

Minutes of a Work Session of the Council of the Town of Blackstone, Virginia, held in the Council Chambers located at 100 W. Elm Street, Blackstone, Virginia, on Wednesday, November 12, 2008, at 5:30 p.m.

There Were Present:

Mayor: William D. Coleburn

Council Members: L. Benjamin Green, John W. Hill, Jr., C. Duncan Quicke, J. A. Wilson, Jr.,

Town Attorney: Kennon C. Walden, Jr.

Town Staff: Jennifer H. Beck, Administrative Assistant; David Dunn, Assistant Town Manager; J. Larry Palmore, Town Manager; Joan R. Palmore, Town Clerk; Charles C. Wells, Finance Director

Those Absent:

Council Member: Barbara Thompson, Alfred V. Tucker, Constance T. Wynn

Mayor Coleburn called the meeting to order.

I TOWN FINANCIAL UPDATE

Manager Palmore stated that the bank balance as of today is \$398,995.45. The current amount we borrowed was \$400,000 and the remaining balance on the line of credit is \$370,000.

Manager Palmore reviewed the list of projects showing how much money we have coming in to pay off the remaining balance. (*See Attachment #1*)

Council discussed the Line of Credit and the projects.

Mayor Coleburn asked the Town Manager when he anticipates that these funds will come in.

Manager Palmore answered, within the next six weeks. He added that our goal is to have the entire amount paid off by the end of February, or the first of March.

Councilman Wilson asked about the Tobacco Commission funds.

Manager Palmore answered that we received a grant for the highest and best use of two properties which are the old Epes Supply Building and the former Mitchell's property on Main Street.

Manager Palmore stated that we plan to finish the fire sirens by the first week of December.

Councilman Green stated that by his calculations, the Town's budget is short somewhere around \$110,000.

Manager Palmore answered, yes, that is correct and it will become clearer as we get further into the meeting, why this happened.

Manager Palmore reported on the revenue from the Cigarette Tax, Meals Tax and Lodging Tax. (*See Attachment #2*)

Council discussed these taxes.

Manager Palmore stated that he wants Council to understand that we purchased 4.5 million less kilowatt hours of electricity this year than we did back in 2000, but we are paying more per kilowatt hour now than we did, so therefore we are making less money because we have not increased our prices to cover this.

Mayor Coleburn stated so in other words we are selling less kilowatt hours and we are making less per kilowatt hour than we did just a few years ago; so this is a double wammy.

Councilman Green asked how often is the fuel factor adjusted.

Manager Palmore reported that at the last Virginia Municipal Electric Association (VMEA) meeting we were told that we owe Dominion Power \$4 million as a group on the fuel charge. Dominion representatives were at the meeting and we asked them do we need to adjust again and charge more and they said no. They are claiming it will all level itself out because fuel prices are going to go down to lower than they were two years ago.

Councilman Green asked what are we paying per kilowatt hour now.

Manager Palmore answered around 6.7 cents.

Manager Palmore asked Council to look on the fuel comparison sheet. He explained that the Town paid for all the fuel on the bus shop project and the project we did in the Industrial Park. The comparison shows how much fuel we used in 2007 versus 2008 and the number of transactions and the quantity of fuel on each one. (*See Attachments #3 and #4*). He added that we are doing far more work and the worst part is the prices have gone up on the fuel so that is why

the figure is so high. Manager Palmore explained that the police department's fuel usage is not broken down in these figures but their fuel is included in the total.

Council discussed the fuel comparison sheet.

Manager Palmore stated that we are trying to do everything we can to conserve. We are requiring more people per vehicle and we aren't letting trucks sit and run.

Manager Palmore handed out another sheet on fuel comparison (*See Attachment #5*). He explained that the bus system is growing so therefore we are using more fuel.

Manager Palmore handed out information to Council on the number of employees for the last ten years. (*See Attachment #6*)

Mayor Coleburn stated that we now have 53 full time employees compared with 1998 when we had 55. He added, so **this will dispel the notion that we have too many employees.**

Manager Palmore asked for those who are criticizing us to please tell how him where else in America can two employees cover 4.5 square miles of water and sewer lines as well as the lines at Fort Pickett. He stated that we need to look at the whole picture. He added that we are now down to five employees in the Electrical Department-- we did have six.

Mayor Coleburn stated that we have fewer people working in the Electric Department than ever. We are also at an all time low in the Police Department.

Manager Palmore stated that our mind-set since the meeting back in May is to start cutting and that is what we have done. He asked for people to go around and look at other communities that are doing what we are doing and compare us to anyone. We have only added one person to Administration and that is Lafayette Dickens. Manager Palmore stated that Mr. Dickens is doing a great job. He added that the work load on our employees is getting bigger and bigger all the time.

