

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Norton City Council was held Tuesday, March 19, 2019, at 6:00 p.m., in the Municipal Council Chambers with Mayor Joseph Fawbush presiding.

Present: William Mays, Robert Fultz, Jr., Joseph Fawbush, and Mark Caruso

Also Present: Fred L. Ramey, Jr., City Manager, and William Bradshaw, City Attorney

Absent: Delores Belcher

The invocation was given by the city manager and was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Police Chief James Lane.

At this time, Mayor Fawbush asked council members to amend the agenda to include under Item 6-D-1 a Resolution to Authorize the City Manager to Submit a Grant Application to the Virginia Department of Health – Office of Drinking Water’s Water Supply Assistance Grant Program.

262998

It was the consensus of council to amend the agenda to include under Item 6-D-1 a Resolution to Authorize the City Manager to Submit a Grant Application to the Virginia Department of Health – Office of Drinking Water’s Water Supply Assistance Grant Program, as stated above.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilman Caruso, and passed by the following vote: YES – Mays, Fultz, Fawbush, Caruso, NO – None, ABSENT – Belcher, council moved to adopt the minutes of the March 5, 2019, meeting as presented.

262999

There was no response to the Mayor’s Call for Visitors.

263000

The next agenda item was an update on the purchase of a new ambulance by Norton Rescue Squad (NRS).

Norton Rescue Squad Chief Operating Officer (COO) Todd Lagow said the purchase of the new ambulance has taken over a year and the final cost, including equipment, was approximately \$250,000. He said the purchase of the new ambulance was made possible by a grant, city contribution, and NRS Bingo funds. Mr. Lagow said there is a balance owed of \$6,000 and NRS should be in position to pay the remaining balance. He informed council about the upgraded features on the new ambulance and advised the Virginia Department of Health Office of Emergency Medical Services (VAEMS) inspected and permitted the ambulance today. Prior to the meeting, council members toured the new ambulance with squad members in attendance.

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Councilman Mays said Chief Lagow and Buddy Cash are to be commended for obtaining the grant and their hard work.

Councilman Caruso congratulated NRS and said the new ambulance will be an asset to the community.

Mayor Fawbush thanked Chief Lagow and members of the NRS for their hard work and noted that the new ambulance is the result of their efforts.

Included in council's packets for consideration was a draft copy of the City of Norton Emergency Operations Plan (EOP).

Mr. Ramey advised that the city is obligated by the Virginia Department of Emergency Management to have an Emergency Operations Plan and it must be reviewed and adopted every four years. He said the draft EOP included in packets is similar to the last two plans adopted by city council. Mr. Ramey said Councilman Caruso has submitted some suggested changes and corrections to the EOP since receiving his packet last week. He explained the city's Emergency Management Coordinator Todd Lagow produced the original draft by using a template provided to local governments by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. Mr. Ramey then handed out a second draft EOP that included some of Councilman Caruso's suggested changes and corrections for members to review. He suggested council review the updated EOP along with additional documents he provided members that are utilized to design an EOP. Mr. Ramey said he would place the updated draft EOP on council's April 2nd agenda for discussion. Mr. Ramey advised members to contact him or Chief Lagow if they had any questions or would like to discuss the draft EOP prior to the April 2nd meeting.

262002

After a brief discussion, it was the consensus of council to place the updated draft of the City of Norton Emergency Operations Plan on the April 2nd agenda.

Council had been presented in their packets with a Proclamation Declaring March as American Red Cross Month.

Mr. Ramey said he received a request from the Red Cross asking the city to declare March as American Red Cross Month to recognize the various services their organization provides to the citizens of Norton and across the Commonwealth of Virginia.

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Upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by unanimous vote, council moved to adopt the Proclamation Declaring March as American Red Cross Month. (Insert)

Mr. Ramey told council he wanted to provide an update on several city projects.

Via a PowerPoint presentation, he shared with council that the city is replacing waterlines in Josephine and Clear Creek. He said the two projects are funded through the Virginia Department of Health Office of Drinking Water's Water Supply Assistance Grant and the work will be done in phases. He said construction for both waterline replacement projects should start within the next 30 days and be completed within four months.

