

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 Wednesday, February 12, 2025 at 7:00 p.m.

There Were Present:

Mayor: L. Benjamin Green

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

Town Staff: Philip Vannoorbeeck, Town Manager; Jennifer Daniel, Town Clerk; Brittany Morgan, Treasurer; Jackie Mitchell, Bookkeeper; Jason Robertson, Detective

Town Attorney:

Those Absent: Eric Nash

Special Called Meeting of the Council of the Town of Blackstone, Virginia for 7:00 p.m., Wednesday, February 12, 2025.

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., Wednesday, February 12, 2025, for the purpose of considering the following:

1. *Subdivision Request – Nottoway Avenue*
2. *Mr. John Montoro (Accountant) / Mr. Aaron Hawkins (Auditor) – Zoom*
3. *IDA Nominations*
4. *Roundabout Easement*
5. *Boundary Adjustment Discussions*
6. *DBi Director – Closed Session*

Mayor Green announced that Supervisor John Roark had a stroke, and asked for a moment of silence. He said Chairman Bill Collins was here tonight, and he had set up an account for Mr. John Roark where contributions can be made at any Citizens Bank.

1. Subdivision Request – Nottoway Avenue

Manger Vannoorbeeck said the Subdivision Ordinance requires a review by the Planning Commission, and an affirmative vote by Council. He said this property is located on Nottoway Avenue, and included in the packet is a survey of the entire property. He said SWCI is proposing 17 lots across the front, and is legal by the Town's Ordinance.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the property is zoned R-3, and the zoning standards for single family are the same as R-2. He said it includes 10,000 square feet minimum lot size, and an 80' frontage on a publicly maintained street, and these lots include that. He said the owner has left an access at the intersection of Green Street, so the residual of the property could be developed at a later date.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said because the property is already zoned R-3, he can do single family, duplexes, manufactured homes, and multi-family homes. He said the intention was to build stick built homes. He said the minimum lot size for a duplex is 14,000 square feet, and a few of these lots meet that. He said doublewide manufactured homes would be permissible, but did not think that was the intention.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Planning Commission approved the request, and there is no Public Hearing required for subdivisions. He said water and sewer was already in Nottoway Avenue.

Mayor Green said in the event of a tie, he would be the deciding vote as Councilman Nash was absent.

Councilman Page made a motion to approve the Subdivision request from SWCI as presented on Nottoway Avenue. The motion was seconded by Councilman Gormus.

Councilwoman Williams said a family has a memorial for their children in that area, what will happen to that. Manager Vannoorbeeck said it had been discussed, and was in the right of way of the property, and believed the intention was to remove it. Manager Vannoorbeeck said we can work on finding a more permanent location. Councilman Miller suggested having the family talk to Mr. Walker. Councilwoman Williams said she had the family's contact information.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

2. Mr. John Montoro (Accountant) / Mr. Aaron Hawkins (Auditor) – Zoom

Manager Vannoorbeeck said Mr. Montoro is a long time auditor, and had been working with the Town since roughly April 2024. He said we are very satisfied with Mr. Montoro; he is keenly knowledgeable.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said we are not closed out for last year, so we cannot finish the audit. He said most of the issue is with the General Ledger and bank reconciliations, there is a difference in the figures.

Mr. Montoro said the most important task to be done to close the year or even a month, is to do a bank reconciliation, which sounds simple but has proven problematic. He said he had 12 months laid out on the receipts side, but was having difficulty on the expense side. He said Bookkeeper Mitchell pays the bills in the accounts payable software, then gets brought into the General Ledger. He said the numbers coming into the General Ledger don't tie back to the list of checks issued. He said he was having a tough time with the bank reconciliation. He said in addition, we need to make sure the utility receivables match what is in the General Ledger, and that has yet to be done.

Mayor Green asked Mr. Montoro if he had an estimate on time and money to complete this work, and if there were any guarantees the Town will get to the finish line. Mr. Montoro said there were no guarantees, but could give an estimate on what he thought would happen. He said he could offer progress on a daily basis.

Mr. Montoro said the Town has been without a finance director for almost two years, and the employees currently are diligent, but inexperienced. He said the current accounting system dates back to the 80s, and is not that forgiving, so it is not an easy fix.

Mayor Green asked for an estimate to bring this to an end. Mr. Montoro replied, an estimated two weeks, 80 hours.

Councilman Page asked what 80 hours equaled in dollars and cents. Councilman Allman asked what the billable rate was. Manager Vannoorbeeck said some paperwork estimated 75 hours, and that was \$11,000.00 more, on top of what has already been spent.

