

Minutes of a Continued Meeting of the Council of the Town of Blackstone, Virginia, held in the Council Chambers, located at 100 W. Elm Street, Blackstone, Virginia on Thursday, May 28, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.

There Were Present:

Mayor: Lafayette Dickens

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 Mitchell, Bookkeeper; Sam Murphy, Police Chief

Town Attorney:

Those Absent:

Mayor Dickens called this Continued Meeting from May 18, 2026, to order.

**Graduation Celebration – Viewbank Street – Street Closure/Waive Noise Ordinance**

Ms. Elaine Eppes

Councilman Miller said we cannot grant a 12:00 a.m. time limit for the street closure or Noise Ordinance. He said he has to look out for the other citizens. He said several calls had been made to the Police Department in that area. He said generally the street closures are through 9:00 p.m.

Ms. Eppes asked to waive the requests to 11:00 p.m. Councilman Miller said we normally waive things until 9:00 p.m.

Ms. Eppes said they were making the requests so there were no issues. She said most of their neighbors were lenient to the music.

Councilman Miller asked how people would get to their homes if Viewbank Street is closed. Ms. Eppes asked how does the Town block the streets. She said they would not block the people that live there, they wanted to block those that don't live on that street.

***Councilman Miller made a motion to approve the graduation party at 102 Viewbank Street on June 6, 2026, waive the Noise Ordinance from 3:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., with no street closure. The motion was seconded by Councilman Gormus.***

Mayor Dickens 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 |

### **FY27 Budget**

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the ad for the budget needs to run in the paper for next Wednesday.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the budget is being proposed at \$23,116,261.00. He said of this amount, the Electric Fund is \$7,296,194.00, the Water/Sewer and Water/Sewer Improvements is \$4,682,900.00. He said the remaining is the General Fund, Cemetery and Weatherization.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said with revenue funds for Water/Sewer and Water/Sewer Improvements equate to roughly \$11,979,094.00.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said he was anticipating a significant amount of grants to include a Police IT Grant, Dillard Crawley Grant Funding, Airport Water Project, Workforce Housing, and the Raw Water Line Engineering, He said the grants equate to \$4,195,000.00.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said for the General Fund, if grants were removed would be \$6,942,167.00.

Councilman Gormus asked about the 3.8% base electric rate increase. Manager Vannoorbeeck said this did not include the fuel adjustment, and the 3.8% is subject to change with final rates we receive in June. Councilman Allman said everything in the electric department that effects people's bills are a pass through.

Councilman Page asked if the match was included for the grants in the upcoming year. Manager Vannoorbeeck said the water for the Airport project is  $\frac{1}{4}$  -  $\frac{3}{4}$ , and the match is not included. He said for most of the projects, the Town has already expended their match.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said for the Dillard Crawley Building, it has a \$515,000.00 grant, \$475,000.00 from DHCD, and \$40,000.00 from the Brownfield Grant. He said the Town has already put in \$100,000.00 in architectural fees and purchasing the property. He said this is enough for the first part of the project, the sprinklers, he said the remaining match will be from the developer. He said the Town was eligible for a 75/25 split because Nottoway County is considered to be a double distressed community.

Councilman Allman asked about the Water/Sewer Fund, are the salaries just water and sewer, or other departments included as well. Manager Vannoorbeeck said Mr. Dan Martin is the Public Works Director, so some of his salary is included.

Councilman Allman said in the General Fund, the salaries included are Admin, DBi, Police Department, Dispatch, Street, Bus, Sanitation, Garage, Fire and Council.

Councilman Page said there is roughly \$770,000.00 in Water/Sewer Repairs. He said this includes Fort Avenue sewer repair and Hodges Street water line. Manager Vannoorbeeck said Fort Avenue is funding in and funding out, but the annual payment of \$110,000.000 is included in the electric department.

Councilman Page said the budget has grown since he was on Council from \$18.9 Million to \$23.5 Million. He said some of this is economic development, which is good for the Town, but how much more can we keep compounding.

Councilman Allman said this would be his 5<sup>th</sup> year, and every year it has been a 2-5% increase in the electric department that is compounding on itself. He said it looks like the Town's budget is growing, but it is just a pass through.

