

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, June 16, 2025 at 7:00 p.m.

There Were Present:

Mayor: Lafayette Dickens (*first meeting*)

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

Town Staff: Philip Vannoorbeeck, Town Manager; Jennifer Daniel, Town Clerk; Sam Murphy, Police Chief; Jackie Mitchell, Bookkeeper; Zac Beares, Fire Chief; Chastiddy Bryant, Community Development Specialist

Town Attorney: Attorney Harf - Zoom

Those Absent: Lloyette Wynn

Mayor Dickens called the June Council Meeting to order.

Dr. Dickens delivered the Invocation.

Mayor Dickens led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Councilman Page asked to have an item added to the Agenda.

Councilman Page made a motion to add Section 2.2-3711A, Subsection 7, which is Consultation with Legal Counsel in reference to probable litigation.

Attorney Harf believed A8 was the more appropriate section if this Closed Session in reference to a letter discussed earlier. He said this section deals with legal advice.

***Councilman Page amended his motion to Section 2.2-3711A, Subsection 8. The motion was seconded by Councilman Allman.***

Mayor Dickens asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

Councilman Miller asked to change the date of the August Council Meeting, as he will not be here. Councilman Page said he was having surgery on July 21<sup>st</sup>, so that would benefit him moving it to the second Monday in August. Councilman Nash said he was not available on a different date. Councilman Allman asked if this could be handled via email.

### **PUBLIC HEARINGS:**

#### **1. FY25/26 Budget**

*Town staff is inviting all citizens of Blackstone to come by the Town Office and have the annual budget explained to them in detail, if they so desire. A Public Hearing on this budget will be held Monday, June 16, 2025 at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers. All interested residents of Blackstone are urged to attend and express their opinion. It is the intention of the Town to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Should you need special accommodations, please contact the Town Manager's office prior to 5:00 p.m. on Friday, June 13, 2025.*

Mayor Dickens opened the Public Hearing.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the total amount of the advertised budget is \$20,558,180.00. He said after advertising one week the Town received notice on electric rates with two changes, one being a True-Up, with the Town's portion being roughly \$90,000.00. He said the rates in the second week of advertising are correct, but he did not change the total amount of the budget. He said the Town charges the citizens over 12 months for the True-Up.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the True-Up will be in the Power Cost Adjustment, which will come off next year. He said the True-Up fee will begin with the July usage. He said the Town received some credits last year, and are still being held in a money market account at roughly \$77,000.00, and is being used to offset the base rate increase this year.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the second item is the Special Regulatory Tax, he said for all users the rate will now be \$0.000165.

Councilman Nash asked if the Town had received the final rates from VMEA. Manager Vannoorbeeck said the final rates are included in the second advertisement of the Budget.

Councilman Gormus asked if the Committee's pay recommendations were included in the advertisement. Councilman Allman did not believe that was included. Manager Vannoorbeeck said it was not included.

Councilwoman Williams believed the salary comparisons were supposed to be presented to Council for review. Councilman Allman said tonight we are just discussing a total dollar figure; this is nothing to do with individual salaries. Councilman Nash said the Budget advertisement includes the 8%.

**Ms. Beverly Ambs – Brunswick Avenue**

Ms. Ambs said in light of the new information, there were some things brought up last month about the pickleball court. She asked if this would be removed to adjust for the changes. Manager Vannoorbeeck said Council can still make changes, but right now the pickleball court was included, along with \$11,000.00 for council chairs. He said the Power Cost Adjustment will still be passed on to the customer, even if some items are removed from the Budget.

Mrs. Tyler Scott said she and a small group play pickleball, but they did not ask for a court, they already have a court to play on. She said they asked the Town if they would put lines down in the Armory so they could play inside during winter.

Councilman Miller asked Mrs. Scott about their court, can anybody play. Mrs. Scott replied no, it was an apartment building with a private agreement.

**Mrs. Jenny Bunn – College Avenue**

Mrs. Bunn said she had not looked over the Budget, but believed tourism was coming up tonight. She asked if there was any money set aside for tourism. Councilman Allman said he did not believe there was a tourism line item in the Budget. Manager Vannoorbeeck said there was nothing specific, the closest thing was the DBi contribution.

Councilman Nash believed the Mayor and Council are now being tasked on how the Armory will operate. He said after the Budget is passed, they may have to amend then. He said he sees one position for the Armory, Tourism Director, and keeping the museums open.

Councilman Page said there are funds included in the Budget for the Carriage Museum and Schwartz Tavern at roughly \$40,000.00. Manager Vannoorbeeck said that money is for capital projects.

