

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, May 15, 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; Jackie Brown, Bookkeeper; Brittany Harris, Treasurer; Chastiddy Bryant, Community Development Specialist; Nicholas Kuzmiak, Police Chief; Dion Tomer, Fire Chief

Town Attorney: Tessie B. Bacon

Those Absent:

Mayor Green called the May Council Meeting to order.

Mayor Green delivered the Invocation.

Mayor Green led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor Green said he would be adding two items to the Agenda for Closed Session. He said one would be an update on Probable Litigation, and the other item would be Personnel, Administration.

Mayor Green asked to move Unfinished Business #1 to the beginning of the meeting, once the representatives arrive.

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

1. Amend & Reenact – Building Inspector Code Sections

*NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
TOWN OF BLACKSTONE*

The Blackstone Town Council shall hold a Public Hearing on May 15, 2023 at 7:00 p.m. in the Blackstone Town Council Chambers, 100 W. Elm Street, Blackstone, Virginia. The Town Council will consider an ordinance which will amend and reenact the following sections of the Town of Blackstone Town Code: 18-36, 18-37, 18-38, 18-52, 18-53, 18-78, 18-123, and 62-48. More specifically, the proposed ordinance will remove references to a building inspector and replace with the title building official. Additionally, the ordinance will revise the requirement that this position report directly to Town Council. The Town Council may approve this ordinance following this public hearing. Any individual desiring to address the Town Council should attend the public hearing at the above stated date and time.

Mayor Green said this Public Hearing is to consider revisions to the Town Code which would remove references to a building inspector and change to Building Official.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said this was discussed at a Health and Ordinance Committee Meeting. He said the State of Virginia changed the title from Building Inspector to Building Official. He said our Town Code also said the Building Inspector would report directly to Council, but years ago the County started providing inspection services for the Town, so they no longer report to Council.

Mayor Green opened the Public Hearing and asked if there was anyone here to speak for or against the proposed changes. There being no comments, Mayor Green closed the Public Hearing.

Councilman Miller made a motion to amend and reenact Sections: 18-36, 18-37, 18-38, 18-52, 18-53, 18-78, 18-123, and 62-48 as presented. The motion was seconded by Councilman Gormus.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

2. Amend & Reenact – Section 14-91(a)

**NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
TOWN OF BLACKSTONE**

The Blackstone Town Council shall hold a Public Hearing on May 15, 2023 at 7:00 p.m. in the Blackstone Town Council Chambers, 100 W. Elm Street, Blackstone, Virginia. The Town Council will consider an ordinance which will amend and reenact Section 14-91(a) of the Blackstone Town Code. More specifically, the proposed ordinance will remove a reference to the Suburban-Agricultural zoning district and replace with the Residential-Suburban zoning district. The Town Council may approve this ordinance following this public hearing. Any individual desiring to address the Town Council should attend the public hearing at the above stated date and time.

Mayor Green said this Ordinance would remove reference to the Suburban Agriculture District, which was removed in the 1990s. He said this removal will be replaced with the current Residential Suburban zoning.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said when the Town completed its boundary adjustments in 1992, specific to Eppington Forest, it was designated as residential agricultural, and at that time mobile and manufactured homes were a hot topic in Virginia. He said Virginia declared agriculturally zoned districts had to permit these types of homes.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said we are asking that Section 14-91(a) reflect the current zoning, which is Residential/Suburban.

Mayor Green opened the Public Hearing and asked if there was anyone here to speak for or against the request. There being no comments, Mayor Green closed the Public Hearing.

Councilman Page made a motion to amend and reenact Section 14-91(a) of the Town Code to reflect the correction in zoning to Residential/Suburban. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Williams.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

MINUTES:

Councilman Nash made a motion to dispense with reading and approve as presented minutes from the Regular Council Meeting on April 17, 2023. The motion was seconded by Councilman Miller.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

VISITORS:

1. Blackstone Chamber – Fireworks Display – 7-1-23

Ms. Deborah Rose - 105 W. Broad Street

Ms. Rose said she was here for the July celebration, which will be on Saturday, July 1, 2023. She said they would like to do fireworks at the Wrigglesworth Complex. She requested the Noise Ordinance be waived, and also asked to have a beer garden at this event.

