

**CHRISTIANSBURG TOWN COUNCIL
CHRISTIANSBURG, MONTGOMERY CO., VA.
MINUTES OF MAY 24, 2011 AT 6:00 P.M.**

A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CHRISTIANSBURG TOWN COUNCIL, MONTGOMERY COUNTY, CHRISTIANSBURG, VA. WAS HELD AT THE CHRISTIANSBURG TOWN HALL, 100 EAST MAIN STREET, CHRISTIANSBURG, VA, ON MAY 24, 2011 AT 7:30 P.M.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Richard G. Ballengee; Vice-Mayor Michael D. Barber; R. Cord Hall; Steve Huppert; Henry D. Showalter; Bradford J. Stipes; James W. Vanhoozier. ABSENT: None.

ADMINISTRATION PRESENT: Interim Town Manager Barry Helms; Clerk of Council Michele Stipes; Finance Director/Treasurer Valerie Tweedie; Assistant to the Town Manager Adam Carpenetti; Director of Engineering and Public Works Wayne Nelson; Planning Director Randy Wingfield; Director of Parks and Recreation Art Price; Director of Aquatics Terry Caldwell; Public Relations Officer Becky Wilburn; Police Chief Mark Sisson.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.

PUBLIC HEARING

1. Budget for Fiscal Year 2011 - 2012.
 - a. Mr. Roger Sutphin of Gum Drive spoke in support of a cost of living increase for Town employees. Mr. Sutphin said Town employees provide valuable services to the citizens and he is concerned that some Council members don't fully understand the importance of these employees.
 - b. Police Chief Sisson addressed Council in representation of the Town's departments, and the department heads stood with Chief Sisson, collectively, as a show of support and unity. Chief Sisson spoke in favor of a cost of living increase for employees rather than a one time bonus. Chief Sisson stated that each department head has found ways to cut their respective budget and streamline resources and efficiencies have been practiced by each department head. Chief Sisson noting that several area localities are giving cost of living increases, stated that Christiansburg has forgone a cost of living raise since 2008, and employee furloughs were imposed this year. Chief Sisson said that the department heads and employees are dedicated to the community and committed to their jobs. Chief Sisson spoke of the recent increase to insurance premiums and he is concerned about the ability of employees to support their families without a pay increase; he doesn't want employees to seek employment elsewhere because of finances. Chief Sisson also expressed his concern that employee morale is beginning to suffer, noting that employee salaries are behind the rate of inflation by 5% according to Consumer Price Index. Chief Sisson asked that Town Council consider step increases as a separate issue from the cost of living increase. Chief Sisson said he and the other department heads are thankful for their jobs and consider it a privilege to work in Christiansburg; they will respect Town Council regardless of Council's decision. Chief Sisson thanked Council for the opportunity to speak.

Councilman Showalter noted that several area localities are giving cost of living increases, but at a rate of 1%. Councilman Showalter reviewed the list of budget cuts, totaling more than two million dollars, submitted by the department heads, and inquired about the importance of the items cut and how the cuts affect operations. Chief Sisson replied that the cuts were not detrimental to operations this year. Director of Engineering and Public Works, Wayne Nelson, said that cuts are made by his department every day, and that cuts do result in diminished services and program, but that he and his employees make the department work no matter the situation. Councilman Huppert said he hopes no one feels that Town Council is against pay raises or the employees, but that the Town's operation is expansive and the capital is not there to support everything. Councilman Showalter said his position is to represent citizens of the community, and Councilman Hall agreed stating he was elected to do a job and he is obligated to the citizens. Councilman Showalter and Councilman Hall both agreed that capital is lacking, and their goal is to avoid lay-offs among departments. Councilman Hall said he is looking to the future and must question the fiscal responsibility of the cost of living increases.

Councilman Hall offered to explain his concerns in detail to anyone interested. Councilman Huppert commented that the proposed budget will take a considerable amount of funding from reserves, money that is needed to cover unforeseen and unexpected situations.

Ms. Carol Lindstrom, Depot Street, spoke in support of employee cost of living increases, stating that employee pay increases come back to town through shopping and eating.

Mr. Brian Lambert, a Christiansburg resident, asked how important the bus service is when compared to Town employees. Councilman Hall said he believes the bus system is not a wise investment for Christiansburg and he supports cutting funding for the service in the budget. Councilman Showalter also expressed a lack of support for continued funding of the bus system because Blacksburg Transit had not been forthcoming with requested information. Mayor Ballengee pointed out that community interconnectivity is a goal in Council's Vision 2020 and that the bus service is essential to this interconnectivity. Mayor Ballengee stressed that the Town can support both the bus service and the cost of living increase as presented in the proposed budget. Councilman Hall pointed out that the bus shuttle service from the Christiansburg High School to the aquatic center during events could be contracted out for eighteen thousand dollars annually. Aquatics Director, Terry Caldwell, agreed that this could be done, and would be necessary since the aquatic center depends on this service. Mr. Curtis Brown of the Christiansburg Police Department said he does not see much use of the buses during daytime hours when he is out on duty. Mr. Fred Newhouse referenced the Town's budget preparation survey and asked what was the highest response received. Interim Town Manager Helms replied that the most popular response was a "clean, safe, healthy place to live". Mr. Newhouse discussed what that encompassed and stressed that priorities need to be set for the budget. Mr. Newhouse urged Council to consider the employees over the bus system, and that consideration should be given to employees. Councilman Hall commented that many of the budget cuts directly affect the health and safety of the community, and if done each year, will compound. Councilman Showalter stated that the Town must consider the operational costs of the aquatic center, and forecast anticipated costs and situations that may arise with a new facility. Councilman Showalter also stated that he want the fee structure for the aquatic center reconsidered. Mayor Ballengee said the Aquatic Center Advisory Committee would review the current fee structure and make a recommendation to Council. Mr. Phil Townley, Second Street, spoke in support of the cost of living increase stating it is important to keep seasoned employees, and that the Town's best investment is the employees. Mr. Newhouse and Mr. Townley both said they would support a tax increase if it meant they wouldn't lose an employee to another agency over salaries. Councilman Hall said that 21,000 people would be affected by a tax increase; he agreed that the Town's greatest asset is its employees, but he must consider the community at-large. Ms. Carol Lindstrom, Depot Street, said she would have no problem with a tax increase and that the quality of service from Town employees has risen in the past several months. Mr. Donnie Cromer of the Christiansburg Police Department addressed Council about the high cost of insurance, stating that the proposed family plan insurance would cost him 40% of his monthly net salary. Mr. Cromer said with the increased cost of fuel and food he has taken a part-time job to supplement his current income from the Town, and he has a private insurance plan for his family. Councilman Huppert said he is surprised that many have spoken in favor of a tax raise as opposed to cutting the employee cost of living increase. Council briefly discussed the high cost of the family insurance plan, and Councilman Showalter asked Interim Town Manager Helms to research this matter and to include a cost/plan comparison with other localities. Councilman Vanhoozier thanked everyone for coming out and sharing their comments.

