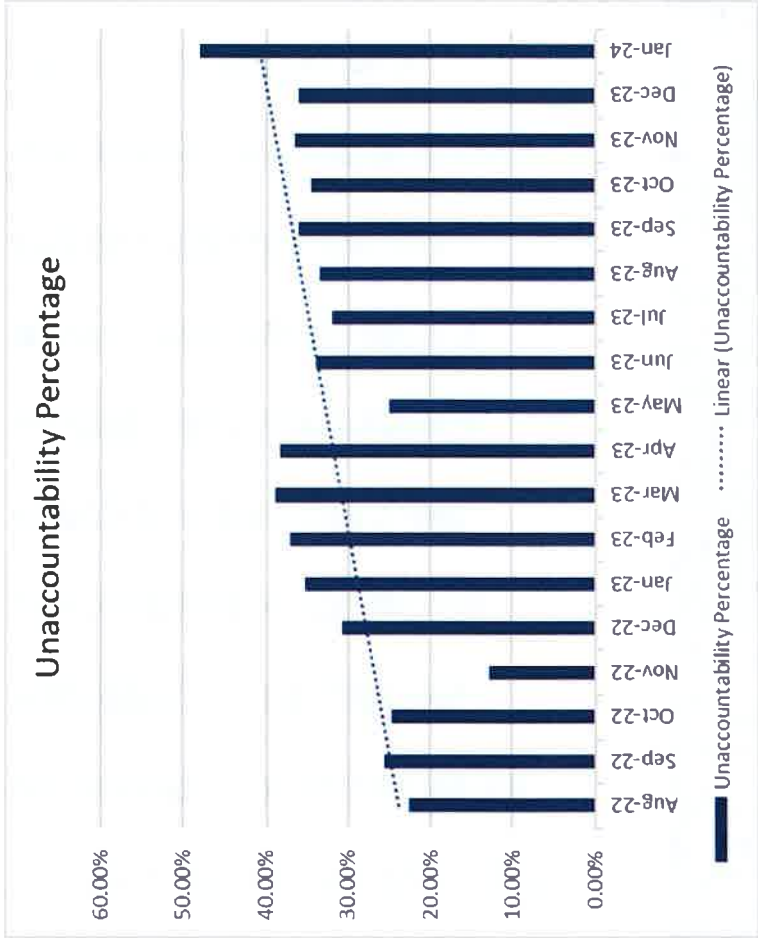


# Water Usage



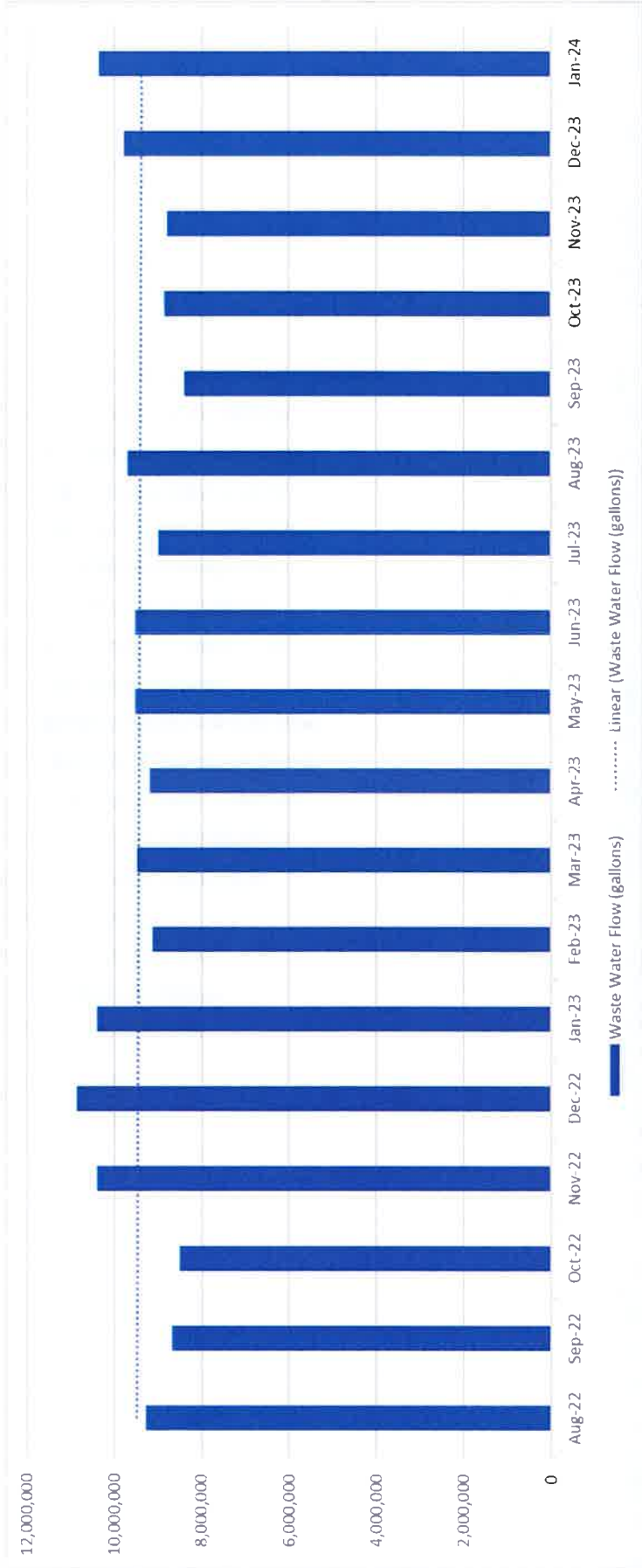


# Water Usage





# Sewer Volumes



# Monthly Department Activity Totals

Month: January

Year: 2024

Total Milage: 3557

# Of vehicles stopped

Traffic: 17

# Of Shifts 56

Check Points:           

General	
Open Business Checks	206
Closed Business Checks	232
Welfare Checks	7
Funerals	3
Bank Escorts	5
Motorist Assist	11
Directive patrols	119
Community Engagement	23
Vehicle Unlocks	7
Alarms	8
Calls For Service (other)	121
Magistrate Assist	1
Warrants	
Warrants Obtained	2
Warrants Served	2
Citations	
Traffic Summons	10
Parking Tickets	3
Warnings -Traffic	8
Investigations	
Domestic Complaints	4
Traffic Accident	4
Follow-up	14
Shop Lifting	4
Larceny	
Other Criminal	6
Emergency Orders	
ECO	
TDO	
Protective Orders	

Arrests	
DUI	
Intoxicated in public	
Criminal Arrests - Non Traffic	2
Criminal Arrest - Traffic stop	
Juvenile Petitions	2
Criminal Summons	2
Assistance	
Assist Fire Department	4
Assist Rescue	3
Assist Sheriff's Office	22
Assist Other LEO	2
Assist DSS	1
Assist Public Works	6
Special Duty	
School Traffic	23
Court - On Duty	4
Court - Off Duty	
Prisoner Transport	1
Training / Instruction	2
Town Code Enforcement	2
Special Events	
Meeting	3
Street Lights	2
Other	5

Cross Walk Observed	12.5	Hours
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**Town of Independence, VA**

**To: Mayor Sexton and Town Council**

**From: Laura Ratcliffe, Town Manager**

**Date: February 1, 2024**

**RE: Manager's Report**

**Following is a summary of the status of various projects and other activities since the last update in January 2023:**

**1) Personnel**

- a. There were no specific activities related to personnel during the month.

**2) Finance/General Administration**

- a. **Financial Trending Reports** – The reports have been further refined to break out capital from the operating revenues/expenses of each fund. Additionally, we are now showing encumbered funds from miscellaneous revenue and grants as a separate line item.