Ms. Rose said this day was also the 100 Mile Yard Sale, and DBi is requesting use of the Town Square for those that do not have yards for the 100 Mile Yard Sale. She said they were trying to make Blackstone the end point so people will stay and have dinner in Town and come see the fireworks.

Mayor Green asked Ms. Rose if she had spoken with DBi about the Town Square. Ms. Rose replied, DBi was in her office today.

Councilman Page said it also says the Chamber wants to close South Harris Street, between Birch and School Street. Ms. Rose replied, yes.

Councilman Nash made a motion to approve the street closure and waive the Noise Ordinance for the July 1st Chamber Event, and have the Chamber provide a TULIP Policy for the beer garden. The motion was seconded by Councilman Gormus.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

Mayor Green believed the Use Agreement for the Town Square for the 100 Mile Yard Sale had already been signed.

Mayor Green called for a recess.

Mayor Green said we have a group of distinguished visitors here tonight. Community Development Specialist Bryant introduced a representative from Virginia Union University, Ms. Felicia Cosby, Director of Government and Community Relations. She said Ms. Jessica Gilbert was unable to attend, but her fiancé was here.

Community Development Specialist Bryant said tonight an MOU is being presented to Council to create a collaboration with Virginia Union University and the Town, as it relates to the upcoming revitalization efforts at the Harris Memorial Armory. She said VUU will host in person training for the hospitality field. She said their Technical College will offer a variety of Certification Courses, as well as an Associate's Degree in the hospitality field. She said this will assist the new and upcoming hotels and restaurants planned for this area. She said VUU will partner with Shane Thomas of Southern Kitchen to educate individuals on the culinary side of hospitality.

Mayor Green recognized Ms. Chastiddy Bryant, for her tireless work she has done on behalf of the Town.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

1 – Virginia Union University – Armory MOU

Manager Vannoorbeeck said this MOU has some boiler plate, but it also represents something special to Blackstone, this is going to be an amazing project. He said the ad for the Armory will be in the paper this Wednesday. He said without Community Development Specialist Bryant, he would not have gotten to know Virginia Union staff, and he was glad he did.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the MOU was a 5 year document, and includes a 90 day withdrawal clause if either party chooses to. He said it shows the Town will assist with things like housing, grant funds, curriculum, and internships. He said we hope this turns out to be as great as we think it can be.

Councilman Nash said he was excited to see the Armory move forward, and we have a vision finally.

Councilman Nash made a motion authorizing Manager Vannoorbeeck and Mayor Green to execute the MOU with Virginia Union University as presented. The motion was seconded by Councilman Miller.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

Councilman Nash asked if this project still had to be completed by August 2024. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied, it was the expectation to be open by August 2024, seeing students enrolled and being trained by this time, but this is the deadline for ARPA Funds.

Councilman Page asked if there would be any temporary housing by then to help. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he did not know. He said Community Development Specialist Bryant had come up with several ideas for downtown or at the school properties. He said it was our expectation to do everything we can to house these students.

VISITORS:

Mr. Thomas Crews – Nottoway County Democratic Committee

Mr. Crews said he provided a copy of his remarks to Council.

Mr. Crews said he was here to address an issue that came up at a previous meeting involving the Inn at Blackstone and Sons of Confederate Veterans. He said comments made seemed to be directed at members of the Nottoway County Democratic Committee, and perhaps even himself as the Chairman, regarding posts on social media. He said the Inn at Blackstone is a private business, they have the right to host whomever they want and Council has no power to deny them this ability. He said the issue being argued is not whether the Inn at Blackstone had the right to host the event, but whether they should host such an event.

Mr. Crews stated, it was said by Councilman Miller that those who spoke out on social media were cowards, because they chose not to voice their concerns here. He hoped Councilman Miller did not think he was a coward, as his actions in the County he believed had proven otherwise. He said regardless of Councilman Miller's personal feelings, he did not find out about the event until Tuesday of the week of the event, and the same is true for most of the members of the Democratic Committee. He said furthermore, there was no reason to come to Council because it would have been inappropriate for Council to intervene in a matter using their official positions. He said the last thing we want is to give a group of neo-confederates' leeway to sue the Town of Blackstone.

