

**TOWN OF INDEPENDENCE
REGULAR SCHEDULED COUNCIL MEETING
TUESDAY, JANUARY 10, 2023
6:00 P.M.
INDEPENDENCE FIRE DEPARTMENT
329 DAVIS STREET; INDEPENDENCE, VA 24348**

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT: None.

TOWN STAFF PRESENT: James Wagoner, Police Chief, Sergeant Matthew Adams, Kim Farmer Town Clerk, Terry Osborne, Utility Director, Mary Ann Halsey, Special Events Coordinator, and Shane Allen.

CITIZENS & GUESTS: Gary Hash, Independence Volunteer Fire Department, Michelle Pridgen, Independence Farmer's Market, Rick Cavey, Bill & Karen Simpson, Laura Ratcliffe, Bob & Fran Bundy, Tom & Pam Evans, Jennifer Snow, Anne Beamer, Kathy Cole, Eric & Gesche Morley, Charlotte Hanes and Dawson Allen.

CALL TO ORDER:

The Council Meeting was called to order by Mayor Ronald Sexton on this 10th day of January, 2023 and declared that a quorum was present.

Mayor Sexton stated the first order of business was to elect a Vice Mayor. **COUNCILMAN BUDDY HALSEY made a motion to appoint Councilman Jim Meier to Vice Mayor. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

GUESTS

Gary Hash, Independence Volunteer Fire Department Chief, stated the IVFD is required per the bylaws, to present a slate of officers to the Independence Town Council for approval. Chief Hash stated that the Fire Department ran 100 calls for 2022. The Fire Department is working on a truck project in hopes to expand possibilities for the new truck. Councilman Cassell asked if the department was in need of anything else. Chief Hash stated that they need some new turnout gear which cost around \$3,000 and the heat pump is giving problems. **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to approve the slate of officers presented. COUNCILMAN BUDDY HALSEY seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

Gesche Morley, Carolina Timber Works, addressed her concerns regarding the Farmer's Market project. Mrs. Morley stated that there were 60 volunteers who built the structure that is currently standing. Mrs. Morley stated that it is so disrespectful to the volunteers that the project is not completed and asked council to finish the structure as soon as possible.

Eric Morley, Carolina Timber Works, addressed his concerns regarding the Farmer's Market project also. Mr. Morley stated that the Town got an incredible price on the structure. Mr. Morley asked council to get the project finished before the first market in May.

Charlotte Hanes, Business Owner, stated that she has several businesses in the Town and County. Ms. Hanes is embarrassed at the Town's ability to complete the Farmer's Market structure. Ms. Hanes stated that the volunteers and the Town need to get together and get the structure completed as soon as possible.

Karen Simpson, Dream Silo owner, stated that people love going to the Farmer's Market. She asked council to get the market completed.

Kathy Cole, Independence Free Market, stated she was part of the Timber Framers and was amazed at how everyone came together to get the project up. Ms. Cole stated that everyone in attendance of the meeting was here and willing to help finish up the structure.

Interim Town Manager Kenneth Vaught stated that last month the right of way easement was completed and that masonries are lined up to do the column work. Interim Town Manager Vaught stated that MRPDC is helping the Town with the project. As of May 2022, the expenses incurred for the project is over \$623,000 with the Town receiving so far \$185,000 with another \$175,000 outstanding. The Town has covered the additional expenses so far.

Vice Mayor Jim Meier stated that council wants the structure finished as much as the concerned citizens do.

Councilman Jason Cassell stated that he was sorry for where we are at today with the structure and that he along with all council wants the project completed.

Laura Ratcliffe, Elk Creek, asked what the estimated cost to finish the structure would be? Utility Supervisor Terry Osborne stated that the estimate for just the grading and the pond was \$284,000. A rough estimate would be another \$400,000.

MINUTES for December 13, 2022, regular scheduled meeting and January 3, 2023, special called meeting were presented for approval. **COUNCILMAN BUDDY HALSEY made a motion to approve the minutes as presented, VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

MONTHLY FINANCES were presented in the amount of \$68,394.27. **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to approve the finances in the amount of \$68,394.27. COUNCILMAN BUDDY HALSEY seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

POLICE REPORT

Police Chief James Wagoner stated the police report was included in council packets. Chief Wagoner stated that the Police Department answered 1,400 calls for 2022.

