

Minutes of a Regular Meeting of the Council of the Town of Blackstone, Virginia, held in the Council Chambers located at 100 W. Elm Street, Blackstone, Virginia, on Monday, October 16, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.

There Were Present:

Mayor: L. Benjamin Green

Council Members: Wesley Gormus, Lloyette Wynn, Christopher Page, Carolyn Williams, Nathaniel Miller, Eric Nash, Jake Allman

Town Staff: Philip Vannoorbeeck, Town Manager; Jennifer Daniel, Town Clerk; Brittany Harris, Treasurer; Jackie Brown, Bookkeeper; Sam Murphy, Detective; Dion Tomer, Fire Chief; Chastiddy Bryant, Community Development Specialist

Town Attorney:

Those Absent:

Mayor Green called the October Council Meeting to order.

Dr. Allen with the Blackstone Ministerial Association delivered the Invocation.

Mayor Green led the Pledge of Allegiance.

MINUTES:

Councilman Miller made a motion to dispense with reading and approve as presented minutes from the Special Called Meeting on September 6, 2023. The motion was seconded by Councilman Nash.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

Councilwoman Wynn	-	Aye
Councilman Page	-	Aye
Councilwoman Williams	-	Aye
Councilman Miller	-	Aye
Councilman Nash	-	Aye
Councilman Allman	-	Aye
Councilman Gormus	-	Aye

VISITORS:

1. 2023 World Series Ponytails

Mayor Green said at 6:00 p.m. tonight, some members of Council attended a recognition night for the Nottoway Ponytails. He said there was pizza and fellowship. He said Community Development Specialist Bryant and DBi Direct Wright coordinated this event, and the girls were presented with championship rings, the coaches received awards and a plaque.

2. Ms. Yvonne Jackson – LCCDC

Ms. Jackson said LCCDC is the Life Changing Community Development Corporation. She said leadership has changed, and with that they have an expansion plan they are pursuing. She thanked Council and the Town Manager for their support in some of LCCDC's efforts. She said they have had many opportunities to work with many families and youth, to include after school programs, summer camps, and have been at this location for 15 years, but have been in the community over 22 years. She said they have expanded the program to support affordable housing. She said they were going to continue to work with the youth and their digital ministry.

Ms. Jackson said they are moving from the facility. She said she met with Manager Vannoorbeeck today to confirm they would be leaving as of December, but this will not stop the services they provide. She said they have invested a lot in this building, just in utilities over 15 years, they have spent \$12,000.00. She said they also did some renovations on the inside.

Councilman Gormus thanked Ms. Jackson for coming here tonight, and said it sounds like a great organization and was grateful for what they had done for the youth. Councilwoman Wynn said she hoped they did not move from the area, in order to keep things rolling.

Councilman Gormus asked if they were a 501c3. Ms. Jackson replied yes.

Mayor Green pointed out that Ms. Jackson for years, paid the electric bill out of her own pocket, and was grateful for all she had done.

The Council thanked Ms. Jackson. Ms. Jackson said they always accept donations.

3. Ms. Deb Rose – Blackstone Chamber – Christmas Parade

Ms. Rose said the Christmas Parade would be Friday, December 8, 2023, with the lineup starting at 5:00 p.m., and the parade would begin at 6:00 p.m. She requested Main Street be closed from Church Street to Nelson's at Tavern Street. She asked that the Noise Ordinance be waived, use of the Town Square, and the funds allocated for the parade be appropriated.

Council did not remember if the \$1,000.00 was included in the Budget for the parade. Mayor Green believed Council donated \$750.00 last year. He added, he and his wife did the parade for 20 years, and if you don't have bands, you have nothing. He believed that is where most of the money will go. Ms. Rose said yes that is correct.

Councilman Page reminded Council that they set aside \$11,000.00 for the Chamber, \$10,000.00 for fireworks and \$1,000.00 for the parade.