Mr. Crews thanked Mayor Green for refusing to speak at the event. He suspected Mayor Green, like himself knew instantly what this group represented. He said the Sons of Confederate Veterans reportedly claim they only want to honor the fallen, who died in the Civil War. He said the issue with the Sons of Confederate Veterans specifically is they promote a neo-confederate ideology, and more specifically the lost cause mythology, which seeks to spread lies about the cause of the Civil War, in order to claim it had nothing to do with slavery. He said one reason for this is to radicalize white folks in the community. He said when they stay in Blackstone, they are attempting to recruit folks from the community to join them. He said all of this is relevant to the Nottoway County Democratic Committee not just because we are interested in protecting Blackstone, and its residents from being radicalized and funneled into a hate group, but because we also signed an agreement with the Inn, to host an event there.

Mr. Crews believed the Inn offered its employees the ability to not work during the time the group was present, unfortunately they were not offered the pay if they chose not to work. He said they were able to negotiate with the Inn to ensure that those who chose not to work received pay. He said they were also able to negotiate the open and public display of the Confederate Flag, even though the Confederate Veterans protested the limitation.

Mr. Crews said it was their hope that the Inn would enact a policy that will make it clear they do not host groups that promote hate and disinformation about our shared history. He said if the Inn is unwilling to enact a policy, then Council will have to wonder what happens if neo-Nazis or the KKK wants to host an event, is Council prepared to give them cover in those cases as well, if not, then why not? He did not believe it was wise for Council to place themselves in the middle of this situation, but if you decide to speak with the owners of the Inn tomorrow, it was his hope that Council will press them on a policy.

Mayor Green asked Mr. Crews what did “give them cover mean”. Mr. Crews said his interpretation was the Inn wants Council to meet with them. Mayor Green replied, no they do not. He added, it is not Council business to meddle in who the Inn rents to or their policies. He said some of Mr. Crews’ comments sounded like he wanted Council to police their activities and he did not see this Council doing that.

Mayor Green said anytime a business owner would like to break bread with him and the manager, we will do so.

Councilman Miller admitted he said the word coward and apologized, but when he read the article, he went crazy and believed Facebook was getting out of hand. He said there was nothing Council could do.

Ms. Christina Collazo – Sullivan Street

Ms. Collazo said she was here to address what was said at last month’s meeting regarding the situation that took place at the Inn at Blackstone, and to address the derogatory comments made by Councilman Miller towards citizens like her. She said when people in the community found out the Blackstone Inn was hosting a Confederate Convention, it stirred up a multitude of emotions, and instilled fear for a lot of people in the community. She said although she and others were very upset at the Inn for allowing the group of Confederate celebrators to come to Town, not one of us uttered the words boycott the Inn. She said many of us expressed personally they would not be giving business to the Inn, and originally it was their disregard to their employees in the situation and not paying them if they took off for that weekend. She said personally she would never support or be comfortable with a racist reunion taking place in our backyards. She said nobody should be forced in an uncomfortable situation in the workplace, just so they can pay their bills.

Ms. Collazo said we all know that hosting this event at the Inn had absolutely nothing to do with the Town of Blackstone or the Council. She said nobody has blamed the Town or council members for this event. She said at the last meeting Councilman Miller referred to people that posted their concerns on their own Facebook page, as ignorant and labeled their acts as cowardly.

Mayor Green said Councilman Miller has offered a heartfelt apology for his comments. He asked Ms. Collazo not to dwell on it. Ms. Collazo said she would like to finish what she had to say.

Ms. Collazo said everybody was well educated on the fact that this situation had absolutely nothing to do with the Town. She said Councilman Miller also made the comment, why didn’t anyone come speak at a meeting, Ms. Collazo said why would Councilman Miller suggest to come speak if Council had nothing to do with this, to look them in their face and tell them there was nothing Council could do, that would be very malish intentions. She found it immensely disrespectful to call a group of people cowards or ignorant, on something they feel strongly about.

Ms. Collazo said to the other members of Council, she thanked them for holding the proper level of professionalism. She specifically thanked Councilman Page and Councilwoman Williams for being able to see both sides of the situation, as someone in a position of power should.

Ms. Collazo said she appreciated Councilman Miller's apology. She added as a body of government, you should be mindful of what you say and how you say it.

Ms. Collazo said it was very rude to interrupt someone when they are speaking, if you are going to allow public comment, you should let the public finish their comments.

