

CHRISTIANSBURG TOWN COUNCIL
CHRISTIANSBURG, MONTGOMERY CO., VA.
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
JUNE 27, 2023 – 7:00 P.M.

A REGULAR MEETING OF THE CHRISTIANSBURG TOWN COUNCIL, MONTGOMERY COUNTY, CHRISTIANSBURG, VA. WAS HELD AT CHRISTIANSBURG TOWN HALL, 100 EAST MAIN STREET, CHRISTIANSBURG, VIRGINIA, ON JUNE 27, 2023, AT 7:00 P.M.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor D. Michael Barber; Vice-Mayor Samuel M. Bishop; Johana Hicks; Tanya Hockett (via phone); Casey Jenkins; Henry Showalter; Tim Wilson

ADMINISTRATION PRESENT: Town Manager Randy Wingfield; Assistant Town Manager Andrew Warren; Town Attorney Reid Broughton; Director of Public Relations (Fill-in for Clerk of Council/Executive Assistant) Christina Edney; Finance Director Valerie Tweedie; Public Works Director Jim Lancianese; Superintendent of Public Works, Streets Travis Moles; Chief of Police Mark Sisson; Engineering Director Mike Kelley; Director of Parks and Recreation Brad Epperley; Small Business Solutions Manager Amanda Hebert

REGULAR MEETING

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Barber announced that Public Relations Director Christina Edney would be filling in for Town Clerk Tracy Heinline and Councilwoman Hockett has asked to join the meeting via telephone.

Councilwoman Hicks made a motion to allow Councilwoman Hockett to join the meeting via phone, seconded by Councilman Jenkins. Council voted as follows: Bishop – Aye; Hicks – Aye; Hockett – Abstain; Jenkins – Aye; Showalter – Aye; Wilson – Aye.

A. Moment of Reflection

B. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Councilman Bishop.

II. ADJUSTMENT OF THE AGENDA

No adjustments to the agenda

III. PUBLIC HEARINGS

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Approval of Minutes of June 13, 2023
- B. Monthly Bill List
- C. Resolution Recognizing July 2023 as Parks and Recreation Month

Councilman Wilson made a motion to approve the consent agenda as presented, seconded by Councilwoman Hicks. Council voted as follows: Bishop – Aye; Hicks – Aye; Hockett – Aye; Jenkins – Aye; Showalter – Aye; Wilson – Aye.

V. INTRODUCTIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

No introductions and presentations

VI. CITIZEN COMMENTS

Charles Robins, 1720 Old Farm Village Road, Apt 22, expressed concern for the lack of discussion concerning housing issues in Christiansburg. Mr. Robins stated that housing in Christiansburg was expensive and most in the community could not afford to pay the high rent. He added that he had spoken to Mayor Barber but has yet to hear anything from other Councilmembers. Mr. Robins named numerous organizations that the Town could reach out to for assistance. He expressed that in case he loses his apartment, he has taken out loans to stay in a hotel and fears he will not be able to pay those loans back. Mr. Robins spoke about the increase in homelessness in the community and how it was difficult for them to find employment since they do not have a home address to place on a job application.

VII. COMMITTEE REPORTS

- A. Street Committee Report/Recommendation (Bishop, Hockett)
 - 1. Memorandum of Agreement for Traffic Signal Coordination Program between Virginia Department of Transportation and Town of Christiansburg.

Engineering Director Mike Kelley brought before Council a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for approval between the Town and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). Mr. Kelley explained the purpose of the MOA pertained to part of the I-81 corridor improvement plan. He explained that if there was an incident on the interstate, the agreement allows VDOT and the Town of Christiansburg to respond to highway incidents, improve operation of routes, put in place infrastructure to monitor conditions, and would require upgrading Town-owned equipment and systems. Mr. Kelley explained that VDOT would cover the cost and the agreement would allow VDOT to take control of the strategic route and

will effectively and efficiently move traffic through the Town to avoid closure on the interstate when accidents happen. Mr. Kelley added that the length of the agreement was a 5-year initial agreement, and the agreement would auto renew and explained that the contract could be terminated with 90 days' notice by either party.

Councilwoman Hicks questioned if the Town would continue to maintain the traffic lights in Town. Mr. Kelley explained that the Town would maintain the Town-owned traffic lights and VDOT would make any upgrades needed.

Mr. Showalter questioned the end result for the Town and how it would improve the process. Mr. Kelley explained that when there is a wreck on I-81 they would adjust the routes through the town to improve traffic. He explained that VDOT would be communicating with traffic control in Salem and as soon as the incident happens, Public Works would be contacted. Mr. Kelley added that VDOT has assessed inventory for the upgraded traffic lights needed in Town and would allow ingress and egress to traffic at lights.