- b. **Grants** – We have received a grant offer from Rural Development for a new police vehicle. Chief Adams will present this at Town Council as we need a resolution to accept from Town Council. The grant will include the cost of the new vehicle as well as outfitting and wrapping it. Additionally, the \$1500 Virginia Tourism Grant for the Love Sign has closed.
- c. **FOIA** – There were no FOIA requests in January.
- d. **Real & Personal Property Tax Billing Dates** – The Town received 85% of the Real Estate Tax budget as of 1/31/24 and 157% of the Personal Property Tax budget.
- e. **Meals Tax** – We've implanted a new tracking system to quickly identify which restaurants have paid their monthly meals tax. Additionally, we are now sending notices of unpaid taxes. At this time, we have one food trucks who is not current on their meals tax.
- f. **Department of Corrections Contract Audit** – The audit and 2025 Rates have been submitted to the DOC. The audit resulted in amounts due the DOC for the two-year period of just over \$31k. I have not had a response from the DOC.
- g. **Credit Card Fees** – As previously discussed at Town Council meetings, the fees charged customers for processing credit and debit cards do not offset the card processing fees the Town is paying. For the first six months of this fiscal year, the Town lost \$2900 in

processing fees. Before adjusting our fees to customers, we wanted to make sure we were receiving the lowest rates possible. The Town Clerk and I met with our current processing partner and are pleased to announce our rates have been lowered effective February 1<sup>st</sup>. Based on an analysis of card charges since July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023, our current service fee charge of \$1 per transaction will cover the estimated average cost of the new card transaction fees charged to the Town. We will continue to monitor this cost as it may not always cover the cost in the future if customers begin using credit/debit cards to pay higher dollar bills such as tax or business licenses. We are estimating this change will lower Town expenses approximately \$2500 for the remainder of the year.