Ms. Sarah Allen – Wards Lane, Crewe, VA

Ms. Allen thanked Council for allowing her to overcome her alleged cowardness, and speak tonight as a private citizen of the County. She said she was recently given a verbal spanking by important people, due to her actions. She said it did not feel good, taste good, and hurt for a few days. She said it was given because they wanted me to do better, so she was going to offer the same tonight because she wants Council to do better and hoped as a citizen in Nottoway, that she was important to Council as well.

Ms. Allen said the definition of a coward is a person that lacks courage to endure dangers or unpleasant things, and someone who is excessively afraid of danger or pain. She asked who on this Council is she supposed to be afraid of, because the way her God made her, she didn't have the spirit of fear. She said to Councilman Miller, she was very disheartened when he referred to citizens as ignorant and cowardly for posting on their own Facebook. She said citizens are allowed to reach out to their Council representatives to voice their opinions, and if you were not aware of that, you know now.

Ms. Allen said she encouraged Councilman Miller to provide his information tonight to all the Taylor Bottom citizens who were denied a new playground. She said Councilman Miller stated Taylor Bottom does not have any children, she goes there and sees children.

Ms. Allen quoted "the opposite of courage is not cowardness, it is conformity, even a dead fish can go with the flow". She said that is exactly what Councilwoman Wynn did, she went with the flow, while Councilman Miller was calling citizens cowardly, she was agreeing and stating people were bumping their gums and cannot come to the Chambers for open session to represent their opinion.

Ms. Allen said citizens are not required to come to meetings to voice their opinions and concerns, they can snail mail, email, call or use social media. She said as a person for racial progress, she knows they have lived through times where you have seen things that hurt your soul, because of the color of your skin. She said we are not here because of the color of our skin, like when Councilwoman Wynn talked about having a peppered family, that added nothing to this conversation, because it is not about the color of skin, it is about hatred. She said that is what the Confederacy was about, hate.

Ms. Allen said Manager Vannoorbeeck was quoted in the Courier Record and on video saying it was a huge disappointment and by people who were not really educated on the topic. She asked what topic are we not educated on, the Confederacy, the bigotry, is there a difference on how the Confederacy affected you or me. She asked if he knew the first human beings, specifically human beings of color born under the Equal Rights and Total Rights, are only 58-59 years old. She said from what she gathered from a distressed citizen, this was not your first inflammatory action, and she encouraged Council to release the video of the Town Manager. She said it was also said the event was peaceful, it was peaceful because it rained the entire weekend.

Ms. Allen said the Inn had a Confederate Event, which is their right, but we have the right to complain, however, she did applaud the Inn in their efforts to make their employees comfortable and held important conversations. She said the Blackstone Inn listened to the community more than Council, and Council was not asked for anything, that's how you build progress.

Councilman Miller said Ms. Allen made a statement that he said Taylor Bottom did not need recreation, that is not true. He said it was asked where was the most logical location for a playground and he replied kids in the East and West End. He said he never said no playground for Taylor Bottom. Mayor Green said we have not even spoke about creating playgrounds.

Ms. Allen asked if money was being put in the Budget for playgrounds. Mayor Green replied, he had made a proposal to put some money aside for community development, and Council would ratify the Budget.

Ms. Allen said people come to her, Mr. Crews or Ms. Collazo because they are afraid of what may happen, so when information is brought to her, she brings it to Council. She said when she is corrected on camera, everybody knows the truth.

Councilwoman Wynn said she was not referring to the entire public about the bumping of gums, and apologized if that offended Ms. Allen. She said it was meant to wake people up about having more communications.

Mayor Green said to Ms. Allen, he admired her courage to speak, because at the podium, he gets nervous. He provided his card to Ms. Allen, if she ever wanted to talk. Councilwoman Wynn said she would provide her information to Ms. Allen as well, because Taylor Bottom is part of her Ward.

Mr. William Clarke – 420 Sullivan Street

Mr. Clarke said he was 72 years old, and born in Nottoway County. He said at an early age, he learned courage, he saw things at an early age that nobody should see. He said when walking bottles were thrown at him because of his chocolate skin. He said he has sacrificed his career for not being a coward. He said he was an activist and had been on Facebook since 2007. He said he did not want to see any black kid afraid of a flag. He said young white kids are being taught hate by the group that came here. He said he knew about the event a month ahead, but kept it to himself so things would not get out of control. He said he didn't come to Council because he knew it was nothing you could do, why waste your time.