Councilman Bishop made a motion to approve the Street Committee's recommendation to approve the Memorandum of Agreement for Traffic Signal Coordination Program between Virginia Department of Transportation and Town of Christiansburg, seconded by Councilwoman Hockett. Council voted as follows: Bishop – Aye; Hicks – Aye; Hockett – Aye; Jenkins – Aye; Showalter – Aye; Wilson – Aye.

VIII. DISCUSSION AND ACTION BY MAYOR AND COUNCIL

A. School Resource Officers

Mayor Barber explained that the Town has requested several meetings with the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors to discuss School Resource Officers, but the County has yet to provide a date. Mr. Barber added that he was not willing to jeopardize the well-being and safety of the children in the schools by not having resource officers. Councilman Wilson agreed with Mayor Barber and expressed that the contract they were presented was lacking and needed a more thorough review. Mr. Wilson added it was disappointing the County has failed to speak with Council and the Town did not want the officers taken out of the schools.

Councilman Showalter expressed that Council still had time to decide since it was summer, and schools were not in session. Mr. Showalter questioned who wrote the contract and noted that the Sheriff does not control funding for these officers. Mr. Showalter suggested a work session to discuss the subject further. He expressed that the contract showed loopholes and should be reviewed further.

Councilwoman Hicks expressed agreement with Mr. Showalter and noted there was still time to make a decision. Mrs. Hicks also questioned where the contract came from and noted that Council was waiting for a response from the County Administrator for a date

instead of a conversation between the Sheriff and the Police Chief. She expressed how important the children in the schools were and stated she would like to wait to see if the County would reach out before making a final decision.

Councilman Bishop noted that four of the Board of Supervisors expressed they would not fund officers in Town schools. Mr. Bishop expressed that even though he did not have children in school he was concerned for the safety of children in schools as well as the school staff. He added that he had originally voted no but expressed that now he was undecided and stated he thought the agreement was between the Police Chief and the Sheriff.

Mayor Barber voiced that he had instructed Police Chief Sisson to have the contract available in case there was a discussion there would be something to review. He added the agreement was not a contract to place the officers in the schools as Council would need to reassign the officers back to SRO positions and the Town would have an understanding about performance within those schools.

Police Chief Mark Sisson stated he had drafted the document as a result of Mayor Barber asking for an agreement. He added that he had sent the contract to Town Attorney Broughton for review.

Town Attorney Broughton expressed concern that the provided contract was unclear what it means to assign a police officer to a school and questioned when they would be present in the school. Mayor Barber expressed that the Town knows when they would provide officers in the schools but at this point was unsure when the County would provide officers.

Councilman Bishop noted that personality conflicts between the two parties needed to be put aside and the focus needed to be on the students and staff in the schools. Councilman Jenkins agreed with Mr. Bishop and expressed that aside from the contract he was not sure the Town was comfortable pulling officers from the schools on July 1st.

Councilwoman Hockett noted there could be several upgrades to the agreement, including dates. She added that signing the agreement meant the Town would not request funding for the officers placed. Mrs. Hockett expressed that her number 1 goal was to have officers in the schools and maintain the relationships between them and the students. Mrs. Hockett voiced her concern as to what would happen after that process and if the County would support the Town in the future. Mayor Barber noted that he planned to ask the Board of Supervisors next year for the same funding, including salary increases.

Councilman Showalter expressed concern that the County would not fund the officers and noted that pulling Town officers out of the schools in 90 days would not work. He expressed that if the officers were placed in the schools, then they should be kept there throughout the school year. He added that there should be a deadline of when the Sheriff plans to provide County officers. Mr. Showalter questioned the other three schools in the Town. Mayor Barber explained that the Town had covered the cost and positions of the three schools previously.

Councilman Showalter questioned the Town's officers' schedules in the schools. Chief Sisson explained there was a full-time officer at the high school, a full-time officer at the middle school, and one officer that divides their time between the two elementary schools and the primary school.

Councilman Wilson expressed that Council should schedule a work session to discuss this subject. Mr. Wilson added there was more to just having an officer in the schools such as the DARE program and accreditation. He added that if Town Council's issue was the wording in the contract, then a work session should take place to go over the contract so it could be presented to the County.

Councilman Showalter made a motion to table the discussion of School Resource Officers and schedule a work session to discuss, seconded by Councilman Wilson. Council voted as follows: Bishop – Aye; Hicks – Aye; Hockett – Aye; Jenkins – Nay; Showalter – Aye; Wilson – Nay.