Councilman Green stated that he is very satisfied with the administrative staff.

Manager Palmore added that we are also a full service DMV and it is getting busier and busier everyday. He explained that the DMV is not a real cash flow for us but it probably pays for one employee. He added that all we have is service. We aren't selling a thing-- we are all about serving the citizens of Blackstone.

Mayor Coleburn asked are we on a hiring freeze.

Manager Palmore answered no because he has two police officer positions that he has to fill and a dispatcher position that has to be filled.

Mayor Coleburn asked are we creating any new positions.

Manager Palmore answered, no.

Manager Palmore handed out information on overtime pay for the last ten years by department. He then reviewed *Attachment #7*.

Mayor Coleburn stated that the current year that we are in now, we paid out \$220,044.05 in overtime which is higher than ever but a lot of this overtime is in the police department. He asked does the Town plan ahead for overtime pay.

Manager Palmore answered, yes, we have to plan and budget for overtime.

Finance Director Wells explained that the overtime is based on fiscal year.

Manager Palmore stated that a lot of the overtime we had to pay out during Hurricane Isabelle and other major storms, was reimbursed by FEMA and we can see where those figures go up during the years when we had natural disasters.

Mayor Coleburn stated that the Town Employees get high marks especially during emergency situations. He added that the goal we all have is to create and make better government.

Manager Palmore asked for Council to consider paying the employees overtime because we are at such short staff, our men and women are working extra hours. In emergency situations, he feels we need to pay our employees overtime. He added that we are working some of our people to death in the police department. He stated that the overtime would need to be pre-approved and we are going to keep it tight.

Councilman Green feels that the Town Manager is perfectly capable of making this decision. He added that he is very impressed with the information he has been provided tonight.

Council would like to have this on the Agenda Monday night.

Manager Palmore informed Council that Ron Silverman is back at work, after his surgery, and doing well.

Questions from Public

Sam Moncure commended the Town Manager and the Finance Director for staying on track with getting the line of credit paid off. He asked for an explanation on the vehicle license tax.

Manager Palmore explained that the vehicle license tax was paid for in April but the fee was for the year of 2008.

Councilman Quicke stated that he appreciates the Town Manager and staff taking the time to do this.

II. TOWN GOALS

Suggestions from Citizens

Beverly Ambs addressed Council. She feels the Town should consider approaching Bon-Secours regarding pursuing a hospital in Blackstone.

Council discussed this further.

Manager Palmore stated that we need a way of honoring our three doctors– Dr. James S. Harris, Dr. Epes Harris and Dr. Stuart White--that started the Blackstone Family Practice Center (BFPC). He feels Bob Riffie, Dr. Rosenbaum and Chuck Beale would be great choices for this committee.

Dr. Stuart White, College Avenue, who was in the audience, stated that under the current plan, we will have 16 hours a day without a doctor. He agreed with Ms. Ambs that it would be a good idea for us to pursue a hospital in Blackstone.

Council discussed this further.

Council asked that the appointment of a committee to honor the three doctors who started the BFPC be discussed at the Regular Council Meeting.

Tom Daniel, Brunswick Avenue, addressed Council and agreed that pursuing a hospital is a good idea. He is in agreement with the Mayor that some teeth should be put in the litter ordinance. He would like to see us move forward on the old school grounds and he recommends pursuing grants.

Mayor Coleburn stated that we are pursuing these things and thanked Mr. Daniel for his ideas.

Tom Daniel informed Council that his company is closing its doors on January 1st.

Mayor Coleburn stated that in his letter to Council, he restated some of the goals we already have. He feels that we need to set a goal to reduce the Town debt by \$2 million by 2011.

Councilman Hill feels that this unrealistic.

Councilman Wilson agreed that this is not possible without raising taxes and fees.

Councilman Hill stated that one of his goals is and has been to reduce the Town's debt but we don't want to raise taxes and fees to do it.

Manager Palmore stated that there is no way that we can possibly do this unless we are willing to go up on fees and taxes. He added that we are already paying back \$900,000 every year.

Manager Palmore stated that he feels now is the time to talk to Council regarding advertising on the bus. He stated that several other localities are making \$100,000 a year on advertising on the side of their busses. He stated that we may have a way to work it out so that DBI could sell the ads on the bus and would get 40% of the money which would help fund their projects and 60% would go back to the bus system. He explained that this is a way to generate funds to help pay for some of the Town's expenses.

Mayor Coleburn stated that he has a blatant conflict but he would like to say that three years ago the Town decided not to advertise on benches because they didn't want to get in the advertising business. He asked will this money ever go back to the General Fund.

Manager Palmore answered, no, it would go back to BABS and DBI because DBI would be doing the advertising.

Council discussed this further.

