

Minutes of the February 8, 2022 meeting of the Saltville Town Council held at 5:00 p.m. in the Town Hall

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

Councilman Morris made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 11, 2022 regularly scheduled meeting, and Councilman Eugene Call seconded. All were in favor.

### **Citizens' Time**

**Kris Sheets and Rose Likins** represented the Saltville library. Ms. Sheets is the branch supervisor of the Saltville branch, and Ms. Likins is the Director of the Smyth County Public Library system. They spoke on the following:

- 1) They will have their Board meeting this month here at the Town Hall.
- 2) Through a grant, they are loaning wi-fi hotspots and tablets with hotspots to all members of the community and are teaching people how to use them.
- 3) The library system is working on getting free wi-fi with two partner churches in the county. Each church will host a router, and the library will pay for the data plan.
- 4) New lockers have come in at the Saltville branch.
- 5) Covid made the library get more creative with how it serves the community including providing curb service.
- 6) Their pop-up library program has been a success.
- 7) Everyone who doesn't have a library card is encouraged to get one. In addition to checking out books, you can also get free e-books.

**Carol Doss** of the Upper Tennessee River Roundtable and Keep Southwest Virginia Beautiful spoke on the following:

- 1) Her groups, in addition to many volunteers, have done a lot of work through the years on the new playground and the trails.
- 2) Through a grant from Dominion Energy, more funding has been obtained to add more things to and enhance existing features of the playground area. She presented the Council with several options.
- 3) The first order of business will be to replace a couple of trees that died and guards to protect from weed eating will be wrapped around the bottoms of the trees.
- 4) The current flower bed will turn into a pollinator garden.
- 5) A pavilion/picnic shelter is part of the plans.
- 6) Steps will be built that go from the parking area on West Main Street down the side of the bank to the playground area.
- 7) Several things already there, such as the outdoor classroom area, need to be cleaned up or modified.
- 8) Installing permanent posts all around the playground for a “story walk”.
- 9) The Mayor mentioned that Mount Rogers may be willing to help out with the pavilion, and Councilman Morris brought up that the Smyth County Foundation has funds for this type of project.

**Preston Frye** represented Saltville Little League and spoke on the following:

- 1) Sign-ups for Little League can now be done online, and there will be in-person signups, too.
- 2) They have a new P.A. system (it cost approximately \$700) because the older one finally stopped working, and the new scoreboards are up. New light bulbs have also been purchased.
- 3) This year’s Opening Day, April 9<sup>th</sup>, looks to be bigger than in past years with a dunk tank and bouncy houses added.
- 4) The Mayor said the town has been talking with both counties about getting more funding for youth programs since the town can only give so much. He asked Mr. Frye to give the Council a breakdown of how many Little League kids actually live in each county since this may help get more funding.

- 5) The batting cage was recently hit and is currently roped off.
- 6) Like many other local Little Leagues, there's been a bit of a struggle to get umpires.

### **Approval of the Agenda**

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

### **Old Business**

#### **1. Signage for roads and the trails and cameras for the trails**

Public Works Director R.B. Henderson stated that there were signs in stock that had the "no trucks allowed" picture on them if the Council wanted to use those to deter big truck traffic on Fifth Avenue, Easy Street, First Avenue, and Wiley Drive. Councilman Morris asked if there should be a process to notify people of the change, and Town Attorney Paul Cassell said that would be appropriate. In terms of failure to obey a sign, Mr. Cassell said the penalty is limited under state law. Moreover, that is a license point violation in Virginia, so truckers will want to avoid that. Police Chief Puckett said he had spoken to a trucker recently who was not from the area who told him that there were signs for both north and south Palmer Avenue on his GPS that weren't really clear about what route to take. Additionally, many truck drivers use a GPS made for cars, and cars can take routes that big trucks cannot. Mr. Cassell suggested preparing a resolution that prohibited truck traffic on certain town streets.

The signs and the cameras were tabled until the March meeting.

#### **2. Auto-Aid**

Smyth County Emergency Management Director Curtis Crawford had previously given the Council a document at the January meeting proposing how all of the county's emergency response providers will work together. Mr. Cassell said the agreement was fine as written.

Councilman Morris made a motion to approve the Automatic Aid agreement and have the Mayor sign it. Councilman Eugene Call seconded, and all were in favor.