Council agreed to July 6th at 5:30 p.m. for a work session to discuss the MOU agreement. Councilwoman Hicks would not be available to meet.

Mayor Barber suggested the Town Attorney and Town Manager discuss the contract with Police Chief Sisson and make the required changes. Mayor Barber inquired if Council would like to include Sheriff Partin in the discussion. Council agreed to not have the County Sheriff included in the meeting.

B. Discussion of Blacksburg – Christiansburg Montgomery Tourism Office funding (Jenkins and Hockett)

Councilman Jenkins stated that the Town had placed the Tourism Office on notice effective July 1, 2022 for one year to make improvements to their website and further include the Town of Christiansburg in brochures, etc. Mr. Jenkins expressed that he would like Council to revisit that decision as to how the Economic Development funds that were currently in the budget were allocated effective FY 23-24. Mr. Jenkins added that he felt it was important to declare that he was an employee of the organization that receives a benefit of the Tourism Office. Mr. Jenkins declared a personal interest and expressed that in working with the COIA office, his employer is part of a group of three or more organizations that receive a promotional benefit from the Tourism Office which would allow him to take place in the vote in a fair way. He added that he would submit the declaration in writing to be recorded in the final meeting minutes.

Councilman Showalter questioned Mr. Jenkins abstaining from the discussion last year due to a conflict of interest. Councilman Jenkins answered that he did not abstain but instead voted for it. He explained that since he has been informed by COIA that he can vote in good conscious.

Councilwoman Hicks questioned if there was a current contract between the Tourism Office and the Montgomery County Museum concerning the property on Pepper Street.

Councilman Jenkins answered that the contract was to be terminated on June 30, 2023 and expressed that they have vacated the premises. He added that he would be voting on the funding for the upcoming fiscal year and that the museum considers their fiscal year a calendar year.

Councilman Showalter questioned if the museum had received funds from the Tourism Office this calendar year. Councilman Jenkins expressed that the Tourism Office had leased the property on Pepper Street from the Montgomery County Museum and included that the funding goes to a third-party property management that funds the museum until June 30, 2023. He added that the Tourism Office had not supported the Museum in a direct way, but they had promoted the region and encouraged individuals to visit.

Councilman Wilson explained that his position of funding the Tourism Office had not changed. He expressed that he felt the Tourism Office had not produced what was asked of them, therefore he would vote against the funding.

Councilman Showalter questioned what the Tourism Office has provided for the Town facilities since the Town gave them notice. Town Manager Wingfield answered that there had been promotional materials provided and a new website activated. Mr. Wingfield expressed that he hoped they would activate the Sports Tourism Council and meet with them regularly. He added that they had not met in some time.

Councilwoman Hicks expressed that when the Tourism Office was in the Christiansburg location, she did not see a return in the funds given to them and expressed that she did not see that changing. Councilwoman Hicks stated that the Town was still a part of tourism and the County would be paying to be a part of tourism as well. Mrs. Hicks added that she thought the Town could do other things with that money instead and suggested investing it in the Town.

Councilwoman Hockett expressed that she supported this item on the agenda because she felt strongly that if the Town pulls out of the regional tourism it would be hard to take the funding and maximize it for all the goals around tourism. She added that everyone would come closer to accomplishing that if they worked together as a region. Mrs. Hockett noted that although she supports staying with the Tourism Office, there were things the Town has asked for that still has not been provided. She added that her support of regional tourism did not mean she was willing to look the other way and say tourism could continue how it was and that a real discussion needed to take place around the direction of leadership. She concluded that she would look to Town Manager Wingfield and the leaders of the other member localities to come together and discuss moving forward in the Tourism Office.

Councilman Jenkins expressed that he appreciated Council holding tourism accountable as a regional tourism office. He added that one of the biggest concerns for him was passenger rail and explained that he could not see a reality where passenger rail comes to Christiansburg and the Town was not part of a regional tourism effort.

Councilwoman Hicks noted that the Town was not only part of the regional tourism but also the NRV Regional Commission and other groups that were able to help the Town accomplish those goals.

Councilman Jenkins made a motion to continue funding the Blacksburg – Christiansburg Montgomery Tourism Office, seconded by Councilwoman Hockett. Council voted as follows: Bishop – Aye; – Hicks – Nay; Hockett – Aye; Jenkins – Aye; Showalter – Nay; Wilson – Nay. Mayor Barber voted Aye to break the tie vote and continue funding for the Tourism Office.

C. Resolution to set real estate tax rate for calendar 2023

Councilman Showalter noted he would not be supporting a real estate increase for the citizens and expressed he felt the Town could have made it a zero net process this year.

