

**CHRISTIANSBURG TOWN COUNCIL
CHRISTIANSBURG, MONTGOMERY CO., VA.
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
AUGUST 21, 2024 – 6:30 P.M.**

A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CHRISTIANSBURG TOWN COUNCIL, MONTGOMERY COUNTY, CHRISTIANSBURG, VA. WAS HELD AT CHRISTIANSBURG TOWN HALL, 100 EAST MAIN STREET, CHRISTIANSBURG, VIRGINIA, ON AUGUST 21, 2024 AT 6:30 P.M.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: Samuel M. Bishop; Kim Bowman; Johana Hicks; Vice-Mayor Tanya Hockett; Casey Jenkins. COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT: Mayor D. Michael Barber; Tim Wilson

ADMINISTRATION PRESENT: Town Manager Randy Wingfield; Town Attorney Reid Broughton; Clerk of Council Tracy Heinline; Public Relations Director Christina Bolt; Fire Chief Billy Hanks; Rescue Chief Josh Settlege; Deputy Fire Marshal Curtis Whitt; Aquatics Director Terry Caldwell

WORK SESSION

I. Call To Order

Vice Mayor Hockett called the work session to order.

II. Adjustment of the Agenda

No adjustments to the agenda.

III. Discussion and Action by Mayor and Council

A. Tourism

Town Manager Wingfield gave a brief background of the Montgomery County – Blacksburg – Christiansburg Regional Tourism Office and explained the mutual agreement allows Montgomery County and the Towns of Blacksburg and Christiansburg to keep 15% of the 1.0% lodging tax collection for internal use for promotion of tourism. Mr. Wingfield added that the 2024-25 Town of Christiansburg's budget includes a contribution of \$179,445 to the Tourism Office. He also noted per contract a 12-month notification to withdraw from the Tourism Office was required. Mr. Wingfield clarified that Town Council voted on March 12, 2024 to provide such notice and a letter was sent via e-mail on March

13, 2024. Mr. Wingfield suggested the option of entering into a Closed Session for Council to discuss the legal details of the contract with the Town Attorney if desired by Council.

Councilman Bishop noted a misquote by The Roanoke Times concerning the Cure Agency, who previously presented to Council, stating the agency worked for the Town of Christiansburg. Mr. Bishop clarified the agency did not work for the Town. Public Relations Director Christina Bolt voiced she would reach out and ask for a correction or retraction.

Councilwoman Hicks expressed the current contract with Tourism was not working for the Town of Christiansburg and added it did not seem fair to charge the lodging taxes. Mrs. Hicks suggested lowering the lodging tax from 9% to 7%. She expressed that visitors look at the added extra charges when they book hotels. Mrs. Hicks noted that the Tourism's website is inaccurate as far as Christiansburg was concerned and would like to see a change.

Councilwoman Hockett asked the group what the most important aspects were pertaining to tourism. Councilwoman Hicks voiced that the gateways into Christiansburg were important, and they were a first look into our Town. Councilman Bishop felt the website was imperative and needed an update and felt advertising a clean maintained Town was just as important.

Councilwoman Hicks noted that when she visits other areas, most hotels advertise with booklets showing restaurants, coupons, hotels, etc. She added that even the Town's website could feature more of what the Town has to offer visitors. Councilman Bishop pointed out that both the Aquatic Center and Recreation Center have events that are open to the public and questioned how visitors were made aware of those events.

Councilwoman Hockett asked Council what they felt the pros of having internal management of tourism would be. Councilwoman Hicks reiterated that she felt lowering the lodging tax would make a difference. Councilwoman Hockett suggested the Town's Finance Director look into lowering the tax bracket and what that would look like. Mr. Wingfield clarified the Town currently collects 9% in lodging tax and 1% goes to Tourism. Mr. Wingfield stated that lodging tax was budgeted at a little over \$211,000 for 1%.

Councilman Bishop expressed the positive of handling tourism internally would be that internally we know what is in our area and should be advertised. Councilwoman Bowman added there would need to be a clear definition of what Council would want if an individual was hired to market tourism. Mrs. Bolt agreed with Mr. Bishop and expressed the Town would know the area better but also felt the goal for the Town was to have better communication and marketing efforts between the Town and the Tourism Office. Councilwoman Hockett suggested forming a steering committee comprised of individuals from the County, marketing advisors, along with the Aquatics and Parks and Recreation Directors to provide direction to the Tourism Office as to what is needed for advertising moving forward. Mrs. Bolt noted that moving forward the Public Relations Department could directly communicate with the Tourism Office what Council would like to see from them. Councilwoman Hicks expressed concern for issues with tourism for 13 years as well as hotel and restaurant representatives feeling discouraged.