Councilman Page said the Town was still making a good margin on utilities to do a payment in lieu to balance the General Fund.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the running total in the General Fund is in the red. He said the Water/Sewer is in the black. He said we transfer over \$700,000.00 every year from Water/Sewer and Electric to the General Fund, because this does not bring money in.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said payment in lieu of taxes means if the electric system was owned by Dominion Power, it would be taxed. He said this money is used to pay a fund.

Councilman Page said if utilities are appreciably in the black, and we fix the General Fund, we would not have to raise rates. Councilman Nash and Allman said we would have to raise taxes. Councilman Page believed people would prefer to have a tax on their real estate versus usage. He added if utilities are in the black, raising rates is not needed, we are taking profits and spending them elsewhere.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said since he has been here, he has chosen to equalize tax rates.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said Mr. Kooch has recommended a 4% increase starting in FY28 for sewer, every year, to keep up with inflation. He said then in 2028 and 2029 he recommended a 2.7% increase to pay for the Forest Drive Force Main and the Fort Avenue project.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said he raised rates twice since he has been here, once in 2012 for a Sewer Consent Order at 26%, and the second time in 2022 was for the East End project at 4%. He said he had not raised rates for inflation because of adding customers.

Councilman Page asked if grants had been pursued for this project. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied no. Councilman Gormus said this will be roughly \$1.06 a month. He added we have to maintain the infrastructure.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said he was proposing to start the 4% increase in this year's budget and earmark this money for a capital project. He said this will only bring in \$65,000.00 a year. He added, it will take a few years of hoarding cash to take on the project.

Councilwoman Williams said the alternative to raising sewer rates would be raising taxes. Councilman Page said the alternative is to look for grants for the project, then do a true rate.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Town was not able to get grants for Forest Drive or Fort Avenue, which are sewer projects.

Mayor Dickens said he asked Manager Vannoorbeeck if there was a way for lower users in individual households to pay less of the increase, and larger users pay more of the burden. Manager Vannoorbeeck said the rates are the Town's to determine. He said to get the same amount of money, all customers that use more than 3,000 gallons residential, industrial and commercial, would pay 5%. He said this would include exempting customers under 3,000 gallons.

Councilman Miller believed we should keep the system we are using.

Councilman Page asked when the project is completed, will we return the 4%. Councilman Nash said there will be another project by then.

Councilwoman Williams did not want Council to scare the customers talking about rates, when it will be roughly \$12.00 a year.

### **Council Compensation**

Manager Vannoorbeeck said this was not included in the budget, and asked how Council wanted to proceed.

Councilman Miller asked how much would this compensation cost. Councilman Gormus replied, \$54,347.00. He said this includes everyone taking the 50% insurance, \$200 Christmas Bonus, and the \$1,000 raise. Councilman Miller said not everyone will take the insurance.

Mayor Dickens believed throwing the entire policy out is not fair, and suggested it be looked at in pieces. He said he provided research of similar sized communities, which was not even discussed by the Committee. He said according to the research Blackstone is behind significantly. He said he also provided the State Code for reference.

Councilman Allman believed him being part of the Finance Committee, they were tasked with being able to afford something. He said it was hard for him to advocate a 4% increase at \$50,000.00, then give it back to Council. He said a smaller bite, such as a pay increase and Christmas Bonus, he did not think that would end the Town. He said putting on his Council hat, he philosophically disagreed with the proposal.

Councilman Allman believed Council was here as a civic duty, and did not think we should be giving ourselves as the employer a Christmas Bonus. Mayor Dickens said he would be willing to withdraw those items and perhaps offer a \$1,000.00 increase for the Fire Chief.

Councilman Page said we all work hard as Council, and takes up a lot of time, he agreed \$50,000.00 was a lot for citizens, but thought \$1,000.00 for the next Council would put them more in line.

Councilman Miller believed the concern was with offering health insurance.

Councilman Nash said it appears we have decreased the proposal to \$9,000.00. He suggested reducing the sewer rate by 1% and give Council nothing. Mayor Dickens said that is not in the proposal. He said this is the only window, it happens once every four years.

Councilwoman Williams said four years ago a raise was passed with no debate, and now we are going back and forth, and did not think it was fair to Mayor Dickens.

Councilwoman Wynn said she was truly neutral.

Councilman Gormus said the Committee did discuss this, and recognized the money may be there. He said his discussion previously with Mayor Dickens the proposal was more than what is being presented now, so the Mayor had compromised. Mayor Dickens replied, a lot.