The next update focused on a series of projects connected to the city's downtown revitalization. Mr. Ramey said city crews are providing streetscape improvements as part of the city's revitalization efforts by replacing sidewalk, installing paver bricks, antique lights, and tree wells. He said city crews will work on other areas downtown that have not been updated but their primary focus in the next few weeks will be 815 Park Avenue, S.W., known as the Norton Friends and Farmers Market building, and the Gateway Project located on the corner of Park Avenue and Route 74 across from Dairy Queen. Mr. Ramey said the downtown revitalization project will be sent to various news outlets this week to advertise for bids.

Another project area city administration plans to continue streetscape improvements in as part of downtown revitalization is at 11th Street, N.W., beginning at the corner of Park Avenue. If funding allows, improvements would begin at the Holiday Inn and continue across the viaduct to John I. Burton High School and would include replacing the sidewalk, as

262004

well as, installing new antique lights on the viaduct and in front of the high school. The goal of this project is to connect High Knob and U.S. Route 23 to downtown. Mr. Ramey said when bids are received city administration will know if funding is available to complete this project.

Mr. Ramey said included in the Downtown Revitalization Program is façade improvements for which council appropriated \$40,000. He said some business owners have met with architects and either have or will participate in the Façade Improvement Program, while others have requested information packets. Mr. Ramey noted the program is a matching grant program and business owners can apply for up to \$7,500 to make improvements to their storefront.

Another part of the overall Master Plan for the city was to make the downtown area and up to High Knob more bicycle friendly. The concept that was chosen to reinforce the city as a bike friendly community was the installation of sharrows (painting a cyclist with arrows) on road lanes. The idea is that the sharrows will remind motorists that cyclist could be in those lanes and increase safety. Also, as part of downtown revitalization, if funds are available, the installation of a Wayfinding System is another item city administration would like to include in the project to connect people to High Knob, the destination center, hospitals, and other locations of interest.

An additional downtown project getting ready to start is the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) Pedestrian Safety Action Plan (PSAP) grant project. This project will upgrade pedestrian crosswalks at 6th, 7th, and 8th Street intersections with ramps and audible signalization at a cost of \$469,000, which is entirely funded by the PSAP grant. The city will install stamped crosswalks at 6th, 7th, and 8th Streets along Park Avenue downtown to match those intersections that have already been upgraded. VDOT wants this project completed this year so work will begin this summer.

Project Apple, which is Sugar Hill Cidery, is currently under construction and will be located in the front portion of the Norton Friends and Farmers Market building located at 815 Park Avenue, S.W. The city received grant funding totaling \$530,000 for the development of the building and construction of the cidery and restaurant which could be completed by the end of July.

Well over a year ago, the city received grant funds in the amount of \$1,178,350 from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and \$50,000 from the Virginia Tobacco Commission to construct a visitor center at the entrance to High Knob, assist with the Devils Bathtub Project in Scott County, and to make improvements to the High Knob Lake area. Mr. Ramey said the Visitor Center and the High Knob Lake projects are on hold until approved environmental assessments are completed.

Mr. Ramey said the city received \$2.8 million dollars from the Federal Land Access Program (FLAP) Grant to construct a pedestrian access trail to connect John I. Burton High School to the visitor center by extending the sidewalk from the school to the visitor center. He said the sidewalk will enhance safety for citizens who live in that area that currently walk along the road and it will also connect downtown to the mountain. Also, a trailhead will be located at the base of the mountain which will connect to the city's trail system and ultimately up to High Knob Tower. Mr. Ramey said the city is under contract with an engineering firm to start design of the project and city administration is working with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) on this project. He said the grant will also allow exhibits to be created for the visitor center and hopefully improvements can be made to Route 619. In addition, the grant will pay for a Trail Master Plan connecting city trails with United States

Forest Service lands, and potentially in the future connect property owned by the Town of Big Stone Gap officials should they decide to move forward with their ideas.

