

**CHRISTIANSBURG TOWN COUNCIL
CHRISTIANSBURG, MONTGOMERY CO., VA.
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 18, 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 SEPTEMBER 18, 2024, AT 6:30 P.M.

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

ADMINISTRATION PRESENT: Town Manager Randy Wingfield; Clerk of Council Tracy Heinline; Public Relations Director Christina Bolt; Director of Aquatics Terry Caldwell; Director of Parks and Recreation Brad Epperley

WORK SESSION

I. Call To Order

Mayor Barber called the work session to order.

II. Adjustment of the Agenda

No adjustment to the agenda

III. Discussion and Action by Mayor and Council

A. Tourism

Mayor Barber noted a meeting had taken place between the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC), Interim Tourism Director Chris Lawrence, and Town staff.

Public Relations Director Christina Bolt spoke referencing gathered information for tourism and focusing on what works for the Town of Christiansburg as well as ideas for moving forward. Mrs. Bolt expressed that relationships and communication between the Tourism Office and Town staff need to be improved, an equitable representation of Christiansburg needs to be provided, and regular reporting presented to Town Staff and Council were crucial roles in moving forward with tourism.

Mrs. Bolt expressed that the Town does well bringing in visitors for swim meets and tournaments but would like tourism to advertise what those visitors can enjoy while staying in Christiansburg. She noted that Christiansburg has a significant amount of sports tourism, and the goal is to bring families in for sports visits and have them enjoy our restaurants, shops, and other amenities and have them return. Mrs. Bolt also added that while Montgomery County and the Town of Blacksburg have a heavy outdoor recreation attraction and there may be separate approaches for each locality, they can mutually benefit from each other when there are events.

Mrs. Bolt touched on the history of tourism and previous approaches that worked for the Town of Christiansburg. She spoke about quarterly meetings with directors and hotel representatives to oversee upcoming events and reporting of those events to show where people stayed, dined, and visited. Mrs. Bolt talked about a master calendar of community events to share with the public and providing physical and digital resources to visitors. She added that helpful and attractive tourism tables at bigger events such as major swim meets at the Aquatic Center and large Parks and Recreation tournaments would be a solid way to inform the public of area attractions.

Mrs. Bolt spoke about ways to measure visits to Christiansburg such as cellphone pings, website clicks, and reports from restaurants and hotels on event weekends. She noted that a tourism leader could coordinate connections with Town staff and hotel and restaurant representatives to plan event weekends as well as finding resources for grant opportunities.

Mrs. Bolt referenced a document provided by VTC that showed data and information of visits by origin based off the Christiansburg zip code and explained the information showed comparisons of visits from different areas and where those tourists visited within the New River Valley. She noted that the VTC suggested focusing on tourists in the middle range percentile due to other areas having those same visitors at the top of their percentile.

Councilman Wilson expressed appreciation for the information Mrs. Bolt provided and agreed that everything discussed is what the Town of Christiansburg needs in order to advertise tourism. Mr. Wilson questioned Council what tourism would look like if the decision would be to place tourism internally. Town Manager Wingfield explained there would need to be a new position formed with a salary and overhead, office space for the position, equipment, transportation, membership dues, trainings, and marketing. He reminded Council the current Tourism agreement was expired and suggested re-writing the agreement to satisfy Council. Mr. Wingfield offered within the agreement to add an expectation of a certain number of presentations to Council with data, meeting with Town directors, and maintaining virtual visitor centers and events.

Councilwoman Hicks expressed concern the Town of Christiansburg had not been represented for years by the Tourism Office and added there were other events taking place in the Town that are not advertised such as the movie theater, Uptown (New River Valley) Mall, and Depot Park. Mrs. Hicks questioned the return of investment over the years with tourism.

Councilman Jenkins referenced handouts that showed the return of investment for Montgomery County in the form of visitor spending and expressed his disagreement with Mrs. Hicks. Mr. Jenkins questioned Aquatics Director Terry Caldwell if there were issues from her perspective pre-Covid-19 with tourism. Mrs. Caldwell felt there were no issues and expressed that tourism now needs to be maintained from what worked in the beginning.

Councilman Wilson asked if Council could see what a new proposed agreement would look like. Mr. Wingfield answered yes, he would need to hear from Council what they would like to include in the agreement first.

Mayor Barber expressed that he had spoken with Chris Lawrence, Interim Tourism Director and Mr. Lawrence had made changes to the program and website recently and progress has been made better representing Christiansburg. Mrs. Bolt questioned if Council would like to have the Tourism Office give them an update on the changes they have made. The majority of Council answered yes. Mrs. Bolt suggested requesting an email from the Tourism Office with those updates.

Councilwoman Hicks suggested dividing the tourism funds between the Aquatic Center, Parks and Recreation, and the Public Relations Departments and give them an opportunity to provide information on tourism. Mrs. Bolt noted that her position in Public Relations differs from tourism, and she would need further education concerning tourism and stated she did not feel this was staff's expertise. Mayor Barber expressed that Town department heads have budgets and massive programs they oversee every day and do not have the time or experience to deal with tourism and felt that would be a waste of resources of Town staff.

Councilman Bishop stated he was not in favor of hiring another position internally and did not recommend pushing tourism onto Town staff. He expressed his issue with the Tourism Office was the lack of communication with the Town and that Christiansburg was not presented well. Mr. Bishop noted that in the future if the Town partners with the Tourism Office again, he would like to see them at Town Council meetings quarterly presenting updates. He thanked Mrs. Bolt for her presentation and expressed to Mr. Wingfield he would like to see a re-write of the tourism agreement.

Councilwoman Hockett urged Council to keep in mind that funding the Tourism Office is an investment and the return on that investment is growth of tax revenue. Mrs. Hockett expressed that if the surrounding locations pool the funding and consider the impact it would be far greater than what the Town could do individually. She added that placing tourism with department heads would be a mistake and felt also felt there needed to be rebuilt trust between Tourism and the Town. Mrs. Hockett explained that Council did not want to join the Regional Tourism Office as it has been the last few years, but instead wanted everyone working together as a team in a different way with different results with the Tourism Office.


Councilwoman Bowman appreciated the presentation and expressed that even though she had concerns about working with the Tourism Office to have it in-house seemed too

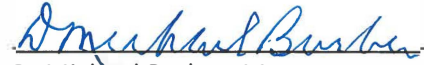
much of a workload for Town employees. Mrs. Bowman added that she had hoped for more recent data from the VTC but ultimately believes the Town would benefit from updating the original tourism agreement and add measures concerning leaving tourism if the Town was not represented well. Councilman Wilson agreed and suggested the Town update the exit process in the contract with the Tourism Office in case there was a need to pull out again. Councilwoman Hicks added that this discussion of tourism hopefully shows the citizens of Christiansburg that Council cares.

Mayor Barber noted that Christiansburg was somewhat of a staging area for visitors due to having the ability to get anyone to where they want to visit in the New River Valley. He added that the Town plays a major role in what the whole of the New River Valley needs and expressed the need to have small businesses advertised and on maps for visitors.

IV. Adjournment

There being no further business to bring before Council, Mayor Barber adjourned the meeting at 8:19 p.m.


Tracy Heinline, Clerk of Council


D. Michael Barber, Mayor