

MINUTES OF THE STRASBURG TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, APRIL 9, 2024, AT 7:00 PM IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS OF THE STRASBURG TOWN HALL.

Certain Council Members met with Boy Scouts at 6:30 p.m.

Call to Order:

Mayor Boies called the meeting to order.

Pledge of Allegiance: Council Member **Kimmons** led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Invocation: The invocation was given by Council Member **Lowder**.

Roll Call:

ROLL Called with the following members present: Mayor Boies, Vice Mayor McCornyn, and Council Members Hooser, Kimmons, Lowder, Monahan, Stover, and Woodson. Absent: Council Member Carter

Public Hearings:

Introduction and Recognition of Visitors and Guests:

- **National Autism Awareness Month Resolution – Mayor Boies** read and signed the resolution and asked for all to be advocates for autism.

Mayor's Comments:

Thanked all for helping with Vintage in the Valley.

Mayor Boies said that each year, VML asks for submissions of essays for the “If I Were Mayor” contest. **Ms. Bockman** and two other English teachers, at Signal Knob Middle School asked students to participate in this contest. **Piper Dellinger** read her essay; **Piper** was just notified her essay is the State contest winner. She will be back in attendance next month for the presentation by VML.

Ms. Bockman, 8th grade Civics teacher, said she was very excited to receive the email from **Mayor Boies** regarding this essay. She and two other teachers made this an all grade assignment with eight finalist essays from Signal Knob Middle School being submitted to the State competition. She was impressed with what they had taken away from classes on local government. She said she was very proud of **Piper** and her wonderful essay that she wrote.

Citizen Comments:

Kim Bishop, 728 Crystal Lane, Strasburg, VA: She said she hopes all remember the essay by **Piper** as there are some citizens who want to be involved and heard.

Ms. Bishop read from a prepared statement: “Greetings Council, I’m here today to inform you that I spoke with the town manager, who spoke with the mayor about giving me fifteen minutes of a work session to speak directly to the council about the process I watched **Mr. Lassiter** and **Ms. Davis** go through regarding their sidewalk and back garden. It was decided by the two of them that it would be better for me to simply come before you and use my three minutes of citizen comments every meeting.

I want to let you know that 15 minutes divided by three minutes equals five meetings that you will have to listen to me bring this topic up again, and again, and again, and again, and again, and possibly more...who knows with me. You can ask **Councilwoman Monahan** and/or **Councilman Kimmons** about my tenacity. If I say I’m going to do something, I will do it. And every time I revisit this topic it will be one more chance for the media to print something less than positive about our town.

Honestly, I do not want to come before you month after month. I have better things to do with my time than coming here, but I feel strongly that things need to be addressed and I will do so. I want

to do this at a work session because that is where the Council has the opportunity to engage with citizens and their concerns, and I expect that some or all of you will have something to say to me on this topic.

I am not doing this at the behest of **Mr. Lassiter** or **Ms. Davis**. This is 100% my view as a citizen and ex-council person about the way this was handled and about many comments made by this Council and the mayor which were untrue, as far as I see it. I'm bringing this before the whole Council so that you can discuss and decide whether or not you would prefer one meeting, it can even be in the summer during the slow season, or five or more.

I know that my opinions and thoughts are not really of any consequence to you, but as a Council you should have the courtesy to listen and acknowledge that the process was poorly used and that the personal dislike of **Mr. Lassiter** and **Ms. Davis**, and even me, did play a role in the exercise of the application of the UDO. Thank you for your time."

Mayor Boies said she thinks there was some misunderstanding of the process. We no longer have committees, but we have liaisons. The committee of the whole can be used to getting this on the agenda. Items should be brought to the liaison and then a determination will be made as to moving it forward to the entire Council. She advised **Ms. Bishop** that she would need to have a meeting with **Council Member Lowder** first.

Ms. Bishop said she can sit with **Mr. Lowder**, but it doesn't change the fact that she wants to speak to the entire Council. If this is not added to an agenda, she will be coming to the work sessions and speak before Council for three minutes for many meetings. **Mayor Boies** said citizens can come to as many meetings as they wish and speak to Council.

Consent Agenda:

- 1) Minutes of the March 4, 2024, Town Council Work Session
- 2) Minutes of the March 12, 2024, Regular Council Meeting
- 3) Minutes of the March 14, 2024, Joint meeting of the Town Council and Planning Commission
- 4) Minutes of the March 18, 2024, Work Session
- 5) Declaration of Surplus Items
- 6) Tax and Utility Account Write-Offs

Council Member Council Member Kimmons moved to approve the consent agenda; second by Council Member Council Member Monahan. The motion passed unanimously.

