



**TOWN OF INDEPENDENCE
REGULAR SCHEDULED COUNCIL MEETING
TUESDAY OCTOBER 10, 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 Phipps, Assistant to the Town Clerk.

CITIZENS & GUESTS: Michelle Pridgen, Independence Farmer's Market, Steve Marshall, Jennifer Snow, and Teresa Osborne.

- Public Hearings
 - Zoning: Public Hearing for three proposed rezonings. 1) 119 Journey's End Drive, Independence, from General Commercial to Single Family Residential 2) Change the Core Commercial Zoning to include animal services, 3) 109 Hilltop Drive, Independence, from Single Family Residential to Core Commercial
 - Independence Town Code Changes of committee members and billing process.
 - A public hearing will need to be scheduled to take public comments on a VRA Bond Issuance for a sewer project.
- Call to Order
 - Welcome/Decorum-Mayor Sexton called the meeting to order this 10th day of October 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 ayes.**
- Reports, Presentations or Requests
 - None.
- Old Business
 - Code Change:
 - **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to change the Independence Town Code to change the committee structure from 8 members to 4 members. COUNCILWOMAN KIT MARSHALL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
 - VRA Bond Issuance: The bond is for improvement to the Town's sewer system. A public hearing will be held on November 14th to take public comments.
 - Town Park Bid Status: Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that the bids received were \$895,000 and \$920,825. The updated project would include the drainage system, move the driveway, electrical,

plumbing, concrete pad, and grading. Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that the Rural Development Grant money of \$175,000 will expire next August and will not be renewed.

- New Business
 - Planning Commission Recommendation-Zoning Changes:
 - **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to approve the zoning request for 119 Journey's Drive, Independence, from General Commercial to Single Family Residential. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
 - **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to change the definition for Core Commercial Zoning to include animal services. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
 - **VICE MAYOR JIM MEIER made a motion to approve the zoning request for 109 Hilltop Drive, Independence, from Single Family Residential to Core Commercial. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
 - Virginia Outdoor Foundation Grant:
 - The Foundation has approved a \$65,000 grant for the North Independence Town Park. The grant can be used for landscape, park furniture, play equipment, trash receptacles, and due diligence for the conservation deed recording. Town Manager Ratcliffe asked Town Attorney Brooks for an explanation of the deed of dedication. Town Attorney Roger Brooks stated that the Town would need a surveyor.
 - Convenience Fees:
 - Town Manager Ratcliffe is looking into lower cost options for the convenience fees. The Town is currently being charged a fee of 5.5% for customers using a credit or debit card. The Town only charges customers \$1 per transaction. To date, the town has paid \$1000 more in fees than they've received in fee charges.
 - Real & Personal Property Tax Billing Dates:
 - Town Manager Ratcliffe asked the council to authorize her to approve the due date to 80 days after receiving the information from the county. **COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made the motion to authorize the Town Manager to change the tax due date to 80 days after receipt of the county billing. COUNCILWOMAN KIT MARSHALL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**
 - Police equipment surplus:
 - Police Chief Matthew Adams stated that 2 of the surplus shotguns were purchased.
 - Town Clerk/Treasurer (Kim Farmer)
 - Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that bills were going to be processed the 1st and 3rd week of each month.
 - Police Report (Chief Matthew Adams)
 - Officer Mullins got his breathalyzer certification. Office Holderfield is doing a great job and hoping to get his certification also. Everyone got fitted for their safety vest. The equipment for the new police vehicle should be here next week.
 - Utility Directors Report- (Terry Osborne)
 - Utility Supervisor Osborne stated his written report was included in packets. There are currently 18 meters that do not read.
 - Special Events Report- (Mary Ann Halsey)
 - Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that Mary Ann currently has 7 sponsors for the Mountain Fall Foliage Event, which is this Saturday, October 14th.
- Town Manager's Report
 - Programs, Projects, and Updates
 - Community Meeting is scheduled for October 17th 6:00pm at the 1908 Courthouse. This is an opportunity for the Town Resident to give feedback on the Town five-year strategy.

- Mayor's Report
 - Mayor Sexton stated that he hopes to adopt the new town code books at next month's council meeting after everyone has a chance to look over.
 - Mayor Sexton stated that the change in the committee leadership (Infrastructure and Community Development) will take effect in January with Finance and Personnel remaining the same.
 - Mayor Sexton asked the council to start considering different ideas such as beautification.
 - Mayor Sexton stated that Safe Halloween is October 31st from 4:30pm to 7:00pm. It will be on Courthouse Street and on the 1908 Courthouse Lot.
 - Mayor Sexton stated that he is going to have tours of the Town's property and ask council to participate.
- Town Attorney's Report:
 - Town Attorney Roger Brooks nothing for open session.
- Committee Updates
 - Town Park Special Committee – Councilwoman Collins-Town Manager Ratcliffe discussed.
 - Personnel Committee – Councilman Cassell-Nothing to report.
 - Finance Committee – Vice Mayor Meier- stated there will be a finance committee meeting on November 9th 6:00pm to 8:00pm. Business owner meeting on November 4th at 4:00pm.
 - Sewer Committee – Councilman Halsey-absent.
 - Water Committee - Councilman Halsey-absent.
 - Beautification Committee – Councilwoman Collins asked about the flags being replaced and about the Blue Devil Flags for the school. Councilwoman Collins stated that the barrels are in bad shape and need to be eliminated.
 - Streets, Sidewalks, and Lights Committee – Councilman Miller VDOT contacted for pedestrian walkways.
 - Broadband Special Committee – Councilman Halsey-absent.
- Community Matters – Registered Speakers and Public Comment-
 - Michelle Pridgen, Independence Farmer's Market, thanked public works for helping with the Market. Ms. Pridgen stated the last market is this Friday. Grayson Landcare will be at Fries on November 16, 2023.
 - Jennifer Snow, Independence, stated that an artist that was doing a mural on her property located at 307 East Main Street. Ms. Snow stated he was told that he was not to paint until the mural was approved. Town Manager Ratcliffe stated that the EDA board has to approve all murals in Town and asked that all artists come by the Town office to speak with her. Town Manager Ratcliffe also stated that the Town holds business meetings the 2nd Thursday of each month at 4:00pm and business owners were encouraged to attend. Ms. Snow suggested holding resident meetings quarterly.
- 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 KIT MARSHALL 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

Buddy Halsey-I So Certify
Mark Miller -I So Certify

Joan Collins-I So Certify
Kit Marshall-I So Certify

COUNILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion to amend the current personnel benefits to include paternity leave as presented during closed session. COUNCILMAN MARK MILLER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.

COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion to amend the Town Manager's contract as presented. COUNCILMAN MARK MILLER seconded; motion carried with all ayes.

No other business, Mayor Sexton adjourned the meeting.

-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.