Mrs. Bunn said she believed Mrs. Sallie Glenn would do a bang up job with DBi, including tourism. She said her problem was tourism was not just in the historic district; it should be for the entire Town. She said she asked Mayor Dickens to consider a Tourism Committee to work with DBi on areas outside the Historic District. She asked if there would be funds for this.

Councilman Page said the Virginia Tourism Corporation offers grants throughout the year, so there may be funding with that.

**Mr. Tom Taylor**

Mr. Taylor said he just wanted to say hello to Mayor Dickens.

Mayor Dickens closed the Public Hearing.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said this meeting would be continued to 7 days from now to adopt and appropriate the Budget before July 1, 2025.

Councilman Gormus asked about the light at Maple and Main Street. He said this is a safety related issue. Manager Vannoorbeeck said it is not currently in the Budget, but could be added, but something would have to be subtracted.

Councilman Gormus said there are 14 days left in this fiscal year, there is still \$500,000.00 in the water/sewer utilities fund, with \$290,000.00 in Capital Outlay. He hoped \$100,000.00 could be pulled from that. Manager Vannoorbeeck said we may be able to.

Councilman Page said he had a few people call him for a pickleball court and a splash park. He said he was not opposed to the stoplight, but there are multiple items to consider.

Councilman Allman said he has asked for walking trails on College Hill. Councilman Gormus said when the walking trail was brought up, he asked about a pickleball court, and amended his motion to provide estimates for both.

**Mr. Clarence Hawkes**

Mr. Hawkes asked to adjust the Budget to meet the needs of the handicap. He said there needs to be a ramp in front of the Council Chambers. He said the Chambers should be made available for all citizens. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he would look at previous drawings when the Chambers were going to be renovated, and see what was included for a handicap ramp. Councilman Page suggested moving the bench as a temporary fix.

## **MINUTES:**

*Councilman Nash made a motion to dispense with reading and approve as presented minutes from the Regular Council Meeting on May 19, 2025 and the Continued Meeting on May 29, 2025. The motion was seconded by Councilman Allman.*

Mayor Dickens asked all in favor or opposed:

### **VOTE:**

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

## **VISITORS:**

### **1. Mr. Aaron Hawkins – Robinson, Farmer, Cox – FY24 Audit**

Mr. Hawkins said he was here to present findings from the FY24 Audit. He said there was a Management Letter included in the packet. He understood the Town had to seek help to get everything reconciled so the Audit could take place.

Mr. Hawkins said Page 1 includes the Auditor's Report, with an unmodified opinion, which means the statements included are correct and can be relied upon based on their testing. He said on Page 7 is where the fund financial statements begin, labeled Exhibit 3. He said the Town has three funds, General, Capital Projects, and Special Revenue. He said the fund balances for the General Fund and Capital Projects still have a deficit, but are smaller than deficits from previous years.

Councilman Nash asked why there were deficits, is it because depreciation is not accounted for. Mr. Hawkins said depreciation has nothing to do with governmental funds. He believed the deficits started roughly three years ago.

Mr. Hawkins said on Page 9 shows what happened during the year. He said the General Fund began the year with a negative \$800,000.00, and ended with a negative \$448,000.00. He said with Capital Projects the year started negative \$380,000.00, and ended negative \$95,000.00. He said the Special Revenue had a positive, but believed was pulled from the Cemetery Fund. He said when you combine all three funds there is a positive of \$84,000.00. He said the Town needs to diligently work towards positive numbers.

Mr. Hawkins said on Page 11 are the Utility Funds, also known as Enterprise Funds. He said these are healthy funds, so when you combine the Utility Funds with the Governmental Funds, it is a much better picture of the Town as a whole.

Mr. Hawkins said the net position in the Electric Fund shows \$6.8 Million, Water/Sewer is at \$5.9 Million. He said on Page 12, those funds had an increase in their net position. Councilman Page said the numbers are deceiving because there is \$1 Million in depreciation, when only \$250,000.00 was depreciated, so \$750,000.00 was not depreciated and put in the bank. He believed the funds were healthier than what we are looking at. Mr. Hawkins said for the utility funds, he agreed.

Mr. Hawkins said on Page 83 includes their reports and opinion on the financial statements. He said this page has to be issued since the Town is a governmental entity. He said this includes internal control testing and state compliance work. He said if there were findings to report they would be included on this page, but there were no findings.