Councilman Page asked if these issues were recent or dated back in time. He said he was told we couldn't close the books, and wondered how they were closed out last year. Mr. Aaron Hawkins said last year the bank reconciliation was off by roughly \$39,000.00. He said for an auditor, that is an immaterial amount, and was presented in the Management Letter to Council. He said now we are dealing with \$480,000.00.

Councilman Page asked if the problem could be narrowed down in this fiscal year. Mr. Hawkins said he had no idea how the amount had changed so much since June 2023 to June 2024.

Mr. Montoro said rather than doing a traditional reconciliation, he can do an approach that will give a reasonable amount to bring it in closer, and within the time frame.

Councilman Allman said if at some point we have exhausted all our resources and spending enough where it is fiscally irresponsible, is there an option to clear this and make sure this doesn't happen in the future. Mr. Hawkins said Council has the ability to determine this amount cannot be resolved, but in his opinion, it was a lot of money to do that. He said the audit would be effected by this also.

Councilman Allman said he understood it would effect the audit, as it should. He said at some point there has to be a limit, we shouldn't keep spending tax dollars for what appears to be a pen and pencil error.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said at a minimum we exhaust the 80 hours. He said he was not comfortable with writing this off, he wanted an independent party to tell us what we are doing wrong.

Mayor Green said this was a manure sandwich, we have two choices, we don't pay and don't get it resolved, or take a bite from the sandwich and fix this, or have a complete total disaster.

Councilman Miller asked how the audit was conducted last year. Mayor Green said there is a problem in the accounting system, and has escalated. He said \$39,000.00 was written off last year. Mr. Hawkins said it was not written off. Mayor Green said it was not a spotlight on it, but now it is exponentially growing.

Councilman Page asked if there was any physical money missing, or is it just accounting. Mayor Green said Manager Vannoorbeeck has exhausted his resources to confirm there is not a penny missing. Manager Vannoorbeeck said he could account for the cash. Mr. Hawkins said he has no reason to believe any money is missing from what he has seen. He said that is not even something he would think about. Mr. Montoro said he has not come across any dollars that seem to be missing. Mr. Hawkins said from what he has seen, he believed it was the accounting software.

Mayor Green said by Manager Vannoorbeeck pushing for completion, it tells him there is no fishy business at all. He said after completion if there is \$400,000.00 missing, it would show up then. Councilman Page said he was not accusing anybody; he was just asking questions.

Councilman Gormus believed the last time this was discussed, it appeared this happened 2-3 years ago, and was mislocated, but according to the auditor, the Town was off \$39,000.00, and now we are another \$443,000.00 off. He said it sounds like it has been narrowed down to the last 12 months. Bookkeeper Mitchell said since the last finance director left, we have noticed discrepancies in the bank reconciliations. Treasurer Morgan said it could be something we are not recording correctly. They both said they need more training.

Councilman Gormus asked how much was owed to Mr. Montoro now. Manager Vannoorbeeck said there is \$14,000.00 owed in outstanding invoices, and have already paid \$10,000.00. Mayor Green asked for clarity, what is the total amount. Manager Vannoorbeeck replied, \$36,000.00.

Mayor Green asked what is included in the Professional Services line item. Manager Vannoorbeeck said \$100,000.00, and we are at \$66,000.00. He said getting this resolved is priority number one.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said Councilwoman Williams made a comment at the last meeting; it is time to move on from two years ago. He said that doesn't mean forget it, but we need to solve this so staff has confidence in their information being entered into the system, and we cannot do 80% of the things we want to do because we cannot produce an adequate audit.

Councilwoman Williams asked staff if they were getting the training they need. Bookkeeper Mitchell said at the Town, no, but she had enrolled herself in school. Councilman Page believed the Town should pay for those classes. Councilman Gormus said we paid \$60,000.00 last year to a lady to do training. Bookkeeper Mitchell said she did not train; she was looking for the \$39,000.00.

Bookkeeper Mitchell said Council sees the bills every month, this place does not stop, it is millions of dollars coming in and going out every month. She said being a mom, wife, and working full time, there is little time to eat, sleep and go to school. She said she and Treasurer Morgan are doing the best they can, and Manager Vannoorbeeck has been helpful.

Mayor Green said he appreciated this, and asked to get through this, then discuss furthering education.

Councilwoman Wynn said she concurred with the training. She said she was concerned how the difference went from \$39,000.00 and has now tripled. Mayor Green believed there were things not going where they should be going. He said our grants rely on the audit.

Councilman Miller said maybe something got put in the wrong place two years ago and we did not catch it, and now it is being brought up. Manager Vannoorbeeck said that could be the case, but we are now trying to find out how to solve it.