Councilman Nash made a motion to donate \$1,000.00 for the Christmas Parade towards paying for the expenditure of the bands travel expenses. The motion was seconded by Councilman Miller.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

Councilwoman Wynn	-	Aye
Councilman Page	-	Abstain
Councilwoman Williams	-	Aye
Councilman Miller	-	Aye
Councilman Nash	-	Aye
Councilman Allman	-	Aye
Councilman Gormus	-	Aye

Councilman Allman made a motion to grant the Chamber requests for the Christmas Parade on December 8, 2023 at 6:00 p.m., as presented. The motion was seconded by Councilman Gormus.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

Councilwoman Wynn	-	Aye
Councilman Page	-	Abstain
Councilwoman Williams	-	Aye
Councilman Miller	-	Aye
Councilman Nash	-	Aye
Councilman Allman	-	Aye
Councilman Gormus	-	Aye

Councilman Miller said he received a request today, to contact Petersburg Schools to see if their band would be at the Parade. Ms. Rose said she would get in contact with them.

4. Ms. Debra Damon – 204 S. West Avenue

Ms. Damon said she and her husband were some of Blackstone's newest residents. She said they were active in their previous community and retired military. She said they have purchased a large property, but do not have a spot that is convenient to park their Recreational Vehicle (RV). She said if the information she received is correct, RVs are not allowed to be parked on the Town streets. Manager Vannoorbeeck said RVs can be parked on the street, but you cannot stay or live in an RV.

Ms. Damon asked if there was a size restriction. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied no. He said it cannot create a sight distance issue.

Ms. Damon said they want to be good neighbors. Manager Vannoorbeeck said if tractor trailers can be parked on the street, RVs would be permissible.

Mayor Green asked if there would be any additions to the Agenda tonight.

FIRE CHIEF'S REPORT:

Chief Tomer said there was a meeting last week on the radio project, and hoped to have a contract signed by the end of the year. He said this is a multi-million dollar radio system through the County. He said Tower 9 was now in December for final inspection. He said as for the Annual Awards Dinner, evites were sent out today, and asked if everyone would respond either way.

Mayor Green asked if Tower 9 comes in after the calendar year, does that jam the Town up financially. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied no.

Chief Tomer said their organization had tried several times to get a grant for a UTV, but have been unsuccessful. He believed without one in the rural areas for search and rescue, it would be detrimental, and in the future, they would add a skid unit for brush fires. He said last week the membership voted to approve this purchase, and would be utilizing all department funds from donations. He said this would not cost the Town anything, and is already covered under their insurance, but it might cost \$100.00 annually to add a trailer to the policy.

Chief Tomer said Fire Prevention Week was good success. He said they had also been involved with the schools for fire education. He added at Blackstone Primary they do a poster contest, with the winners getting a ride to school in a fire truck.

Chief Tomer said their next fundraiser would be the Bull Blast, the second one this year. He said on October 31st, they would be doing their Truck or Treat.

Chief Tomer said they received an Emergency Operation Plan (EOP) from the County, and was last updated in 2016.

Chief Tomer said the Assistant Chief and his wife had a baby, and Captain Cody Lewis was selected for the Virginia Fire Officer Academy.

Chief Tomer pointed out the years of service, with one being him. Mayor Green asked for a round of applause for Chief Tomer for 32 years of service. Chief Tomer said he joined at 14 years old.

Chief Tomer said he was waiting for the AFG Grant to open, which would include a diesel exhaust system. He said there are more studies out now on the effects of diesel exhaust and hydrocarbons associated with cancer. He said when the building was built, we did not think about this, and now all turn-out gear is lined up on both sides of the bay area. Chief Tomer did not know the cost for an exhaust system, but with our community size, there is usually only a 5% match, and he did not expect it to be more than \$10,000.00.

Mayor Green said Council agreed by Common Consent to allow the Fire Department to apply for grant funds for an exhaust system, but to report back to Council with figures.

PAYMENT OF BILLS:

Mayor Green stated the bills that have already been paid are in the amount of \$701,167.77.

Councilman Nash made a motion to approve the bills that have already been paid in the amount of \$701,167.77. The motion was seconded by Councilman Miller.