Mr. Hawkins said on Page 85 includes the federal compliance work for the federal assistance the Town receives, this is for anything over \$750,000.00, and requires single audits. He said this included the ARPA funding expended in FY24. He said there were no findings from the ARPA testing they performed.

Mr. Hawkins said the Management Letter highlights the fund balances with deficits. He said this also included Bank Reconciliations, which the Town relied on consulting to help get ready for the Audit, which was longer than usual for a timely Audit. He said for a successful year end, you have to have successful monthly bank reconciliations. He stressed that the bank reconciliations are to be done every month.

Mr. Hawkins said the third item from the Management Letter is mileage rate reimbursement, the Town was still using an old mileage rate. He believed Town Policy states they are supposed to use the most recent IRS rate when reimbursing mileage.

Councilman Nash said ways to improve the General Fund from being in the red is increase taxes. Mr. Hawkins replied budgeting in general. He said right now you are not budgeting to break even; you are budgeting to get back into the positive. He said you almost need to budget to increase the fund balance. Councilman Nash gave an example of removing pickleball, but leave it in the budget as unspent. Mr. Hawkins said Blackstone is his only client showing a deficit.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said an option is transferring funds. Mr. Hawkins said transferring from the Utility Fund.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Town's General Fund does not generate the revenue for fire trucks, sidewalks and the Armory.

Mr. Hawkins said they would be back at the end of June to start preliminary work for FY25.

Councilman Gormus asked about Page 88, is that how much grant money was received for FY24. Mr. Hawkins replied yes, but the ARPA funds were actually received two years prior. He said once it is being spent, it is showed here. He said this also included \$1.6 Million from USDA, which includes grant and loan.

Councilman Page asked if his firm could train Town employees to reconcile bank statements. Mr. Hawkins said being the Town's auditors, they could not do that, they have to be independent.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said at Council's desk is a letter from Mr. John Montoro with VML/VACo, who helped with closing the books for the year. The letter said one of their tasks was reconciling the Town's bank accounts from July 2023 – July 2024. The letter said it was originally reported there was \$400,000.00 more cash than showing in the bank. The letter said the Town pays VMEA monthly and the August 2023 payment for \$398,000.00 hit the bank but was not recorded, so Mr. Montoro made the adjustment. The letter recommended the Town bring the reconciliations up to date, then Town staff can be trained to do this.

Mr. Hawkins said he had not seen this letter, and had not been told what specifically was done.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said he really needs to continue with Mr. Montoro, so he can teach Bookkeeper Mitchell how to reconcile. He said Mr. Montoro had agreed to work for the Town as an independent instead of with VML/VACo. He said his hourly rate would be \$120.00 an hour.

Councilman Allman asked how many hours. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied, whatever it takes to get it done.

Councilman Nash asked how many months is the Town behind. Bookkeeper Mitchell said the last bank reconciliation was done by Treasurer Morgan in March 2025, but was not completed.

Councilman Nash asked if this needed to be addressed with our new Treasurer that will be hired soon. Council agreed the Treasurer and Bookkeeper Mitchell should be cross trained.

Mr. Hawkins said Bookkeeper Mitchell and staff have done a good job, they just need training.

Councilman Page suggested having Mr. Montoro do the bank reconciliation from March through June, then train the Treasurer. Mr. Hawkins supported that idea.

Mayor Dickens asked how much is still unaccounted for. Bookkeeper Mitchell replied zero.

2. Ms. Jerry Morton – 401 College Avenue – Drainage Issues

Manager Vannoorbeeck said she was not here tonight. He said this would be a private property ditch, and recommended this go to the Street and Light Committee. Councilman Gormus said if it was on private property, do we need to look at it. He said after not doing Mr. Armes' ditch, that should be a moot point.

Councilman Miller said since it was not on Town property, it would be dropped.

**FIRE CHIEF'S REPORT:**

Chief Beares said the radio system with the County is being worked on month to month.

Chief Beares asked Manager Vannoorbeeck about hydrant testing, and painting the bonnets on the hydrants. He said we just hired a third employee in the Water/Sewer Department.

Chief Beares said the Diesel Exhaust System is starting this month. He said we have not submitted for the Forestry Grant yet. He said the Town was awarded \$148,588.00 through the Virginia Fire Programs for the Burn Building, and includes a \$10,000.00 match. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he received the Agreement today, and would present at the next meeting. He said the \$10,000.00 match was provided to the Town by Nottoway County.

Chief Beares said the Blood Drive would be held on June 25<sup>th</sup>. He said they did training recently on new handheld devices that pick up heat.