Councilwoman Hicks expressed that she wanted lower taxes and that she felt any funds left over should go towards the general fund to help pay for other items, such as upcoming infrastructure projects.

Councilman Wilson made a motion to approve the resolution to set the real estate tax rate for CY 2023, seconded by Councilman Jenkins. Council voted as follows: Bishop – Aye; Hicks – Aye; Hockett – Aye; Jenkins – Aye; Showalter – Nay; Wilson – Aye.

D. Resolution to set personal property tax rate for calendar 2023

Councilman Bishop made a motion to approve the resolution to set the personal property tax rate for CY 2023, seconded by Councilwoman Hicks. Council voted as follows: Bishop – Aye; Hicks – Aye; Hockett – Aye; Jenkins – Aye; Showalter – Aye; Wilson – Aye.

E. Resolution to set water, sewer, and garbage rates for FY 2023-24

Councilwoman Hicks expressed concern for the increase of rates for Town citizens and noted that she would be voting against the rate increase.

Councilman Showalter asked if the Town was still fulfilling the commitment to the Water Authority capital improvement. Town Manager Wingfield answered that the Town was still paying the Water Authority, and that construction should be complete by the end of 2023.

Councilman Wilson made a motion to approve the resolution to set water, sewer, and garbage rates for FY 2023-24, seconded by Councilman Bishop. Council voted as follows: Bishop – Aye; Hicks – Nay; Hockett – Aye; Jenkins – Aye; Showalter – Aye; Wilson – Aye.

F. Resolution to approve the FY 2023-24 budget

Councilwoman Hockett expressed that there had been enormous community support for funding the Montgomery Museum and Wonder Universe and questioned if there were any other comments concerning the subject.

Mayor Barber noted the funding for both museums had been tabled and explained the figures that would be voted on in the budget did not include museum funding. He added that there could be a budget amendment in the future if Council desired. Mr. Wingfield reminded Council that if the item was a small percentage of the budget the Town would not have to advertise or have a public hearing.

Councilwoman Hicks noted the increase for Town employees in the budget and expressed that she appreciated all the hard work from Town employees.

Councilman Showalter stated it was important to be sensible with the real estate taxes that effects the Town residents and added that the Town lowering the rate per \$100 in value, would still make citizens pay more in real estate taxes. He noted that he had suggested to Council that instead of a possible 9% total cost-of-living and merit increase for Town employees, Council could lower the cost-of-living and merit to 2% each. He expressed that he would not support the approval of the budget due to this.

Councilman Bishop made a motion to approve the resolution to approve the FY 2023-24 budget, seconded by Councilman Wilson. Council voted as follows: Bishop – Aye; Hicks – Aye; Hockett – Aye; Jenkins – Aye; Showalter – Nay; Wilson – Aye.

G. Resolution to appropriate the funds for FY 2023-24 budget

Councilman Wilson made a motion to approve the resolution to appropriate the funds for the FY 2023-24 budget, seconded by Councilman Jenkins. Council voted as follows: Bishop – Aye; Hicks – Aye; Hockett – Aye; Jenkins – Aye; Showalter -Aye; Wilson – Aye.

H. Town of Christiansburg's US Department of Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grant 2023 Annual Action Plan

Mayor Barber explained this was funding had been used for sidewalk improvements within a certain restricted area of Town based on economic conditions. Assistant Town Manager Andrew Warren added that the location was in the Park district bordered by E. Main Street, Roanoke Street, and Depot Street. He added that the project does include an emergency home repair program that was being developed with Habitat for Humanity which would service residents throughout the community.

Councilman Wilson made a motion to approve the Town of Christiansburg's US Department of Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grant 2023 Annual Action Plan, seconded by Councilman Bishop. Council voted as follows: Bishop – Aye; Hicks – Aye; Hockett – Aye; Jenkins – Aye; Showalter -Aye; Wilson – Aye.

IX. STAFF REPORTS

A. Town Manager

Mr. Wingfield reported that a Conditional Use Permit public hearing would be set for August 8, 2023 for 21 townhouses located on 2.148 acres on Montgomery Street, between Church Street and Lucas Street. Mr. Wingfield also reported that July 4th festivities would be held downtown from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and the fireworks event would take place at 9:15 p.m. He added that the Montgomery County League of Women Voters were requesting a Council Candidate Forum to be held at Town Hall on October 12, 2023 at 7:00 p.m. that he planned to authorize. Mr. Wingfield concluded that he did not have a definite date for the Christiansburg Huckleberry Park but that he hoped it would be in July. He added that delays were due to a late arrival of an electrical panel for the field lights and now they are working on finishing touches.