Old Business (Discussion and/or Action Items):

1) Water & Sewer Extension Policy

Description: Proposed policy to define how extensions of the Town of Strasburg's water and sewer system main lines will be made.

Mayor Boies said this has been discussed with Council at several Work Sessions. She asked if there were any questions.

Council Member Lowder moved to approve the Water and Sewer Extension Policy as presented; second by Vice Mayor McCornyn. With no further discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

2) Dunmore Rezoning (discussion continued from March 12, 2024)

Description: Update on the proposal since the last meeting.

DP&PS Otis gave an update on this possible rezoning. The applicant is not ready to move forward at this time. He wants to meet with some of the homeowners who had concerns. They feel they will have something to bring back next month.

Council Member Stover thanked **DP&PS Otis** for coming out on a Sunday to meet with the HOA

Board.

3) Proposed FY2025 Budget

Description: Discussion on proposed FY2025 Budget.

Mayor Boies thanked all for the hard work that had gone into getting us to this point with the budget.

Council Member Monahan said she and **Council Member Stover** met with **Town Manager Coggsdale** and **Director of Finance Fletcher** and discussed what they feel comfortable with. They think Council has done very well with the General Fund being the fund that has a deficit as this is the fund where we make the most money. It was thought we could have a Finance Retreat where various things such as merit pay could be discussed, as well as utility taxes. She is advocating using the surplus in the Water Fund to offset the amount in the Sewer Fund and using the remainder to balance the General Fund with the extra coming from the General Fund Reserve Balance. She does not want to raise taxes at this time, but after the retreat, if we find we must raise taxes, we could then tell citizens exactly why the taxes have to be raised.

Town Manager Coggsdale said his goal is to have agreement from Council on the advertisement for the Public Hearing which will be held on May 6. He reviewed the options that Council can do to balance the budget.

The first question is if Council is willing to utilize the remaining overage in the Water Fund to balance the General Fund after balancing the Sewer Fund with the Water Fund balance. **Council Member Monahan** has indicated she would like to utilize the Water Fund and the General Fund Reserve to balance the General Fund.

Council Member Kimmons proposed a change. He is interested in changing how much employees would be paying for health insurance for employees, which could put more in employees' pockets. He would like to move to a 60%/40% split which would put us more in line with Woodstock. He said this would be an increase of \$136,500 to the budget and would be putting \$330 dollars every month into the pockets of employees when they are paying for a family plan; it would put \$182 into an employee's pocket that is paying for a dual plan.

Council Member Monahan asked how many employees would benefit from this. **Town Manager Coggsdale** said we have 63 health insured budgeted; everyone enrolled in health care would benefit from this. We offer the KA250 and the KA1000. All are offered the single, dual, and family plans. The KA250 costs were given for each level with comprehensive dental.

Council Member Stover said federal law states that employers must cover 50% of coverage and we are way above this. Every person is in a different situation. He would like to see if there are other plans we can offer up. At the individual rate, it isn't bad what an employee has to pay, but it is high for the family plans.

Council Member Woodson asked what the cost would be to pay 100%. He knows it is a big number, but his understanding was that prior to 2013, the town covered 100% of the cost. It was noted that the town covered 100% of the employee only plan.

Mayor Boies asked how we could get the \$136,000. **Council Member Kimmons** said we could lower the COLA to 3% and still be giving a raise that is comparable to the CPI (Consumer Price Index) and still put more money in the pockets of the employees by giving them this reduction.

Town Manager Coggsdale said a 5% COLA is not the same for each employee, but every percent is roughly \$47,000.

Mayor Boies said we are talking of retention. Would this help; she doesn't know the answer to

this.

Council Member Woodson asked how many people we have lost. **Town Manager Coggsdale** said **Chief Sager** has brought forth problems with retention. **Town Manager Coggsdale** doesn't think we are losing people in droves. The discussion we had last week with grade scale was for recruitment. Paying good benefits is a retention issue. We need to decide which is more important, recruitment or retention. He noted that insurance is paid a month in advance.

Council Member Kimmons said we would have approximately \$30,000 more in deficit. He went over different scenarios of how to cover this. **Council Member Monahan** said this would be a good topic for a retreat. She said since the five percent COLA has been discussed during the last few budget discussions, if we decided to change the COLA, what would this do to the employees and how would they feel. **Town Manager Coggsdale** said if you were on the lower end of the pay scale, the employee would like the insurance side. If you are on the higher side of the pay scale, you would want the COLA. It is a very individualized question.

Council Member Monahan asked how many are on the family plan. Numbers were given for each category.

