



**TOWN OF INDEPENDENCE
REGULAR SCHEDULED COUNCIL MEETING
TUESDAY JULY 11, 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, Joan Collins, and Kit Marshall.

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT: Mark Miller.

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, Crystal Crueton, and Curtis Harrington.

- Public Hearings
 - None
- Call to Order
 - Welcome/Decorum-Mayor Sexton called the meeting to order this 11th day of July 2023, and declared a quorum present.
 - Approval of Agenda, Consent Agenda, Meeting Minutes-Mayor Sexton asked for approval as presented. **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to approve the agenda, consent agenda and meeting minutes as presented. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all eyes.**
- Reports, Presentations or Requests
 - Curtis Harrington, Tri County Real Estate, stated that he was proud to say he was a resident of Independence. Mr. Harrington stated that he has heard of all kinds of good compliments for the new Town Manager, Town Council and Town Employees. Mr. Harrington stated it was pleasant to go into the Town Hall. Mr. Harrington stated that several years ago a committee was formed in 1970 to help get funds for development of the Town. Mr. Harrington stated that as of today only 2 members are surviving. The committee would like to donate the current amount left in the account to the Town to go toward the Town Park. Mr. Harrington stated there was approximately \$28,000 left. Mr. Harrington asked if the Town accepted the donation if Council or Town Manager would do a letter accepting the money. **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to accept the donation for the Town Park. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all eyes.**
- Old Business
 - Tree removal on 21-Town Manager Ratcliffe spoke with the Town's lawn care contractor that stated the cost would be \$500 in which they intend to have moved within the next couple of weeks.

- VDOT Options for Intersection Hwy 58/21 Pedestrian Crosswalks-Town Manager Ratcliffe has spoken to VDOT. A meeting will be scheduled with Town Manager Ratcliffe, Councilwoman Joan Collins, and VDOT to discuss this issue.
- Town Investment Options-Town Manager Ratcliffe looked into options for the Town. Scott Wickham, Robinson Farmer Cox Auditor, stated that there are investment pools through VML and State Treasury which are government approved investment funds and are more liquid than CD's. Discussion ensued. Council agree Town Manager Ratcliffe should invest town funds in the LGIP (State Treasury) funds.
- New Business
 - Economic Development Authority:
 - Approval to renew terms for:
 - Renee Nester to June 30, 2027 (resigned) Paul Furr if appointed.
 - Beck Hall to June 30, 2027
 - Mayor Sexton stated that Renee Nester and Town Attorney Roger Brooks have resigned from the EDA board. Paul Furr, owner of Painted Mane has shown interest in being on the board. Mayor Sexton stated that upon council's approval the board will have six members which are Lance Hart, term to June 30, 2026, Steve Marshall, Chairman, term to June 30, 2025, Buddy Halsey, term June 30, 2026, Becky Hall, term June 30, 2027, Tom Maxwell and Paul Fur, term June 30, 2027. **COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion to accept the appointments as presented. VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER seconded; motion carried with all ayes. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion to accept the resignation of Renee Nester and Roger Brooks. VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
 - Planning Commission:
 - Approval to renew terms for James Johnson and Leesa Dalton to June 30, 2027. **COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion to renew terms for Mr. Johnson and Ms. Dalton until June 30, 2027. VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
 - Architectural Review Board:
 - Approval to renew term for Jimmy Moss to June 30, 2027. **COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion to renew Jimmy Mosses term on the Architectural Review Board as presented. COUNCILMAN BUDDY HALSEY seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
 - Town Clerk/Treasurer (Kim Farmer)
 - Bills & Payroll-Monthly payables were presented in the amount of \$344,740.45. Councilwoman Kit Marshall stated that in payables were invoices for the Tractor Garden and benches which will be reimbursed to the Town. **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to approve payables in the amount of \$344,740.45. COUNCILWOMAN JOAN COLLINS seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
 - Police Report (Chief Matthew Adams)
 - Chief Adams stated the new police car will be delivered in a week or two. The fourth of July was good from a safety perspective except for one accident after the parade. There will be changes around the intersection of 21/58 next year. Office Jonathan Mullins will be in training the end of next month for breathalyzer testing. Chief Adams has been looking into Blue Line which is a program offered in the school zones. The program would be no cost to the Town. There will be speed signs along with cameras. The Town of Wytheville currently participates in the program and is very well satisfied with it. Mayor Sexton asked Chief Adams to have them come and do a presentation at next months meeting. Chief Adams stated that two businesses in Town have recently been broken into so council needs to be on the lookout and aware of what is going on.
 - Utility Directors Report- (Terry Osborne)
 - Paving is being done in Town. Powerhouse Road is not on the list to be paved. At the Virginia Carolina Water Plant eighty test have to be done by August. Sixty of the test are run with the

other 20 needing the river to be muddy before they can be run. The wastewater treatment plant has a 97% removal rate. Robert Brown and Peabody Holdaway are doing an excellent job. Mr. Brown is also helping run the test at the VCWA. Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that the whole team came together to get the testing done with Mr. Brown coming in 3rd shift to get them done.

