

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, February 26, 2024 at 7:00 p.m.

There Were Present:

Mayor: L. Benjamin Green

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

Town Staff: Philip Vannoorbeeck, Town Manager; Jennifer Daniel, Town Clerk; Brittany Morgan, Treasurer; Sam Murphy, Police Chief; Chastiddy Bryant, Community Development Specialist; Emma Wright, DBi Executive Director, Ashley Seamster, Utility Billing Clerk; Shay Farley, Police Corporal; Zac Beares, Deputy Fire Chief

Town Attorney:

Those Absent:

Mayor Green called the February Council Meeting to order.

Dr. Allen delivered the Invocation, and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor Green read the following for Black History Month.

For many Black History Month is a time to recognize African Americans who paved the way for our Country, in a place not so long ago, African Americans were not treated as equal. He said the times have changed and he was delighted to see the Town of Blackstone progressing in a positive way for all Americans. He said it was an honor to say we strive to create inclusivity, diversity recognition and equality for each and all everyday in Blackstone. He said the Town Office is staffed with all walks of life that doing an amazing job keeping the Town alive. He said we have started an annual Juneteenth Celebration in the heart of Blackstone that draws in over 3,000 individuals. He said Mayor Coleburn started a tradition, to honor African American heroes in the community for their outstanding leaderships and contributions to society. He said last but not least, the once historical Harris Memorial Armory, will soon be home to two historically black colleges to offer continuing education in the hospitality field. He said for some, the progress may seem minor, but always remember baby steps are still a forward movement and makes him proud to be the Mayor of Blackstone.

MINUTES:

Councilman Nash made a motion to dispense with reading and approve as presented minutes from the Regular Council Meeting on January 22, 2024, and the Continued Meetings on February 7, 2024 and February 12, 2024. The motion was seconded by Councilman Miller.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

VISITORS:

Mr. John Listman – 712 Oak Street

Mr. Listman said the memo included explains the support they were looking for. He asked for clarification on banners in the parks or on private property. Mayor Green said there had been discussion about banners, and we are awaiting the hiring of a Town attorney, and banners may be one of the first items that comes up.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said banners on residential properties are prohibited. He said on commercially zoned properties, it does not talk about special events. Mr. Listman said we are not a political group, we are patriotic, and the banner would only be up for a week. Manager Vannoorbeeck said for special events, he believed we could find a way to make it work.

Councilman Gormus believed the property Mr. Listman was referring to, across from the Grace Baptist Temple belongs to Mr. Louis DeNitto.

Mr. Listman said Community Development Specialist Bryant joined their committee, and she suggested using banners for the events, but their group had not discussed yet. He said if they decide to do a banner the first one would be for Memorial Day. Councilman Allman hoped the issued would be closed by mid April.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said a banner on private property for these events would be ok. Mr. Listman said it would be up a week to ten days, and removed after the event.

Mr. Listman said the Town pays for an ad in the local paper for the Veterans Day event, but they do not pay for an ad for Memorial Day, which is a significant holiday also. He said the ad for Veterans Day last year was \$135.00, and was told by Mr. Billy Coleburn, that for an additional \$25.00 they would run the ad on their Facebook page, which has 15,000 viewers. He believed the Vietnam Veterans could pay the \$25.00, if the Town would pay for running an ad in the newspaper.

Councilman Miller said the Veterans Day event was started with the three VFW outfits. He said Mr. Betty Branum used to handle the Memorial Day event, and she has since passed. Mr. Listman said the Town assists with one Patriotic Holiday, and was asking for assistance with the other Patriotic Holiday.

Mr. Listman said they want to raise awareness to increase the attendance of the ceremonies, especially for young people so they have an idea of the sacrifice and service of the people that have gone before them in the military.

Councilman Page made a motion to approve paying \$160.00 each for advertising for Memorial Day and Veterans Day services. The motion was seconded by Councilman Miller.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

Mr. Listman thanked Mayor Green for attending both events, and encouraged members of Council to attend, and bring your families, he said you are our face of government.

Spring Hill Baptist Church – Pastor Travis Warren

Pastor Warren said he was here tonight seeking Council's help to lease 401 Harris Street. He said Spring Hill Baptist Church would like to expand their outreach ministry, and use this building for that purpose. He said this would include their health and empowerment services, as well as Veteran services. He said they also want to have a clothes closet, food pantry, new mother's area, a farmer's market, and a before and after care center.

Pastor Warren said after renovations of the building, he would like Council to consider letting them expand their outreach. He said they already have a garden, and want to be able to give away fresh vegetables as a farmer's market. He added all services will be free to the public, they just need the space.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said there are budget issues, but he had met with an architect and asked him to look at the building for minimum things that need to be done, such as window replacement and heating and air. He said he was waiting on figures, but thought this was necessary, since the request from Spring Hill was for rent and utility free.

Councilman Nash said he liked the idea, but for fairness, believed it should be open for RFPs. Manager Vannoorbeeck said we can do that in the interim, he would advertise in the paper.

