

**TOWN OF INDEPENDENCE  
REGULAR SCHEDULED COUNCIL MEETING  
TUESDAY, MARCH 14, 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:** Matthew Adams, Interim Police Chief, Kim Farmer, Town Clerk, and Terry Osborne, Utility Director.

**CITIZENS & GUESTS:** Starr Anderson, Rick Cavey, and Steve Marshall.

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Mayor Ronald Sexton called the council meeting to order this 14<sup>th</sup> day of March 2023 and declared that a quorum was present. Mayor Sexton read the decorum policy.

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.**

Mayor Sexton ask council for a motion to approve the minutes for February 14, 2023, regular meeting and for February 23, 2023, special called meeting. **COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. COUNCILWOMAN JOAN COLLINS seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

**REPORTS, PRESENTATIONS OR REQUEST:**

None

**OLD BUSINESS:**

None

**NEW BUSINESS:**

Town Manager, Laura Ratcliffe, recommended council remove Jeff Miller from the Making Grayson Glow Committee due to his passing and appoint Councilwoman Joan Collins as the chairwoman. Mrs. Ratcliffe proposed the following Making Grayson Glow members, Cooper Adams, Tiffany Adams, Dreama Morton, Karen Halsey and Andy Anderson as the financial management member. Mrs. Ratcliffe also asked the council to update authorized signatories on

the Making Grayson Glow checking account to add Joan Collins and Tiffany Adams with removal of Jeff Miller. **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to approve the recommendation of Town Manager Ratcliffe as presented. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

Town Manager, Laura Ratcliffe, stated that the Wade Ward family inquired about having the mural of Mr. Ward refreshed. Town Manager Ratcliffe checked with the one that initially painted the mural, Charles Akers, who gave her an estimate of \$5,600 to refresh it. Councilwoman Kit Marshall asked if the Ward family could possibly do a fundraiser to help raise money for it. Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that the family was not capable of getting one together. Mayor Ronald Sexton stated that the EDA would meet to consider funding the mural.

Town Manager, Laura Ratcliffe, stated that the Police Department has an opportunity to apply for a DCJS ARPA grant. The grant is for \$10,000 to be used for equipment and technology. The department is in need of updated protective vest. This would be a great opportunity for the department to use the funding for the vest. **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to authorize submission for the grant authorizing Town Manager Ratcliffe to execute all documents for the grant. COUNCILMAN MARK MILLER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

#### **TOWN STAFF REPORT:**

MONTHLY FINANCES were presented in the amount of \$153,012.65. Town Clerk Kim Farmer stated that the payables were up this month due to the VRA payment along with repairs at the wastewater treatment plant. **COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion to approve the finances in the amount of \$153,012.65. VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER 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 Patrolman Jonathan Mullins was in training for 4 days this past month. Interim Police Chief Adams stated that the department had several complaints about speeding on 21. The department has been patrolling this area which has upped the summons.

UTILITY REPORT-Utility Supervisor, Terry Osborne, stated that his report was in council packets. Supervisor Osborne stated that all of the blowers at the wastewater treatment plant are running. Councilman Jason Cassell ask if operator Billy Cornett was still working. Utility Supervisor Osborne stated that he was. Mr. Cornett has not given a set date when he was retiring but is in the process of filling out paperwork and would let him know as soon as he could. Utility Supervisor Osborne stated that the part-time workers were hauling sludge. Vice Mayor Jim Meier thanked Utility Supervisor Osborne for putting in culvert at North Park.

SPECIAL EVENTS-Town Manager Ratcliffe, stated that Special Events Coordinator, Mary Ann Halsey is working on the Spring Bash event.