- Single: 26
- Dual: 13
- Family: 24

Council Member Kimmons said we don't have to give a COLA and he gave numbers of how much more people could make with his plan. He said those on the single plan would not see an increase. **Town Manager Coggsdale** gave numbers for what some might see in their paycheck.

Mayor Boies asked for individual thoughts. She thinks the decision is, Option 1, to not do anything and save the bigger discussion for the retreat; Option 2, reduce COLA to 3% in order to enhance health insurance for employees on dual or family plans; Option 3, tax increase. **Council Member Kimmons** said we wouldn't have to increase taxes as the additional amount could be pulled from the General Fund Reserve.

Vice Mayor McCoryn said **Council Member Kimmons** is proposing to reduce the COLA to 3% and add to the deficit or reduce the COLA to 3% and raise taxes by 2.5%.

Mayor Boies said we could advertise a 2.5% tax increase and then think about this.

Council Member Monahan said she doesn't want to go for a tax increase at this late hour. We need facts and point people in the right direction.

Mayor Boies asked what the Council feels about a tax increase. **Town Manager Coggsdale** said if it is decided not to do a tax increase, then we would have to advertise on how to balance the budget. Decisions on COLA and insurance can be made later, but we need to know what to advertise for a balanced budget.

Vice Mayor McCoryn would like to advertise the 2.5% increase in taxes.

Council Member Hooser said we need to be a better employer. We used to cover a lot more of insurance for employees. This is the same conversation over and over. This is a draining conversation. When you pull from a fund balance reserve, we don't have a balanced budget. We are failing. How much do we have to raise taxes? COLA should be, at a minimum, the rate of inflation so they are not taking a pay cut. Any ideas you have for this town, we will never get the way we do things. We are getting a police department, but using grant funds for it. Streetscape came with a grant. A new pool would cost us. He isn't going to vote for a budget where we draw from the reserve. That is a failed budget. He wants to see a 4% COLA but he won't pay for a budget

when we draw from reserve. We should talk about the budget every single month.

Council Member Lowder said he would say no to a tax increase; exhaust all other options first. He does not want to advertise for a tax increase.

Council Member Hooser asked what is conservative by running on a deficit. Conservatism is not to have as low taxes as possible; conservatism is making sure you aren't spending more money than you need to. We aren't bringing in enough money. We used to bring in more. Every time we have a reassessment, we lower taxes. This is not a conservative value. Deficit spending is a liberal thing to do.

The consensus was to not advertise a tax increase.

Town Manager Coggsdale said we need to decide how to get the \$59,622 off the books. **Council Member Monahan** said the Water and Sewer are enterprise funds and work hand-in-hand. Would all be willing to use the Water Fund overage to balance the Sewer Fund. **Town Manager Coggsdale** said this could be transferred out. **All were in favor of doing this.**

Town Manager Coggsdale said we would have \$81,273 left and this could be used toward balancing the General Fund. **All were in favor of doing this.**

This would leave a deficit of \$59,622. **Mayor Boies** said we either need to cut the budget or take it out of reserve. **Town Manager Coggsdale** said if we aren't using the \$59,622 out of reserve, we would need to cut the budget now. Things can be changed after the advertisement. For the advertisement, we have to say if we are raising taxes or not and the budget has to balance. We can advertise more and use less, but we can't advertise for less and need more. Things can be moved around after the public hearing.

Consensus was to take out of the reserve.

Mayor Boies said we need to find out where we are as far as the health insurance and other issues facing the budget.

Town Manager Coggsdale said if we advertise the budget of \$16,219,107, we can't go higher. The things we were talking about earlier could change this.

Council Member Kimmons said we should advertise a \$16,300,000 budget.

Mayor Boies said we need to make sure we have the money if we want to change the COLA and the health insurance.

Town Manager Coggsdale said the problem is currently the expenses don't show the additional health insurance, but he said we should be able to work around that.

Mayor Boies said maybe we should just advertise a budget with a \$50,000 addition. The transfer would be \$109,000. We would have to build in an expenditure of \$50,000.

Mayor Boies said it sounds like a majority will benefit from this, but there are still a third of employees who would not benefit from the lower COLA. She thinks it is important to hear from employees on this.

Council Member Kimmons wanted to make the budget \$16,300,000 to make sure we have a buffer. We would not have to use that much. **Town Manager Coggsdale** said the transfer would be \$145,015. He said earlier it was \$109,000 but this increase would be more than the switch.

Mayor Boies said this would just be a buffer.

Consensus was to advertise the budget at \$16,300,000.

Staff will have to work to break this down. It might not be accurate to say all the money will come from the General Fund reserve.