Councilman Miller said we need to do whatever is best for the building, and let Council decide.

Mayor Green said this request had already been referred to the Buildings, Property and Cemetery Committee.

Juneteenth Committee – Ms. Ellen Clary Eppes – Sutherland, VA

Ms. Eppes read the following:

The Town of Blackstone Juneteenth Committee humbly requests funding for the 4th Annual Celebration. The Committee would like all fees from the 3rd Juneteenth Celebration to be covered again for the 4th Annual Celebration. Town of Blackstone funding would assist with entertainment, logistics, transportation, public works, decorations, advertisement, and other event expenses. As a non-profit, all additional money would help fund future events the organization hosts. In addition to Town coverage, the Committee is requesting:

- *Closing of Main Street on June 29, 2024 from 7:00 a.m. – 10:30 p.m., from Tavern to Irvin Street, with Broad being the cross street*
- *Waiving all banner fees to hang banner overhead in front of Post Office*
- *Waiving the Noise Ordinance*
- *(Two) Adopt of Trucks*
- *Event posted on the Town's website, Facebook Page, and posted on the electronic board at the Fire Station*
- *Access to stages, additional chairs, tables, drop chords, traffic signage, and any town equipment needed for the event*
- *Access to the Town Square*
- *Access to electric hook-up in the Town Square if Square is unavailable*
- *Reservation of Seay Park*
- *Access to Police Department Conference Room*

Councilman Gormus asked if their 501c3 was registered. Ms. Eppes replied, yes.

Councilman Nash said he asked last year for a list of the expenses, but never saw a copy. He asked if the \$5,000.00 was all monetary, or for such things as port-a-johns. Ms. Chastiddy Bryant said they are issued purchase orders from the Town, and explained what the funds from the Town went towards.

Councilman Nash said he also asked for the total of meals tax collected. Ms. Bryant said they provide a form to the food vendors, and then they check their form for the upcoming year to be sure meals tax was paid, or they cannot return.

Councilman Nash asked about the email that mentioned different locations in Blackstone, and other parts of Virginia. Ms. Eppes said their heart is Blackstone.

Councilman Gormus asked how much was spent last year. Ms. Bryant replied roughly \$4,500.00 of the Town's money, and overall, \$17,000.00.

Councilman Allman thought it was discussed last year about the Juneteenth Committee trying to get grants. Ms. Eppes said we are trying but it is a slow process.

Mayor Green said he supported the festival and the \$5,000.00, but if it is not Blackstone, the taxpayers should not foot that burden. Ms. Bryant said they did a survey, and some businesses did not want the event on Main Street, so if Council or the community wanted them to move it, they were looking at other locations.

Councilman Nash asked if the event would be held in the Armory area, once the renovations are completed. Ms. Bryant said we want our event to be distinguished from Arts and Crafts, and not be the African American Arts and Crafts. She said we want to keep it on Main Street.

Councilman Nash made a motion to allocate the \$5,000.00 included in the Budget for the Juneteenth Celebration to be held in Blackstone. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Williams.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

Councilman Nash clarified it is not all cash, it is in-kind as well.

Councilman Page said he abstained because of the amount he was paid last year to DJ.

Councilman Allman asked Manager Vannoorbeeck if he had any problems with the requests from the Juneteenth Committee. Manager Vannoorbeeck said we cannot commit to the banner.

Councilman Nash asked the Juneteenth Committee to consider the Armory area next year for the event.

Councilman Nash made a motion to approve the requests from the Juneteenth Committee as presented. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Wynn.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

Spring Fling Walk-A-Thon – Craigwil Ministries – Ms. Tonya Booth, Blackstone, VA

Ms. Booth said she was here requesting support and prayers from Council. She said this will be our third annual walk event being held on April 27, 2024 starting at the Fire Department. She said she has already spoken with Chief Murphy and Chief Tomer. She said this would include police escorts, and they would like to work with DBi to make the event successful. She said all proceeds go towards three \$500.00 scholarships to one senior at Nottoway, Lunenburg and Brunswick. She said Craigwil is a 501c3, the registration begins at 7:30 a.m. with the walk starting at 8:30 a.m. She added the registration fee is \$20.00.

Councilman Nash made a motion to approve the use of the Fire Station and police escorts for the Spring Fling Walk-A-Thon for Craigwil Ministries. The motion was seconded by Councilman Miller.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

FIRE CHIEF'S REPORT:

Deputy Chief Beares said the Tower was here, it came in Saturday night. He said it may be going back to AES for small items to be fixed, and then they would start mounting tools. He said Pierce would be training them at the end of March for six days. He believed the truck would be in service by June.

Mayor Green said he would like to do something and invite Representative Abigail Spanberger, and the County delegation. Deputy Chief Beares said they were scheduling a Push In for possibly June.

Deputy Chief Beares thanked this Council and the previous for everything done with this 2 ½ year project.

Mayor Green asked about the grants mentioned in the report, where would the 50/50 Department of Forestry funds come from. Deputy Chief Beares said it would come from their budget line item.