UTILITY SUPERVISOR:

Utility Supervisor, Terry Osborne, stated that his report was in council packets. Utility Supervisor stated that the bucket truck is still being worked on. The initial cost was \$7,500 now it is up to \$12,000. The cost will be split between the three owners, the Town, County and School. The unaccountability rate for this past month was 34% due to water leaks. The water that is going out of the WWTP is almost perfect. The VCWA had issues with leaves getting into the gallery, which has been fixed.

SPECIAL EVENTS:

Mary Ann Halsey presented a list of events for 2023. Mrs. Halsey thanked the public works department and the police department for helping out at the events.

MANAGERS REPORT:

1) ARPA Funding:

- a. Town Clerk Kim Farmer has identified half of the first-round of funding.

2) Farmer's Market:

- a. The right of way easement for the highway 21 entrance has been recorded.

3) Penn Court Waterline:

- a. Council needs to take action to adopt the resolution of easement. **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to approve the resolution of easement as presented. COUNCILMAN BUDDY HALSEY seconded; motion carried with all ayes.** The Town also needs to approve a land use permit for VDOT. **COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion to approve the permit. VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

4) North Park:

- a. Town Clerk Kim Farmer returned the \$10,000 to the Twin County Foundation.

5) DHCD Housing Grant:

- a. The MRPDC will keep the Town informed on the housing grant process.

6) Sewer I & I Project:

- a. The Town has two procured engineering firms under long term contract, The Lane Group and Hurt & Proffitt. Mr. Brooks will need to confirm compliance with state procurement laws for the project.

7) Rural Development Audit Notification:

- a. The Town is waiting on the audit firm to finish up the Town's 2021-2022 audit. The audit for 2022 is still being completed.

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

- a. The Town is waiting for disbursement of funds. When received Town Clerk Kim Farmer will disburse them to the appropriate agencies.

9) VCWA:

- a. Sparta and Independence Town Managers met and agreed the Authority is not following the billing or formula in the agreement. The engineer firm is reviewing the formula to try and help resolve the issue.

10) Solid Waste Ordinance:

- a. Town Council and Town Attorney need to review the Town's Solid Waste code to get clarification on the ordinance.

11) Real Estate and Personal Property Taxes:

- a. An ad was placed in the newspaper with stating the due date was moved to March 6, 2023.

12) VRS Life Insurance:

- a. Town Clerk Farmer is getting information together for council to consider.

13) Town Rate Schedule:

- a. Previous Town Manager Reid Walters had worked on a new schedule. Council needs to look at and discuss the new rates during the budget process.

14) The Crooked Road:

- a. The Crooked Road would like to install two signs at no cost to the Town. The Town would be responsible for installation. **COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion to approve the installation of the 2 new signs. VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

15) Manager Days Worked:

- a. Interim Town Manager Vaught worked 11 days in December with 59 hours.

TOWN ATTORNEY:

Town Attorney Roger Brooks stated that council has 45 days to appoint someone to the vacant seat on council. There will need to be a special election in November to fill the vacant seat.

MAYORS REPORT:

Mayor Sexton stated that the Independence Cares Committee helped with 190 kids this year. The one that stood out the most was a child wanting a mattress. The committee was able to get him a mattress and bed frame. Mayor Sexton reported that the Independence Rescue Squad run over 3,000 calls for 2022 with the number of calls increasing yearly.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Mayor Sexton updated the committees.

Water: Buddy Halsey, Chairman, Jason Cassell, Joan Collins

Sewer: Buddy Halsey, Chairman, Mark Miller, Jason Cassell

Streets: Mark Miller, Chairman, Jim Meier, Joan Collins

Personnel: Jason Cassell, Chairman, Mark Miller, and Town Manager

Traffic: Joan Collins, Chairwoman, Jason Cassell, Buddy Halsey

Beautification: Joan Collins, Chairwoman, Jim Meier, Mark Miller

Budget: Jim Meier, Chairman, Joan Collins, Buddy Halsey, Town Manager

Solid Waste: Mark Miller, Chairman, Jason Cassell, Buddy Halsey

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, Interim Town Manager Kenneth Vaught, Police Chief Wagoner, Sergeant Adams, and 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**

COUNILMAN BUDDY HALSEY made a motion to add all council members and the mayor to the signature cards at the bank. VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.

VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to appoint Sergeant Matthew Adams as interim Police Chief effective February 1, 2023.

VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to give Police Chief Wagoner his badge an revolver. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.

Town Attorney Roger Brooks recommends council approve the Town to be a member of the 811 program. **COUNCILWOMAN JOAN COLLINS made a motion for the Town to become a member of the 811 program. COUNCILMAN MARK MILLER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

With no other business Mayor Sexton closed the meeting.