Mr. Clarke said no disrespect to Councilman Miller, roughly 30 of the people he called a coward, voted for him. He said he was thinking about running for something, which is why he is supporting people that support him. He said people were confused because this group used the Inn's logo on their invitations, so people thought the Inn was sponsoring it.

Mr. Clarke said he hired a young man, Sydney Parrish, and he showed him that if handled right, Facebook is the best thing you can get. He said what he does, he does for the love of Blackstone and Nottoway County.

Councilman Miller said a lot of rumors have been spread about him and the playground. He said that was not said, and can be taken back to Taylor Bottom.

Ms. Mae Tucker - 336 Tucker Lane, Blackstone, VA

Ms. Tucker said she came tonight to talk about Councilman Miller, but after hearing his apology, she accepted that. She said her grandmother used to say "it's not what you say, it's how you say it". She said it could have been expressed in a different way. She said she found out about the event a few days before and upset her. She said you all may not have lived with the Sons of Confederate Veterans, but she was from South Carolina, and knew about it. She said she hated what they stood for, and this was not their first time here, but the first time being open with it. She said when she started getting calls, she told them it was no need going to Council because they had nothing to do with it. She said she told people not to make a move, she contacted Mayor Green and suggested the police be on high alert.

Ms. Tucker said the Inn needed to put a policy in place, if they are going to live in our community, we have a right to discuss that with them. She said she was not a coward, and if there is an instance for Council to sit in on a meeting, voice your opinion, don't be afraid to do so.

Ms. Tucker said if the Town has a playground in an area, it is not for Taylor Bottom, Luke Street, Church Street, it is for the kids. She said a playground would be open to everybody. She said Council was elected by people that want you to work for the community, so please work together.

Councilman Nash said the concern as Council, we know the importance of the Inn at Blackstone. Ms. Tucker said anyone over 40 knows the Confederacy is about hate. She said don't teach kids hate, they don't hate each other, they are taught hate.

Mr. Tom Taylor – Harris Street

Mr. Taylor said he represents Ward A, and defended his Ward leader. He said Councilman Miller did not say half the stuff being said. He said Councilman Miller has attributed a lot for Ward A, we would not have the water and sewer, housing and other projects because people were trying to sabotage it, but Councilman Miller did not allow it. He said it you come after Councilman Miller; Ward A is coming after you all.

FIRE CHIEF'S REPORT:

Chief Tomer believed the County would be opening the bid packet for the radio systems this month. He said this is estimated to be \$7-\$8 Million. He said the Tower was still getting ready for production. He said the County has approved ESO as our records management system for all emergency services in Nottoway County. He said this will help in the Budget, as the Town currently pays \$400.00 a month for the records management system. He said this system keeps them in compliance for reporting to the office of EMS, the Virginia Department of Fire Programs and the federal side.

Chief Tomer said the Golf Tournament was a success with 18 teams. He said it was a good fundraiser for the Fire Department.

Chief Tomer said they now have 56 members with 18 of them having over 20 years of service each.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the demolition work at the Fire Training Grounds was almost complete, but the slab was going to stay. He said the old tanker received a very low bid on GovDeals, so it will be taken to ABC Recycling. He said the asbestos was removed from the building. He asked Chief Tomer for a date to burn the wood left out there.

NEW BUSINESS:

1 – Travel Policy

Chief Tomer said he brought this up because the Policy was enacted in 2018. He said in this Policy it included a \$45.00 cap for meals per day. He said lodging and mileage has GSA rates, but meals are capped. He asked if Council would consider moving meals to a GSA per diem.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said for meals currently GSA is \$64.00.

Councilman Nash asked if this just pertained to the employee, and not their significant other. Chief Tomer replied correct, we do not support significant others with travel.

Councilman Allman made a motion to amend the Town's Travel Policy to include meals at the GSA Rate. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Wynn.

Councilman Nash asked if an employee is taken out to dinner by Pierce for example, is the employee still reimbursed. Chief Tomer replied, they produce receipts for reimbursement.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

PAYMENT OF BILLS:

Mayor Green stated the bills that have already been paid are in the amount of \$976,407.46.

Councilman Nash made a motion to approve the bills that have already been paid in the amount of \$976,407.46. The motion was seconded by Councilman Miller.

Councilman Nash asked about drainage improvements for \$37,000.00. Manager Vannoorbeek said this is for a contract that was approved in 2021, with Treescapes. He said they were approved for several projects, and just finished the final project on Bird Road.