## MANAGERS REPORT:

- 1) **ARPA Funding:**
  - a. Will be discussed during the budget phase.
- 2) **2022 Audit:**
  - a. We have a draft. The auditors will present at April's council meeting.
- 3) **Real Estate and Personal Property Taxes:**
  - a. The total budget percentage received as of March 9<sup>th</sup> was 99%.
- 4) **Town Park:**
  - a. The park is planned to open in 2024. Town Council formed a committee for the project. The committee is Joan Collins, Kit Marshall and Mark Miller with Joan being the chairwoman.
- 5) **Penn Court:**
  - a. Town Attorney Roger Brooks got the information needed for the funding agency. The project is estimated to take 6 months for completion. The hourly rate has increased \$14,000 the projected cost of the project is \$470,000 with the Town funding \$145,000.
- 6) **DHCD Housing Grant:**
  - a. No activity to report this month.
- 7) **Sewer I & I project:**
  - a. Councilman Buddy Halsey will report on regarding selection of the project manager.
- 8) **DEQ Non-Competitive Litter Prevention and Recycling Grant:**
  - a. Funds have been disbursed to the Town of Independence, Town of Fries, Town of Troutdale, and Grayson County. Councilwoman Joan Collins is working with Michelle Pridgen regarding clean up in Town.
- 9) **ARPA Law Enforcement Equipment and Technology Grant Program:**
  - a. Previously discussed.
- 10) **VCWA:**
  - a. Town Manager Ratcliffe and Councilman Cassell attended the meeting last month. The authority board agreed to meet monthly. Town Manager Ratcliffe is meeting with Webster Day along with Ryan Wilmoth and the engineer to discuss the contract.
- 11) **2023-24 Budget:**
  - a. The Town management team is working on a draft budget.
- 12) **Grant Writing Services:**
  - a. Information in closed session packets.
- 13) **Freedom of Information Act Request:**
  - a. The Town has received two requests since March 1<sup>st</sup>. One has been responded to and one is in the process. More information will be provided in the closed session.
- 14) **Fireworks:**
  - a. Will have to be moved to a different location this year.
- 15) **Wade Ward Mural Refresh:**
  - a. Previously discussed.
- 16) **Legends of Grayson:**

- a. Will be at the 1908 Courthouse honoring Wade Ward and Donna Correll. The event is for two days, March 31<sup>st</sup> and April 1<sup>st</sup>. Making Grayson Glow will be doing a fund raiser at the event.

**17) Making Grayson Glow:**

- a. Previously discussed.

**MAYORS REPORT:**

Mayor Sexton stated he and Town Manager Ratcliffe met with the police department. Mayor Sexton, Town Manager Ratcliffe, Councilwoman Joan Collins and Vice Mayor Meier had a tour at the WWTP. March 1<sup>st</sup> Mayor Sexton went to head start and read to the children. Mayor Sexton asked Interim Police Chief Adams if he could take the police car so the children could look at it.

Mayor Sexton set up a Fiber Committee which consists of Buddy Halsey, Chair, Jim Meier and himself.

**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 Committee has started the process in hopes of having an adopted budget by June 13<sup>th</sup>.

Councilman Jason Cassell, Personnel Committee, the Police Chief position is posted internal for two weeks which ends Thursday.

Councilman Buddy Halsey, Water Committee, the main project is the Penn Court Waterline replacement.

Councilman Buddy Halsey, Sewer Committee, The Lane Group is willing to work on the I & I project at the WWTP.

Councilwoman Joan Collins, Beautification, some of the banners need to be replaced. The committee is planning to replace some of the dirt in the barrels on April 15<sup>th</sup> flowers will not be planted until May. Karen Osborne is getting cost together for the flowers. Several volunteers are planning on helping with the watering and care of the plants.

Councilwoman Joan Collins, Town Park committee, met twice. They would like to get rid of the orange fence and replace it with a rail fence. The fence will be put up at no charge except for the cost of supplies. The committee is meeting with Mark Cline from the engineer firm this Thursday to discuss electric and plumbing.

Councilwoman Joan Collins, Traffic and Safety, there is a problem with people parking on the wrong side of the street. Police will watch for this. There is no walk way at the intersection of 21/58. Town Manager Ratcliffe spoke with VDOT today regarding a cross walk.

Councilwoman Kit Marshall, stated that the Grayson County Tourism sign at the Tractor Garden was a distraction. Town Manager Ratcliffe stated she would discuss with Grayson County Tourism director.

Interim Police Chief Adams stated that he had spoken to AEP regarding streetlights being out. AEP ask the Police Department to mark the poles with a red ribbon to identify them.

Utility Supervisor Osborne stated that VDOT has a contractor looking at the sidewalks in Town.

Mayor Sexton stated that beginning next month we would be starting Community Matters which gives people an opportunity to be involved in Town. Anyone who would like to speak at council meetings will have to email to be put on the agenda with up to four speakers with a limited time.

**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. VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER 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**

**COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made motion to add Mark Miller to ARB and remove Ronald; COUNCILWOMAN Kit MARSHALL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

Councilman Mark Miller asked that the council look into legalizing golf carts in town. Discussion ensued. The council agreed this should be looked into further. Attorney Brooks agreed to look into neighboring town ordinances and bring information to the April 2023 meeting.

No other business, Mayor Sexton adjourned the meeting at 9pm