

Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Council of the Town of Blackstone, Virginia, held in the Council Chambers, located at 100 W. Elm Street, Blackstone, Virginia on Tuesday, May 23, 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; Nicholas Kuzmiak, Police Chief

Town Attorney:

Those Absent:

*Special Called Meeting of the Council of the Town of Blackstone, Virginia for 7:00 p.m., Tuesday, May 23, 2023.*

*Pursuant to the authority vested in me as Mayor of the Town of Blackstone, I call a Special Meeting of the Council of the Town of Blackstone, Virginia, to be held in the Town Council Chambers, located at 100 W. Elm Street, Blackstone, Virginia at 7:00 p.m., Tuesday, May 23, 2023, for the purpose of considering the following:*

- 1. FY24 Budget Work Session*
- 2. Closed Session – Personnel - Administration*

Mayor Green added yard sale permits and a visitor to the Agenda.

**Ms. Deborah Rose – Blackstone Chamber of Commerce**

Ms. Rose said the Chamber was pairing with the 100 Mile Yard Sale and wanted to make Blackstone the end destination. She said the fireworks would be that night, July 1, 2023.

Ms. Rose asked that the yard sale fees be waived for Blackstone on July 1, 2023 to allow citizens to participate. She said they planned to have entertainment in the DBi Love Square, as well as offering spaces for the yard sale. She said there would be no charge for the spaces.

***Councilman Nash made a motion to waive the Yard Sale Permit Fees for July 1, 2023 throughout Town. 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 |

**Mr. Steve Koptchak – 201 Pleasant Drive**

Mr. Koptchak said every single day and night he gets the brunt of every modified truck that goes up and down Highway 46. He said he was 576' from that intersection, and hears it inside his house. He said as a resident he should be able to rely on local law enforcement, but it appears there is a DMZ Line that law enforcement does not want to come on his side of Town.

Mr. Koptchak said stereos booming goes through his house. He said he had torn down walls inside his home, and rebuilt them by reinsulating and installing thicker drywall to rectify this himself. He said it still vibrates the walls. He said he has sound machines to help him sleep, but at 576', it still vibrates the walls.

Mr. Koptchak believed everyone on Council hears this, but turns a blind eye to it. He asked if Council knew why catalytic converters were important to a vehicle, emissions, he added hydrocarbons, and the impact to our environment. He thought the EPA would be interested to know Blackstone turns a blind eye to the trucks that run around like they own the streets.

Mr. Koptchak said he listens to a scanner and hears about vehicles being pulled over for 3 miles over the speed limit, and not coming to a complete stop. He believed the Town had lost the upper hand in combatting this. He said maybe some people live in a million dollar mansion outside of Blackstone and don't give a crap. He said he gives a crap, he moved here under the auspices that there was a Noise Ordinance in the Town of Blackstone, there were signs up and now they are gone. He said if these Ordinances are not going to be enforced, take them off the books, and let them run rampant.

Mayor Green said he agreed, the loud trucks are a nuisance, and assured Mr. Koptchak that Blackstone was patrolled equally. He said with emissions, that is not an area the Town has jurisdiction over. He asked Chief Kuzmiak to make enforcing the Noise Ordinance a priority.

Councilman Nash asked if there were any laws that prohibit police officers from stopping vehicles that are louder. Chief Kuzmiak said years ago they could pull people over for loud exhaust, but then law was passed that these were no longer primary offenses, but has now done a reversal. He said we realize the signs are not there anymore, so they are in the process of finding or reordering the signs. He said the police officers are enforcing now, but may not get everyone. He said whether it is posted or not, it is still a violation.

Councilwoman Wynn apologized to Mr. Koptchak for having to endure the noises. She also apologized personally, because she travels Highway 46 daily, and comes home late at night, and does blast her music because of the deer.

Councilman Allman believed that area was one of the few that goes from a turn to 55 MPH.

Councilman Nash said Council had previously approved reducing the entire Main Street to 25 MPH. Manager Vannoorbeeck said you have to step down in speed at the entrances to Town. He believed it should be referred to the Street and Light Committee to refer back to that vote.

Mayor Green referred speed limits to the Street and Light Committee.