Councilman Page asked Mr. Montoro if he was unable to find the problems, is the next step a forensic accountant. He asked if there was a software the Town should be looking into and switch. He also asked if \$11,000.00 was going to cover the cost.

Mr. Montoro said he has data in one form that is coming from the system, and the day it comes from the bank, he should be able to check it off, but right now he was having a hard time doing that. He said this also includes payroll and ACH payments. He said none of this would require a forensic auditor, and would only be needed if he sees an ACH payment going out and does not know what it is for, or if cash was missing. He said if he could not get this to at least \$40,000.00, it would not require a forensic audit.

Mr. Montoro did not believe it would take more than \$11,000.00, however. He said he had been working on something to replace Bright, but did not have an answer yet.

Councilman Allman said he was in support of the additional 80 hours to pursue this, but when we get to the end, he asked Council to strongly consider instead of spending more actual cash, when we have pretty much determined there is none missing, halting the search and making an entry. He said to also look at new software to prevent this, and look at on the job training.

Mayor Green asked that he and Manager Vannoorbeeck meet with staff and report back to Council at the February 24th Council Meeting.

Councilman Allman said after the two weeks he would be requesting an RFP be put out for replacement software. Manager Vannoorbeeck said there was \$69,000.00 in the budget as a first installment, with software being over \$100,000.00. He asked to have the remaining included in the upcoming budget. He asked to wait until after the first of July.

Councilman Miller said if we cannot get this resolved with the 80 hours, we need to go in another direction, either forensic investigator or state police investigator. Manager Vannoorbeeck suggested state police. Councilman Miller said we are playing with taxpayer money.

Councilman Page made a motion to approve the additional 80 hours with Mr. John Montoro with an \$11,000.00 cap, and pay the outstanding \$14,000.00 in invoices. The motion was seconded by Councilman Allman.

Councilman Gormus said he would be voting against this because he thought it should be shared accountability for the oversight of going over the \$10,000.00 between the Town and Mr. Montoro, and as it is, the Town is eating it all. Manager Vannoorbeeck said they did give the Town a \$10.00 an hour deduction, but a fair statement. He added, Mr. Montoro was not a decision maker in this, it was Mr. Lauterberg with VML/VACo. He said Mr. Montoro was a worker bee in this instance, and has been fair with the Town.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

3. IDA Nominations

Manager Vannoorbeeck said there are two positions open. He said we also received an email from Attorney Harf, and because Mr. Michael Bagley currently serves on the Board of Zoning Appeals, he cannot serve on the Industrial Development Authority.

Mayor Green opened the floor for nominations.

Councilwoman Williams nominated Ms. Pam Hawkes. Councilman Page nominated Ms. Debra Rose.

Councilman Page made a motion to close the nominations. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Wynn.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

Councilwoman Williams made a motion to appoint Ms. Pam Hawkes and Ms. Debra Rose to the Industrial Development Authority. The motion was seconded by Councilman Page.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

4. Roundabout Easement

Manager Vannoorbeeck said previously Council accepted an easement from Nottoway County for the relocation of a water line associated with the construction of the roundabout at the Main Gate on Route 40. He said VDOT is moving forward with the project.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said included in the packet is another easement signed by Mr. Gomez, the owner of the property that was proposed to be Nottoway Commons. He asked Council to accept this easement so water line can be relocated.

Councilman Miller made a motion to accept the easement as presented from VDOT, with Nottoway Commons, LLC. The motion was seconded by Councilman Gormus.

Mayor Green asked all in favor or opposed:

VOTE:

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

5. Boundary Adjustment Discussions

Manager Vannoorbeeck said he had discussed this with Councilman Page and Mayor Green. He said this is something Council needs to decide if they have interest in. He said there is an agreement with Nottoway County to boundary adjust a piece of property. He said there have been discussions to the Airport, and other properties at the Main Gate. He said Hungarytown Road and W. Entrance Road had also been discussed.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said we are filling up in Town. He said before we spend time and energy on this, he wanted to know if this was something Council was interested in pursuing. He said he was not interested in looking at areas that don't already have water and sewer, because a lot of money could be spent running services to certain areas.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said Cox Road had been discussed, but there is a big capital cost involved to run water and sewer. Councilman Miller said when Cox Road was discussed previously, the Town and County were involved.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said a lady from Cox Road attended a meeting a few years ago with a bottle of water from her well, and the water was red and muddy. He said we got a cost estimate to run water line down Cox Road, but the County showed resistance. He believed it was 40 potential customers in this area, and the cost of the water line was going to be \$1.4 Million. He said the County did not give the right to mandate connections.

