



**TOWN OF INDEPENDENCE
REGULAR SCHEDULED COUNCIL MEETING
TUESDAY MAY 9, 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, Mark Miller, Joan Collins, and Kit Marshall.

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT: Buddy Halsey.

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: Michelle Pridgen, Independence Farmer's Market, Gary Hash, IVFD Chief, Mark Emmerson, and Travis Brown.

- Public Hearings
 - None
- Call to Order
 - Welcome/Decorum-Mayor Sexton called the meeting to order this 9th day of May 2023, and declared a quorum present.
 - Approval of Agenda, Consent Agenda, Meeting Minutes-Mayor Sexton asked for approval as presented. Town Clerk Kim Farmer stated that Councilwoman Kit Marshall was inadvertently left off of as being present. **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to approve the minutes with the amendment. COUNCILMAN MARK MILLER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
- Reports, Presentations or Requests
 - Gary Hash, Independence Volunteer Fire Department Chief, stated that in February he came to council asking for the Town to consider helping the Fire Department with the purchase of a new brush truck. The cost of a new brush truck was approximately \$85,000. An application for funding from Rural Development was completed asking for \$50,000. The Fire Department did not receive funding for the brush truck due to low funds however, there is an opportunity to receive \$25,000. The Fire Department could use this to purchase 10 sets of new turnout gear. The approximate cost will be \$37 to \$39k. Councilman Jason Cassell asked if the old truck was still usable. Chief Hash stated it was just an older model. Town Manager Laura Ratcliffe stated that funds from the Town could come from the general fund and ARPA funding. **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to pay \$29,000 from general funds for the Fire Department. COUNCILWOMAN KIT MARSHALL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.** Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that the RD resolution would need to be changed from the fire truck to turnout gear. **COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion to revise the Rural Development**

resolution changing the fire truck to turnout gear. COUNCILMAN MARK MILLER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.

- Old Business
 - Present Town Park Redesign Plan – Joan Collins, Town Park Committee Chairwoman
 - Motion to approve the redesigned elements of the Town Park as presented.
 - Motion to approve Hurt & Profit quote for redesign services and project management.
 - Motion to appropriate funds from Governmental General Fund to pay for Hurt & Profit services for redesign work and project management.
 - **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to approve the redesign elements for the Town Park, approve the quote from Hurt & Proffitt not to exceed \$42,000 from the general fund. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
- New Business
 - Independence Volunteer Fire Department Rural Development Grant – Chief Gary Hash
 - Motion to approve pursuing Rural Development grant to fund turn out gear instead of brush truck. (In Reports)
 - Independence Volunteer Fire Department request for funds for new truck equipment.
 - Motion to approve appropriation of funds from General Governmental account to pay for new fire truck equipment up to \$29,000 per request from Independence Volunteer Fire Department. (In reports)
 - Closed Bid Opening Process
 - Dump Truck – 1 bid received-Rick McLean \$450
 - Pick-up Truck – 1 bid received-Trent Farmer \$250
 - **COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion to accept the bids as presented with the condition they be removed from the Town’s lot by May 19th 5:00pm. COUNCILMAN MARK MILLER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
 - Present plan for Town Hall Repairs – Laura Ratcliffe, Town Manager
 - Motion to approve appropriation of funds from Governmental Capital account to pay for Town Hall repairs. Town Manager Ratcliffe stated the repairs consist of replacing the flat roof, replacing all of the insulation, ceiling tiles, and fixing the holes in the duct work. The estimated cost is \$78,743.41 for the repairs. The Town has a building fund account which can be used toward the renovations. Councilwoman Kit Marshall and Town Manager Ratcliffe are going to paint. **COUNCILWOMAN JOAN COLLINS made a motion to approve funding for the Town Hall repairs in the amount of \$78,743.41. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
 - Present 2023-24 Budget Recommendation
 - Motion to accept recommended budget as proposed budget for 2023-24 fiscal year. Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that the ad for the budget will be run in the paper on May 24th and May 31st edition. A public hearing is scheduled for June 5th, 6:00pm, IVFD. **COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion to approve the proposed 2023-2024 budget. COUNCILMAN MARK MILLER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
- Town Staff Report
 - Town Clerk/Treasurer (Kim Farmer)
 - Bills & Payroll-Monthly payables were presented in the amount of \$88,194.96. **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to approve payables in the amount of \$88,194.96. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
 - Police Report (Chief Matthew Adams)
 - Chief Adams reported the department sold two old vehicles. A 2013 Taurus brought \$2,475 and a 2006 Ford Explorer brought \$470. Drug take back program on April 22nd took in 26 pounds of drugs. Officer Jonathan Mullins recovered a stolen vehicle from Washington County. Chief Adams attended the new Police Chief Conference which gave him good references. Chief Adams