Councilman Gormus said when this is voted on, he will abstain, and if extra money is provided, he will be donating to a charity.

Councilman Page said Crewe and Burkeville have had several turnovers, so with small stipends you may see more turnover midterm. He said then you have to conduct special elections, which cost taxpayers more money. He did not think this would pass with the insurance and Christmas Bonus, but giving the \$1,000 raise, it may have a chance because it is reasonable.

Councilman Nash said it should be an honor for us to serve on Council; we are here as a duty for those that elected us. He said putting us at any pay puts us on a pedestal, when actually we are lower than our citizens. He believed it was not discussed last time because it was a smaller amount being proposed.

Councilman Nash said nobody should say “the three of you may be able to afford it”, someone may not have a pot to “ “ in, but philosophically this is for the people. He said he would not take a payment just because he may need it, if it is not for the betterment of the community, it should not be taken. He said it was not fair talking about increasing rates, and then increasing Council pay.

Mayor Dickens asked Councilman Nash if he believed what we were currently getting we shouldn’t get. Councilman Nash said yes, take it all away.

Councilman Gormus said until the raise was voted on when he was sitting in the audience 4 years ago, he didn’t know it paid. Councilwoman Williams said she didn’t know either.

Councilman Page asked Councilman Nash if he didn’t think we should be paid, has he ever given it back. Councilman Nash replied, who do you think does things around this Town, the question irritated him. Councilman Allman said a good portion of his pay is donated as well.

Councilwoman Williams said of course she would like to have an increase, however, those Council members that need insurance, she would like to see them have it.

Clerk Daniel clarified the Mayor’s compensation proposal was not included in the proposed budget. She added the 4% sewer increase is not included either.

***Councilman Miller made a motion to include in the FY27 Budget a \$1,000.00 each increase in Council/Mayor/Fire Chief pay for a total of \$9,000.00. The motion was seconded by Councilman Page.***

Mayor Dickens asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

Manager Vannoorbeeck said it would be included in the budget.

Councilman Gormus asked to change his vote to Nay. He said he did not want to be the reason this passed 3-2.

Councilman Page argued Robert’s Rules, the vote is over and announced.

Mayor Dickens said he proposed this, and voted yes to break the tie.

## **Salaries**

Councilman Miller asked if merit raises were being given this year. Councilman Gormus said the merit column actually shows certifications, not merits. Councilman Allman said those are more like step raises, not merit.

Councilman Allman said if Council is not in agreement to do merit raises, do we want to motion to get rid of merit raises.

***Councilman Miller made a motion to discontinue the merit system. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Williams.***

Councilman Gormus said those that do go above and beyond, are worthy of more, like the ones that bettered themselves on the list.

Mayor Dickens asked about the positions that don't have the opportunity to get certifications. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he made an attempt to give an 8% raise last year, which is how he was going to solve that. He said we weren't able to get over that hurdle.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said there are already built in certifications for Linemen and Water/Wastewater Operators. He added getting a CDL does allow for \$1.50 raise.

Councilman Allman explained his thoughts on merit raises, with those that did not perform getting a 1%, and those that went above getting 3%, which should balance out to the 2% being proposed. He said the training with OneDigital was done, along with the employee review system, but now at the goal line, there is cold feet and now some don't want to do that.

Councilman Nash asked how much was spent training the employees with OneDigital. Bookkeeper Mitchell believed it was included in the \$1,500.00 monthly charge, just using hours.

Councilwoman Williams believed merit was good in some cases, but not fair to everyone. She said jobs offer a cost of living, then based on your work performance you could get more. She said it was discussed that some may get zero, which is why she was against the merit raise.

Mayor Dickens said the merits would have to be objective. Manager Vannoorbeeck said they would always be objective.

Councilman Gormus suggested changing the title of the column so it does not say merit.

***Councilman Allman made a substitute motion to change the merit column to "professional development". The motion was seconded by Councilman Gormus.***

Councilwoman Williams said everyone should have an opportunity to get steps, not just certain departments. She asked what incentive does the sanitation department have. Councilman Gormus said if an employee wants to work their way up, there are classes out there. Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Town would pay for it. Councilwoman Williams asked if the employees know this. Councilwoman Wynn said employees are not always informed.

