



**TOWN OF INDEPENDENCE
REGULAR SCHEDULED COUNCIL MEETING
TUESDAY AUGUST 8, 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, and Mary Ann Halsey, Special Events Coordinator.

CITIZENS & GUESTS: Michelle Pridgen, Independence Farmer's Market, Gwynn Cornett, Jennifer Snow, and Gary Hagston.

- Public Hearings
 - None
- Call to Order
 - Welcome/Decorum-Mayor Sexton called the meeting to order this 8th day of August 2023, 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 meeting minutes as presented. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
- Reports, Presentations or Requests
 - Greg Hagston, Blue Line Solutions, presented to the council what the company does. The company offers a school safety photo speed program. Blue Line Solution did a pilot study at the elementary school and the high school in 2021. Out of 18,529 vehicles that went thru the school zone from 7:30am to 4pm 3,200 vehicles were over the speed limit up to 11 and under, 1,492 vehicles were over 11-16, and 651 vehicles were over 21 and above. Mr. Hagston stated the flashing school lights have to be active and working in order to be charged. The school superintendent has control of the lights. The most important part of the program is to be transparent with people. You have to educate and give warning before the program goes live. The purpose of the company is to be proactive instead of reactive. Vice Mayor Jim Meier asked if the equipment would be effective by the weather? Mr. Hagston stated it would not. Councilwoman Kit Marshall asked if the lights would be kept up to date or flashing when school was closed. Mr. Hagston stated that they would be. The current equipment is out of date therefore no one can be charged with speeding while the school lights are flashing. Chief Matthew Adams spoke with Kelly Wilmore, Grayson County School Superintendent, who is supportive of the program. Council asked Chief Adams to work with Mr. Hagston to draft a preliminary contract for consideration.

- Old Business
 - None to report.
- New Business
 - Motion to approve cancelling September 2023 Council Meeting:
 - Town Manager Ratcliffe stated she, along with Chief Adams and Utility Supervisor Osborne would not be able to attend the September council meeting and recommended council to cancel the September meeting. **COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion to cancel September 2023 council meeting. VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
 - Motion to declare Police equipment surplus:
 - 2 Rock River 223 Patrol Rifles
 - 2018 Ford Eco Sport
 - **COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion to declare the police equipment as surplus. VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.** Town Manager Ratcliffe stated the new police vehicle would be here tomorrow and in service within a couple months. Town Manager Ratcliffe is looking at options to do something with the 2014 Ford Explorer. **COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion to sell the property on GOV Deals. COUNILMAN MARK MILLER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.** Town Manager Ratcliffe stated the value of the guns was \$300. The police officers are wanting to purchase these themselves.
 - Town Clerk/Treasurer (Kim Farmer)
 - Bills & Payroll-Monthly payables were presented in the amount of \$95,410.17. **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to approve payables in the amount of \$95,410.17. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
 - Police Report (Chief Matthew Adams)
 - Chief Adams stated the new police car will be delivered tomorrow. Copperhead Graphics will be installing the graphics along with the red and blue lights. Policeman Jonathan Mullins will be attending a breathalyzer training the end of this month in Richmond. The police department is patrolling more on 21 North due to the increase in speeding on that route. Chief Adams stated that he and Councilman Jason Cassell discussed the option for the police department to start unlocking vehicles. Chief Adams stated the cost for the kits were approximately \$300. The vehicle owner would be required to sign a waiver to alleviate the police department of damages if any to unlock their vehicle. Town Attorney Roger Brooks stated that as long as the owner signed the waiver regarding the safety of the officer it would be fine. **COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion to approve the police department to purchase the equipment to unlock vehicles upon Town Attorney Roger Brooks approval of the written waiver. COUNCILMAN MARK MILLER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.** Chief Adams stated that National Night Out was a success.
 - Utility Directors Report- (Terry Osborne)
 - Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that Utility Supervisor Osborne is doing well. He has a follow up appointment on the 24th of August at which time doctors will let him know when he can return to work. Public Works Supervisor Wesley Weaver is doing a good job. The Town did run wells due to Sparta having a big leak. There was a water line break on Grayson Street. The Police department helped out with it.
 - Special Events Report- (Mary Ann Halsey)
 - Mary Ann stated the Mountain Fall Foliage Event is scheduled for October 14th.
- Town Manager's Report
 - Programs, Projects, and Updates
 - Town Park:

