

TOWN OF INDEPENDENCE, VA

April 2024, Volume 1

TOWN PARK UPDATE

You may have noticed activity at Town Park. Phase 3 is underway which means the park will be opening soon. Weather permitting, we believe Farmers' Market Opening Day on May 3rd will happen at Town Park!

Phase 3 involves grading, drainage, stone work, fencing and adding two frost-free water sources.

Keep an eye out for more info on future developments, including volunteer planting opportunities.



Coming
Soon!

LEAD & COPPER RULE AND WHAT IT MEANS TO YOU

In 2020, the EPA announced a new Lead & Copper Rule focused on getting the lead out of our nation's drinking water. The new rule requires all water systems in the United States to perform an assessment of the types of pipes used to get water to your faucets. This includes the pipes leading which the Town maintains, as well as those from the meter into a home or business. This assessment must be completed and reported to the local EPA office by mid-October.

Why is this important? Because we need everyone's help to identify what type of pipes you have leading to your home or business. Please read the following questions & answers which will help you understand how you can assist in gathering this info.

Q: What do you need from me?

A: All property owners need to complete the enclosed survey **FOR EACH PROPERTY YOU OWN** and return it to Town Office by April 30th. You can also complete it electronically on the Town website at www.independenceva.com. **Anyone fully completing a survey for their owned property will receive a \$25 credit toward your next Utility bill.** Yes, it's that important to us to get your response!

Q: What will the Town do with the information I provide?

A: We'll compile all the info into an electronic file that will be sent to the EPA once all info is received.

Q: What if I don't know the answers?

A: That's ok, complete it as best you can. We may have to come to your property and do hydro excavating to look the pipes. If that's the case, we'll give you notice before anything happens (and will put your property back the way we found it).

Q: Will I have to replace my pipes if they are made of lead?

A: We're still waiting for an answer to that question from the federal government.

Q: Who can I talk to if I have questions?

A: Call the Town Manager, Laura Ratcliffe, at 276-768-6532 or Public Works Director, Terry Osborne, at 276-768-0373.

"We need everyone's response to the survey to make this project as successful as possible" Mayor Ronald Sexton

EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM COMING APRIL 1ST

Would you like to be notified easily when there's an issue with water or sewer in Town?

If yes, contact Jacqueline Smith at the Town Office to be added to the Emergency Alert system. Alerts can be received as a text, phone call, or email. Jacqueline can be reached at 276-773-3703 or jacqueline@independenceva.com

The system will also be used to share other important information as needed from time to time.

LET'S TALK UTILITY BILLING AND PAYMENTS

Earlier this year we did a survey to understand if you thought email billing, online payments or autodraft payments would be a good idea. Over 10% of you responded (Thank you!) overwhelmingly "YES" to all three. So, listening to your feedback, we went to work to get these services implemented and are happy to let you know that....

Email billing is now available. If you would like to receive your bill earlier and stop the small cards in the mail, contact any Town Clerk to get enrolled.

Autodraft and online credit card payments are coming soon. We're in the process of creating and testing these to make sure it works before we open the access to everyone. Once the online system is implemented for credit card payments, we will no longer accept payments over the phone.

Town Council Contacts

Mayor – Ronald Sexton
rsexton@independenceva.com

Councilman Jim Meier
jmeier@independenceva.com
Vice Mayor & Finance Chairman
Member of Infrastructure Committee

Councilman Jason Cassel
jcassel@independenceva.com
Personnel & Infrastructure Chairman

Councilwoman Kit Marshall
kmarshall@independenceva.com
Community Development Chairwoman
Member of Personnel Committee

Councilman Buddy Halsey
bhalsey@independenceva.com
Member of Infrastructure and Finance Committees

Councilman Mark Miller
mmiller@independenceva.com
Member of Community Development and Personnel Committees

Councilwoman Joan Collins
jcollins@independenceva.com
Member of Community Development and Finance Committees

Do you have some extra time? Have you ever thought about volunteering for the Town?