Deputy Chief Beares said Blackstone has the oldest running Junior Fire Department in the State. He said they would be adding six more members next month, there is no limit on Junior Firefighters.

Deputy Chief Beares said the Rib Fundraiser was a success. He said they held a Sip and Paint event for their significant others. He said they would be having a Blood Drive on March 26, 2024.

Deputy Chief Beares read the current years of service.

PAYMENT OF BILLS:

Mayor Green stated the bills that have already been paid are in the amount of \$785,485.14.

Councilman Nash made a motion to approve the bills that have already been paid in the amount of \$785,485.14. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Williams.

Councilman Nash asked about the meals advance reimbursement. Manager Vannoorbeeck said they get a check in advance, then return the receipts and any money left over.

Councilman Gormus asked about the invoice for the Tavern roof. Manager Vannoorbeeck said it was the first drawdown from the contractor, as they are entitled to their Performance and Payment Bonds reimbursed as part of the contract. He believed they would start work on March 4, 2024.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

Mayor Green stated the bills not yet approved, and to be paid, are in the amount of \$583,088.84.

Councilman Miller made a motion to approve as presented, the bills not yet paid in the amount of \$583,088.84. The motion was seconded by Councilman Page.

Councilman Miller asked if this would be the last check to Ms. Ann Harrity Shawver. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied yes, he pulled the plug on that.

Councilman Nash said under the Armory, there was an amount from Lawn Solutions. He said All About Grass was handling the lawn maintenance. He just wanted to be sure we were not treating the lawn at the Armory.

Councilman Nash asked about traffic lights and the conflict monitor, was that for Dinwiddie Avenue. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he did not know; he would ask Mr. Dan Martin.

Councilman Nash asked when the light at Eighth and Main would be fixed. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he was waiting on an appropriation from Council.

Mayor Green asked about the Fire Department and a washer repair for \$3,500.00. Manager Vannoorbeeck said that was for stabilizing the turn-out gear washing machine. He said when it was first received, Town staff mounted it, but this was to use the manufacturer's mounting. Councilman Nash said this would be coming out of a line item in the Budget.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

APPROPRIATIONS:

Manager Vannoorbeeck said Bookkeeper Brown prepared the Appropriation. He said the amount was for \$509,685.00, which is what was received from the Department of Health as a reimbursement for the aeration project, that the Town had already paid for two years ago. He said out of this money, we paid off the line of credit at Benchmark in the amount of \$274,000.00. He said the line of credit was used for a significant amount of new meters.

Councilman Gormus said this was money set aside for new controls at the Water Treatment Plant, and \$140,000.00 for N. West Avenue and Forest Drive ditches. Manager Vannoorbeeck said cash was set aside, but in order to balance the appropriation, we received \$509,000.00 that was not in the Budget.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said \$96,000.00 was already set aside in cash, and the work had already been done. He said \$140,000.00 is now set aside, and expected a portion would be spent tonight, and the rest is in the account.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said now that he knows what the amount is for N. West Avenue, it lets him know what he has to work with on Forest Drive.

Councilman Nash said \$274,000.00 was paid to Benchmark, can we say everything else included in the Appropriation meant we were over budget on. Bookkeeper Brown replied, getting ready to be. Councilman Nash said it was scary to think we have already spent that much over Budget.

Councilman Gormus questioned the \$50,000.00 in professional services. Bookkeeper Brown replied, she was bumping up the Budget because they were already looking like they were going over. Manager Vannoorbeeck believed a good portion of that was Ms. Shawver.

Councilman Nash made a motion to approve the Appropriation as presented in the amount of \$509,685.00. The motion was seconded by Councilman Gormus.

Councilman Gormus asked where on the list is N. West Avenue and Forest Drive. Manager Vannoorbeeck said they are not on the list; the cash is set aside. Councilman Gormus said but these are part of the money being set aside. Manager Vannoorbeeck said yes, it is part of the \$509,000.00.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the items on the Appropriation list have already been spent, so we are cleaning up the expenditures.

Councilman Miller asked if the cost for the football field was included. Manager Vannoorbeeck said if it was not needed to balance, then no it was not included. He added, we do have the \$50,000.00 from the County, and sitting in the same place the \$140,000.00 is, a money market account.

Councilman Page questioned \$10,000.00 for dumpsters. Manager Vannoorbeeck said we buy dumpsters every year because we sell them to businesses, at no mark up.

Councilman Allman said from the Appropriation, not budgeted, like dumpsters, how much is the Town expected to get back. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he did not know.

Councilman Allman said if these items are out of the Budget, where is the money going to come from. Bookkeeper Brown said it is coming from the \$509,000.00, because that amount was not included in the Budget. She added, we have the revenue, and now have to show it in the expenditures.

Councilman Gormus questioned \$21,000.00 repairs and maintenance to office equipment. Bookkeeper Brown said that was from the Police Department, and would have to pull the invoice to see what it was for. She said they have a Budget, but went over it for this particular line item.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Street & Light – met 2-7-24, minutes included in February’s Council Packet

Trees Downtown

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Committee recommended DBi research appropriate trees and look into Downtown Block grants.