Mr. Koptchak did not believe that would resolve the issue, he said that was part of it, but the second part is policing. He said with monitoring the scanner, in two weeks, no tickets were issued, and every five minutes he is hearing noise. He said he has dispatched the police 15 times for loud music, 9 times for ATVs and golf carts on the Main Road with no lights. He said these people were only advised of the law. He said in his experience as a federal law officer, you advise the law and then enforce the law.

### **FY24 Budget Work Session**

Manager Vannoorbeeck said he and Councilman Allman are scheduled to meet with the Town of Crewe tomorrow. He provided at Council's desk pricing for a water line to Crewe.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said also provided at Council's desk is information for Personal Property relief. He said last year the County provided 60% relief, along with the Town, and had been perpetual since the 2000s. He believed the County was proposing to go to 45% this year.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the total taxable value on vehicles is \$181,210.00. He said the Town budgeted \$115,000.00 for Personal Property taxes. He said the Budget tonight is based on 60% at \$.72, which shows \$115,000.00 in revenue.

Councilman Nash said if we have enough money to not increase taxes for fluff projects, such as ditches, then we should leave it at 60% relief rate.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said in the Budget includes \$96,000.00 towards ditches for Mr. Somerville and Mr. Armes.

Councilman Gormus asked if the ditch project on Forest Drive was moving forward. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he had to set money aside. Mayor Green said the driveway on S. Main Street is included also.

Manager Vannoorbeeck believed a Work Session was scheduled for June 7, 2023, the Public Hearing would be June 21, 2023, and the adoption would be June 28, 2023.

### **EXPENDITURES:**

#### **Ladder Truck**

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the capital projects are really finishing up what other councils have done. He said we will pay for the ladder truck, and should be here in September. He said this includes \$1,840,000.00 of expenditure for the ladder truck, of that \$1,050,000.00 is grant, \$270,000.00 is cash on hand, \$200,000.00 came from the County, and \$70,000.00 in apparatus money. He said \$520,000.00 will be loan.

Mayor Green asked if the loan and rates were already secured. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied yes. Councilman Page asked how long the loan was for. Manager Vannoorbeeck believed 20 years. He said six months of payments were included in this budget, and was roughly \$30,000.00.

#### **Armory**

Manager Vannoorbeeck said we have the Armory, at \$3,881,000.00, which is the expenditure amount. He said \$2,200,000.00 is from ARPA Funds, \$1 Million is from Industrial Revitalization Funds, and \$581,000.00 is from the Tobacco Commission. He said there are no local dollars right now, but there have been some issues with the Department of Historical Resources, in order to get the money for the furnishings, they want the Town to meet historic guidelines, which would have made the project crazy expensive. He said if the Town has to come up with Plan B, that is not included in the Budget.

#### **2 Police Cars**

Manager Vannoorbeeck said two police cars are included, and should be paid for with ARPA money Chief Kuzmiak received. Chief Kuzmiak said it would include three police cars, all funded by ARPA Funds.

#### **Bucket Truck**

Manager Vannoorbeeck said this is included in the Budget, and will be paid for this year. He said this Budget reflects the Town transferring \$215,000.00 of cash on hand into the Budget to pay for the Bucket Truck. He said delivery should be in the fall, and Mr. Dan Martin actually ordered it 18 months ago. He said there will be no financing on this truck.

### Regulators

Manager Vannoorbeeck said Mr. Martin has \$100,000.00 of regulators. He said the Town is broken up into three circuits of electric systems, West Entrance, Birch and East Streets. He said in the past few years the Town has replaced the breakers in each circuit. He said this current year we are replacing the first voltage regulator, and there are two more to go, with one being in the upcoming Budget. He said the cost this current year was \$98,000.00, so that is what is in the FY24 Budget.

### Town Hall Bathrooms

Manager Vannoorbeeck said there is \$40,000.00 included for the Town Hall bathrooms.

### Aeration System

Manager Vannoorbeeck said one tank is scheduled to receive an aeration system, which is supposed to help with THMs. He said this will be \$120,000.00. He said the aerator helps dissipate some of the chlorines by keeping the water moving.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Town still uses very old gas cannisters, and they are dangerous. He said ultimately, we would like to get away from chlorine cannisters.

### Private Ditches

Manager Vannoorbeeck said there was \$96,000.00 in the upcoming Budget for private ditches.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said he did not have anything in the Budget for the old Dillard Crawley Building. He said there were some grants the Town could apply for. He said Community Development Specialist Bryant was working on some grants for playgrounds.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the original numbers for this Budget included 3% across the board raises for employees. He said now anyone making under \$35,000.00 this year will get 4%, and all others will get 3%.