## **New Business**

### **1. Mount Rogers Transportation Rural Technical Committee appointment**

Mr. Martin said this was a Board of the MRPDC that meets bi-monthly. He recommended someone be appointed who had some working knowledge of transportation issues. This Board helps with road improvements and how a town has a say in VDOT's six-year plan.

Councilman Morris made a motion to appoint Mayor C. Todd Young to this Board, and Councilman Eugene Call seconded. All were in favor.

### **2. Youth recreational sports**

Councilman Morris said he had been talking to Robbie Millhorn of the Junior Panthers Football regarding new helmets and jerseys. This could be paid out of the town's ARPA money. The Mayor asked that Mr. Millhorn bring an official quote to the special-called meeting that is going to be held next Tuesday regarding the ARPA funding. The Mayor also said that Smyth County is having a meeting soon dealing with recreation funding for towns in the county, and that there could be even more money out there. Washington County will be approached as well.

Councilman Morris also said that the press box for Little League was repaired and spruced up before Covid hit, so now the girls' softball press box needs the same treatment with regard to the plumbing and electrical. It also needs painting. Mr. Henderson said his staff could handle these topics.

Councilman Comer said he had talked to Mr. Sturgill regarding the fencing at the softball field who told him they had two fencing quotes. The town will pay half the cost of the fencing. This will be put on next month's agenda.

### **3. Snow removal**

Councilman Morris mentioned that the truck broke down the first time it snowed, and the town bought the F350 with the plow and spreader. Mr. Henderson said the new spreader worked well on the next snow and used the brush truck to push the snow. Also, the spreader on the pickup truck did the job. Councilman Morris asked him if he had the equipment necessary to keep doing the job for snow removal. There is a 550 at Empire Ford that has been waiting for a part since last spring, but the current trucks should be able to handle the town for now. The salt is just very corrosive. Councilman Morris said this drives home the point of needing a new town shop so the snow vehicles can get under a roof and have a wash bay where the salt can be removed. He asked that a new town shop be put on March's agenda.

#### **4. Town Manager hiring and firing powers**

Councilman Morris made a motion to amend the town's personnel policy to allow the Town Manager to have the discretion of hiring and firing. Councilman Gary Call seconded, and all were in favor.

#### **5. Dissolving of town committees**

Mr. Cassell said the committees were established in the Town Code, Section 2-21. If the Council wishes to dissolve them, they'll need to have an ordinance doing so. Councilman Morris made a motion directing Mr. Cassell to prepare that ordinance for the March meeting, and Councilman Eugene Call seconded. All were in favor.

#### **6. EMS, Inc. report**

Gary Johnson spoke on the following:

- 1) The DEQ report for January was submitted.
- 2) There were a couple of overflows related to line blockages and not excess rain.
- 3) The belt press conveyor issue has been resolved through Waste Management's insurance company.
- 4) The VDH monthly report and the Water Treatment Leak Loss Report were submitted.
- 5) The water meter replacement project should start in a couple of months and be finished by the end of the summer.
- 6) There was a meeting at the Lane Group to go over the mapping of the town's valves, hydrants, manholes, etc.

#### **Committee Reports**

Councilman Comer discussed the oversight of the ballfields, particularly during tournament weekends, so that someone from the town is available whenever an event is happening to protect the town from a liability standpoint. This would not involve telling various softball leagues how to operate but making sure that everything runs smoothly. This may be a paid position to where that person is on the grounds whenever an event is occurring.

The question is what kind of rate structure this person or persons would be paid. The town could also establish a fee for teams participating in tournaments (excluding the school's athletic teams). Again, this would not involve managing the rules of the tournaments but just making sure someone from the town is present. Councilman Morris agreed and said that this oversight has been needed for years. The issue, of course, is the pay structure. Councilman Comer recommended at least two individuals be there for all events, and they would be part-time employees. These people would have to coordinate with the school since they would have priority.

The Mayor stated that during school games the school administrators would be present, during Little League games, their Board would be present, so he could see this person or persons dealing more with travel ball and adult softball leagues. Councilman Morris concurred and said the town could maybe pay someone a stipend for during this. Councilman Comer said that the Emergency Medical Services Department is wanting to have a softball league, and they could police themselves for their regular season, but this so-called town overseer would need to be there for any tournaments that are held and would be the chief scheduler. They would also perform an inspection when the event is over to see if there has been any damage.

This will be discussed further at the March meeting.

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

Mr. Henderson spoke on the following:

- 1) A section of the force main developed a crack, so it was repaired.
- 2) There were two minor overflows in January, one in Henrytown and the other off of Battleground Avenue.
- 3) The town's insurance company told us to have the hydrant fixed at the corner of Easy Street and Fifth Avenue, and they would take care of the cost through the driver's insurance.
- 4) Waste Management's insurance company is paying for the damage to the conveyor belt at the sewer plant.
- 5) He gave the Council a report about the town's water system. He and Mr. Martin had been to a meeting at the county where this was discussed.

## **Police Chief's Report**

Chief Puckett spoke on the following:

- 1) A vehicle was stolen at Titan Wheel, and it was recovered in North Carolina. Charges are pending.
- 2) There is still nothing definite from the jail on resuming the inmate program.
- 3) Even though Woolly Day was cancelled, the Mayor did the weather prediction.
- 4) The stats for all of 2021 are included. The numbers have risen since the department switched to a speed enforcement grant.
- 5) The Mayor commended Assistant Chief Lynch for leading the department with 26 citations.

## **Fire Department Report**

Chief Lynch spoke on the following:

- 1) There were ten calls in January with five in the town, four in the county, and one assisting Glade Spring.
- 2) One new member has been added to the Auxiliary giving the department thirty-one members.
- 3) There will have a Fire Fighter 1 class with Chilhowie coming up. Councilman Morris if these classes are usually held at the Fire Academy, and Chief Lynch replied they normally are, but since so many are going to take this class, an exception was made.
- 4) The Mayor asked if the department received any funding from Washington County and was told no. The Mayor then asked if the department has a mutual-aid agreement with Washington County, and Chief Lynch said no, but they did have one with Glade Spring. The Mayor continued and asked who would respond if a fire occurred on South Main Street on the left side leaving town. Chief Lynch replied that any fire on the left of South Main Street on the way to Glade Spring would be handled by the department and any fire on the right side would be covered by Glade Spring. The department could respond, but it would have to be at the request of Glade Spring.

The Mayor asked if the town would respond to a fire at the gas company and was told yes. He mentioned that Washington County gets a lot of tax revenue from the gas company, yet they won't help fund the Saltville Volunteer Fire Department. Chief Lynch said his department used to get funding from Washington County, but that stopped five or six years ago., so the Mayor asked him to compose a letter to Saltville's representative on the Washington County Board of Supervisors, Randy Pennington, asking for funding and give it to Mr. Martin.

### **Emergency Medical Services Report**

Richelle Lowman spoke on the following:

- 1) There were seventy-eight calls in January. Seventy percent were covered with advanced medical services, and the other thirty percent had an advanced provider on standby.
- 2) None of their expenses for January were unforeseen, and they are breaking even for the year.
- 3) An emergency grant has been submitted for the purchase of a new ambulance. Also, a training grant application will be submitted, which if successful, will allow them to have First-Aid training out of their own facility.
- 4) Mr. Cassell had requested they change some of the wording in the change to their personnel policy at last month's meeting, so they did that.

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

Mr. Martin spoke on the following:

- 1) With warmer weather coming, there have been seven blight letters sent out. Three other properties need more extensive cleanup, so we'll work with Mr. Cassell on those.
- 2) Blighted properties are a constant challenge for the town. The Mayor said he would like to see the town consider hiring someone to be the ordinance enforcement person since other local towns like Damascus have one. The one for Damascus is part-time. Maybe Mr. Martin could find someone like a retired police officer who could do this. Councilman Gary Call made a motion to advertise this position, and Councilman Comer seconded. All were in favor.

3) The Lane Group has undertaken a water study that was requested by Smyth County and will be county-wide.

4) There's a potential piece of property for the town to purchase. He asked that the Council vote to have him go into negotiations to purchase this property. Later the town will discuss this during a Closed Session. Councilman Morris made that motion, and Councilman Gary Call seconded. All were in favor.

5) He's working with the town's grant writer on a historical preservation grant to restore the Stuart Cabin.

6) John Quillion of the Sons of the American Revolution told the Council that a descendant of John Broady is a member of his organization, and they are wanting to furnish a flag and flagpole at the Broady Cemetery if the town will help them install it. There was agreement from the Council to allow this.

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