Councilman Gormus made a motion to have DBi research appropriate trees and look into Block Grants. The motion was seconded by Councilman Miller.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the concerns are the trees pushing up the sidewalks downtown. He believed what was being proposed is a larger grate for the trees.

Mayor Green said he spoke with Ms. Connie Irby, who is on a forestry committee in North Carolina. He said he was told the federal government has grants to replace these trees. He added Ms. Irby said when these trees were planted, they needed to be in a 5x5x5 pit. He said Ms. Irby mentioned a species of oak trees. He said he would pass this information on to DBi.

Councilman Page asked if this would be committing Council to replace the trees. Mayor Green replied no. Councilman Page said the feedback he received was to keep the trees we have and fix the sidewalk. Mayor Green did not think it would be in the Town's best interest to spend \$150,000.00 in concrete to save the trees and dig them out. He said the vast majority of doing this work could come from a grant.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

Tavern Street

Manager Vannoorbeeck said B&B Consultants was trying to come up with a solution for a drainage problem.

814-816 Luke Street

Manager Vannoorbeeck said this is on public property and Town crews will clean it out, but was too wet right now.

605 Second Street – (Ms. LeGrand)

Manager Vannoorbeeck said there was no recommendation from the Committee.

410 Fourt Street – (Taggart Property)

Manager Vannoorbeeck said there was no recommendation from the Committee.

Mayor Green said he received a nice letter on this property, and he was going to respond.

Councilman Page said isn't this the same area where we were going to have an engineer look because the whole area floods, from Second to Fourth Streets and Academy Avenue. Councilman Nash believed it was from Academy to Lunenburg Avenue.

Councilman Page said it also includes Sixth to Eighth Street, and a lot of the water is directed to the Bunnell's. Manager Vannoorbeeck said if there is a motion to approve, he would pipe it in.

Councilman Page said how much longer can we ignore the flooding on that side of Town, we use the moratorium as an excuse. Manager Vannoorbeeck said we are not ignoring; we are addressing the projects.

Councilman Allman made a motion to authorize Mayor Green to correspond with the property owners of 410 Fourth Street, letting them know there is a moratorium on ditches and cannot go on private property. The motion was seconded by Councilman Nash.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

316 Sixth Street – (Goldman Property)

Manager Vannoorbeeck said there was no recommendation from the Committee.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said this area had been addressed, it was cleaned out.

801 Lunenburg Avenue – (Bunnell Property)

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Committee looked at this area, and reminded Council there was an attorney representing the Bunnell's. He said the Committee recommended he write a letter to their attorney.

Councilman Allman made a motion authorizing Manager Vannoorbeeck to write a letter to the Bunnell's attorney.

Councilman Nash said he would like to know what the letter will say. Councilman Page added it was hard to vote on a letter without knowing the content. Manager Vannoorbeeck said the letter would say it is a private ditch, and Council has a moratorium on private ditches, so no work would be done now.

Councilman Nash seconded by motion.

Councilman Gormus asked if this ditch became a problem after curb and gutter was done. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied, no. Councilman Gormus said, so the letter written was not the truth. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he could not speak to their veracity or integrity, but curbing did not have anything to do with this.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said Mayor Green had lived there for 25 years, and that water has always run through there. He said Mayor Green questioned the size of the piping downstream installed by the Town 30 years ago.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

Mayor Green said since some of the requests had no recommendations from the Committee, he asked for a motion that we do nothing on private property because of the moratorium.

Councilman Allman made a motion that the Town do nothing on private property because of the moratorium.

Councilman Miller asked if the four ditches with no recommendation were on private property. Mayor Green replied yes.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said Ms. LeGrand was requesting the Town address a ditch on Town property across the street from her home. Mayor Green said Ms. LeGrand was afraid she would back into the deep ditch.

Councilman Nash asked if the property owner might assist the Town, since we closed the alley. He suggested a guardrail. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he would ask the property owner.

Councilman Gormus asked about the Armes ditch, if the \$140,000.00 has enough for his ditch, that the previous Council voted to do, why isn't that being addressed. Manager Vannoorbeeck said we don't have the money.

Councilman Gormus said N. West Avenue was at \$31,000.00, of the \$140,000.00, and Forest Drive was at \$15,000.00. Manager Vannoorbeeck said Forest Drive was at \$40,000.00 with Town staff doing the work. Councilman Gormus said he was at the meeting when Council committed to fixing the Armes' ditch.

Councilman Miller agreed with Councilman Gormus. He said the previous Council voted to do Mr. Armes' ditch, so it should be honored.

Councilman Allman said the problem is not with the ditches, but we are currently talking about raising taxes to supplement the Budget, we are also debating employee raises because of the projects we keep throwing out. He said before we do more ditches, we need to get the Budget under control, and then if there is extra money, we come back and do them. He said when we are talking about raising taxes for individual properties, that is not fiscally responsible.