Councilman Allman asked if the wood on the windows at the Armory was the contractor's responsibility or the Town's. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied, that is on us, it was not included in the scope of work.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

Councilwoman Wynn	-	Aye
Councilman Page	-	Aye
Councilwoman Williams	-	Aye
Councilman Miller	-	Aye
Councilman Nash	-	Aye
Councilman Allman	-	Aye
Councilman Gormus	-	Aye

Mayor Green stated the bills not yet approved, and to be paid, are in the amount of \$408,493.78.

Councilman Page made a motion to approve as presented, the bills not yet paid in the amount of \$408,493.78. The motion was seconded by Councilman Miller.

Councilman Nash asked about Richmond Irrigation at the Fire Department, was this a monthly maintenance fee. Clerk Daniel replied, it is not a monthly maintenance, but after they come for inspections, they provide a quote for repairs. She said her and Manager Vannoorbeeck discussed, and since the Town is paying for their service, we need to make repairs they see necessary. She said they maintain the Fire Station and the Medical Center, and their quoted price includes a startup visit, wet checks and winterization. She said they also charge mileage being out of their territory area, so maintenance repairs are scheduled during regular visits as well.

Councilman Nash asked that the Medical Center be marked reimbursable for Richmond Irrigation.

Councilman Page asked about cleaning services in each department, multiple charges in the same amount, he asked if the Town was being billed by the month. Bookkeeper Brown said we have to bill by each department, we are billed once a month and divided amongst each department.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

Councilwoman Wynn	-	Aye
Councilman Page	-	Aye
Councilwoman Williams	-	Aye
Councilman Miller	-	Aye
Councilman Nash	-	Aye
Councilman Allman	-	Aye
Councilman Gormus	-	Aye

APPROPRIATIONS:

There were no appropriations.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

There were no Committee Meetings.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

1. Personnel Policy

Manager Vannoorbeeck said himself, several other employees and some members of Council carry firearms conducting Town business on Town property. He said an issue was raised by him carrying openly in response to somebody shooting the windows out of his work vehicle. He said the Town's Personnel Policy does not permit the carrying of firearms, so he was requesting Council revise the Policy. He said it currently reads "possession of dangerous material such as explosives, firearms or weapons in the workplace is not permissible or acceptable", and Manager Vannoorbeeck is requesting it be changed to "possession of dangerous materials such as explosives in the workplace is not permissible, but firearms may only be possessed in the workplace if the employee possesses a valid concealed carry permit issued by the State of Virginia, and a copy of said permit is included in the employee's personnel file".

Manager Vannoorbeeck said with the demeanor of folks these days, he highly recommended the Second Amendment Right be upheld.

Councilman Allman made a motion to approve the policy changes as presented. The motion was seconded by Councilman Page.

Councilman Miller said if he was a town employee and have a permit, he should be allowed to carry a weapon. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied, absolutely. Councilman Page added concealed carry. Manager Vannoorbeeck said most employees have carried for years, and would continue to carry. He said a lot of Town employees are not eligible to carry. Councilman Page said Council are considered employees as well.

Councilman Nash asked when this would take effect. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied, immediately.

Councilman Gormus asked if there would be a meeting to announce the policy change. Manager Vannoorbeeck said correct.

Councilman Gormus asked if carrying without a permit on file would be a violation of Policy. Manager Vannoorbeeck said correct. He said there is a Disciplinary portion in the Policy, and he would have to deal with the employees, and Council would deal with Council being in violation.

Councilman Page said he supported the Policy, but asked about more training from the Town. Manager Vannoorbeeck said in order to have a Concealed Carry Permit, you have to go through a course mandated by the State.

Councilman Page asked what the Town's Policy would be on when it can be used, will the employees be trained on use of deadly force.

Councilman Page believed the wording in the Policy should say "firearms may only be possessed in the workplace if concealed and if the employee possesses a valid concealed carry permit".

Councilman Page asked Councilman Allman if he would be willing to add this language to his motion.

Mayor Green said we have called for the question, and told Councilman Page he could offer a substitute motion. Councilman Page said he seconded the motion, but could withdraw his second without the wording being included.

Mayor Green said we ended discussion. Councilman Page withdrew his second to the motion.