Councilman Nash said cost of living raises is an easy way for employees not to go above and beyond, so he was pushing more for merit raises. He said we want employees to come to work and give 110%. He said employees will probably gain more with merit raises.

Councilman Miller said he and Councilman Nash discussed having the Employment and Police Committee look into this for next year's Budget.

Councilman Nash pointed out if an employee of the Town makes \$35,000.00, the benefits package without holiday pay, is \$6,000.00 annually.

Councilman Gormus asked about the Discretionary Fund, Christmas Bonuses. Councilman Nash believed that was for the Fire Department, and has always been put under Council Discretionary. Bookkeeper Brown said the \$18,000.00 is Town employee Christmas Bonuses. Councilman Page said the Town budgets \$18,000.00, but never spends that much. Manager Vannoorbeeck said the figure is correct, it may just be the coding.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said under the Fire Department there is \$29,000.00 for Fire Allowance.

Councilman Gormus said there is over \$100,000.00 in Professional Services under Town Administration. He asked if the \$10,000.00 was what was voted on the other night. Manager Vannoorbeeck said Council wanted someone to help write benefits and policies. He said he interviewed someone and they declined to take the work, so he was going to readvertise. He said the money for an HR Consultant has not been spent.

Councilman Gormus asked about IT services. Manager Vannoorbeeck said this is for Code Blue. Councilman Gormus asked if the County had employees that do this. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he did not know.

Councilman Gormus asked about the \$70,000.00 budgeted for Professional Services, and only spent \$33,000.00 so far. Bookkeeper Brown said that just reflects what has been spent through January 2023, not the entire year. She added Attorney Bacon is coded under this.

Councilman Gormus said there is also \$16,000.00 as a line item for Legal Services.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the only other legal fees are with bond counsel.

Councilman Gormus asked about Janitorial Services for \$8,000.00. Manager Vannoorbeeck said we used to have a part time employee, who retired, and the services were then bid out.

Councilman Gormus asked why there was zero in Council Discretionary Christmas décor. He asked if the Town did a float. He asked about a tree in the Town Square, it gives people a reason to gather. Manager Vannoorbeeck said there was a tree donated in Seay Park.

Councilman Gormus said with Code Enforcement there is only \$1,500.00 and we have spent \$6,000.00 since January. Councilman Nash said we have overspent that much, why aren't we going up. Manager Vannoorbeeck believed that may also include the old Dillard Crawley building.

Councilwoman Williams asked what cigarette stamps were. Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Town buys the stamps that are put on the bottom of cigarettes sold in Blackstone, the companies that package the cigarettes, buy the stamps from the Town. Councilman Nash said in the Town, we tax each pack \$.25.

Councilman Page asked about Professional Services under the Water Department. Manager Vannoorbeeck said that would be engineering. Councilman Page asked about \$7,500.00 under the same department for HR Services. Manager Vannoorbeeck said that can be struck.

Councilman Gormus asked about Committee Meeting payments. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied, the Board of Zoning Appeals and Planning Commission are paid \$50.00 each, per meeting.

Councilman Miller asked why there was zero in Weatherization on page 24. Manager Vannoorbeeck said it may be in a different location, but there is a \$50,000.00 transfer from the Electric Department and we will be getting \$40,000.00 from Nottoway County.

Councilman Gormus asked how DBi goes from \$26,000.00 to zero as of January. Councilman Nash said they are paid by the Town. Manager Vannoorbeeck said it was under a different line item.

Councilman Gormus asked about dues under the Police Department. Manager Vannoorbeeck believed this was for being a member of the Criminal Justice Academy.

Councilman Miller asked about Community Programs in the amount of \$17,744.13, what is this used for. Chief Kuzmiak said these are donations provided to the Police Department for youth and community programs. He said community programs could be Halloween, and this year there would be a National Night Out working with the County, in addition to the cookouts.

Mayor Green asked about K9 Food and Supplies being at zero. Chief Kuzmiak said the dog was retired. He said another dog has been discussed, but was not included in this Budget.

Councilman Gormus asked about the Fire Department, Other Benefits, Fire Allowance. Manager Vannoorbeeck said this is based on per fire call ran per individual.