Councilman Miller said if we say we are going to do something, and then don't do it, that makes us an untrustworthy Council.

Councilman Nash said the Armes' ditch was approved 3-2, but with what money, it has not been put in the Budget. Councilman Gormus said he was not asking for extra money, but from the \$140,000.00, if there is money left over, why wouldn't we fix the ditch. He added if it was committed to before this Budget, then why wasn't it included in the current Budget.

Councilman Page said respectfully to Councilman Allman, this Council has approved two ditches out of 50-60 overflowing, with eleven requests in the past few months. He understood they should be layered out, but how long are we going to continue with almost an entire Ward being flooded. Councilman Allman said there are low areas, and not a great situation, but he was out with a shovel the past rains, cleaning out ditches.

Councilman Allman said our Budget is in a situation he calls the mayonnaise sandwich, where we cannot afford the lunchmeat. He said a lot of the ditches are purely aesthetic, and we don't need to be spending money on them. He said we are now talking about 60 days for utility cut offs, which will be a major deficit to the Budget.

Councilman Page suggested instead of using the moratorium, we have an engineer provide options and work into the Budget over a few years. Councilman Allman said the moratorium was put into place because of the money being spent, and engineers are very expensive.

Councilman Page said we are planning for the Taylor Bottom project now; we should be doing the same for the ditches.

222 Forest Drive

Manager Vannoorbeeck said this would be discussed later in the meeting.

Health & Ordinance – met 2-8-24 – minutes included in February’s Council Packet

Banners

Councilman Allman said the Committee discussed banners, and has questions for legal Review.

Seav Park

Councilman Allman said he would be doing more research, and would likely have questions for legal.

Food Trucks

Councilman Allman said there were no recommendations, but has talked with some food truck owners and would present to the Committee or Council shortly.

Panhandling

Councilman Allman said he would be setting up a meeting to discuss further with Chief Murphy.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

1. Out of Town Trash Collection Request

Manager Vannoorbeeck said there are quite a few people not paying for trash in Cole Harbor. He said the easiest thing to do is cease and desist on trash collection outside Town limits. He said the customers on Lakeside Drive have sewer with the Town, but did not know when trash pick-up started.

Manager Vannoorbeeck recommended to stop picking up trash outside of Town limits. He said keeping up with this is problematic, but we will do our best if Council chooses to continue.

Councilman Nash suggested contacting each residence that is not paying. Councilman Miller suggested giving the trash truck drivers a list.

Councilman Nash asked what the garbage rate was for out of Town. Utility Billing Clerk Seamster replied, \$24.25.

Councilman Page suggested if customers do not have water, sewer or electric and want trash pick-up, they pay a \$50.00 deposit. He said to include a spreadsheet every month, and if customers don't pay, they don't get trash picked up. He said our employees need to perform the way they need to.

Councilman Page made a motion for customers that do not have water, sewer or electric and want trash pick-up, they pay a \$50.00 deposit and the out of Town rate, and to update the route to reflect who pays and who does not pay.

Councilman Nash said that only addresses those without utilities. Councilman Page said if a customer has water, sewer or electric, there would be no deposit for trash.

The motion was seconded by Councilman Nash.

Treasurer Morgan said trash can be added as an invoice.

Councilman Allman said if someone is already receiving a bill, that would be where his line was. Councilwoman Williams said she disagreed; these people should get notice. Treasurer Morgan said Utility Billing Clerk Seamster sent out notices today, and gives them 15 days to respond. Manager Vannoorbeeck said we need to stop picking this trash up immediately.

Councilman Nash said this trash pick-up is within the routes at Cole Harbor and Tenth Street and Lakeside Drive.

Manager Vannoorbeeck clarified; the Town cannot mandate trash outside of Town.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

2. Crewe Water Project

Councilman Allman said we have received the number from the Town of Crewe, which allows us to proceed with the RFI. He said we now need to decide if we want to proceed with the engineer refreshing the numbers.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the RFI has to be submitted by March 8, 2024. He said if we don't submit an RFI, Prince Edward will be the provider. He said if Blackstone takes this on it will be \$26 Million in debt.

Councilman Allman made a motion to submit an RFI to the State of Virginia for the Crewe Water project, with Crewe as the Town's partner. The motion was seconded by Councilman Miller.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

3. Raw Water Line

Manager Vannoorbeeck said this is a potentially \$14 Million project, which is part of the \$26 Million if we were to provide water to the Town of Crewe.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said enclosed is an engagement letter from VML/VACo, but the numbers were not correct. Councilman Nash believed it was a moot point until we see what happens with Crewe.

4. N. West Avenue – Stormwater Culvert Bids

Manager Vannoorbeeck said on February 13, 2024, we opened sealed bids, and received three. He said lowest responsive base bid was from Gilmore Environmental Consulting in the amount of \$31,245.00. He said he was not recommending the alternate, which would be a new wing wall at the far end. He said instead we will install a box, go approximately another 80’ to the back of this property line and then rip rap.