Mayor Green asked if there was a second to Councilman Allman’s motion.

The motion was seconded by Councilman Gormus.

Councilman Page made a secondary motion, that the Policy also include the following: “employees can carry concealed and they must possess the concealed carry permit and on file in the office”.

Mayor Green asked what was the difference in the original language. Manager Vannoorbeeck said it would now say it must be carried concealed. Councilman Page said the way it is written now, someone could carry openly.

Councilman Allman said if there was an issue, he believed the Town Manager could address it.

Mayor Green asked for a second to Councilman Page’s motion, there was no second, so the motion failed.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

Councilwoman Wynn	-	Aye
Councilman Page	-	Nay
Councilwoman Williams	-	Aye
Councilman Miller	-	Abstain
Councilman Nash	-	Aye
Councilman Allman	-	Aye
Councilman Gormus	-	Aye

Councilman Miller asked if the employees could get more training before it goes into effect, such as firearms safety. Manager Vannoorbeeck said they already have it from when they get the permit.

Councilman Allman asked Manager Vannoorbeeck to educate the employees on the policy change.

2. Culvert Installation Policy

Clerk Daniel said the newest version was at Council's desk.

Councilman Miller asked if there was still financing for this installation. Manager Vannoorbeeck said we usually take payment up front, but if someone has a hardship, we will do an interest free payment plan.

Councilman Page asked if this Policy takes into effect natural easements. Manager Vannoorbeeck did not believe it made a difference because it still requires Council approval on private property. He said with a natural easement, if it is being discharged, the Town has the right to enter the property.

Councilman Miller made a motion to approve the Culvert Installation Policy provided at Council's desk. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Williams.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

Councilwoman Wynn	-	Aye
Councilman Page	-	Nay
Councilwoman Williams	-	Aye
Councilman Miller	-	Aye
Councilman Nash	-	Aye
Councilman Allman	-	Aye
Councilman Gormus	-	Aye

3. School Property Deed

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Town of Blackstone is now the owner of almost 12 acres, previously owned by the School Board, then surplus to Nottoway County, who prepared a Deed, and is now recorded. He said this property is at Wigglesworth.

4. Town Manager Contract

Manager Vannoorbeeck said this Contract was presented at a previous meeting, and Councilman Page called him today and said there were a few places that said County and should be Town.

Mayor Green asked to discuss Section 4, he said a few Council members wanted to grapple this out. He said the Contract says Manager Vannoorbeeck gets a 3% annual raise, or whatever the employees receive. Manager Vannoorbeeck said if Council wants to make it equal to what the other employees get, that was fine with him.

Councilman Allman said if we abide by last year's Budget split, that would violate that. Mayor Green said it would be changed to the effect Manager Vannoorbeeck would get the same increase, if any increase, as administrative employees.

Councilman Nash did not like seeing any of that, because what they discussed in the Budget were Merit Increases this year, instead of across the board.

Councilman Page said Section 5 has a Performance Review for him annually. He said his concern with the Contract was the length.

Councilman Nash believed Council agreed we were going to try and do Merit Raises. Councilman Gormus said there has to be a process for Merit Recognition. Mayor Green said without an HR employee, are we ready for that.

Councilman Miller said the Employment and Police Committee was supposed to be setting up rules for the merit raises.

Mayor Green said today the cost of living applies, as merit has not taken effect yet.

Councilman Allman asked if employees were entitled to a cost of living raise now. Councilman Nash and Miller replied no. Councilman Miller said in the past everyone has received the cost of living, we said this year it would be merit raises.

Councilman Nash said we made it clear during the Budget process last year, we were going to try and go to merit raises. He said in his opinion, you base it off the cost of living. Councilman Gormus believed we first needed to decide on a percentage.

Councilman Allman said if other employees are not entitled to a raise, then Manager Vannoorbeeck should not get it either.

Mayor Green agreed, and said people need to be paid by merit, not years of service. Councilman Gormus suggested raises be based on Town Policy. Councilman Allman believed the contract time needed to be looked at too.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said he included three years in the Contract. Mayor Green said he intended to run at least another term; he said it would take him four years to learn the job. He preferred seven years in the Contract.

Councilman Page said with three years he was concerned because this Council would be on its way out in the middle of an election. He suggested at least a four or five year. Manager Vannoorbeeck said this binds neither party, and thought it was a moral obligation for the term, to not seek other employment.

A few members of Council liked three years.

Councilman Allman asked if industry standards were typically terms. Manager Vannoorbeeck said three years was probably on the longer end of the industry. He said he has never had a contract before, and doing this for 30 years. He believed three years was fine, but was agreeable to longer.

Mayor Green asked Manager Vannoorbeeck if he wanted a contract. Manager Vannoorbeeck did not think it was obligatory, but he liked the fact if Council changes, and he is a few years from retirement, Council can terminate him without cause.

Mayor Green said if Council can fire Manager Vannoorbeeck, and he can leave at any time, why are we going through this. Manager Vannoorbeeck said to benefit him.

Mayor Green asked Council if they were in agreement with four years. Councilman Gormus added, with pay increases per Town Policy.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said his Contract would include the following changes, make the corrections from County to Town, raises will be determined by Performance Review and Town Policy, and a four year term.

Mayor Green asked if these changes could be done by the close of business on October 26, 2023. Manager Vannoorbeeck said if you wanted him to, he said it can be voted on tonight.

Councilman Nash made a motion to approve Manager Vannoorbeeck's Contract with the following changes, make the corrections from County to Town, raises will be determined by Performance Review and Town Policy, and a four year term of employment. The motion was seconded by Councilman Miller.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

Councilwoman Wynn	-	Aye
Councilman Page	-	Aye
Councilwoman Williams	-	Aye
Councilman Miller	-	Aye
Councilman Nash	-	Aye
Councilman Allman	-	Aye
Councilman Gormus	-	Aye

5. DHCD – Armory Resolution

Manager Vannoorbeeck said Community Development Specialist Bryant had provided the enclosed Resolution, which allows the Town to apply for Industrial Revitalization Funds for the Armory in the amount of \$247,217.00 for kitchen equipment.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said we previously asked for this amount from the Department of Agriculture and turned down their funds because they were requiring historic standards on the construction.

Councilman Nash made a motion to adopt the Resolution as presented and authorize Mayor Green to execute. The motion was seconded by Councilman Allman.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

Councilwoman Wynn	-	Aye
Councilman Page	-	Aye
Councilwoman Williams	-	Aye
Councilman Miller	-	Aye
Councilman Nash	-	Aye
Councilman Allman	-	Aye
Councilman Gormus	-	Aye

6. Tourism Zone Tax Exemption

Manager Vannoorbeeck said at the October 4, 2023 Continued Meeting, the tourism based zone for real estate tax exemption was approved for Blackstone Academy Square. He said we are now asking for the taxes to be abated for Patriot Square for 2023, in the amount of \$2,807.58.

Councilman Allman made a motion to approve abating the real estate taxes for the improvements at Patriot Square in 2023 in the amount of \$2,807.58, over three years. The motion was seconded by Councilman Miller.

Councilman Gormus asked how we will know when the three years are up. Manager Vannoorbeeck said Council will vote on these every year. Treasurer Morgan said she would keep up with it.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

Councilwoman Wynn	-	Aye
Councilman Page	-	Aye
Councilwoman Williams	-	Aye
Councilman Miller	-	Aye
Councilman Nash	-	Abstain
Councilman Allman	-	Aye
Councilman Gormus	-	Aye

ON-GOING PROJECTS:

1. Dilapidated Buildings

Manager Vannoorbeeck said 107 Taylor Street is now demolished. He said this will be secured with deed of trust. He thought the cost would be around \$8,500.00, due to asbestos. He said the property owner discussed with Clerk Daniel about a payment plan.

2. Meals Tax / Lodging Tax

Treasurer Morgan said there was only one outstanding Meals Tax as of today. She said one business has a payment plan.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said there were eight outstanding Lodging Taxes. He asked Treasurer Morgan if the money had been paid, and she was just figuring out how to apply the money. Treasurer Morgan replied yes.