Councilman Gormus asked about the Fire Department, Repairs and Maintenance Vehicles, \$25,000.00 is budgeted. Manager Vannoorbeeck said Chief Tomer asked for this and he could not remember what it was for.

Councilman Gormus asked about Street Department, Materials and Supplies – Secondary. Manager Vannoorbeeck said that is for paving.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said we try to balance the revenues and expenditures. He said Enterprise Funds apply to Water, Sewer and Electric, and also called Revenue Funds.

Councilman Page asked about Repairs & Maintenance, Meters. He said this year \$25,000.00 was budgeted, and \$1,200.00 has been spent. He said in previous years the most spent was \$15,000.00, but in the upcoming budget we are budgeting \$45,000.00. Manager Vannoorbeeck said we are replacing the registers on the majority of the water meters. He said by the end of the fiscal year, we will spend \$250,000.00 in replacing meters.

Councilman Page asked about Repairs & Maintenance at the Water Treatment Plant. He said \$55,000.00 is being budgeted, but have never spent more than \$20,000.00. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he was not aware of any projects, and would ask Mr. Edward Harris.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said there is an old oil furnace at the Water Treatment Plant that needs replacing, but is not included in the budget.

Councilman Miller asked about Dues & Membership under the Wastewater Treatment Plant at \$800.00, and the past few years this line item was not used. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he did not know why it increased, but would check with Mr. Edward Harris.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said there has been a large increase in chemicals for the Water Treatment Plant at \$90,000.00.

Councilman Gormus asked what was Nottoway Decal Money. Manager Vannoorbeeck said when Personal Property taxes are paid, it includes \$25.00 and is divvied up amongst the Blackstone, Burkeville and Crewe Fire Departments and the Nottoway Rescue Squad. He said the Crewe and Burkeville Fire Departments were more independent, but Blackstone has a budget for their Fire Department.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the County provides three pools of money, one is Fire Programs, which supports equipment purchases, around \$28,000.00. He said we also receive Decal Money, which goes in the General Fund. He said the third amount of money provided by the County is Apparatus Funds, which is usually \$70,000.00, and put in a money market account every year to be applied to trucks, etc.

#### **REVENUES:**

Manager Vannoorbeeck said Real Estate Taxes are at \$375,000.00. He said he did not include the Inn at Blackstone because their Tourism Zone gave them a three year pass. He said Personal Property Taxes are at \$115,000.00.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said he budgeted \$200,000.00 on Sales Tax, which is conservative, through January the Town was already at \$115,000.00. He said this is susceptible to the economy, as is Meals Tax.

Mayor Green said he had made a request to the Finance Committee about Meals Tax. He said the Town collects 6.5% and he would like to go to 7%, which would generate \$50,000.00. He said he would like to have a Council Discretionary Fund for Community Development. He said he has heard about playgrounds, and was intrigued by Councilman Gormus' idea about a sign similar to the Fire Department's. He said we have grants from time to time, like when DBi needed \$10,000.00, or the fireworks request from DBi.

Mayor Green said Meals Tax is unique and directed at every Blackstone citizen. He said people in and out of Town pay this tax.

Councilman Page asked where the money comes from for the Chamber Fireworks and the \$10,000.00 grant for DBi. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied, Council Discretionary.



Councilman Nash asked if any requests were submitted, because nobody had seen them. Councilman Page said the Chamber submitted something. Manager Vannoorbeeck said Juneteenth submitted also. Clerk Daniel reminded Manager Vannoorbeeck there was a folder in his office. Councilman Miller said Council had not seen any requests.

Councilman Allman asked Councilman Nash what the budget was when he started. Councilman Nash replied \$9 Million. Councilman Allman said the budget now is \$22 Million, how much more do we need. Mayor Green said he was talking about raising revenue to do specific projects for the community.

Councilman Nash said he agreed with the avenue, but felt we already do that, when there is a project viable, we spend it. He said \$96,000.00 for private ditches could be community events for two years.

Councilman Gormus said we have a \$55,000.00 revenue for Town tags, where is that. Mayor Green replied, in the General Fund.

Councilman Nash said he would like to do more things to pull in tourism, and entice people to live in Blackstone. He said we do things already, but not to benefit the entire Town.