Councilman Nash asked what the purpose of the box is. Manager Vannoorbeeck said it will be to drain out the two yards.

Councilman Miller made a motion to accept the low base bid from Gilmore Environmental Consulting in the amount of \$31,245.00, with the alternate not being accepted for the N. West Avenue ditch. The motion was seconded by Councilman Gormus.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

Manager Vannoorbeeck said \$140,000.00 has been set aside, and with the N. West Avenue project, that will leave about \$105,000.00. He said for Forest Drive there was a design already, and he expected the materials to cost about \$40,000.00, with the Town installing this.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said B&B Consultants came to him and said for Forest Drive, they did not recommend the pipe work, but instead open the ditches, lay the bank back around the curb. He said B&B Consultants designed the pipe install as directed by Council, but are still concerned about the force main. He said B&B Consultants is recommending an alternative, which is plugging in the pipe across the road, open the ditch, laying the bank back, and create a ditch. He asked Council if he could investigate this option with B&B Consultants.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said he would report at the next Council Meeting.

Mayor Green said by reducing the scope of work, we may be able to do all three ditches with the \$140,000.00. Councilman Gormus clarified, the Armes' ditch.

Councilman Gormus made a motion to hold off on ordering materials for the Forest Drive project until we get more information on other options. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Wynn.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

Councilman Nash asked about \$32,935.00 for sidewalk. Manager Vannoorbeeck said the majority was on Main Street in front of Moncure Insurance. He said it also included fixing a drop inlet on Third Street, and new sidewalk on High Street behind the new Brewery.

Mayor Green asked for a copy of the invoice from S. Walker Construction for the sidewalk work in front of Moncure Insurance, to pass along to DBi.

5. House Bill 906

Manager Vannoorbeeck said this Bill means you cannot cut people off for 60 days after being late. He added customers cannot be cut off if the temperature is above 92 degrees or below 32 degrees. He said this is going to be a problem and cause a major cash crunch.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said he would be presenting to the Account & Finance Committee several cost saving measures. He said this would include a hiring freeze, deposits, and changing penalties and interest on accounts. He said this is catastrophic, but our Delegates Lee Ware and Tommy Wright voted against this, but our Senator voted for this. Mayor Green said he received correspondence from the assistant of our Senator saying she would not vote for it. Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Senate voted 40-0.

Councilman Miller asked if penalties would still apply. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he was proposing to raise the penalties and interest. He said it doesn't say anything about not being able to collect penalty and interest, but does limit on some accounts that receive aid and making deposits more than 25% of the outstanding balance.

Councilman Miller asked if we would still offer payment plans or extensions. Treasurer Morgan replied, there would be no point. Manager Vannoorbeeck added, this applied to every account, every month.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said if the Governor signs this Bill, we need to stop doing extensions with the April bill.

Councilwoman Williams believed this was a good time to work with the citizens to start educating people, because nobody wants a \$2,000.00 bill. She suggested putting something in with the utility bill.

Mayor Green referred the fees and results of House Bill 906 to the Account & Finance Committee.

6. Armory – Tobacco Commission – Grant Agreement – Making Ends Meet

Manager Vannoorbeeck said we have been working on money to build the kitchen at the Armory. He said we recently received \$121,000.00 in grant funds, but it is a 1:1 match. He said he still intended to pay for this project 100% with grants.

Manager Vannoorbeeck asked for authorization to execute the agreement.

Councilman Nash asked if there was a guarantee to find the \$121,000.00 match elsewhere. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he could not swear to it. He said we don't have a project without a kitchen.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said we have applied for another grant, and Community Development Specialist Bryant was confident the Town would get it. He said Council authorized them to apply for \$500,000.00.

Councilman Page made a motion to accept the Grant Agreement from the Tobacco Commission in the amount of \$121,383.00 and authorize Manager Vannoorbeeck to execute the Agreement. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Williams.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

ON-GOING PROJECTS:

1. Dilapidated Buildings

Manager Vannoorbeeck said 902 Second Street is now demolished. He said we are now working on 911 Church Street, and have met with some of the family, who are not happy with the enforcement efforts.

Manager Vannoorbeeck believed 301 N. High Street would be closed on this week. He said the developer that is purchasing the property is planning for demolition and will construct possibly five townhouses.

2. Meals Tax / Lodging Tax

Treasurer Morgan said there is one business in collections with TACS.

Councilman Nash asked what is TACS deadline for the delinquent account. Treasurer Morgan said several months. Manager Vannoorbeeck added, if TACS does not get anywhere, we will move forward.

3. Street Improvement Projects

There was nothing to report.

4. Wrigglesworth Sports Complex

Councilman Miller said kids will be on spring break April 1st – 5th, so there will be a neighborhood cookout for the kids, and they will pick up rocks to get the football field ready.

Councilman Gormus asked if there had been any progress on the concession stand at Wrigglesworth. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied no.

5. Taylor Bottom Block Grant

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Town received a \$60,000.00 Block Grant, and we await the formal agreement for acceptance.