Councilman Nash said when looking at the Air B&B file, when payment is received, will that include all eight. Treasurer Morgan replied yes, but sometimes a business might file 0 because they did not have any stays. She added the reporting is 45 days behind.

Councilman Nash said if there are eight reported being behind, but we are waiting on reporting from Air B&B, then we shouldn't have them on the outstanding list.

3. Street Improvement Projects

Manager Vannoorbeeck said we are done with street improvements for the year.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said in the bill list there was a portion of paving to Whitehurst Paving that was done in the Cemetery. He said \$17,500.00 was for the Cemetery, and \$232,000.00 was tar and gravel, and will be VDOT reimbursable.

4. Wrigglesworth Sports Complex

There was nothing to report.

5. Taylor Bottom Block Grant

Manager Vannoorbeeck said surveys would be done in this area. He said these surveys would be done for the DHCD Block Grant on October 20th, 23rd and the 26th, between 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Councilman Nash asked to send out a Code Red for the Taylor Bottom area. Councilman Page asked this be put on the Town's website and Facebook page also.

6. Armory

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the contract for the Armory renovation has been executed and a Pre- Construction meeting would be held on October 19, 2023 at 10:00 a.m. He said we will coordinate demolition because the Town is responsible for getting the mechanical and electrical removed. He said when the Notice to Proceed is signed, that starts the construction deadline.

7. Weatherization

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Town's local match had not been set aside, but we do plan to do some work this year. He said we have received the \$40,000.00 from Nottoway County and the Town will contribute \$50,000.00.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said with Workforce Housing, one home has been completed, and the new owner should be moving in this month. He said two more homes are being bid out.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the second property on Hurt Street, the Town does not own this. He said there will be another home built on this property, but the Town has no interest in this property, and will not be subsidized by the Town, but the house will be built for Ms. Chastiddy Bryant. He said this will be a separate program on a piece of property the Town does not own.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Vertiport – Allen C. Perkinson Airport

Councilman Allman said a vertiport is a similar designation to a heliport, except it deals with advanced air mobility vehicles. He said the FAA approved the Town's airport to have the very first one in the nation. He said this means having the first one, the State of Virginia will do some research, he said we will document the flights and how things work.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said a vertiport is for vertical landings and takeoffs for unmanned systems.

2. Talbert & Bright – Annual Agreement Renewal

Manager Vannoorbeeck said attached is a one year Agreement between the Town and Talbert & Bright. He said the Town uses Talbert & Bright as engineers for airport related capital projects.

He said this Agreement does not commit the Town to any money, they will be the engineer of record, and the Town does not have to procure services.

Councilman Page made a motion to approve the one year extension Agreement with Talbert & Bright. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Williams.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

Councilwoman Wynn	-	Aye
Councilman Page	-	Aye
Councilwoman Williams	-	Aye
Councilman Miller	-	Aye
Councilman Nash	-	Aye
Councilman Allman	-	Aye
Councilman Gormus	-	Aye

3. Veterans Day Ceremony – Resolution

Manager Vannoorbeeck said this Resolution is as advised by Attorney Bacon to inform the public that a member of Council has provided a bid for services for the Town. He said Bright Lights Entertainment has submitted a price of \$200.00 to provide DJ services for the Veterans Day Ceremony.

Councilman Nash made a motion to adopt the Resolution as presented. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Wynn.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

Councilwoman Wynn	-	Aye
Councilman Page	-	Abstain
Councilwoman Williams	-	Aye
Councilman Miller	-	Aye
Councilman Nash	-	Aye
Councilman Allman	-	Aye
Councilman Gormus	-	Nay

4. Halloween

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Town would not be closing Brunswick Avenue for Halloween this year. Councilman Allman suggested putting the temporary speed bumps out on Brunswick Avenue. Manager Vannoorbeeck added signage would need to be in place.

Clerk Daniel said the churches would be combining this year, with the Presbyterian Church hosting.

Councilman Miller asked that the temporary speed bumps be placed at Tavern and Broad Streets.

COMMITTEE REFERRALS:

Mayor Green said at Council's desk is a letter from an attorney that is representing a resident on Lunenburg Avenue, in reference to ditches.