Mr. Heath Hyatt of the Christiansburg Police Department spoke to Council about the importance of step increases, which are presented as an incentive at the time of hire. Without the step increases, Mr. Hyatt said he would not have accepted a job with the Christiansburg Police Department because of an initial cut in his pay at hiring.

SPECIAL MEETING

I. CALL TO ORDER

MAYOR BALLENGE called the Special Meeting of Council to order.

INTERIM TOWN MANAGER HELMS stated that an area of concern was brought to him regarding mowing of the Rosa Peters Park, which the Town has done for years. Mayor Ballengee explained that the property is owned by the African American community and is maintained by a grant that provides little annual operational funding. The Town has assisted in this maintenance because the park is open to the public and offers a pool with lifeguards, and a meeting hall for summer programs, even though it is privately owned. The Town has also mowed property owned by VDOT. Councilman Barber added that because of the trust fund structure the property can never be sold. Councilman Showalter stated that since the Town doesn't own the Rosa Peters Park, the Town should not provide maintenance on the property. Councilman Barber noted that the mowing has been done as part of the Parks and Recreation budget, and only a portion of the property around the playground and along the banks, is mowed by the Town. Parks and Recreation Director, Art Price, gave a brief background history of how this park was established as the Negro Children's Playground through an endowment from Mrs. Rosa Peters. Mr. Price said the Town does not have a written agreement with the Board of Trustees for mowing, but the Town owns adjacent property and mowing is provided as a courtesy. Councilman Showalter stated that he would like for the caretakers to submit each year for support as is done by other nonprofit organizations.

I. DISCUSSIONS BY MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEMBERS

1. Council action on:
 - a. Set water, sewer and garbage fees. Mayor Ballengee reviewed the reason for these increases as discussed during the last Town Council meeting. Councilman Vanhoozier made a motion to approve the fees as advertised, seconded by Councilman Huppert. Town Clerk Stipes polled Council as follows: Barber – Aye; Hall – Aye; Huppert – Aye; Showalter – Aye; Stipes – Aye; Vanhoozier – Aye.
2. Budget for Fiscal Year 2011 – 2012. Councilman Hall made a motion to set an additional work session for Tuesday, May 31, 2011, to further discuss the budget. Mayor Ballengee recommended setting the work session for June 1, 2011, since the Planning Commission has a meeting scheduled for May 31, 2011. Mayor Ballengee urged Council to be prepared to take action on the budget during the June 1, 2011 meeting. Councilman Barber made a motion to set a Special Meeting, which will include a budget work session, for June 1, 2011, seconded by Councilman Stipes. Council voted on the motion as follows: AYES: Barber, Hall, Huppert, Showalter, Stipes, Vanhoozier. The meeting was set for 7:00 P.M. Town employees were invited to attend but will not have an opportunity to participate. Councilman Showalter requested that the total cost of mowing the Rosa Peters Park, for this fiscal year and all previous years, be provided at the meeting.

Councilman Stipes made a statement as to the current budget process and the amount of work that went into the presented proposed budget, which was balanced within nine thousand dollars, with cuts. Since the originally proposed budget, numerous, unsuccessful, attempts have been made at compromise, and Councilman Stipes expressed dismay that the debates continue and a split vote is anticipated. The budget presented was a mammoth effort, and Councilman Stipes said it reflects the direction in which the Town should be headed. Councilman Stipes acknowledged the setback realized two weeks ago with the dramatic cost increase to the health insurance plan. Councilman Hall agreed that the proposed budget was a large effort, but commented that the disagreement is over the definition of a balanced budget. Councilman Hall said he does not consider the proposed budget to be balanced with the carryovers and cuts to vital services. Council further discussed the proposed budget and the possibility of borrowing funds from reserves, of which there are over ten million dollars in undedicated funds, in an effort to balance the budget without penalizing employees or cutting services.

Councilman Hall stated that he will be encouraging the Town in the future to focus on the planned 911 facility on Route 114, commenting that staffing the facility would be a good use of reserve funds. Councilman Hall said establishment of this facility would be in keeping with the citizens' priority of having a clean, safe place to live.

III. ADJOURN

There being no further business to bring before Council, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM.