

Minutes of the regularly scheduled meeting of the Saltville Town Council held on December 14, 2021 at 5:00 p.m. in the Town Hall

**Council:**       **Monica Johnson, Jeff Comer, Eugene Call, Bryan Morris, and Gary Call**  
**Steve Surber was absent**

**Mayor:**       **C. Todd Young**

**Staff:**       **Brian Martin, Town Manager**  
**Paul Cassell, Town Attorney**  
**Erik Puckett, Police Chief**  
**R.B. Henderson, Public Works Director**  
**Steve Johnson, Clerk/Treasurer**

Councilwoman Johnson made a motion to approve the minutes of the October 12, 2021 Public Hearing, and Councilman Comer seconded. All were in favor.

Councilman Morris made a motion to approve the minutes of the November 9, 2021 Public Hearing about the leasing of two town properties, and Councilman Eugene Call seconded. The motion carried 4-0-1 with Councilwoman Johnson abstaining since she was not present for the Hearing.

Councilman Morris made a motion to approve the minutes of the November 9, 2021 Public Hearing about the possible changes to Bank Street, and Councilman Eugene Call seconded. The motion carried 4-0-1 with Councilwoman Johnson abstaining since she was not present for the Hearing.

Councilman Morris made a motion to approve the minutes of the November 9, 2021 regularly scheduled meeting, and Councilman Eugene Call seconded. The motion carried 4-0-1 with Councilwoman Johnson abstaining since she was not present for the meeting.

### **Citizens' Time**

**Pastor Billy** of the Northwood Fellowship said there would be a snow machine this Friday at the Christmas drive-thru for the annual backpack giveaway from 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. There will be soup and hot chocolate and goodie bags. The first 200 will also get cupcakes and candy canes. They will also supply every Head Start program in the county with a total of 200 Christmas boxes.

The Fellowship has been using the old VFW building and has fixed up the property but wants to do more formal changes via a lease for the property. They wish to have a five-year lease at \$1 per year and will pay all utilities. The Mayor asked Town Manager Brian Martin to get with the town's attorney to work out a lease.

**Janice Orr** represented the Museum of the Middle Appalachians (MOMA) and said that the annual Christmas Winter Wonderland display was currently open for people to enjoy. The trees have been decorated by various churches, businesses, civic groups, and individuals for the purpose of being a memorial. MOMA is open every day and on Thursday nights from 6:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. This particular event is currently on the Virginia Tourism Commission's website as a holiday light destination in the state.

She is currently working on a Muck Dam Disaster Memorial. There's a committee who has met and talked about the location of the memorial and the form it will take. It was agreed that the Commons Area was the best site since it would get the most exposure there, and there would be too much red tape involved to place it at the actual site of the disaster. The committee has also talked to a monument company about the design of the memorial, and it was recommended that it be granite since it will last. Every name of the people who perished will be engraved, so it will also be pricey. The committee agrees that everything should be in place by 2024, the hundredth anniversary of the event.

Fundraising will have to be done to pay the cost of the stone and the engraving. She asked that the town's address be used for those who wish to donate to the cause. The Mayor suggested the town place the donations in an account at the bank set up specifically for this. Ms. Orr also asked that the town set aside an amount in the town's annual budget each year to help with the cost and told the Council she would keep them updated on the progress.

### **Approval of the Agenda**

Councilman Morris made a motion to approve the agenda, and Councilman Eugene Call seconded. All were in favor.

### **New Business**

#### **1. Housing topics**

Jimmy Moss of the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission (MRPDC) spoke on the following:

- 1) He's the Director of Housing Development for the MRPDC, and they received a \$2 million grant to develop workforce housing units in Southwest Virginia. These units will be affordable to fill a housing gap for those who fall into that category and for what is needed in a specific area. These units can be rentals or owned, and they have to be completed by June 30, 2024.
- 2) He's been made aware that the town has a pretty big parcel of land that could be used as a building site.
- 3) In response to a question from Councilman Comer, Mr. Moss said that these units could be any type of dwelling from apartments to stand-alone homes. However, any rental units would be restricted to 80% A.M.I. individuals.
- 4) Councilwoman Johnson mentioned that the town's latest Comprehensive Plan laid out a housing plan that Mr. Moss would be able to work with.
- 5) The cap on the sale price would be \$295,000 per unit for a single family. They look for people who bring a benefit to the community such as first responders, teachers, etc.
- 6) Councilwoman Johnson asked about the low end of the price spectrum, and he said there was no minimum square footage threshold. She also asked about the homes being Eco-friendly, and he stated not so much with this grant but there are others out there.
- 7) Because it has to be done by 2024, he recommends getting a Virginia Housing Stand-alone Grant. The Mayor replied that the county would be willing to help with the water and sewer.
- 8) Councilman Eugene Call inquired about regions of the town that need to be rehabbed, and Mr. Moss said that would fall under the CDBG money from DHCD program, and that money is out there; additionally, he has done many projects with the CDBG funding.

## **2. EMS, Inc. report**

Gary Johnson spoke on the following:

- 1) The weekly meetings with the town's staff are held every Monday at 10:00 a.m.
- 2) The DEQ report for November was submitted, and the town has had no violations in a long time.
- 3) Both of the VDH reports, the regular one and the Water Treatment Leak Loss, were submitted for November.

4) The painting of the tanks at Edgewood and on 107 has finished. There's just a little bit of clean-up left.

5) At the engineering meeting last week, the aerial crossing was discussed as was the meter replacement project and the Phase I line replacement. Upgrades at the wastewater plant were also discussed.

### **Committee Reports**

Councilwoman Johnson thanked everyone who helped with the Christmas parade, tree lighting, and concert. Santa was a big hit after the parade. She hopes to see the Council members work collectively in the future on various town happenings and suggested that a book of procedures be put together so that Council members will know how to proceed for various town events such as parades, Labor Day, etc. That way there is continuity, and there's no confusion about the duties involved. The events about which Pastor Billy spoke earlier will wrap up the Christmas season.

The Garden Club has some ideas about sprucing up the Commons Area, and in the spring Northwood's FFA chapter will probably build some planters around town.

The bulk of the work has been done on the LOVE sign, and the students at the Smyth County Career and Technology Center in the Building Trade class are going to finish this.

Councilman Comer has spoken to Bill Woodward about the Herbert "Chub" Arnold sign and memorial, and Mr. Woodward mentioned this was discussed at the golf course board meeting as well. Now, the wording and the placement for the signage can be put together.

Councilwoman Johnson asked if the School Board has been approached about naming the stadium after Mr. Arnold, and Councilman Comer not yet, but that was a good idea.

Regarding guidelines for the use of the softball field, Councilman Comer stated that the EMS department has inquired about starting a softball league to make the field a more active facility. We'll be looking for EMS to help put together a plan for this including coordinating tournaments. Also, the new scoreboard donated by United Salt is very nice, and Northwood softball coach BJ Buchanan is looking into more fencing options.

### **Public Works Director's Report**

R.B. Henderson spoke on the following:

- 1) Several road cuts and holes were patched last month by using the hotbox the Mayor procured.
- 2) There were several water leaks repaired including a big one on River Road. Councilman Gary Call thanked him for fixing that particular leak.
- 3) The Lane Group has been smoke-testing lately.
- 4) The Christmas decorations were put on display.
- 5) The conveyor belt for the sewer plant should arrive next week.
- 6) The water tanks are back online, and Smyth County let the town use their generators during the cleaning and painting process.
- 7) There have been no problems getting chlorine and fluoride.
- 8) The Mayor asked when the speed bumps were going to be taken up for the winter like has been discussed in previous meetings especially since it's supposed to snow this weekend. Mr. Henderson said they are currently reading water meters and would take the speed bumps up when they are finished.

### **Police Chief's Report**

Chief Puckett spoke on the following:

- 1) The department participated in the Marion and Chilhowie Christmas parades.
- 2) Six hundred dollars was collected for the No-Shave program with proceeds going to the Saltville Elementary School. They also participated in the Shop-with-a-Hero program at Wal-Mart.
- 3) The Saltville Christmas parade went off without any hitches.
- 4) The stats for last month are included.
- 5) He asked that Chris Hogston be promoted from Patrolman to Sergeant which reflects his experience with the town. This won't change the current year's budget. Councilman Morris mad the motion to promote Officer Hogston, and Councilman Gary Call seconded. All were in favor.

6) An ad has been running for an open position, and as of today, no applications have been turned in. However, there is a candidate currently in mind, but if his name is discussed out loud, he will be terminated from his current job.

Councilwoman Johnson said she thought this potential new hire should also be picking up brush or trash since he will be working with the inmates if they return. Councilman Morris replied that he would not start an officer at \$29,000 a year to pick up trash.

### **Fire Department Report**

Chief Bryan Lynch spoke on the following:

- 1) There were eighteen calls last month with nine each in the town and county.
- 2) There is one new member now which brings the total membership to twenty-five.
- 3) As of December 1<sup>st</sup>, their call volume has increased 45% from last year. There have been 206 total calls this year so far.
- 4) Answering questions from Councilwoman Johnson, Chief Lynch said that all members were volunteers and he would check to see how many were EVOC certified.
- 5) Councilman Eugene Call commented he enjoyed their Christmas party.
- 6) The Mayor asked why there were so many more calls this year as opposed to last year. The Chief replied that there have been more electrical/wiring fires this year for whatever reason.

### **Emergency Medical Services Report**

Director Kyle Brewster spoke on the following:

- 1) There were seventy calls in November, down some from October.
- 2) Two members are currently training and will be able to teach their first EMT class from January 10 – April 14. There is a \$500 cost per person to take the class.
- 3) A domain has been secured for the EMS department, and a website will be built shortly.

4) Richelle Lowman told the Council that after the revenues and expenses were calculated, the Squad had a \$3894 profit for November. The town has been reimbursed for all payroll through October.

5) They should receive notice by the end of the month if their latest grant application was approved.

6) Councilwoman Johnson asked why the EMS department presented the Council with a list of people wishing to be a volunteer or an employee, but the fire department does not. She asked that both departments operate under the same procedure whether it be prospective members of both organizations are brought before the Council for approval or they aren't. Councilman Morris said the fire department was its own private organization and operated as a non-profit to which Councilwoman Johnson replied that the fire department used to bring prospective members for Council's approval but no longer did. Chief Lynch said the fire department's members are not considered employees of the town but volunteers of the Saltville Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. and have their own standard operating procedures separate from town employees. The Mayor agreed with Councilwoman Johnson and said they used to bring their prospective members for the Council to approve, but that was when they had a bunch of different issues going on. Councilman Morris added to that saying that Saltville EMS was a department of the town and not a non-profit organization.

Councilwoman Johnson then asked that her application to be an EMS volunteer be voted upon. She had circled on the application to be either a volunteer or an employee. The Mayor asked Mr. Cassell if this could be discussed since it was not on the agenda and that the Council was not presented with an application from Councilwoman Johnson tonight but at a prior meeting. Mr. Cassell responded that the Council could act now or wait to a future meeting. Councilman Morris suggested bringing her application to the meeting in January.

7) Councilman Morris asked about billing return percentage on their calls, and Mr. Brewster said they have not received their first report yet.

### **Town Manager's Report**

Mr. Martin spoke on the following:

1) The town is looking to purchase a hotbox like what used for the asphaltting recently done. Councilman Morris made a motion to authorize Mr. Martin to purchase one contingent upon Mr. Henderson's approval of the one chosen. Councilman Eugene Call seconded, and all were in favor.

- 2) Regarding the water system improvements, there are currently supply chain issues regarding the meters in terms of there being a chip shortage for the radio-read system. But the winning bid was under the estimate.
- 3) The issue on Highway 107 near the entrance to Fifth Avenue has been fixed. The rehab of the bridge at the end of Government Plant Road is slated to start in the spring, and there will be a meeting with VDOT regarding Bank Street becoming one-way.
- 4) The RFP for waste collection services is due tomorrow and will be on January's agenda.
- 5) There was just one RFP received for IT services, and it was not from the town's current provider. This will also be on January's agenda.
- 6) The town's engineers are looking into lighting at the 107 Overlook, the Battlefield Overlook, and the Salt Trail.
- 7) He and the Mayor will be at the Smyth Twelve meeting on the 21<sup>st</sup>.
- 8) He and the Glade Spring Town Manager and the Director of the Smyth County Tourism Association rode the Salt Trail to map out locations for lighting and signage.

### **Closed Session**

Councilman Morris made a motion to enter Closed Session in accordance with the Code of Virginia, Section 2.2-3711(A)(1) to discuss town-wide employee performance and bonuses and to discuss personnel in the Emergency Medical Services Department and in the Police Department; and Section 2.2-3711(A)(8) for consultation with legal counsel employed by a public body regarding specific legal matters requiring the provision of legal advice by such counsel. Councilman Eugene Call seconded, and all were in favor.

After exiting Closed Session, Councilman Morris made a motion to certify that the Closed Session was conducted in conformity with Virginia law regarding those matters that are exempted from open meeting requirements and nothing was discussed other than what was mentioned in the motion to convene Closed Session. Councilman Eugene Call seconded, and the roll call vote was 5-0 in the affirmative.

Councilman Morris made a motion to offer a police department job to the candidate discussed in Closed Session. Councilman Gary Call seconded, and all were in favor.

Councilman Morris made a motion to approve the EMS personnel changes and pay increases as discussed in Closed Session. Councilman Gary Call seconded, and the motion carried 4-1 with Councilman Comer voting no.

Councilman Morris made the motion to pay the ARPA bonuses at a rate of \$100 per month from March of 2020 through December of 2021 for full-time employees and \$50 per month from March of 2020 through December of 2021 for part-time employees. This will be paid after January 1, 2022, and the eligible employees have to remain employed through December 31<sup>st</sup>. Councilman Comer seconded, and the roll call vote was 3-1-1 with Councilman Gary Call voting no and Councilman Eugene Call abstaining.

Lastly, Councilman Eugene Call made the motion to adjourn, and Councilman Morris seconded. All were in favor.