Mayor Green referred this letter to the Street & Light Committee. He asked to possibly have a report on November 1, 2023.

Mayor Green referred the buildings at the old school property to the Buildings, Property and Cemetery Committee.

MAYORS MINUTE:

Mayor Green said he, Manager Vannoorbeeck and Councilman Miller spoke today about going forward with the Police Chief.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said Friday at 5 p.m. was the deadline for receiving applications, and six were received. He asked that the Employment and Police Committee review the applications, and decide how many to interview. The top applicants will be interviewed by the entire Council.

Mayor Green said the Committee would meet on October 25, 2023 at 7:00 p.m. to review the Police Chief applications. He asked Manager Vannoorbeeck to try to have the interviews at a Continued Meeting on November 1, 2023.

Mayor Green said he was going to take this opportunity to honor a man he deeply respected. He said he doubted he would be sitting in this chair if not for his encouragement and advice, when he appeared on the ballot for the first time in 1994. He said Doug Coleburn's remarkable contributions to Blackstone, Nottoway County and the surrounding county are truly commendable. He said his 52 year career as an elected official is a testament to his unwavering dedication, and the positive impact he had on the Town's development and wellbeing. He said some of his accomplishments, such as the creation of Seay Park, by diverting a shopping center and leading the effort to restore Schwartz Tavern showcased his vision for preserving local heritage and enhancing the community's cultural and recreational assets. He said his personal involvement in purchasing and donating items to Schwartz Tavern speaks to his hands on commitment to historical preservation.

Mayor Green said Mr. Coleburn's resolute stance on year round dog confinement, even in the face of criticism, and the subsequent overwhelming support it received in the election, when offered as a referendum, reflect his principled leadership and his ability to champion important causes. He said his support for downtown restoration and revitalization, including his decision to paint the Courier Record building an attractive orange color, which was the architect's suggestion, revealed his innovative and forward thinking approach to community development. He said his actions inspired other local merchants to follow suit, contributing to the visual appeal and vibrancy of the Town.

Mayor Green said additionally, his dedication to the Nottoway County War Memorial located in Seay Park, through both his financial donations and extensive research further demonstrated his commitment to honoring and remembering the sacrifices of those like Doug Coleburn, who served their Country. He said Doug Coleburn's selflessness and dedication to public service is a shining example of what it means to serve a community with love and devotion. He said his legacy will continue to inspire and benefit the people of Blackstone for generations to come. He said he truly sowed the seeds of progress, and made his mark on the Town.

Mayor Green said there is one thing for sure, they just don't make them like Doug Coleburn anymore.

POLICE REPORT:

Corporal Farley was in attendance.

Councilman Allman said for the public, there were five loud noise tickets on the report, to include exhaust, loud radio, plus a good number of stops.

CITIZEN COMMENTS:

Mr. Tom Taylor – 111 S. Harris Street

Mr. Taylor said with the Petersburg Band, he would like to have no restrictions for them. Mayor Green said that would be the purview of the Chamber.

Mr. Taylor said he worked with the DOC for 30 years, they did not give everybody a license to carry a gun, there had to be training.

Mr. Clarence Hawkes – 406 Brunswick Road

Mr. Hawkes said he comes to the meetings and listens, and tonight you are giving permission to carry concealed weapons, so in other words you are generating a gun culture for good citizens and those that have questionable characterizations. He said he thought Council was on a higher level of thinking, and with a higher level of thinking, you do research to encourage everyone to do the right thing. He said it seems like you are superseding the Police Department. He suggested doing more research and bring in some counselors and the police department to really look at this. He said you will walk on somebody's porch with a concealed weapon, then some people are going to polish up their weapons, and the Town could find yourselves in court cases. He said even though the Town has good employees, every once in a while, someone is going to make a slip or accused of a slip.

Mr. Hawkes encouraged Council to look at this further, the Town wants to attract good employees. He said what was done tonight, could make people want to have changes on this Council as the years come.

Councilman Allman said this came about because the windows were shot out of Manger Vannoorbeeck's truck, and there have been internal threats. He said what came to his mind was in 2019 12 people lost their lives at the Virginia Beach Municipal Building in a gun free zone. He said that was his research.