Councilman Nash asked if this would be an appropriation. Manager Vannoorbeek replied yes, we will need to figure that out.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

Mayor Green stated the bills not yet approved, and to be paid, are in the amount of \$233,540.56.

Councilman Miller made a motion to approve as presented, the bills not yet paid in the amount of \$233,540.56. The motion was seconded by Councilman Nash.

Councilman Nash asked about Weatherization and a storage container, should that be reimbursed. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied yes, by Town funds.

Councilman Nash asked about WEG Transformers. Manager Vannoorbeeck said there are still two more to come. He added these are 750KV Transformers that are specific to Wilkerson Tire. He said these were ordered in 2021.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said Wilkerson Tire's build out will require the 750KV, and a spare, but they have not reached that point of consumption yet. He said the smaller transformer currently in use, will be removed. Councilman Nash asked if the Town would recoup the money for the transformers. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied yes, they are an amazing customer for the Town.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

APPROPRIATIONS:

There were no appropriations this month.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

1. Account & Finance – met 4-27-23 – minutes included in May's Council Packet

FY24 BUDGET

Councilman Nash said the Committee was meeting again on Wednesday, but there was nothing to report tonight. Manager Vannoorbeeck said after this meeting, there would be a Work Session for the full Council.

2. Employment & Police – met 5-2-23 – minutes included in May’s Council Packet

CLOSED SESSION – PERSONNEL - ADMINISTRATION

Councilman Miller said there was nothing to report, this would go to the Account and Finance Committee.

CONSENT AGENDA:

There were no Consent Agenda items.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

1. Virginia Union University – Armory MOU

This was discussed earlier in the meeting.

2. Culvert Installation Policy

Manager Vannoorbeeck said there had been some discussion about this Policy and making it a 2/3 majority vote to spend money, primarily on the private side.

Councilman Miller asked about work being done at someone’s house, can a payment plan be set up. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied yes, with curb and gutter, payments can be made.

Councilman Nash asked roughly, what is owed in liens for curb and gutter, etc. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied, \$100,000.00. Councilman Nash said he was not concerned about interest, but more of setting a time line, perhaps 10 years.

Councilman Page asked if Council had the authority to limit Council’s power and force a 2/3 vote. Mayor Green said there are four instances that require a 2/3 vote, and it includes those elected, not present. He said one that requires 2/3 vote is anything over \$10,000.00, any tax imposed, borrowing money, and a veto.

Councilman Page said if there is something under \$10,000.00, can we force a 2/3 vote. He said the General Assembly says what can be passed with a 2/3 vote.

Councilman Page made a motion to postpone the vote on the Culvert Policy until next month, upon clarification from Attorney Bacon. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Wynn.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

3. USDA Grant – Taylor Bottom

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Town made application for a \$2 Million Grant, and USDA has since said they would not provide this, but would provide \$5 Million in loan. He said the Town was not prepared to make that kind of commitment because he was not comfortable with the numbers from the Preliminary Engineering Report, and we have a General Obligation Debt Limit, and still have projects going on. He said we need to take the cost and see what we can leverage from the State for housing and drainage improvements. He said we can reapply, and he plans to.

4. Award Bid – Concrete Pads/Headwall

Clerk Daniel said the bid tabulation was at Council's desk.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the bids were opened today, and there was a wild swing between the prices, with one at \$72,000.00 and the other bid at \$21,000.00. He said he would like to talk to the low bidder before moving forward.

Manager Vannoorbeeck asked to discuss this further at the next Council Meeting.

5. Accounting Consultant

Manager Vannoorbeeck said Treasurer Harris and Bookkeeper Brown have asked to hire Ms. Ann Shawver for assistance. He said she is a retired Finance Director from the City of Roanoke. He asked Council to approve hiring Ms. Shawver at \$185.00 an hour, and could exceed \$10,000.00.

Councilman Nash asked how many hours did the previous person work. Treasurer Harris replied, she worked two days a month, for three months. Manager Vannoorbeeck said Ms. Shawver would work remotely. Treasurer Harris did not believe this would be full days of work, and would help them close out the year.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Preliminary Audit went well, but did find some uncompleted balances that have carried over for about a year, and need to be resolved.

Councilman Page asked, beyond closing 2023, how many more hours would be needed. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied, a guess would be another 25 hours.