Following are volunteer opportunities currently available:

- Weeding the Tractor Garden – While all green things have a purpose, some we don't want in our garden. If you know the difference, you're our person!
- Trash Pick Up – multiple streets through Town are looking a little sad. Town will provide safety vests, bags & pickup grabbers
- 4th of July Festival – need volunteers to assist with set up, running, and clean up
- Mountain Foliage Festival/Privy Races – need volunteers to assist with set up, running, and clean up

Contact Laura Ratcliffe, Town Manager, at 276-768-6532 or laura@independenceva.com if interested in helping out with these activities

Town of Independence
Lead Service Line Inventory Survey
Survey of Customer Owned Service Lines

Please complete and return to Town Office by April 30th 2024

If you own more than one structure in Independence, please complete a separate survey for each location. Additional copies are available at the Town Office.

Date of Survey: _____ **Account Number (from Water Bill)** _____

Physical Address of Owned Location:

Your Name: _____ **Best Phone Contact:** _____

Email address _____

Building is a (circle one): Residence Commercial Building

Year Line was installed (if unknown use year building was built) _____

Type of plumbing service line entering the structure? Circle one.

If not known, inspect the plumbing line where the water from the meter enters the structure.

- Plastic
- Copper
- Galvanized Steel
- Lead
- Other

How did you determine the material of your water service line? Circle one.

- Visual Inspection
- Lead Test Kit
- Plumbing Records
- Scratch Test
- Other

See reverse side for help in identifying what type of material you have leading from your meter to your owned structure.

How to Check Your Service Line's Material

- Find the water service line entering your property. You may see it where it comes through the floor or wall, in a basement or lower level, or at the property's water shutoff valve.
- Bring a magnet and a metal object, such as a coin, with you to check the pipe's material.
- Scratch the pipe with a metal object, such as a coin, to reveal the metal. You may need to scratch through paint.
- Try to attach a magnet by sticking it to the pipe.

If your pipe is plastic:

- It may be blue plastic (also known as PEX) or white/black and often labeled "PVC"
- It will not scratch
- A magnet will not stick

If your pipe is copper:

- It may be copper, brown, or have green tint
- If gently scratched it will be the color of a bright penny
- A magnet will not stick

If your pipe is galvanized iron:

- It may be black, silver or rust in color
- When scratched, the area will remain dull gray
- A magnet WILL stick

If your pipe is lead:

- It may be dull gray and the pipe is often curved
- There may be a "bulb" shape near the fitting and the fitting is usually a different material than lead.
- When scratched, it will be a shiny silver color.
- A magnet will not stick

Public Hearing on April 9th at 6pm

Fire Department, 329 Davis Street, Independence, VA

Two Public Hearings will be held on Tuesday, April 9th, to gain feedback on the following proposed code and zoning changes:

Water Code: As it relates to Section 51, it is proposed to:

Water 51.01 Connection Required change from:

All residents of the town shall be required to be connected to a public water system approved and licensed by the State Department of Health.

To:

All residents **and businesses** of the town shall be required to be connected to a public water system approved and licensed by the State Department of Health, **unless the owner meets the requirements listed in 51.03.**

51.06 Right of Inspection change from:

Every person occupying any property into which water is conveyed under this chapter shall permit any authorized agent of the town to enter such property, at reasonable hours, to inspect works therein or to see if provisions of this subchapter have been violated.

To:

Every person occupying any property into which water is conveyed under this chapter shall permit any authorized agent of the town to enter such property, at reasonable hours, to inspect works therein or to see if provisions of this subchapter have been violated. **It is the obligation of the property owner to provide free and clear access to the meter.**

51.10 A) 2 Disconnection for Late Payment change from:

That if any bill is not paid by or before that date, a second bill will be mailed containing a cutoff notice that if the bill is not paid within ten days of the mailing of the second bill, service will be discontinued for nonpayment

To:

That if any bill is not paid by or before that date, a second bill will be mailed containing a cutoff notice that if the bill is not paid within ten days of the **billing** of the second bill, service will be discontinued for nonpayment

51.14 Guidelines for Service change from:

Unless otherwise specified, it shall be assumed these guidelines apply to three quarter inch or smaller connections. Any connections over three quarter inch will require negotiations with the Council