Chief Beares mentioned probationary and full status of members, and have received three new applications. He said the Golf Tournament was a success. He said they participated in a drill at FASTC for a helicopter down.

Chief Beares said they would be doing a walk through at Wilkerson Tire on June 30<sup>th</sup>. He said they were going to try and do one walk through a month with all the new building going on.

Chief Beares said pump testing was completed last month, and all units passed. He provided the years of services.

Chief Beares said they have been getting calls for automatic crash calls, because people get gas and leave their phones on the roof of their car, then drive off and it hits the ground and reports a crash.

Councilman Gormus asked if a walk-through had been done at Velvet Textile. Chief Beares said it had been over a year, they were getting calls for sprinkler heads busting, and finally shut it down. Councilman Nash said there are holes in the building throughout. Manager Vannoorbeeck said it is an out of town interest that owns the building, and only use the back portion. Council discussed the condition of the building.



## **PAYMENT OF BILLS:**

### **ALREADY PAID:**

Manager Vannoorbeeck stated the bills that have already been paid are in the amount of \$1,032,124.72.

***Councilman Miller made a motion to approve the bills that have already been paid in the amount of \$1,032,124.72. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Williams.***

Councilman Nash asked about a food reimbursement for \$150.00. Manager Vannoorbeeck said sadly the wrong person's power was cut off, and they had a refrigerator full of food.

Mayor Dickens asked for a Roll Call Vote:

### **VOTE:**

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

### **TO BE PAID:**

Manager Vannoorbeeck stated the bills not yet approved, and to be paid, are in the amount of \$527,322.13.

Councilman Miller asked if Wright's Auto changed their name. Councilman Nash replied, they sold the business to Clarksville Auto.

***Councilman Nash made a motion to approve as presented; the bills not yet paid in the amount of \$527,322.13. The motion was seconded by Councilman Page.***

Councilman Nash asked about the speed tracker under Police Department in the amount of \$2,565.00. Chief Murphy said this is tracker of speed, where he believed people were slowing down when they saw the sign, but this is less obvious.

Mayor Dickens asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

### **APPROPRIATIONS:**

#### **Appropriation #1 – Airport = \$10,000**

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Town received a \$10,000.00 grant from the Department of Aviation for July 4<sup>th</sup> fireworks. He said this is adding to the Town's current budget. Bookkeeper Mitchell said it would be paid out tomorrow.

***Councilman Nash made a motion to approve the appropriation as presented. The motion was seconded by Councilman Allman.***

Councilman Gormus believed the Town did provide \$10,000.00, and this grant would reimburse the Town. Councilman Page said the Town provided \$5,000.00 to the Chamber, then the Chamber found a grant, that the Town had to apply for, but required the Chamber to spend their money first of \$15,000.00. He said the Chamber did, and the State is reimbursing them.

Councilman Miller asked how much total is the event costing. Councilman Page replied roughly \$23,000.00 per location.

Mayor Dickens asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

### **Employment & Police – 5-22-25 – minutes included in June’s Council Packet**

#### **Closed Session – Personnel - Salaries**

Councilman Miller said they were provided Treasurer applications, and waiting on a date to set up interviews. He said the Committee will interview the applicants, and the top three would be brought to Council.

Clerk Daniel said seven had been chosen for interviews.

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

### **1. Armory Internet**

Manager Vannoorbeeck said he just received the most recent proposal from CodeBlue, and would be presented at the Continued Meeting.

Councilman Nash asked if any answer was received on why there needed to be two separate lines. Community Development Specialist Bryant said Virginia State University’s classes are all online, so they need a dedicated network. She said Virginia Union University does not need a dedicated line because students can just log into their account. Councilman Allman said if VSU needs a dedicated line, they should share the cost.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the new price is cheaper, but the monthly cost includes a firewall, which makes it more expensive, and he did not understand that.

Councilman Nash asked if there was any aid from VSU for the dedicated line. Community Development Specialist Bryant said she could ask. Councilman Allman understood needing fiber, but this appears to be going above and beyond the scope.

Councilman Miller said we need to get everybody together and hash everything out so there is no confusion.

Mayor Dickens asked how much is the internet estimated to be. Manager Vannoorbeeck said with the firewall, \$1,800.00 a month. He said the new vendor is \$900.00 a month, but then the firewall is added.

Councilman Gormus said the Town voted to renovate the building; they did not vote for an additional \$25,000.00 a year to provide internet for the people that are going to be using it. He asked what the Town was using internet for in the Armory. Community Development Specialist Bryant said for the computer labs.