Councilwoman Hicks questioned if there would be a fence around the stormwater pond at the new park. Mr. Wingfield explained there would be a fence on the tire side of the pond.

B. Town Attorney – no report

C. Other Staff

Director of Parks and Recreation Brad Epperley expressed congratulations to the youth baseball and softball teams. He explained that the 10-U Cal Ripken team won the district tournament and would be traveling to Wise, Virginia for the state tournament. He added that the 10-U softball team also won their district tournament and would be traveling to Manassas, Virginia this weekend for their state tournament. Mr. Epperley also added that the 12-U baseball team was in the state tournament as well and they would be participating in the Cal Ripken state tournament the Town would be hosting at Harkrader Sports Complex on July 16th.

X. COUNCIL REPORTS

Councilwoman Hicks reported that the Central Business Committee would meet again on July 25th. Mrs. Hicks requested Council's opinion on the façade grant and noted that when she drove through Christiansburg, she noticed the difference the grants have made on properties in the downtown area. Mrs. Hicks expressed she would welcome ideas pertaining to smaller grants for businesses and making sure there is no discrimination against other businesses that are not downtown. She expressed that she would like to hear from the citizens as well as business owners in the community. Mrs. Hicks added that the Agency on Aging met today and noted that the meetings were lengthy but very productive.

Councilwoman Hockett expressed appreciation to Council for allowing her to join the meeting via phone.

Councilman Wilson reported that he and Councilman Jenkins had met with Small Business Solutions Manager Amanda Hebert. Mr. Wilson explained that she had been in

this position for 3 months and the work she had accomplished was phenomenal. He added that in the next month Mrs. Hebert would present to Council a 10-week program that teaches potential business owners how to write their own business plan. Mr. Wilson noted that at the end of the 10 weeks, participants would present their plan to a panel and have the opportunity to receive grant funding which would come from donations.

Councilman Jenkins agreed with Mr. Wilson and noted that Mrs. Hebert has done a fantastic job concerning the groundwork and future plans surrounding vacancies and occupancies in the area and he looks forward to the progress that can be made with small businesses. Mr. Jenkins also reported that Central Business had received feedback from last year regarding the façade grants and would be making several of those changes.

Councilwoman Hicks expressed appreciation to Mrs. Hebert for the information that was sent out to Councilmembers concerning her efforts with small businesses. Mrs. Hicks asked Mrs. Hebert to send her information on what makes a small business verses a large business.

Mayor Barber suggested that any questions concerning small businesses should be referred to Mrs. Hebert and noted the many compliments and positive feedback he had received from the community.

Councilman Showalter addressed Mr. Robins public comment concerning subsidized housing and expressed that he felt there should be a conversation or work session to wade through this issue. Mr. Showalter expressed that if 10% of your population was at poverty level then he felt your leaders should address the issue. Councilman Wilson stated that there is a group called New River Valley Community Action that was designed around addressing these types of issues and suggested inviting them to speak at an upcoming Council meeting. He noted that they had presented to the New River Valley Regional Commission last month. Councilman Showalter asked if Council would be willing to have a work session on the subject. He noted that he would bring this issue back up in the following months.

Mr. Showalter also added that he had talked about mass density property areas in the past and questioned if Council still wanted the Planning Commission to look at solid waste disposal or was there a recommendation to update the municipal code. Town Manager Wingfield explained that this issue was currently at the Planning Commission development subcommittee level. Mr. Warren explained there were several items for townhouses that planning staff had been reviewing and unfortunately the review has not been fast due to staffing shortages. He added that currently code enforcement had been a higher priority in the Planning department. Mr. Wingfield noted that staff could try to expedite an answer on that subject and move the other townhouse issues to the side.

Councilman Showalter questioned where staff was concerning Town visitor maps. Mrs. Edney noted that the new Town visitor maps had gone to the printer today.

Councilwoman Hicks agreed a work session should take place concerning subsidized housing but also encouraged Mr. Robins and others in the community to come up with helpful solutions. Mrs. Hicks expressed that contractors were building to rent not to sell, and rent has increased. Mr. Warren added that one thing Council should be aware of was that if you were working with New River Community Action, there were block grant funds available and noted that around 20 families had been helped thus far through them. He expressed that there were other affordable housing initiatives happening regionally that could be exciting to consider as well.

XI. OTHER BUSINESS

XII. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to bring before Council, Mayor Barber adjourned the meeting at 8:28 p.m.

Christina J. Edney
Christina Edney, Public Relations Director

D. Michael Barber
D. Michael Barber, Mayor