participated in a walk for child abuse prevention with Sherriff Vaughan. Chief Adams met with Town Manager Ratcliffe and Michelle Pridgen regarding the Town Park security. Town Manager Ratcliffe got the police department an evidence cabinet. The police department received approval of ARPA funding. The funds will be used toward bullet proof vests and rifles. The 2021 explorer has been at the garage in Wytheville for one month today.

- Utility Directors Report-VDOT got money to work on the sidewalks. The sidewalk at Dr. Miniclier's office is fixed. The Penn Court project has started. The crew is doing a good job. The 811 system is live for the Town.
- Special Events Report-Spring Bash is June 3rd 11am to 3pm. The band Reflections will be performing. The 4th of July event is coming together. The Blue Ridge Girls will be performing. Creek Bottom Brewery will be set up.
- Town Manager's Report
 - Programs, Projects, and Updates
 - Lead and Copper Assessment-Town eligible for funding in the Spring, \$250,000 is requested through Virginia Department of Water. Should find out in October if funded. The project has to be completed before September 2024.
 - New Service rates are on the Towns website.
- Mayor's Report
 - Mayor Sexton thanked council and Town employees. There have been a lot of meetings and new council.
- Town Attorney's Report-Nothing for open session.
- Committee Updates
 - Town Park Special Committee – Councilwoman Collins-Split rail fence was ordered and will be here within two weeks.
 - Personnel Committee – Councilman Cassell-Congratulated Chief Adams
 - Finance Committee – Councilman Meier-Has a presentable 2023-2024 Budget
 - Sewer Committee – Councilman Halsey-Absent
 - Water Committee - Councilman Halsey-Absent
 - Beautification Committee – Councilwoman Collins-Dirt replaced in the barrels; Robert Collins donated flowers for the barrels which was a little over \$800, new trash cans ordered using litter grant funds.
 - Traffic & Safety Committee – Councilwoman Collins-Waiting on VDOT regarding speed zones, Councilman Miller has contacted VDOT regarding golf carts.
 - Streets, Sidewalks, and Lights Committee – Councilman Miller-VDOT has contracted out someone to grind down the sidewalks, AEP is replacing the streetlights with LED when going out.
 - Solid Waste Committee – Councilman Miller-Closed session issue.
 - Broadband Special Committee – Councilman Halsey-Absent
- Informational Items
- Community Matters – Registered Speakers and Public Comment-
 - Closed Session Michelle Pridgen, Independence Farmer's Market, thanked Chief Adams, and Chief Deputy Hash for safety at the Farmer's Market. The public works department setup a handwash station for the Market. The first market was held last week with 31 vendors. Grayson Land Care helped Councilwoman Collins do litter pickup.
- 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 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
Mark Miller-I So Certify
Kit Marshall-I So Certify**

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

- 1) Reviewed the proposals for Janitorial and Grounds Maintenance. **COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made motion to accept Gail Clark’s proposal of \$10,660 for janitorial and Ethan Paisley’s proposal of \$15k for grounds maintenance. COUNCILMAN MARK MILLER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
- 2) **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made motion to reallocate amount from general fund, not to exceed \$227k, to the sewer general fund before year end to clear the negative fund balance. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

No other business, Mayor Sexton adjourned the meeting.

- Adjourn

-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.