Manager Vannoorbeeck reminded Council, without the colleges there would have been tax increases.

## 2. VMEA – Battery Energy Storage System (BESS)

Manager Vannoorbeeck said this system would be located in Manassas and Harrisonburg. He said battery storage is another way to reduce demand. He said they expect when the BESS system is installed, it would reduce the annual cost to the VMEA group \$3.1 Million, and of that amount, the estimated savings to the Town would be \$139,000.00 annually. He said Blackstone is a 4.4% member of VMEA.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said there is a cost associated to the Town with BESS for the interconnection construction, and according to Brian O'Dell with Harrisonburg Electric, it would be less than \$50,000.00, and reflected in the Town's bill.

Councilwoman Williams asked if this would be a savings to the citizens. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied, yes, but with the savings it would go towards the Taylor Bottom and Eppington Forest projects until paid off.

***Councilman Allman made a motion to adopt the Resolution and accept the Agreement as presented, having Mayor Dickens execute the Agreement. The motion was seconded by Councilman Miller.***

Mayor Dickens asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

Councilman Page asked how long it would be before it was up and running. Manager Vannoorbeeck said third quarter of July, so about a year from now.

## 3. Industrial Development Authority Nomination

Manager Vannoorbeeck said if anyone has a name, please notify Clerk Daniel.

#### 4. Dillard Crawley Building – 114 S. Main Street Update

Manager Vannoorbeeck said Attorney Harf and Town staff attended Circuit Court regarding eminent domain, with the Town of Blackstone vs Courtland D. Coffey Entertainment, LLC. He said the Defense did not contest the motion, and an Order was entered. He said all rights were awarded to the Town, with the Town paying \$42,500.00 for the building.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said Attorney Harf was named Commissioner for the matter, and will assist with the transfer.

Attorney Harf asked for a motion to authorize himself and Manager Vannoorbeeck to issue a check and draft any documents necessary. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he had ordered a survey.

***Councilman Page made a motion authorizing Attorney Harf and Manager Vannoorbeeck to issue a check in the amount of \$42,500.00, and draft any documents necessary, along with a survey. The motion was seconded by Councilman Nash.***

Mayor Dickens asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

#### 5. Dillard Crawley Building – Industrial Revitalization Funding

Councilman Gormus said if the Town comes up with the \$500,000.00 match for the 1:1 match, then a buyer would pay no less than that to reimburse the Town. Manager Vannoorbeeck said if the grant does not come through, then yes, that would set the purchase price.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said last year the Town applied for a MUMS Grant, but could not be approved because the Town did not own the building. He said if the Town receives the grant, the plan was to stabilize the roof, replace rotten structural components, hook the sprinkler system back up, and any wiring and electrical work needed. He said once this is completed then put the building on the market, and the Town's cost is only \$42,500.00.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said he had some cost estimates from Burton Construction, which is where the \$500,000.00 came from.

Councilman Gormus asked if the building had to be historically accurate because of the age of the building. Manager Vannoorbeeck said if tax credits are being used, then yes.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the roof was leaking in adjacent buildings.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said applications were due on May 30<sup>th</sup>, and has already been submitted, but included is a Resolution needed as well.

***Councilman Nash made a motion to ratify the submission of the grant application for Industrial Revitalization Funding for the 114 S. Main Street project, and adopt the Resolution as presented, along with signature on the Certification. The motion was seconded by Councilman Allman.***

Councilman Gormus asked about the wording in the grant application for the 1:1 match for stabilization. Manager Vannoorbeeck said if the Town keeps the building, the Town is on the hook for \$500,000.00.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Town was not making it look nice inside the building, but this has a residential and commercial component. He said there has to be an 80/20 split, 20% for residential and 80% for commercial.

Councilman Allman said this building shares a wall with six other businesses.

Mayor Dickens asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

#### **6. Award Bid – Armory Parking Lot**

The Town bid out 67 parking spaces, to be built to the north of the Armory, with some spaces being behind the Armory.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said bids were opened on June 9, 2025, with the low bid being from Barker Construction in the amount of \$365,920.00, but exclude the alternate. He said the cash was on hand in the Town's money market account.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the alternate was for a handicap space in front of the Armory. He said he had already talked to Mr. Jason Walker to install.

***Councilman Page made a motion to award the Armory Parking Lot to Barker Construction in the amount of \$365,920.00. The motion was seconded by Councilman Nash.***

Mayor Dickens asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

### **ON-GOING PROJECTS:**

#### **1. Dilapidated Buildings**

There was nothing to report.