- The Town received approval of the revised plans for the Town Park from Rural Development. Town Manager Ratcliffe stated the Town is waiting on Grayson County to sign off on the erosion part.
- Penn Court Waterline replacement:
 - The project was going great until last night. The contractors were working and had to cut off water off at the Nursing Home and Mount Rogers Mental Health. The water valve was hot therefore water was still running. The Town spoke with the engineers and Rural Development which stated a new hydrant would have to be put in.
- Sewer I N I Project:
 - Bond Counsel was selected for the project (Spillman Thomas and Battle). The estimated cost is \$1 million. The Town will get a loan from VRA in the amount of \$250,000 with the rest of the project to be forgiven. The loan needs to be closed by the end of this year. Matthew Lane with Lane Engineering is handling this project.
- Mailing for water/sewer bills:
 - Due to issues with the mail the water bills are taking a long time to get distributed. It is taking around a 5-day turnaround to get to customers. Council needs to discuss possibly changing the water/sewer billing.
- Town Employees:
 - Wesley Weaver, Public Works Supervisor, is reporting to Utility Supervisor Terry Osborne. The Town has hired two new public works team members which will start on August 21st. An offer for the police officer position has been given. The interviews for the part time clerk started today.
- EDA:
 - The board is starting to hold meetings monthly. The board is currently looking at the current programs with the possibility of adding other ones. Grayson County EDA asked Town Manager Ratcliffe to attend their meeting held on August 15th to look at options to collaborate with the Town.

Councilwoman Kit Marshall inquired about the tree removal on 21. Councilwoman Marshall stated that the ground maintenance contractor gave council a price and council agreed to have it removed. It is still there. Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that she gave notice to the contractor (Ethan Paisley) on July 10th.

Mayor's Report

- Mayor Sexton stated that he recommends council change the town committees down to 4. A public hearing will need to be held to change the Towns code. **COUNCILWOMAN KIT MARSHALL made a motion to hold a public hearing on Tuesday, October 10th, 6:00pm at the IVFD to take public comments on changing the Town of Independence Code to have 4 committees instead of 8. COUNCILWOMAN JOAN COLLINS seconded; motion carried with all ayes.** Mayor Sexton asked council to consider holding a meeting for Town residence to see what their 5 year plan would be for the Town. The mayor would like to have it on the 3rd Tuesday in October 6:00pm at the IVFD.
- Town Attorney's Report:
 - Town Attorney Roger Brooks stated that in order to have a code update council would have to hold a public hearing.
- Committee Updates
 - Town Park Special Committee – Councilwoman Collins-Town Manager Ratcliffe discussed. Councilwoman Collins stated that everyone is tickled that something is being done on the park.
 - Personnel Committee – Councilman Cassell-Town Manager Ratcliffe discussed.

- Finance Committee – Councilman Meier-Town Manager Ratcliff is working on a mockup to look over last year and moving forward to the new year.
- Sewer Committee – Councilman Halsey-nothing to report in open session.
- Water Committee - Councilman Halsey-nothing else to report besides the updates from Town Manager Ratcliff and Utility Supervisor Osborne.
- Beautification Committee – Councilwoman Collins stated the barrels in town need to be replaced. It would be nice to have the power lines underground and trees planted below the elementary school. Town Manager Ratcliff will look into possible grants for this.
- Streets, Sidewalks, and Lights Committee – Councilman Miller did not have anything to report on at this time.
- Broadband Special Committee – Councilman Halsey- did not have anything for open session.
- Informational Items
 - None.
- Community Matters – Registered Speakers and Public Comment-
 - Michelle Pridgen, Independence Farmer’s Market, stated the market hit 300 customers which was the first time since they moved on Courthouse Street. The Free Market is weighing what is coming in and going out of the market to see how much is left out of the landfill. Food Independences numbers are still up. This is a concern for them especially since we are not in the Holiday season yet. Ms. Pridgen is working with students regarding the upcoming Grayson County Fair this weekend and encouraged council members to attend.
- 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 and Town Manager Laura Ratcliff to stay. COUNCILMAN BUDDY HALSEY 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
Mark Miller -I So Certify**

**Jason Cassell-I So Certify
Joan Collins-I So Certify
Kit Marshall-I So Certify**

Motion to approve the contract with Sustainable Results, LLC for grant writing services with the change of venue to Grayson County, VA was made by Buddy Halsey and seconded by Mark Miller. All approved.

Motion to approve the Town Manager to execute the financing offer from Virginia Resources Authority for the Sewer I and I project was made by Jim Meier and seconded by Kit Marshall. All approved.

Motion to approve the job descriptions and pay grades for the Water Treatment Plant positions as presented was made by Jim Meier and seconded by Mark Miller. All approved.

No other business, Mayor Sexton adjourned the meeting.