Councilman Page said according to the salary sheet he saw three employees with a 2% raise in the sanitation department, getting evened up January 1<sup>st</sup> with the minimum wage adjustment. He said they will be at \$13.26, and on January 1<sup>st</sup> minimum wage will go to \$13.75, then they will get a \$.49 increase on top of minimum wage. He said we don't want to devalue employees, if they are worth \$.22 now, they should be worth \$.22 above minimum wage after January 1<sup>st</sup>.

Mayor Dickens asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

Manager Vannoorbeeck clarified there will be a 2% across the board.

Bookkeeper Mitchell asked if this meant evaluations would not be done anymore. Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Personnel Policy says evaluations will be done. He said they just won't apply to salaries.

Councilman Page questioned the employees that will be effected by the minimum wage increase. Councilman Gormus said those employees are getting the 2% on what they make now. Manager Vannoorbeeck said those employees will get the 2% on top of minimum wage in January.

Bookkeeper Mitchell clarified the employees are currently making \$13.00 an hour, with the 2% they will get a \$.26 increase, so July 1<sup>st</sup> they will be making \$13.26. She said on January 1<sup>st</sup> they will get a \$.49 increase to get to \$13.75 to meet minimum wage standards.

Councilman Allman said what was voted on is what was just described.

Councilman Page said if they get the 2% on top of the minimum wage increase the employees would be at \$14.24, where they should be.

Councilman Nash said this is called wage suppression, and happened with the Police Department. He said we raise the low end, and are not solving anything just by raising to minimum wage. He said then you have to look at Mr. Tucker who has been here a long time and a good employee.

Councilwoman Williams asked who can live off of \$13.75.

### **Stoplights**

Councilman Nash said we still need to discuss Agency Funding and a stoplight at Maple. He suggested including in the budget a legit study for the stoplight. Councilman Gormus said would we be wasting money on a study that we know needs to be done.

Councilman Miller suggested a stoplight at the Deco Den. Manager Vannoorbeeck said that was a private street. Councilman Allman agreed Maple was a bad intersection, but there are lots of places that have bad intersections.

Councilman Nash said a lady was here previously talking about crosswalks, and we need them.

Councilman Nash asked what it would cost to have VDOT look at the downtown area with issues. Manager Vannoorbeeck said it would be free if VDOT does it. He added hiring a consultant would be \$12-\$15 Thousand.

Councilman Nash asked where we can improve Main Street with safety issues. Councilman Gormus added, we need to get a good assessment on the crosswalk buttons.

Councilman Allman asked to entertain VDOT before using professional services.

***Councilman Gormus made a motion that Manager Vannoorbeeck look into the possibility of a stoplight at Maple and Main by having a study done the most economical way, whether with VDOT or professional services, and include the Historic Business District. The motion was seconded by Councilman Page.***

Mayor Dickens 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 |

### **Agency Funding**

Councilman Miller said this would be for Juneteenth and the Blackstone Chamber.

Councilman Allman asked if \$11,000.00 was left for Agency Funding. Bookkeeper Mitchell replied the proposed budget includes \$10,000.00.

Councilman Nash said Juneteenth was asking for \$5,000.00 and the Blackstone Chamber was asking for \$4,250.00. Councilman Page believed the Chamber's request was \$1,250.00 for Christmas and \$3,000.00 for July 4<sup>th</sup>.

Councilman Gormus asked if the Chamber still needed the money. Councilman Page said they are running a \$23,000.00 event for the Town every year. Mayor Dickens said that is a yes.

Councilman Gormus asked if any board members received any checks from the Chamber. Councilman Page asked if he was referring to this particular event. Councilman Gormus replied no, as a whole. Councilman Page said there have been some board members that have gotten a few things. Councilman Gormus asked Councilman Page if he was one of them. Councilman Page said he had received a payment from the Chamber, but not from the fireworks.

Councilman Gormus asked about loan repayments. He said three board members received \$1,000.00 a piece on top of what Councilman Page got. Councilman Page said it was a loan two years ago. Councilman Gormus said from 2025. Councilman Page said the board members loaned the Chamber money. Councilman Gormus said it is the same amount they get for a consulting fee. Councilman Page said there had been some consulting fees paid. Councilman Gormus asked Councilman Page if he had received money. Councilman Page replied yes for consulting, maybe three times.

Councilman Gormus asked if there were board members that get paid for clean-up and that help with Arts & Crafts. Councilman Page replied no. Councilman Gormus said according to what he had, it shows one person getting paid for three days. Councilman Page said they have paid staff, that are not board members.