III. MAYOR COLEBURN'S LETTER TO COUNCIL

Suggestions by Council Members

Councilman Wilson does not think the Council should get involved in hiring and firing. He feels we would be creating a problem that is not necessary. If the Police Chief and the Town Manager dismiss someone and it is not proper the it should be up to the court to decide if it is right or wrong.

Councilman Quicke feels that the more we know the more we open ourselves up to liability.

Mayor Coleburn stated that the Town Council is already liable. He doesn't think us being in the loop makes Council more liable.

Manager Palmore stated that people could sue the Council Member individually– if they are involved in the hiring and firing process and something is done incorrectly–not as a whole which would be covered under Town insurance.

Mayor Coleburn asked is it unrealistic for the Council or the Employment Committee to be briefed when someone is hired.

Councilman Wilson feels that it is a good idea when Council is notified about key administrative staff but not for the hourly workers.

Manager Palmore feels that this is the way it has always been and it needs to stay. The Employment Committee has always interviewed for key personnel positions. He agrees this should be a direct decision by Council but when it comes to the garbage truck driver or the street department worker, this would cause numerous problems.

Councilman Green does not want to get into hiring but he feels as a member of Council, he should be informed when an employee is dismissed.

Mayor Coleburn does not feel it is an issue of the public officials being embarrassed when they don't know when we have a new employee, it is more a matter of people not being confident in their government officials when the public knows more than they do.

Councilman Green would like to know as a member of Council if someone has left and when we have hired someone.

Mayor Coleburn asked Council not to feel this is micro-managing he just wants Council to consider some of these issues.

Geoffrey Murray addressed Council and stated that he agrees with Mayor Coleburn. He stated that the School Board puts it in the paper when they fill a position and he feels it is a good idea.

Manager Palmore stated that he will be happy to do this.

Discussion of Tentative List of Goals

Council went down the Mayor's Letter item by item. (See Attachment #8)

Mayor Coleburn stated that he really wants to make a poster child out of someone this year for littering. He is tired of walking up his street after jogging and picking up things that are unsanitary. He is really mad about litter and he feels it is a top three issue facing this Town right now.

Councilman Green asked are we confident that our ordinances are up to date on littering.

Manager Palmore answered, yes, we are doing all we can under State Law.

Council discussed the Mayor's proposal to have the Town Manager provide written reports on each project.

Manager Palmore stated that he feels overwhelmed now and it gets tougher and tougher each year. We have great personnel that work for the Town and we do all that we can. He asked Council to please call him or come by if they have questions. He feels this is too much to ask him to give a written report each month on all the different projects we have going on.

Mayor Coleburn stated that he views his job is to get people to think and to jump start ideas.

Manager Palmore asked the Council to consider giving Jennifer Beck the title of Director of Transportation and Community Development. He added that no more money will come with this title change.

On motion by Councilman Green, seconded by Councilman Hill, the Council unanimously approved giving Jennifer Beck the title of Director of Transportation and Community Development. The motion carried as follows. Vote:

Councilman Quicke	-	Aye
Councilman Green	-	Aye
Councilman Wilson	-	Aye
Councilman Hill	-	Aye

Discussion: Councilman Green asked will there be any change in responsibilities.

Manager Palmore answered no.

Mayor Coleburn read a letter from Nottoway County Administrator Ronnie Roark asking that Council provide the County with a list of three or four problems facing Blackstone over the next few years. He asked Council to think about the three or four pressing issues we have facing us and to be prepared to talk about this Monday night.

Councilman Green has several issues he would like us to talk to the County about such as dilapidated buildings, recycling, and the Department of Military Affairs possibly moving its headquarters. He also wants us to include our goals to clean up the Town and take care of what we have already started. He love the hospital idea but we have got to finish what we start.

Manager Palmore informed Council that the street scaping will not be done by October 2009 on the Downtown Revitalization project. He added that we are in the process of meeting with the Downtown merchants to work out the contracts. He stated that we cannot put out individual numbers for the property owners. If the property owners want to give out their number, that is up to them, but the Town cannot give out these numbers. Manager Palmore stated that DBI has done an outstanding job with this project and added that getting the large percentage of merchants that we have committed to improving their facades is unheard of.

Mayor Coleburn thanked everyone for their hard work.

Councilman Hill feels that some of the goals that we already have are still in the works but there are some that can be changed or moved.

Councilman Green asked that a list of the current goals be included in the December Council Packet.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to bring before Council, Mayor Coleburn adjourned the meeting at 7:35 p.m.

MAYOR
OF THE TOWN OF BLACKSTONE, VIRGINIA

APPROVED AND ADOPTED

TOWN CLERK
OF THE TOWN OF BLACKSTONE, VIRGINIA