To:

Unless otherwise specified, it shall be assumed these guidelines apply to three quarter inch or smaller connections. Any connections over three quarter inch will require **approval by** the Council

51.14 (F) Guidelines for Service change from:

If the service is available to a unit serviced by the town system, the customer will be required to pay the monthly fee. The only exceptions to this rule are:

In the case of illness lasting 30 days or more in which case the customer would be in a hospital, rest home, nursing home or other such facility and the unit to which the service is provided would be unoccupied for the entire period. In such case, the meter bill will still be read at the regular time and the customer will be billed if the meter shows any usage.

To:

If the service is available to a unit serviced by the town system, the customer will be required to pay the monthly **minimum** fee. The only exceptions to this rule are:

In the case of illness lasting 30 days or more in which case the customer would be in a hospital, rest home, nursing home or other such facility and the unit to which the service is provided would be unoccupied for the entire period. In such case, the meter bill will still be read at the regular time and the customer will be billed if the meter shows any usage. **In case of customer death or property vacancy, if the property owner or estate does not want services at the unit, they may request the services be disconnected and the meter removed. In such cases, the property owner/estate will be required to pay a fee set by Council from time to time to help offset the overhead costs of maintaining the Town's water system.**

Note: Committee recommendation is for this fee to be \$15 per month.

51.99 Penalty

Add section C – Late Payment:

Any bill not paid on or before the due date will incur a 10% penalty for late payment.

Nuisance Code: As it relates to Section 91.03 Nuisance Enumerated, it is proposed to:

Remove the word “**annoying or annoyance**” from sections 91.03(A) 2,3,4,7

Add to section 91.03(A) 3 “**All downed trees, including root ball, will be removed within 60 days of occurrence or discovery.**”

Change section 91.03(A) 5 from:

All obstructions caused or permitted on any street or sidewalk to the danger or annoyance of the public and all stones, rubbish dirt, filth, slops, vegetable matter or other article thrown or placed by any person on or in any street, sidewalk or other public place, which in any way may cause any injury or annoyance to the public.

To:

Only organic materials readily susceptible to decay or rot may be maintained in compost piles for the express purpose of producing compost for use on the property where it is located. Examples of such acceptable materials include leaves, grass clippings, food scraps, etc.

Compost piles must be well-controlled, screened from public view, and maintained to prevent the contents from burning or blowing off of the subject property. No other materials, such as trash, rubbish, tires, or similar waste materials, may be accumulated on any property. Compost piles which stink or produce foul or offense orders beyond the subject property lines must be either removed or appropriately confined to prevent the smell from escaping the subject property.

Add to section 91.03(A) item 10:

Grass, weeds, or similar vegetation in excess of 8 inches in height shall be deemed to be a nuisance subject to trimming or mowing by the Town, or its agents, at the expense of the property owner.

Add to section 91.03(A) item 11:

All vehicle parking must be in compliance with Town Code Chapter 70

Land Usage Code: As it relates to Section 150.24 Posting and Size Numbers, it is proposed to:

Change the language from:

Numerals indicating the official numbers for each principal building or each front entrance to such building shall be posted in a manner as to be visible and distinguishable from the street on which the property is located. These numbers shall be at least three high in size.

To:

Numerals indicating the official numbers for each principal building or each front entrance to such building shall be posted in a manner as to be visible and distinguishable from the street on which the property is located. **Buildings not visible from the street shall have the numbers posted at the street.** These numbers shall be at least **4**" high and **½ inch wide.**

Note: this change is necessary to be in compliance with the State Fire Code

Zoning: It is proposed to:

Change the definition of allowable occupancies in the Core Commercial District Zone to include: "Temporary vacation rentals not to exceed 2 bedrooms per unit". This would include first floor/ground floor occupancy for these types of temporary vacation rentals.

Focus on Public Works.....

You see these guys all over Town but do you know their names and what they do for us?