Councilman Gormus asked how much it cost the Chamber/Town for the Good Morning Virginia show. Councilman Page replied, it cost the Chamber \$3,000.00.

Councilman Gormus asked if the Chamber still needed money, there was \$6,500.00 spent in advertising. Councilman Page said the Chamber's finances are provided to the Town.

Councilman Allman did not know if it was clear that board members were getting paid. He said at the last meeting it was said this was a volunteer organization. Councilman Page said it is a volunteer position. He said there were a few consulting fees paid to multiple board members last year. He said this was voted on by the board and announced.

Councilman Allman said if the Town is giving out Agency Funding, and a council member is receiving consulting fees from it, that seems important to disclose. Councilman Page said Ms. Deborah Rose received consulting fees also. He said again, the Board approved this. Councilman Allman said with Councilman Page as the Chairman. Councilman Page said yes, but he did not vote on his consulting fees paid to him.

Councilman Allman believed previously that Councilman Page had no financial gain from this. Councilman Page said that as not a financial gain. Councilman Allman said receiving consulting fees is not a financial gain? Councilman Page said there were a few members that put over 300 hours into making something happen in a short amount of time. He said when you break down the hours, it was a small reimbursement, which would have basically been the cost for hiring staff.

Councilman Allman asked Councilman Page how much he has received. Councilman Page replied three \$1,000.00 payments from the Chamber, along with two other board members. Councilman Allman said the Town gave the Chamber \$6,000.00 last year. Councilman Page said the fireworks has its own account, and the consulting fees did not come from that.

Councilman Page said if there is an issue with the Chamber, you can come to a meeting and it can be explained. Councilman Allman said he did not have an issue with the Chamber, he just did not think the reason for abstention was thorough. Councilman Page said he had been abstaining for four years with the Chamber, even before the Board graciously decided to pay some consulting fees.

Councilman Page said the Chamber had been building the fireworks account up, which has \$15,000.00, and the event is \$23,000.00. He said the Chamber is asking for \$3,000.00 this year, which is below the \$5,000.00 from last year. He said they are trying to reduce the amounts each year.

Councilman Allman said he had ethical concerns when the Town is receiving \$10,000.00 in Department of Aviation Grant Funds and the Town provided \$6,000.00 to the Chamber, and Councilman Page received consulting payments from the Chamber. He said that was not presented in the abstentions. Councilman Page said he had always abstained due to his position and relationship with the Chamber. Councilman Allman said it is not a volunteer organization if you are getting paid. Councilman Page said it is a volunteer organization.

Councilman Gormus believed any funds the Town allots going forward to support an event, should be handled by the Town paying the vendors. The Town will not be handing over any money.

Councilman Page said the Chamber turned in \$20,000.00 in invoices, and the Department of Aviation refunded \$10,000.00 to the Chamber. He said let's not try to act like the money didn't go where it said it went; all receipts were provided.

***Councilman Nash made a motion to allot \$5,000.00 to Juneteenth. The motion was seconded by Councilman Allman.***

Mayor Dickens 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 Wynn made a motion to allot \$4,250.00 towards the Blackstone Chamber. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Williams.***

Mayor Dickens asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

Councilman Miller said he voted no because things that have been said, he did not understand what was going on.

Councilman Page said there is \$15,900.00 in the fireworks account. He said the idea was to become self sustaining in a few years. He said Crewe's fireworks has a separate account, with roughly \$8,900.00. He said this request was to help with the funds for this year, but the Chamber would be fine.

***Councilman Allman made a motion to approve increasing the sewer rate 4% for the FY27 Budget. The motion was seconded by Councilman Gormus.***

Mayor Dickens asked for a Roll Call Vote:

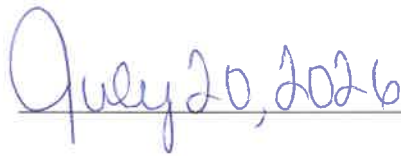
VOTE:

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

Councilman Nash clarified the 4% on sewer will equate to \$1.05 a month the first year.

There being no further business to bring before Council, Mayor Dickens declared this Continued Meeting adjourned at 8:58 p.m.

 MAYOR OF THE  
TOWN OF BLACKSTONE, VIRGINIA



APPROVED AND ADOPTED

 TOWN CLERK  
OF THE TOWN OF BLACKSTONE, VIRGINIA