Chairman Bill Collins with the Nottoway Board of Supervisors said his Board was showing some interest, but he was only one of five. He said we recently went to the General Assembly to see Delegate Lee Ware, and met with someone that located grant money for hookups to the house from the main line. He said for those that want to be on Town water, there is grant money, based on the economics of that area, and a possible health problem with the water.

Chairman Collins said there could be economic development out there, and go further, the water quality at the old Williams Electric is not very good, then maybe cross the bridge and go to 460. He said Dinwiddie County just put a new Sheetz in, on private property, it was sold at \$100,000.00 an acre for 9 acres. He said this Board is open to more discussions.

Chairman Collins said right now if you have a well there is no water bill, and there were some citizens that wanted it to stay that way, and that may be where the negotiations fell apart.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said for the East End Project, all the services were paid for through SERCAP, which pays for the service from the main line to the house. He said the Town received \$90,000.00 in grant money from SERCAP. He said in Amelia, DEQ said they shall build a water system and was provided \$400,000.00. He said as for wells, the health department says there cannot be cross connections, which means a house having two sources of water. He said a well source would have to be cut, but can be used for watering gardens or filling pools.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said we cannot have individuals opting out of the water system, the water has to move, so customers have to be connected. He said he spoke with individuals who own industrial property on the other side of the railroad tracks, and would be an appreciable user, but the County's motion did not allow the Town to go over the tracks. He believed that would keep an 8" line flushed.

Councilman Miller asked what happens if DEQ were to say the water on Cox Road is not fit. Mayor Green believed that would be on the County, right now it is not in the Town limits. Chairman Collins said his Board realizes this issue was not resolved.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the Town was awarded a grant to build that water line in 2003. He said after the drought, wells started filling up again, and people did not want to participate because they did not want the bill. He said a joint application from the Town and County is stronger than an application just from the County.

Councilman Gormus said he was shocked hearing the lengths the Town was just discussing for the possibility of adding 30-40 people, spending millions. He said we are at odds for a guy that wants to spend \$4 Million to add 30 residences right here in Town that would not cost the Town that much. He said the Town would benefit just as much with these utilities.

Councilman Miller made a motion to work with the County to get the water line started.

Councilman Page asked Councilman Miller if he would expand on his motion. He said if we are going to talk about annexation, we should get a proposal with all possible areas.

Chairman Collins said neither of us have much money, but if we look at the economic standpoint, we can get grant money for health and safety.

Councilwoman Williams suggested before any talks, do a survey with the residents on Cox Road.

Councilman Gormus said we are forgetting all the infrastructure we still need to upgrade and maintain properly, that we need to spend money on. He said we are looking at expanding our infrastructure, instead of taking care of what we have.

Manager Vannoorbeeck said the County did do a survey, and was almost evenly split.

Mayor Green asked if Council was interested in various annexations.

Councilman Page made a motion to start the process of various annexations.

Councilman Allman asked if the Town was planning to spend money on this. Manager Vannoorbeeck said no, he and Gregg Zody could work on this to begin with.

There was no second to Councilman Page's motion.

Councilman Allman said he did not think we had enough information.

Councilman Miller withdrew his original motion, then seconded Councilman Page's motion to start the process of various annexations.

Councilman Allman said this seems very vague, and before we put energy into something, he would like to know what direction we are talking about.

Councilman Page said his motion included working with the County to bring mapping of all possible annexations to Town. Mayor Green said he would like Council to be presented with pros and cons.

Councilman Page said he approached Manager Vannoorbeeck two years ago about annexation, not recently.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

Mayor Green said the motion was denied, so there is no more annexation.

6. DBi Director – Closed Session

CLOSED SESSION:

Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711-A

1/ Personnel – DBi Director

Councilman Gormus made a motion to go into Closed Session for (1) 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 Councilwoman Williams.

Mayor Green asked for a Roll Call Vote:

VOTE:

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

Councilman Gormus 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:

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

Councilman Page said Council did not pass the motion for boundary adjustments, but asked this be referred to the Buildings, Property and Cemetery Committee. He said this would allow Manager Vannoorbeeck to work with the committee first to identify the areas before going to the County.

Councilman Page offered a motion to refer boundary adjustments to the committee. Mayor Green said a motion was not needed he could refer this to committee, and if they choose not to discuss that is up to them.

Mayor Green referred annexation to the Buildings, Property and Cemetery Committee.

There being no further business to bring before Council, Mayor Green declared this Special Called Meeting adjourned at 8:33 p.m.



MAYOR
OF THE TOWN OF BLACKSTONE, VIRGINIA

February 24, 2025 APPROVED AND ADOPTED



TOWN CLERK
OF THE TOWN OF BLACKSTONE, VIRGINIA