6. Armory

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the first Progress Meeting would be March 7, 2024. He said up to this point, they are discovering significant water damage to structural components that must be repaired. He said he received the first Change Order today in the amount of \$97,000.00, and believed it would be the first of many. He said he did not have the money, but there was no choice but to repair the rotten wood.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said we need to be realistic, the people of Blackstone said they wanted to spend \$2 Million on a building. He said we have you to the threshold of spending nothing, but he still may have to come to Council for some money.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the inside of the building has to be done first. He said we removed the exterior of the building from the project. He said the Town is still responsible for painting the interior, finishing the floors, and the kitchen, that is why we are trying to get the \$500,000.00 grant.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said he was not crazy about the current architect; they are not as aggressive as he prefers. He said he had already rejected a \$360,000.00 Change Order for scraping plaster off the walls. He said we used Town staff to do this work.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said we are acting as the arbiter of what is possible. He said he has told the contractor a change order is only approved if it is holding the roof up. He said the architect forgot to put a water fountain in, and wanted the Town to pay \$9,700.00, he told the architect he forgot it so he should pay for it. He said we are not paying for their errors.

Councilman Nash asked Manager Vannoorbeeck to advise Council of when items are being removed or any change orders. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he would report after every Progress Meeting. He said anything left out is because we cannot afford it.

Manager Vannoorbeeck asked to hire someone to design the kitchen through an RFP. He said this would come from the \$121,000.00.

Councilman Miller made a motion to hire someone to help design the kitchen, and handle the floor, ceiling, painting and the exterior of the Armory, outside the original scope of work. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Wynn.

Councilman Allman said didn't we just talk about having some money left over from the \$140,000.00. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he believed the Armory group had \$40,000.00, maybe they can make a donation.

Councilman Gormus said the \$140,000.00 is going towards ditches. Councilman Allman said we talk about ditches, but we can't finish projects that we put \$5 Million into.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

7. Weatherization

Manager Vannoorbeeck said based on our current fiscal situation with House Bill 906, he was recommending not funding Weatherization this year.

8. Workforce Housing

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the two houses under construction on Broad and Dillard should be occupied by May 1, 2024. He hoped to put two more houses out for bid after these two close, and believed they would be built on Tavern Street, on property that Mr. John Hill is selling to Southside Outreach.

9. Roundabout – Water Relocation

There was nothing to report.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Reconnect Policy - Update

Manager Vannoorbeeck said highlighted in the packet are the changes. He said instead of saying “meter being removed”, it now says “disconnected”. He said instead of just being delivered in person, we now allow fax and email as well.

Councilman Nash made a motion to approve the updated Reconnect Policy as presented. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Wynn.

Councilman Page said he was concerned with Item #4, especially with House Bill 906. He said leaders in the future may ask for inspections to get power back on for a regular disconnection. He asked to have a two week time frame added to #4.

Councilman Page made a secondary motion to approve the Policy, but add 14 days to item #4. There was no second to this motion.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

2. Water Leaks – Broad Street / Epes Street

Manager Vannoorbeeck said both homes were connected when the Town reconstructed water lines for the first phase of the East End project. He said both homes had the same issue, a coupler disconnected, but both homes, the warranty had expired. He said because the Town’s contractor made the connection at the time, he had Mr. Andre Hicks make the repairs recently.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the additional sewer charges would be deleted, because the water went on the ground. He asked Council to relieve the water portion to something reasonable, such as their average bill.

Councilman Page asked how much of a warranty is on the homes. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied, one year for the contractor. Councilman Page said the contractor should pay the bill. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he would try to collect it.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said a gentleman in one of the homes knew something was going on, but Manager Vannoorbeeck found it.

Councilman Nash asked if there were inspectors on these projects. Manager Vannoorbeeck believed it was Robbie Williams, an inspector for B&B Consultants.

Councilman Nash said there was another project at Rick's Auto, where the ground wasn't compacted correctly, and the inspector was B&B. Manager Vannoorbeeck said the contractor was responsible to come back. Manager Vannoorbeeck said the inspector was fired for S. Main Street.

Councilman Nash made a motion to reduce the water usage to a three month average on the utility bills presented for Broad and Epes Street.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the sewer would already be reduced to the minimum.

The motion was seconded by Councilman Gormus.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

3. DMV Addendum

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the DMV Addendum now requires that DMV do the background check for employees. He said this could take a month, as with other things, not very timely. He said if we hire someone, they cannot be behind the counter for five weeks, even to collect utilities. Treasurer Morgan said a current employee has to sit five weeks with the new employee for training. Manager Vannoorbeeck added, he was not allowed behind the counter unless he signs a sign-in sheet.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Finance Committee may hear about eliminating DMV. He said we lose money every day on DMV, but it is a service that nobody else offers. He said we collect about \$32,000.00 a year and probably pays one of the ladies on the counter.

Councilman Nash made a motion to authorize Manager Vannoorbeeck to execute the DMV Addendum as presented. The motion was seconded by Councilman Allman.