Councilman Miller said he understood, but every employee does not need to carry a concealed weapon on this job. He said when you start putting guns in everybody's hands, you are asking for trouble. Manager Vannoorbeeck said 1/3 already carry.

Councilman Page said he wanted the Policy to enforce the weapons be concealed, but that was not approved tonight, so he voted no, but the Policy now allows for open carry. He said if we are going to allow employees to carry concealed, they should also be provided with the same de-escalation training as provided to our officers.

Councilman Page made a motion that anyone that files their concealed permit at the Town Office, also receive de-escalation training that is provided to the police officers.

Councilwoman Williams said she was one that asked the police be here for the meetings because she felt unrest with things going on in Town. She said she did not have a problem with employees carrying, because in Walmart she sees people carrying, and they are not concealed.

Councilwoman Wynn said she had questions before voting, and was concerned, there is a thin line between life and death situations. She said as a God fearing person, she did not want to see anybody's life being threatened or taken.

Councilman Gormus believed Councilman Page was referring to crisis management training. He said everybody where he works has to go through this training.

The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Williams.

Councilwoman Williams said she was concerned about certain employees carrying a weapon, as Councilman Miller has brought up.

Clerk Daniel asked Manager Vannoorbeeck who cannot carry a weapon. Manager Vannoorbeeck believed felons and domestic violence offenders cannot carry. Councilman Allman added anyone with a protective order against them. There are certain records that prohibit someone from carrying a weapon.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said this would be codifying what is already happening. He said he feels this is important, and sometimes he feels unsafe coming to work.

Mr. Hawkes said this may be the opportunity to bring in consultants to help de-escalate situations. He suggested doing a survey to find out why people are angry.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

Councilwoman Wynn	-	Aye
Councilman Page	-	Aye
Councilwoman Williams	-	Aye
Councilman Miller	-	Aye
Councilman Nash	-	Nay
Councilman Allman	-	Nay
Councilman Gormus	-	Nay

Mayor Green said he was going to take this under advisement, and had five days.

Mr. Hawkes said he would let the politics fall as they may. He encouraged Council to understand their constituents, work with them, and don't come across heavy handed. He said try to work away from the gun culture, and think about our citizens.

Mayor Green asked that Councilman Miller and Manager Vannoorbeeck meet with him in the morning, he would like time to discuss and think about it before making a decision.

Mrs. Damon asked if the Police Department was brought into this conversation. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied no ma'am. Mrs. Damon believed the opinion of the Police Department may be welcomed.

Mayor Green asked that Detective Murphy be included in the meeting tomorrow morning. Councilman Page asked Mayor Green to find out more about de-escalation tactics.

Mrs. Tyler Scott - 811 Brunswick Avenue

Mrs. Scott said she and her husband retired here over five years ago from Richmond. She said she did not feel as safe as she used to. She said several months ago, a car load of thugs tried to get young jogger in the car on Brunswick Avenue. She said a few weeks ago her elderly neighbor was threatened by a young man. She said a neighbor informed her recently, that their houses were probably being cased by a drug addict. She said when she walks her dog at night and sees a car coming, she moves into the woods so they cannot see it is a woman at 10:00 p.m., she is kind of scared.

Mrs. Scott said about de-escalation, she was knocked down about 25 years ago in Alexandria, Virginia, while a man held a gun in her face, and took her bag. She said there was no time for de-escalation.

Councilman Page said his stance on citizens carrying open or concealed is 100% yes, but when you have a government in the course of their official duties working, we need to have policy, procedures and training in place or we become liable if something happens. Mrs. Scott said for citizens it is like we are under siege, and happening all over the country.

Mayor Green continued this meeting to Wednesday, November 1, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.

There being no further business to bring before Council, Mayor Green adjourned this meeting.



MAYOR
OF THE TOWN OF BLACKSTONE, VIRGINIA

November 20, 2023 APPROVED AND ADOPTED



TOWN CLERK
OF THE TOWN OF BLACKSTONE, VIRGINIA