#### **2. Meals Tax / Lodging Tax**

Manager Vannoorbeeck said there were three outstanding meals tax. He said one was starting to concern him, as it is a chain restaurant, but we will continue to press the matter.

#### **3. Street Improvement Projects**

Manager Vannoorbeeck said bids for S. Main Street paving from the Laundromat and Car Wash to the southern Corporate Limits will be opened on June 20, 2025. He said this is a \$600,000.00 grant from VDOT for State of Good Repairs.

#### **4. Wigglesworth Sports Complex**

Manager Vannoorbeeck said staff would be building new benches for playground equipment, because there was a request for more seating in the area.

Councilwoman Williams asked Manager Vannoorbeeck if he had talked to Ms. Mae Tucker about the seating her church wanted to donate.

#### **5. Taylor Bottom Block Grant**

Manager Vannoorbeeck said he received notice today from DHCD that they are now accepting applications for projects such as Taylor Bottom. Community Development Specialist Bryant said the deadline was August 1, 2025.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said his expectation for the match for this project would be the electric reconductoring.

#### 6. Armory

Manager Vannoorbeeck said kitchen equipment was still being installed.

Councilman Page asked when the flagpole would be replaced.

Councilman Miller asked who would be in charge of pricing for use of the building. Manager Vannoorbeeck did not think it should be the Town, and believed Mayor Dickens would address this tonight. Mayor Dickens said not tonight.

#### Weatherization

Community Development Specialist Bryant said she was still trying to find people to qualify.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said there was \$120,000.00 in the Weatherization Fund.

Councilman Miller said the funds are not helping anyone right now, but spending \$80,000.00 on one house only benefits one person.

#### 7. Workforce Housing

Councilman Miller asked if the three houses being built had anyone qualified. Community Development Specialist Bryant replied, one person had qualified, and explained what she and Southside Outreach have been doing.

Councilwoman Williams suggested having the people commit to coming to the office and hear Southside Outreach explain the program.

Councilman Gormus said the people that need this the most, are the least likely to actually be able to qualify.

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

#### 1. Fort Avenue – Deed Acceptance

Manager Vannoorbeeck said this is a manhole located at the intersection of S. West Avenue and Fort Avenue. He said \$300,000.00 was included in the budget this year, but the estimate is \$582,000.00.



Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Damon's own the property where the new sewer line would go, and they have signed an easement, that is included in the packet.

***Councilman Nash made a motion to accept the Sewer Line Easement as presented. The motion was seconded by Councilman Gormus.***

Mayor Dickens asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the high cost is because it has to bore under the railroad.

## **2. VAcorp Insurance Renewal**

Manager Vannoorbeeck said this insurance covers the Town's Liability, Property/Casualty and Worker's Comp. He asked Council to renew with VAcorp in the amount of \$218,713.00.

***Councilman Nash made a motion to renew insurance with VAcorp in the amount of \$218,713.00. The motion was seconded by Councilman Page.***

Councilman Nash asked why there was an increase. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he would have to contact Mr. Morgan Quicke.

Mayor Dickens asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

### 3. Armory Use Request

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Chamber is requesting to use the Armory on August 9, 2025 from 11:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. for a job fair. He believed the building would be completed.

***Councilman Nash made a motion to approve use of the Armory, if available by that date. The motion was seconded by Councilman Allman.***

Mayor Dickens asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

### 4. Raw Water Line – State Economic & Infrastructure Development

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Town is eligible for a grant through Southern Crescent with DHCD for up to \$500,000.00. He said if this is awarded, it would be applied towards to overall cost of the raw water line.

***Councilman Nash made a motion authorizing the Town to submit an application for the grant through Southern Crescent with DHCD for up to \$500,000.00. The motion was seconded by Councilman Page.***

Mayor Dickens asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

## 5. College Avenue – TAP 21 Application

Manager Vannoorbeeck said we met with VDOT on Friday and did a walk through. He said previously Council approved submitting a grant application for sidewalks and curb and gutter on Amelia Avenue. He said we found out we can have two applications going at the same time, and the most pressing he has heard recently is on College Avenue between Sixth and Eighth Streets. He said VDOT was not going to just allow for Sixth through Eighth, it would have to go back to Fourth Street.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the owner of the Inn at Blackstone would have to participate in a 50/50 deal for curb and gutter, and the Town pays for the sidewalk 100%. He said VDOT wants the sidewalk to connect to something, and Fourth Street has sidewalk. He said he had to convince VDOT that Eighth Street is a good terminus.