Council Member Woodson asked why the water and sewer fund are in the negative? Do we not charge enough? **Town Manager Coggsdale** said the water fund has a surplus of \$156,000 which is for operations. We will need to start talking about what is needed for CIP and what we want to allocate for this. He discussed more on the amounts for operations and what is needed for CIP.

Council Member Kimmons moved to set a **Public Hearing for the proposed FY2025 Budget, Rates and Fees and the proposed FY2025 CIP for Monday, May 6, 2024, at 7 p.m. with a budget of 16,300,00 with no tax increase. Second by Council Member Lowder. With no further discussion, the motion passed with one nay (Council Member Hooser).**

New Business:

Reports:

Departmental Reports:

*****Complete reports are provided in the Council packet which is available on the town's website at www.strasburgva.com. Reports are also found on the "Meetings" page of the website (<https://www.strasburgva.com/meetings>).*****

DP&PS Otis welcomed new employee **Monica McClure** as a Zoning Technician. She is catching on quickly and proving to be a big help.

DP&PS Otis gave a packet to Council for the joint meeting on April 23.

Council Member Monahan asked if we could say we absolutely don't want a certain use in town. **Town Attorney Helm** said it would be an individual discussion on what they don't want. **Council Member Monahan** said she was talking about vape shops. Could we limit the number.

DP&PS Otis said he thinks it would be unlawful to just say vape shops and it would have to be smoke shops. **Town Attorney Helm** said you must have a valid purpose for restricting a use. Just because you don't like it doesn't mean others agree. They are valid industries.

Council Member Woodson said he knows there are taxes on tobacco products, but it was noted the taxes are on cigarettes only and not on vape products.

It was stated that **Melody Nixon** started working on a full-time basis on Monday, April 8.

The Town and County Dinner will be on May 8 at the Civil War Museum. Please, RSVP by April 24.

Council will be serving the Community Dinner on May 1 at St. Paul Lutheran Church.

Town Manager Coggsdale thanked all for the discussion tonight and there will be further discussion before the adoption.

Town Attorney Helm said we got the order entered on the South Loudoun Street matter. This grants the town judgement in the case.

Special Committee Reports:

Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission: Council Member Kimmons said they met

last month with a presentation on a service that doesn't pertain to Strasburg or Shenandoah County which is broadband internet. Shenandoah County chose not to participate in this.

Council Member Items:

Council Member Stover was thinking of his grandfathers when he looked at the date of today. They are the ones who turned him onto his love for the Civil War. Today, April 9th marks the 159th anniversary of General Lee's surrender in Appomattox. He reminded all that 620,000 people lost their lives during this war. He had family that fought on both sides. His grandfathers wanted him to know about the war so he would know that this was fought for land.

Both of his grandfathers served in World War II, one in the European theater and the other in the Pacific theater. One was a republican and the other a democrat and they both helped to raise him so he hopes this makes him a little more rounded.

He read a quote from a soldier, Ray Leopold,

“In the process of this battle we took about 18 or 19 German prisoners. A young man approximately 24 years of age turned to me, and in a voice completely accent-free, he said, "Where are you from?" I said, "I'm from the United States." "Where... in the United States?" "The Northeast," I said. "Where Northeast?" I said, "I'm from Connecticut." "Where in Connecticut?" He was persisting. I said "Yes, I'm from Waterbury, Connecticut." "Ah, yes," he said, "Waterbury, at the junction of the Naugatuck and Mad Rivers." Now you have to know a bit about the area. The Naugatuck is a fairly substantial river, but the Mad River is a little stream that you can jump across without any trouble. Anyone who knew this... I was puzzled. I said, "How did you possibly know that?" He said, "I was in training for the administration." "The administration of what?" I said. He said, "The administration of the territories." My blood ran cold. I couldn't imagine that Hitler, in his wildest imagination, not only had figured he practically had Europe in his grasp, but he also figured that he would control America, too.”

He continued by saying he has always loved military history. This is fought for land. We are here and can freely disagree because of the military. He has loved studying military his entire life, but could not serve because of cerebral palsy, he could not meet the physical requirements. His grandfathers told him to serve where he can. He did not want to serve on Council and he tells people that he does not dislike being on Council. On Council, you will run into people who are mean and unreasonable, but most are nice. He is thankful for his grandfathers and those who serve in the military.

Mayor Boies thanked Council Member Stover for his service.

Council Member Hooser said he has a fund for his daughter, Jasper. This is her college fund. He considers this to be *her* money. What he compares this budget that we are talking about now, is that if he needed money to make repairs on his house or a special project, instead of picking up extra hours for himself, he would take it from his daughter. He feels this would be irresponsible of him. This budget is irresponsible.

Closed meeting:

Adjournment:

Being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 8:44 p.m.