- h. **Online Bill Pay, Auto Draft, Email Bills** – Last month reported we thought these services would be implemented by year end. Based on activity in the last week, we are now targeting the end of March for the go live on these services. The final cost to implement these services is \$500 annually. This is the cost of the email exchange server. In addition to emailing bills, we will also be able to email employee pay stubs.

### 3) Infrastructure

- a. **Penn Court** – Closeout is still pending.
- b. **Sewer I & I** – Project financing at a standstill due to additional requests/underwriting from Rural Development. Town Council needs to approve parity between RD and VRA. Additionally, it appears DEQ might be expecting us to bid project before finalizing financing. I am in the process of following up with our engineer on this issue.
- c. **Lead & Copper Assessment** – Project Manager assigned from VDH and kick off meeting held. VDH needs additional documentation before we progress. I am in the process of submitting requested paperwork. Terry will be the project manager from the Town. Project will require feedback from all water customers and we suggest a survey with a water bill discount for those who return it. The Infrastructure Committee reviewed this suggestion and is recommending \$25 for everyone who returns completed survey by deadline. The project must be completed with results submitted by October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024. At this time, it is unknown the requirements for the replacement phase. Additionally, the grant we received is a reimbursement grant so monies will be needed to front expenses and we can only submit 3 reimbursement requests for the life of the project.
- d. **Past Due Penalties/Utility Bills** – The Town financials currently reflect over \$1,181,581.84 in uncollectible penalty and utility service charges for inactive accounts. Many of these charges involve closed businesses and deceased customers. We have begun a detailed review of each account to make sure they are appropriate for write off vs. collections. The following provides a breakdown of the current analysis:

1.31.24		2014 & Before	Remaining to Review
# Customers	411	114	297
Water	\$ 16,298.54	\$ 3,106.88	\$ 13,191.66
Sewer	\$ 31,647.84	\$ 7,414.72	\$ 24,233.12
Penalty	\$ 1,133,314.11	\$ 923,529.30	\$ 209,784.81
Water Flat Fee	\$ 110.65		\$ 110.65
Sewer Flat Fee	\$ 210.70		\$ 210.70



Best practice is to diligently collect all amounts due and begin writing off on an annual basis so that the financials do not reflect these large sums. I made a recommendation to the Infrastructure Committee to write amounts that are more than two years old. While they agreed with the recommendation, I was asked to provide more data on the aging of the accounts. At this time I am asking for approval to write off all amounts related to the 114 accounts listed above.

#### 4) **Community Development**

- a. **Town Park** –The revised plans are in final processing. The plan is to advertise the RFP starting in mid-February with proposals due by March 8<sup>th</sup> and work completed by April 26<sup>th</sup>. This timeline would allow the site to be open in time for the May 3<sup>rd</sup> Farmers Market opening. The only work our employees will be able to complete is fencing and water installation.
- b. **Economic Development Authority** – The EDA met on January 30<sup>th</sup> and approved their grant program. Steve Marshall will present on this at Town Council. The program has been communicated to the public via social media and on the Town website.
- c. **Mass Communication** – The Town’s Everbridge Mass Communication site is enabled and configured. All Town Council and Town employees have been added and we are testing the system. We need to continue to collect and load resident and business data to the site; however, we plan to go live with the site by the end of March.
- d. **Special Events** – Jennifer Snow and Crystal Cureton volunteered for special events. Additionally, I spoke with the Grayson Recreation Board and they will ask one of their members to participate. My recommendation is Council needs to decide if this is a large enough group. If yes, my recommendation is they be asked to organize, advertise and run the Privy Races while the Town Special Events Coordinator organizes the festival/parade portions of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, Mountain Foliage, Safe Halloween, and Christmas events.

#### **Upcoming Meetings and Events:**

1. Community Development Committee – February 20<sup>th</sup> – Time & Place TBD
2. Businessowners Meeting – February 22<sup>nd</sup> @4pm
3. Town Council – March 12, 2024

#### **Upcoming Town Closures:**

1. Monday, February 19<sup>th</sup> – Washington’s Day