Councilman Allman asked what the cost estimate was from Fourth to Sixth Streets. Manager Vannoorbeeck said using S. Walker Construction's number, \$192,000.00.

Councilman Nash said the easiest fix is widening the shoulder area. Councilman Page asked if the Town had VDOT funding for that. Manager Vannoorbeeck asked if he was referring to asphalt on the shoulder area. He said he could find \$40,000.00.

Councilman Allman asked Manager Vannoorbeeck to report back at the Continued Meeting, after the meeting with VDOT tomorrow.

Councilwoman Williams suggested installing signage to slow down for walkers.

Councilman Gormus said the deadline for submitting the application was May 31<sup>st</sup>, has this happened. Manager Vannoorbeeck said it was already submitted.

Councilman Gormus discussed the figures being charged for the TAP 21 estimate, he said it is \$601.50 per foot, for 740 feet of concrete. Manager Vannoorbeeck said VDOT requested a cost estimate from our engineers.

Councilman Gormus said S. Walker's pricing is roughly \$100 per foot. Councilman Nash clarified S. Walker's price was far cheaper. Manager Vannoorbeeck said to get VDOT grant money, you have to spend money.

Councilman Allman believed there were 8,000 vehicles in one direction on College Avenue, on a skinny road. He said there was a dramatic increase of walkers in that area since the Inn opened, plus the citizens have been complaining for the last 20 years.

Councilman Page agreed with the discussion, and asked do we want to get involved with VDOT, where the price triples. Councilman Allman said he would like to hear what VDOT tells Manager Vannoorbeeck, then make a decision on what is the best option.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the funding for this project would not be until FY2027.

Mrs. Jenny Bunn said she lives on College Avenue and advised on how bad the speeding was.

Mrs. Tyler Scott said she lives on Brunswick Avenue and walks, and makes it a point not to walk on College Avenue.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said if we do not accept VDOT funding, the Town does not have to do Fourth to Sixth Streets.

Mayor Dickens said the Town spends a lot in other areas, so this needs to be balanced out. He said Ward C has not had a lot of attention, compared to other Wards. He said we are taxpayers like everyone else.

Councilman Allman asked if we ratify the submission, can we not accept it later. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied yes.

***Councilman Allman made a motion to ratify the submission of the TAP 21 Grant to VDOT in the amount of \$381,702.00 for Sixth to Eighth Street on College Avenue. The motion was seconded by Councilman Nash.***

Mayor Dickens asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

The vote was a tie, so Mayor Dickens vote was Aye.

#### **6. DMV License Agent's Agreement**

Manager Vannoorbeeck said there were three changes, one being cameras must be utilized for training, newest operating systems will be used to ensure virus protection, and any law enforcement officer bringing a DMV subpoena to the DMV office is prohibited from accepting it, it must be delivered to DMV Headquarters.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said this is basically the same agreement the Town signs every year.

***Councilman Nash made a motion to authorize Manager Vannoorbeeck to execute the annual DMV License Agreement. The motion was seconded by Councilman Miller.***

Mayor Dickens asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

7. MOA – State Police – Annual Waste Services Agreement

Manager Vannoorbeeck said this is an annual agreement to pick up trash at the State Police Driving Course on Ridge Road. He said there are no changes because the rates did not change.

***Councilman Miller made a motion to authorize Manager Vannoorbeeck’s signature on the annual Waste Services Agreement with the Virginia State Police. The motion was seconded by Councilman Allman.***

Councilman Nash asked when would the Town get out of the private sector business. He said this facility is out of Town. Manager Vannoorbeeck said they came to the Town because they could not find anything feasible elsewhere.

Mayor Dickens asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

8. Town Square Request – 8-9-25

Manager Vannoorbeeck said typically DBi will approve these requests, but this event has a Noise Ordinance waiver. He said the second event is requesting to serve alcohol.

The event will be on August 9, 2025 from 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m., the request was made by Duo Disciples.

***Councilman Allman made a motion to approve the Town Square request as presented, and waive the Noise Ordinance. The motion was seconded by Councilman Page.***

Mayor Dickens asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

**9. Town Square Request – 9-12-25**

Councilman Allman said this request is for another Hometown Jams, he said the first one got rained out. He said this event would have live music.

Manager Vannoorbeeck asked if the street closure was back on. Councilman Allman replied yes, but would use discretion, if it was not needed, they would take it down.

This event will be September 12, 2025 from 5:30 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.