Councilwoman Bowman expressed concern for the contract with the Tourism Office stating there were no metrics and no cap and noted that taxes will continue to increase, and the Town would continue to give money, but felt the Town was not receiving what they asked for. Mrs. Bolt stated she would reach out to other facilities to ask how they work with tourism. Councilwoman Hicks expressed she did not feel like it was solely the Town's job to market tourism and suggested in the future including the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce on tourism discussions. Mr. Wingfield noted that the Town generally places small advertisements in magazines such as the Virginia Travel Guide.

Councilwoman Hockett asked Council their thoughts on the pros of working with the Tourism Office. Councilman Jenkins noted his personal interest pertaining to Council's discussion regarding the Tourism Office stating his employer is part of a group of three or more organizations that receive a promotional benefit from the Tourism Office. Mr. Jenkins explained that if the Town backs out of tourism, the communication lines would be severed, and the Town would not have a say of what is advertised. He added that several marketing leveraging grants from the state would be lost as well. Councilwoman Bowman noted she utilizes Google when visiting other areas as well as guides and mentioned the Town could benefit from one. Councilwoman Hockett expressed that with search engines, the town you are looking for may not be the first to come up.

Town Attorney Reid Broughton discussed the contract with the Tourism Office and explained the agreement was signed on July 30, 2014. Mr. Broughton added that the initial term was for a total of 9 years and expired on July 19, 2023. He referenced Section 7 of the contract that stated a 12-month prior notification was required unless the governing body fails to appropriate funding for further participation. And Section 8 that stated in the event of termination of agreement, after the payment of all outstanding debts and costs, all remaining personal property shall be divided among the participating entities based upon contributions. Councilwoman Hicks questioned if Council could call for a budget amendment to un-appropriate funds and asked if the contract was still valid since Council felt what they had asked for was unsatisfactory delivered. Councilwoman Hockett questioned who was filling in since the Director of the Tourism Office was no longer employed there. Mr. Wingfield explained that County Administrator Angie Hill had volunteered Deputy County Administrator Chris Lawrence to fill in temporarily.

Council agreed to add Tourism to the upcoming Town Council agenda for further discussion and a vote.

B. Emergency Services Funding Requests for Montgomery County

Mr. Wingfield explained that Montgomery County provides equipment and funding for both Fire and Rescue response in Montgomery County, but the funds do not adequately cover the costs of providing services to the unincorporated portions since staffing has become an increasing expense in part due to a decline in volunteerism and training demands. Mr. Wingfield noted that the Revenue Recovery program helps fund a portion of staff but not all full-time staff cost. Mr. Wingfield added that Town Council had requested he speak with County Administrator Angie Hill. Mrs. Hill requested for a letter detailing the request so it could be passed to the Board of Supervisors. Council agreed a letter should be sent. Mr. Wingfield noted that in the letter he would like to mention the

plans concerning a new Fire and Rescue location, along with a request for funds for full-time Fire and Rescue staff. Fire Chief Billy Hanks expressed that it would be difficult to ask for funding for staff when there was currently no room for employees until a new location was built. He added that Rescue was well staffed currently but would need staff for the future second location.

Chief Hanks noted the two locations they were looking at for a new facility were on Peppers Ferry Road and Roanoke Street. He added that there are few volunteers that live near the Peppers Ferry corridor to respond to emergencies, but emergencies have increased in that area. He also explained career staff would be placed in the final location in order to man the facility. Chief Hanks noted that as the Town continues to grow in population, the services provided by the Town will continue to grow as well. He clarified that he felt the Peppers Ferry Road location beside the Huckleberry Park would be a better fit for an emergency services facility due to the growth in that area and the increased calls. Mr. Wingfield noted there could be available property further down Peppers Ferry Road, but the Town did not want to build in the County.


Councilwoman Bowman expressed she would like to see the portion of the mentioned Park property be used for what it was intended which was to pay towards the Huckleberry Park loan. Chief Hanks asked Council if they preferred the new facility be visible to a main road or corridor. Council answered they would like the building to have easy access for emergency vehicles, but it did not need to face a main corridor.

Mr. Wingfield suggested adding a closed session to the September 10th Council meeting for discussion and Council agreed.

IV. Adjournment

There being no further business to bring before Council, Vice-Mayor Hockett adjourned the meeting at 8:12 p.m.


Tracy Heinke, Clerk of Council


Tanya Hockett, Vice-Mayor