Councilwoman Williams said she was on Council when we voted for the \$96,000.00, but believed it got to that amount because they had been requesting help for the past 20 years. She said that was in the past, and she doesn't like living in the past. She said going forward, she liked the 7% for projects, such as playgrounds.

Councilman Page said he was concerned if this was approved, and it goes in the General Fund, he asked if Council was committed to build two-three playgrounds. Councilwoman Williams did not know if it should be dedicated to just playgrounds, but have the money there for Council to vote as a whole.

Councilman Miller said he was not against playgrounds, but first we need an infrastructure, which has never been discussed. He said people won't come to a park if the neighborhood doesn't look good.

Councilman Allman said at some point we ran this Town with the same amount of people, at \$10 Million, and now with the same amount of people, we are at \$21 Million, so where that half a percent is increased, it is always going to increase, and will get lost in the system. He said he would like to find it in the current system, rather than keep raising the system.

Mayor Green said the County donates \$2,000.00 to the Town for recreation, let's have a friendly conversation with them. He said if we go to the County with a project, for example for \$100,000.00, and the Town has \$50,000.00, that gives us credibility. He said he has never wanted to burden the taxpayer, but thought this could be a benefit to the Town.

Councilman Page said each of us are here to represent the citizens of Blackstone, and if a playground is proposed on Church Street and Main Street, and the citizens agree, it doesn't mean it is a certain place, but we can start the process.

Councilman Nash asked where the additional \$45,000.00 in Lodging Tax was going. Manager Vannoorbeeck said it will be in the General Fund, but will go a long way towards the Ladder Truck.

Councilwoman Wynn said when she was growing up there was a Drive In movie theater, and brought in lots of money. Councilman Page believed with the theater in Farmville, it was limited to what can be shown. He believed that would be private sector, but a park would be public sector.

Councilman Gormus appreciated the work on the Budget, but thought if there were more realistic numbers provided, such as if it is budgeted high, but not spent, where does that money go. Mayor Green said in the past the Town didn't have two nickels, but through Manager Vannoorbeeck's financial wisdom, is how the Town has \$4 Million in reserves. Councilman Gormus believed the \$50,000.00 was in the budget somewhere.

Manager Vannoorbeeck talked about the transfer of funds to the General Fund to balance the budget. He said on the revenue side of the Electric Department, the fuel adjustment is not going to be as low as proposed. He said what was provided at the last meeting was the increase in fuel adjustment, at \$.018 per kilowatt hour, but the estimate provided in January was \$.017.

Councilman Miller asked about education for employees, there was nothing in the budget. Manager Vannoorbeeck said there is \$1,500.00 under Administration for Training and Education.

Councilman Page asked if there was anywhere in the budget to find money for parks. Manager Vannoorbeeck said without raising rates, you can change the relief rate on personal property taxes. Councilwoman Williams did not agree because people already have a hard time paying taxes now. Councilman Page agreed.

Councilman Page asked if there was any cash on hand. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he spoke with Councilman Page earlier about the land sold to Mr. Jason Walker in the Industrial Park. He said there is \$78,000.00 from this in cash. He said he was going to purchase a parking lot, but it got sold. He said we offered \$42,000.00 to the property owner of the old Dillard Crawley Building, and was going to use the \$78,000.00 towards that.

Councilman Nash said outside the budget, select locations for a park and talk to the property owners to see how much they would sell for.

Councilwoman Williams said she likes the idea of parks, but who decides where they go.

Councilman Nash said he asked Clerk Daniel to contact the Census to find out where the concentration of kids are.

Councilman Gormus suggested contacting Emporia about their process for playgrounds and locations.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said there is \$75,000.00 in the budget to tear down the old school building.

Councilman Nash asked Manager Vannoorbeeck to send Council the budget requests that were received in March of this year.

**CLOSED SESSION:**

Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711

1/ Personnel – Administration

***Councilwoman Williams 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. The motion was seconded by Councilman Nash.***

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 Miller 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 Councilman Gormus.***

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 declared this Special Called Meeting adjourned at 9:34 p.m.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
MAYOR  
OF THE TOWN OF BLACKSTONE, VIRGINIA

July 17, 2023 \_\_\_\_\_ APPROVED AND ADOPTED

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
TOWN CLERK  
OF THE TOWN OF BLACKSTONE, VIRGINIA