***Councilman Nash made a motion to approve the Town Square request for the Hometown Jams, to include closing Main Street from Broad to Elm Street, waive the Noise Ordinance and allow alcohol to be served. The motion was seconded by Councilman Allman.***

Councilman Gormus asked when the Arts & Crafts Festival was this year. Councilman Page said September 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>. Councilman Gormus clarified the Hometown Jams would be the Friday before.

Mayor Dickens asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

## **COMMITTEE REFERRALS:**

There were no referrals.

## **MAYORS MINUTE:**

Mayor Dickens thanked everyone for their support and time invested in this process. He said he was impressed with everyone here, and had a lot of respect for each of you. He said he had met with all council members, except Councilwoman Williams, she had been on vacation, but would meet with her soon.

Mayor Dickens believed we needed to get the Budget appropriated, and move forward. He said the future was bright, so let's embrace the challenges and put up some points.

Mayor Dickens said having had experience with tourism and DBi, he believed this was key for the Town. He said we need to promote tourism, even beyond the downtown area. He asked Council to consider activating the Tourism Committee to include Jenny Davis Bunn, Councilman Nash, Billy Coleburn, Dianne Lester, Robert Thomas, Sallie Glenn, and Councilman Page.

Attorney Harf said there are Standing Committees in the Town Code. He said this can be done with a motion by the will of Council.

***Councilman Nash made a motion authorizing Mayor Dickens to appoint the Tourism Committee. The motion was seconded by Councilman Allman.***

Mayor Dickens asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

## **CITIZEN COMMENTS:**

### **Mr. Charlie Berry**

Mr. Berry asked about the \$140,000.00 in savings to Blackstone, does that get passed on to the customers. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he would be requesting to do a fairly large reconductoring project, and get authorization to borrow \$1 Million. He said the savings would be used to pay back that project, and once that is complete, then the savings would go back to the customers.

Mr. Berry asked if we save money by purchasing it during the low hours, can they do that for the customers. He said for instance washing clothes, using the dishwasher, during low times. Manager Vannoorbeeck said residents don't really have a demand charge on the bill, it is paid in the base rates. He said commercial areas have the demand charge, in addition to their usage.

Mr. Berry asked if it had been decided who would manage the Armory. Manager Vannoorbeeck did not believe we were at that point yet, but thought the Mayor would find a group to represent the whole Town. He said the group should be an advisory committee to the Council.

Mr. Berry asked when the Armory would be ready for prime time. Manager Vannoorbeeck said the contract states July 7, 2025.

## **POLICE REPORT:**

Chief Murphy clarified the speed tracker discussed earlier in the meeting, was obtained through grant funds.

Councilwoman Williams said she received calls today about someone driving a golf cart, holding a baby, and another child in the front seat. She said we need to be mindful of this, that is a safety issue.

Councilman Miller asked to check into the rules for the gaming machines. Manager Vannoorbeeck said they are illegal. Chief Murphy said he was waiting on clarity for the status of the machines.

***Mayor Dickens continued this meeting to Wednesday, June 25, 2025 at 6:00 p.m.***



**CLOSED SESSION:**

Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711-A

- 3/ Acquisition or Disposition of Real Property - Airport
- 5/ Prospective Business or Industry
- 8/ Legal Matters

***Councilman Nash made a motion to go into Closed Session for (3) Discussion or consideration of the acquisition of real property for a public purpose, or of the disposition of publicly held real property, where discussion in an open meeting would adversely affect the bargaining position or negotiating strategy of the public body, (5) Discussion concerning a prospective business or industry or the expansion of an existing business or industry where no previous announcement has been made of the business' or industry's interest in locating or expanding its facilities in the community and (8) Consultation with legal counsel employed or retained by a public body regarding specific legal matters requiring the provision of legal advice by such counsel. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Williams.***

Mayor Dickens asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

***Councilman Nash 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 Williams.***

Mayor Dickens asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

***Councilman Gormus made a motion to deny reimbursement for legal fees to Mayor 21 of Blackstone. The motion was seconded by Councilman Page.***

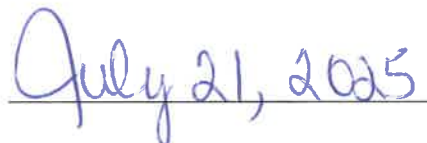
Mayor Dickens asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

There being no further business to bring before Council, Mayor Dickens adjourned this meeting at 10:22 p.m.

  
MAYOR  
OF THE TOWN OF BLACKSTONE, VIRGINIA

  
APPROVED AND ADOPTED

  
TOWN CLERK  
OF THE TOWN OF BLACKSTONE, VIRGINIA