- Special Events Report- (Mary Ann Halsey)
 - The 4th of July was good. It was perfect weather. The horses at the new location was a perfect spot. Christmas in July sponsored by Making Grayson Glow is this Saturday. Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that the only issue she was aware of was goat at a house close to where the fireworks went off went through a fence. Next year the Town will look into different options for the fireworks. Councilwoman Joan Collins asked about looking into drone fireworks. Crystal Crueton, resident on Powerhouse Road, stated it was her goat that went through the fence and she was upset that the fireworks were set off at the Elementary School. Ms. Crueton stated that the neighborhood consists of elderly people and there are residents with PTSD (which is her husband) close to the new location. Ms. Crueton stated it was disrespectful to the residents and hit a nerve on her that residents were not notified in advance. Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that the Police Department went to surrounding residents with letters to inform them of what was happening. Town Manager Ratcliffe encouraged Ms. Crueton to attend Town Council meetings to be more informed of what was going on. Vice Mayor Jim Meier thanked Mary Ann for a successful 4th of July event.
- Town Manager's Report
 - Programs, Projects, and Updates
 - Town Park:
 - The Town received revised plans for the Town Park from Hurt & Proffitt. They will be sent to Rural Development for approval. The revised plan eliminates the second building. The split rail fence will be taken down until the construction is done then will be put back up. Electrical for four food trucks will be in place. The bidding will start in October. The Twin County Community Foundation has agreed to transfer the money that was originally for North Park to the Town Park. Councilman Buddy Halsey asked if there was a stipulation for receiving the money since there was one previously. Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that the only one was for the money to be focused on a green space area.
 - Town Manager Ratcliffe has a meeting tomorrow in Wytheville regarding the DHCD housing grant.
 - Benches and Rockers:
 - The Town had 2 benches installed in front of the 1908 Courthouse in Councilman Jeff Miller's honor. In addition, 4 more rockers are funded to go along Town with an additional 2 funded to go at the Tractor Garden. The cost is \$1,170 for benches and \$975 for the rockers.
 - Department of Corrections Contract:
 - DOC have been notified of the water and sewer increase. Town Manager Ratcliffe is going to do a 2 year look back audit.
 - Businessowners Meeting:
 - The first session is for Thursday, August 10th from 4-5 pm at the IVFD. Meetings will be held for different districts.
 - Town Hall Update:
 - The office will be moving back the week of July 24th with opening day on July 31st.
- Mayor's Report
 - Mayor Sexton stated that he didn't have anything else for open session.
- Town Attorney's Report-Nothing for open session.
- Committee Updates

- Town Park Special Committee – Councilwoman Collins-The project is moving but slowly. The split rail fence really makes a huge difference.
- Personnel Committee – Councilman Cassell-Nothing for open session.
- Finance Committee – Councilman Meier-Last year budget process went smoothly.
- Sewer Committee – Councilman Halsey-nothing else to report besides the updates from Town Manager Ratcliffe and Utility Supervisor Osborne.
- Water Committee - Councilman Halsey-nothing else to report besides the updates from Town Manager Ratcliffe and Utility Supervisor Osborne.
- Beautification Committee – Councilwoman Collins is excited about the bench and rocker program. Chez Helmick with Edward Jones has verbally committed to purchased 2 benches for the Tractor Garden.
- Streets, Sidewalks, and Lights Committee – Councilman Miller was absent. Councilwoman Joan Collins stated she is looking forward to meeting VDOT regarding the crosswalks.
- Broadband Special Committee – Councilman Halsey-stated he did not have anything to report on.
- Informational Items
 - Making Grayson Glow is having a Christmas in July event that is August 15th at the 1908 Courthouse.
 - National Night Out is August 1st
 - Art & Ag Show is September 9th and 10th.
 - Councilman Buddy Halsey asked for the progress on the mural at 136 East Main Street. Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that EDA would have to discuss it.
 - Councilman Jason Cassell thanked all Town’s employees for a job well done. Councilman Cassell also gave thanks to new councilmembers Kit, Joan, and Mark for their hard work at improving the Town.
 - Councilman Buddy Halsey asked Councilwoman Marshall about the stones at the Tractor Garden. Ms. Marshall stated that the committee is debating on continuing the project due to taking them up and replacing after getting engraved. Councilwoman Marshall stated that the left-over pavers could possibly be used at the Town Park.
- Community Matters – Registered Speakers and Public Comment-
 - Michelle Pridgen, Independence Farmer’s Market, thanked everyone for all their help. Ms. Pridgen reported that 57 kids came out to Kid’s Day, Wellness Day this the 14th of July with Berry Day the 21st of July. Ms. Pridgen thanked Mary Ann on the 4th of July parade stating it was one of the longest ones she had been to.
- 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 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
Kit Marshall-I So Certify**

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

COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL motioned to approve the updates to the personnel handbook policies on Compensation and Time & Attendance and the Job Descriptions and pay grades for the Town Clerk,

Director Public Works, Deputy Clerk, Deputy DMV Clerk, Office Clerk, Public Works Crew Leader and Public Works Crew Member as presented by the Town Manager. COUNCILMAN BUDDY HALSEY seconded. Motion passed.

VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER motioned to approve the employee bonus for exceptional performance over the last year to Peabody Holdaway and Robert Brown. COUNCILWOMAN JOAN COLLINS seconded. Motion passed.

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 distracting behavior or nuisance; and
- Please turn off cell phones and other such devices before entering the meeting room.