The last and most important project for the city and the region is Project Intersection. The project has received grant funds totaling \$7.5 million dollars from the Virginia Tobacco Commission, The Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy (DMME), The Appalachian Regional Commission, and a Power Grant. Mr. Ramey said property located at the intersection of U.S. Route 23 and U.S. Route 58 above the Virginia-Kentucky Shopping Center will be purchased for a regional industrial park that will be owned by Wise, Lee, Scott, and Dickenson Counties and the City of Norton. Mr. Ramey said the plan is to first remove the highwall and then regional partners want to construct a facility up to 175,000 square feet for manufacturing or advanced manufacturing jobs. He said the city has been authorized to begin environmental assessments and to design a plan to remove the highwall on U.S. Route 23.

Finally, although it is not a city project, Mr. Ramey said he wanted to mention the feasibility study and development of an overall master plan for the Powell River Trail North Project, which is a potential rails to trails development, because it is important to the city. He said the former Louisville and Nashville Railroad (L&N Railroad) is vacated from Norton to Appalachia and from Appalachia to Big Stone Gap. Mr. Ramey said currently the Towns of Big Stone Gap and Appalachia are almost connected through the abandoned rail system. He said Lenowisco Planning District received grant funding to study the feasibility of connecting Norton and Appalachia through the abandoned rail system and this project is currently ongoing and is important with communities.

On behalf of council, Mayor Fawbush commended city administration, employees, and all agencies that are working together to bring these projects to completion. He said the city has a great deal to be proud of and citizens will see things changing over the next several months.

Added to council's agenda for consideration was a Resolution to Authorize the City Manager to Submit a Grant Application to the Virginia Department of Health Office of Drinking Water's Water Supply Assistance Grant Program.

The city manager said this application is for Phase III, which is the final grant submission the final grant submission for the Clear Creek Water Project.

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Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by unanimous roll call vote, council moved to Authorize the City Manager to Submit a Grant Application to the Virginia Department of Health Office of Drinking Water's Water Supply Assistance Grant Program.

Also, in packets for council consideration was a transfer to Norton City Schools, dated January 28, 2019, in the amount of \$150,000, to cover January 2019 payroll expenditures.

Upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by unanimous roll call vote, council moved to confirm the transfer to Norton City Schools, as stated above.

263006

In comments from the city manager:

Mr. Ramey provided council with a copy of a new brochure printed by the Town of Abingdon that includes Norton as a "day trip" for tourists using Abingdon as a base camp.

263007

He informed council that city administration entered into a contract with Pearson Appraisal's Service for the city's 2019 Real Estate Reassessment.

Mr. Ramey provided members with a copy of the March Retail Sales Tax Report.

He reminded council the city next tentative budget workshop is scheduled for 8:30 a.m., Saturday, April 6th in council chambers.

Mr. Ramey said he anticipates the school board will present its budget to council on April 16th.

He said another tentative budget workshop is scheduled for 8:30 a.m., Saturday, April 20th and city administration expects to present the city budget to council on May 7th.

The following comments were made by council members:

Councilman Fultz, echoing the update on city projects and grant funding, said this morning he counted seven different projects that are ongoing downtown. He commented the city center will look like a construction zone for the next several months and it will be inconvenient but it is necessary for progress.

263008

Councilman Caruso thanked the city manager for the update on city projects.

He congratulated John I. Burton Basketball Coach Aaron Williams and the Boys Basketball Team for their success during the 2018-2019 season.

Councilman Caruso noted the city needs to keep the public informed on construction timing downtown.

He said he would like to include a crime brief at one of the budget workshops.

263009

Councilman Caruso reminded members of the retirement dinner for Wise County Sheriff Ronnie Oaks scheduled this Friday, March 22nd.

He asked that a brief description of city boards be added to the city's website.

Councilman Caruso said the Tourism Committee would like council's views of the city's Litter Control Plan, so he asked members to review the plan at their convenience.

Mayor Fawbush noted the city celebrates its 125th anniversary in 2019, and is going through a resurgence with the many projects going on downtown and throughout the city.

263010

Mayor Fawbush thanked the city clerk for an accurate account of council meetings.

There being no further business to come before council, the meeting adjourned.

CITY OF NORTON, VIRGINIA



Joseph Fawbush, Mayor

ATTEST:



Rebecca K. Coffey, Clerk of Council