Treasurer Morgan said 90% of walk in traffic is DMV. She said most are from Richmond, Chesterfield and Dinwiddie areas.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

4. Lakeview Cemetery – Annual Clean-Up

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the first week of March we do the annual clean-up. He said he had never been contacted by an organization to install Confederate Flags in the Cemetery. He said Policy says a local organization has to be approved by Council to install flags. He said he would like to remove the Confederate Flags during clean-up, and leave the American flags.

Councilwoman Wynn made a motion to remove the Confederate Flags during the annual clean-up from Lakeview Cemetery. The motion was seconded by Councilman Page.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

COMMITTEE REFERRALS:

There were no additional referrals.

MAYORS MINUTE:

There was nothing to report.

POLICE REPORT:

Councilman Gormus said he had been approached by some people about residents of Jan's Residential doing things that sound pretty bad around the Grab & Go and Race In. He asked if the Police would look into this.

CITIZEN COMMENTS:

Mrs. Debra Damon – 204 S. West Avenue

Mrs. Damon asked why she had to give her address, for those listening, they now know where she lives. Mayor Green said it was part of Council's Policy, and if it is on tape we can go back and refer.

Mayor Green said next time Health & Ordinance meets he would have the Committee discuss.

Mrs. Damon said earlier in the meeting there was discussion about previous Council making promises about flooding in a neighborhood, but did not follow through and fund it. She said she did like Councilman Page's suggestion of giving more notice, not just say we don't have the money. She said what Councilman Miller said about the integrity of this body means a lot. Mayor Green said this Council is a continuing body, so anything done prior to this Council remains, unless the new Council decides not to go that route. Manager Vannoorbeeck believed Mrs. Damon was confusing two different discussions, one is a private ditch, and the other is an area that is flooding.

Mrs. Damon said with the trash information, she said as a new resident, the employees made it very clear what was expected and what had to be paid for. She said if people are getting free trash, they know it, and she was glad letters were being sent out. She thanked the trash guys; she said it was the best trash service they have ever had.

Mrs. Damon asked about House Bill 906 and the Reconnect Policy, if someone is disconnected and the temperatures go below the range, are they reconnected regardless. Manager Vannoorbeeck said once disconnected, we do not have to reconnect.

Mrs. Damon asked about hydrant flushing, the messages say not to do laundry during these times, but is it ok to drink the water during flushing. Manager Vannoorbeeck said we put the notice out because it could stain your clothes. Mayor Green said he would not drink the brown water, let it run and it will clear up.

Mrs. Damon said she called to have a street light repaired, and it was done in two days, that never would have happened in Chicago. She was very appreciative.

Mrs. Damon asked about a personal property where water was being wasted in a yard that was discussed last month. Manager Vannoorbeeck said it was no longer being wasted because the Town put a lock on the meter, and they are not allowed to cut water back on until the leak is fixed. Treasurer Morgan said the resident was out of the house. Councilwoman Williams said she spoke to the resident last Friday.

Ms. Beverly Ambs – Fourth Street

Ms. Ambs said Council has talked about how tight money is, yet you still give money to Juneteenth, this \$5,000.00 could be put into other projects.

Ms. Ambs asked Ms. Chastiddy Bryant about Juneteenth, it was said there was \$17,000.00 made last year, plus \$4,100.00, it is going to cost \$2,100.00 plus the \$5,000.00 to run a one day event. Ms. Bryant replied yes ma'am, because the price of things goes up, and she explained what the funds were spent on.

Ms. Ambs said closing Main Street causes businesses to be closed. Councilman Nash said that is why he asked that next year they consider the Armory area.

Ms. Ambs asked if this would continue to be an expense the Town takes on, and if it was needed every year. Mayor Green replied, it will have to be requested every year, and approved by an affirmative vote.

Ms. Ambs said if this is an annual item every year, does it not become a line item. Mayor Green replied no, it is at Council's discretion.

Ms. Ambs said we need to be better stewards with the Town's money, since the budget is so tight.

CLOSED SESSION:

Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711-A

- 1/ Personnel – Town Attorney
- 7/ Legal Matters

Councilman Nash 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 Williams.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

Councilwoman 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 Wynn.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

Manager Vannoorbeeck asked for the following motion as Jan’s Residential is allowed up to 8 residents, and at last check they had 11.

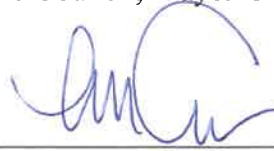
Councilman Nash made a motion to criminally pursue the proprietor of Jan’s Residential, located on N. High Street for the violation of the Town’s Zoning Ordinance for exceeding well over a year the number of permissible residents, which is 8 or fewer. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Williams.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

There being no further business to bring before Council, Mayor Green adjourned this meeting at 10:11 p.m.



MAYOR
OF THE TOWN OF BLACKSTONE, VIRGINIA

March 18, 2024

APPROVED AND ADOPTED



TOWN CLERK
OF THE TOWN OF BLACKSTONE, VIRGINIA