Councilman Gormus asked if this was bid out. Manager Vannoorbeeck said we got three different prices, one from Ms. Debra Robinson and Mr. John Montero. Treasurer Harris added it is hard to find someone that is familiar with the Town's accounting software.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said expenses would also include for her travel.

Councilman Nash asked Treasurer Harris if this person would teach them enough, that it would not be something needed yearly. Treasurer Harris replied, correct.

Councilman Nash made a motion to authorize Manager Vannoorbeeck to execute the Agreement with Ms. Ann Harrity Shawver as presented for accounting services up to \$10,000.00. The motion was seconded by Councilman Allman.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

ON-GOING PROJECTS:

1. Dilapidated Buildings

Manager Vannoorbeeck said on May 11, 2023, the Circuit Court did grant the Town authority to demolish 806 Falls Street, and he awaits the Order from Attorney Bacon. He said the Town will also begin the clean up of 802, 804 and 812 Falls Street, and must be done by June 16, 2023.

2. Meals Tax / Lodging Tax

Manager Vannoorbeeck said there was one outstanding Meals Tax, that is in addition to Huddle House.

3. Street Improvement Projects

There was nothing to report.

4. Wrigglesworth Sports Complex / TAP 21

Manager Vannoorbeeck said Councilman Miller asked him to get with the Gators to start designing the wiring and the layout of the Concession Stand.

5. East End Neighborhood Project

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the last house in the East End project has been awarded to Divine Builders at 114 S. Harris Street, in the amount of \$28,715.00. He said this is mostly exterior improvements. He said this will be done with all grant monies provided by the State.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the drainage portion of the project, there is a half of a block left on Tavern Street, and before he leaves the area, the block on Epes Street will be completed.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the pavers are supposed to be here in the month June. He said Birch, Oak, School, and Lester Streets are slated for tar and gravel. He said paving and patching had to be done first. He said there is a contract executed already with Whitehurst Paving.

6. Taylor Bottom Block Grant

There was nothing to report.

7. Armory

Manager Vannoorbeeck said this Wednesday in the Courier Record, and next Sunday in the Richmond Times Dispatch the Armory renovations are being advertised, as well as on eVA.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said he was very excited to see Virginia Union here tonight. He said the mention of Southern Kitchen, that is really good food.

Mayor Green asked to write a letter to Virginia Union in appreciation of them being here tonight.

8. Weatherization

Manager Vannoorbeeck and Community Development Specialist Bryant said there was another week at the home on Patterson Street. He said the front porch was removed, and put back smaller, so it will be made bigger for Ms. Patterson's wheelchair.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Travel Policy

This was discussed earlier in the meeting.

2. VMEA – Fuel Adjustment

Manager Vannoorbeeck said this goes into effect in April. He said the actual fuel adjustment cost is .01852 per KWH. He said the estimates provided previously were at .01718. He said this is about a 7% difference, and will be a pass through.

Councilman Nash asked with the fuel adjustment going down, and the power going up, will it be almost a net. Manager Vannoorbeeck believed it would be a net to zero increase.

COMMITTEE REFERRALS:

There were no referrals.

MAYORS MINUTE:

Officer of the Governor Letter

Mayor Green said included is a letter from the Governor on the EDC. He said Nottoway, Cumberland and Prince Edward County are all offering sites for a poultry operation that would fill the void from Tyson's closing their Henrico plant. He said he and Manager Vannoorbeeck spoke today, and they agree the Nottoway County site is the best by far, so we need to follow this to the end.

Mayor Green said he had communication over the weekend with the Vice Chairman, Shelli Hinton. He said he would be preparing a letter to the Chairman of Board and the Superintendent, as well as attending the meeting. He believed we were still on track to acquire the School Property.

Mayor Green said he wanted to report on the dog tags, he said his time was dwindling down, because Council was generous enough to give him 90 days to secure a procedure where the Town will issue the County's tags.

Mayor Green said Nottoway's Treasurer is retiring, and an interim has been appointed, who starts on July 1, 2023, so this will be taken up with the new Treasurer.

Councilman Miller made a motion allowing Mayor Green an additional 60 days to work with new Treasurer on dog tags. The motion was seconded by Councilman Gormus.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

Mayor Green said the West Entrance Road Gate to Pickett will be opening tomorrow, May 16, 2023, through September 30, 2023. He said it will be open Tuesday through Friday only, 6:30 a.m. – 10:30 p.m. He said around October 1st, they will indicate the plans for the future.