Wesley Weaver, Jayson Harmon, and Kyler Lewis are our Public Works Crew. When they aren't fixing water and sewer leaks or backups, they're installing, rechecking, and reading meters (and yes, sometimes having to cut off water if a customer doesn't pay), putting up and taking down the Making Grayson Glow lights, assisting with special projects through Town and at the Virginia Carolina Water Authority, making sure the Town trash cans are ready for Wednesday pick up, working the water valves and hydrants through Town, replacing street signs, mowing and edging, assisting with special events and basically anything elseWhew!

Wesley has been with us for 21 months and was promoted to Supervisor last year. He just welcomed a new son and will gladly show you pictures.

Jayson joined us last August. Recently married, we're hoping he soon becomes a Town resident as well.

Kyler also joined us last August. During his interview he said his favorite pastime was "working". That is the truth...but he didn't tell us about his amazing ability at impersonations. He keeps us laughing all the time.

We are so lucky to have these three men working for us. Their great attitudes and work ethic are making a difference in our Town. If you run into them, introduce yourself and thank them for a job well done.



TOI Public Works – Pictured left to right...Kyler Lewis, Jayson Harmon, and Wesley Weaver

TOWN BEGINS PLANNING 4TH OF JULY FESTIVITIES

“Faithful and True to the Red, White, and Blue” will be the theme of the upcoming 4th of July Festivities in Independence.

This year, **all parade** participants are required to complete an entry form. Updated vendor applications and parade entry forms are available at the Town Office or online at the Town website www.independenceva.com/forms-applications.

Like last year, the fireworks will be set off from the ball field behind the elementary school. There are lots of viewing places throughout Town, including all along Main Street and around the Historic 1908 Courthouse.

Keep an eye out for more information on the festival times, music, parade information and other fun 4th activities sponsored by the Grayson County Rec Park. We'll post regular updates on the Town Facebook page and Town website and in our next newsletter!



2023 Fireworks from Main Street – photo: Tim Pennington

A Note from Laura.....

Spring is here! I can never decide which is my favorite time of year in Independence. Right now it's spring because I love to watch the world “green up”. I think it's also because I love the new possibilities spring brings us...a time to start new and refresh.

This newsletter is a new start. It's been a “to do” since I started as the Town Manager. Town Council and I realize that not everyone wants to look at Facebook or a website to get their information. So, we thought a newsletter every two months (or so) would be a good way to keep you up to date on what's going on in our Town. (We'll still post these electronically for those of you who like it that way).

I'll try to always hit the “important stuff” in this newsletter. But honestly, we're currently working on so many things in the Town, there's not enough room to report on all of it. For more information, I encourage you to look at the Town Council packets on the web-site or get one of the Town Clerks to print a copy for you. Or, come see me...I'd love to talk with you about what's going on in Town.

Best,

Laura

Laura Ratcliffe
Town Manager

Exciting News Independence!

If you missed out getting an engraved paver in the Tractor Garden, you have another chance to leave a memory and help the Town:

- The Town is creating a new walkway at the Main Street entrance to Town Park
- 50 small pavers are available for engraving
- Pavers can have up to 3 lines of text, with up to 8 characters (including standard symbols) per line.
- Each paver is \$150 and the net proceeds (we have to pay for engraving) will go toward Town Park

For more info, contact Kit Marshall at kmarshall@independenceva.com

Paver order forms are available at www.independenceva.com or at the Town Office.



IMPORTANT DATES

April 9th – 6pm – 2 Public Hearings (Zoning Change and Code Change) immediately followed by Town Council Meeting. Fire Department

April 16th – 9am – Community Development Committee Meeting – Fire Department

April 23rd – 6pm - Economic Development Authority Meeting – Fire Department

May 9th – 4pm- Business Owners Meeting – Fire Department

May 14th – 6pm – Town Council Meeting – 2025 Budget will be presented. – Fire Department

Contact Us

Town of Independence, VA
317 East Main Street
Independence, VA 24348

276-773-3703
communitymatters@independenceva.com
www.independenceva.com

Have a question for the Town? Email us at communitymatters@independenceva.com. This is also where you can request to be registered to speak at a monthly Town Council meeting.

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