Mayor Green said the Oak Street property that the Town demolished, and has since sold, and came out net zero.

Mayor Green said he composed the Goals, and the next time we meet, we can make any changes and ratify them.

Mayor Green said Section 2-32, Standing Committees, states the Mayor shall on or before the third Monday of July annually appoint these Standing Committees. He said he saw no changes, unless there is a Council Member that wishes to be removed from a committee.

Mayor Green asked about microphones in the Chambers. Clerk Daniel said she emails him every week and has not heard anything. She said this company has installed all the council recording equipment. Councilman Allman said the last conversation he had with the company; it was the availability of equipment.

POLICE REPORT:

Councilman Gormus said a person in Ward B had communicated with him several times about the Noise Ordinance and issues. He said it looked like there were two violations for the month on the report. He said the person was adamant about noise around the Exxon from vehicles.

Mayor Green asked Councilman Gormus to contact the Chief and provide him with the information.

Councilman Nash thanked Chief Kuzmiak for the breakdown.

Councilman Gormus said the person from Ward B was asking about the signs for Noise Ordinance being gone. He asked if they were going back up. Mayor Green asked to check the four main entrances into Town.

CITIZEN COMMENTS:

Mr. William Clarke asked if the Town lawyer could write up something for the Town's website, not particularly aiming at the group that was here, but to encourage other groups that the Town does not endorse certain types of activities. Mayor Green said he preferred Council to speak through their motions in this Chamber, not on Facebook.

Councilman Nash believed once you give them the credit, it gives them more notoriety. Mr. Clarke said he just wanted people to know Blackstone is a peaceful Town.

Councilman Gormus said the previous Mayor wrote in the newspaper, that it could have passed for a retired pastors convention.

Treasurer Harris said she and Ms. Alex Davis would work on something. Mayor Green asked to get Attorney Bacon's approval and bring back to Council.

Mayor Green said he and Attorney Bacon had discussed penalties concerning business licenses, and asked her if she was prepared to speak to Council. Attorney Bacon replied yes.

Attorney Bacon said there were not a lot of penalties set forth in the Town's Ordinance or in the State Code on business licenses. She said you can impose certain late fees and interest. She said you can levy the tax on someone who has failed to provide the late fees and interest on late business licenses. She said after that it can be done through Treasurer's Liens and sale of property.

Mayor Green said he has assigned this topic to Health and Ordinance. He said we want to know what we can do if someone does not get a Business License. He asked Chairman Page to begin the process, and it may even require some research before meeting.

Mayor Green said he understood what Attorney Bacon said, but we are also a Dillon Rule State, and he wants to know if the State has prohibited us from taking action, while we enforce business licenses, and lack of.

CLOSED SESSION:

Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711

- 1/ Personnel – Administration
- 7/ Legal Matters – Probable Litigation

Councilman Gormus made a motion to go into Closed Session for Discussion, consideration, or interviews of prospective candidates for employment; assignment, appointment, promotion, performance, demotion, salaries, disciplining, or resignation of specific public officers, appointees, or employees of any public body and Consultation with legal counsel and briefings by staff members or consultants pertaining to actual or probable litigation, where such consultation or briefing in open meeting would adversely affect the negotiating or litigating posture of the public body. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Wynn.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

Councilman Gormus made a motion to certify that to the best of each member's knowledge only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements and only such public business matters as were identified in the motion by which the Closed Meeting was convened, were heard, discussed or considered in the meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Wynn.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

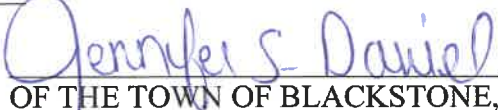
Councilwoman Williams	-	Certify
Councilman Miller	-	Certify
Councilman Nash	-	Certify
Councilman Allman	-	Certify
Councilman Gormus	-	Certify
Councilwoman Wynn	-	Certify
Councilman Page	-	Certify

There being no further business to bring before Council, Mayor Green adjourned this meeting 10:10 p.m.


MAYOR
OF THE TOWN OF BLACKSTONE, VIRGINIA

June 26, 2023

APPROVED AND ADOPTED


TOWN CLERK
OF THE TOWN OF BLACKSTONE, VIRGINIA