

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Norton City Council was held Tuesday, October 6, 2020, at 6:00 p.m., in the Municipal Council Chambers with Mayor Joseph Fawbush presiding.

Council Members Present: William Mays, Robert Fultz, Jr., Joseph Fawbush, Mark Caruso, and Delores Belcher

Also Present: Fred L. Ramey, Jr., City Manager, and Jeffery L. Shupe, Finance Director

The invocation was given by Councilman Robert Fultz and was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by the 2020 AmeriCorps/National Civilian Conservation Corps Southern Region Team River 5 (AmeriCorps/NCCC Team River 5).

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by the following unanimous vote: YES – Mays, Fultz, Belcher, Caruso, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, council moved to adopt the minutes of the September 15, 2020, meeting as presented.

There was no response to the Mayor's Call for Visitors

A public hearing was held to receive public input on a Proposed Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Proposal to be submitted to the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) for the Southside Comprehensive Community Development Project.

Mr. Ramey, via a PowerPoint presentation, showed the area that is considered in the proposed Southside project. He said a public hearing was held in March for this same project but the project did not receive funding. Mr. Ramey told council that DHCD has decided to have a second round of funding this year and city administration would like to resubmit the application and that requires another public hearing.

Mr. Frank Kibler, LENOWISCO Senior Planner, said a few changes were made to the application and he is hopeful the project will be funded this time. He said the application is due the end of October and that the project and funding request are essentially the same as in March.

Mr. Ramey noted that the Southside project includes a waterline replacement component and that the city has received a 70/30 grant proposal from the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) with 30 percent being grant funds. He said city administration has not had a chance to review the proposal.

Mr. Ramey told council that the resolution was not in council packets but he has provided members with a copy of the resolution for approval to resubmit the application.

Mayor Fawbush opened the public hearing.

There being no public comments, Mayor Fawbush closed the public hearing.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilwoman Belcher, and passed by the following unanimous roll call vote: YES – Mays, Fultz, Belcher, Caruso, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, council moved to adopt the Resolution Approving the Resubmittal of the Application to the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) for the Southside Comprehensive Community Development Project.

The next agenda item was an update from the 2020 AmeriCorps/National Civilian Conservation Corps Southern Region Team River 5 (AmeriCorps/NCCC Team River 5).

Mr. Ramey told council that the team may be leaving Saturday and he wanted the team to provide an update on their activities.

Team Leader Sarah Cross stated that the team is on their fourth week in the city and it has been great to be in Norton and to work with Shayne Fields on trail development in the Flag Rock Recreation Area. She said it is great to know that the team will be leaving a lasting mark on the community with the work the team has done on the trail system in Flag Rock Recreation Area.

Several other members spoke to council about their experience in Norton, then Alex Tudela showed a video of the work the AmeriCorps team had completed on the trail system.

Mayor Fawbush told the team that council is glad the team members enjoyed staying in Norton and that the city appreciates the work they have done on the city's trails.

Norton City Trail Coordinator Shayne Fields then called each member of the team to come forward and the mayor presented each member with a plaque and a photo was taken.

Mayor Fawbush then declared council in a 10-minute recess so a group picture could be taken outside with council and the 2020 AmeriCorps/NCCC Team River 5.

After a 10-minute recess, Mayor Fawbush declared council back in open session.

Included in member packets was a request for council to consider refunding of Norton City Financing Bonds, Series 2012C.

Mr. Ramey said the city issued 10 million dollars in debt in 2012 for renovations to Norton Elementary and Middle School (NEMS) and John I. Burton High School and to build a new gymnasium at NEMS. He said the Virginia Public School Authority (VPSA) purchased the bonds and the bonds are scheduled to sell on October 20th with settlement expected on November 10th. Mr. Ramey said it is anticipated that the city could save a total of \$278,000 due to the refunding but the level of savings is subject to change. He said city administration contacted Davenport & Company, Inc., the city's financial advisor, and city attorney William Bradshaw to discuss the refunding. Mr. Ramey said the city has the option of declining the refunding but if the city moves forward with refunding, the city will not have the option to pay off the debt early. He said city administration's recommendation is to opt in on the refunding of the Financing Bonds, Series 2012C.

After a brief discussion and upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilwoman Belcher, and passed by unanimous roll call vote, council moved to authorize the city manager to execute the certificate to opt in on refunding of Norton City Financing Bonds, Series 2012C.

Via a PowerPoint presentation, the city manager provided a funding update on the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) and city administration's plans moving forward.

Mr. Ramey said the city has expended \$492,474 in COVID19 expenditures and has approximately \$200,000 remaining to release. He highlighted the areas the expenditures were used and noted that a significant portion of the CARES Act funds has included partner organizations. Mr. Ramey said council authorized \$120,000 of the CARES Act funds at the September 15th council meeting to purchase a new ambulance, for which, Wise County is paying 60 percent of the total cost. He said other committed funds include \$65,000 for building modifications and \$25,000 for the WIFI Hotspot Project. Mr. Ramey then asked City Development Specialist and City Engineer Stephen L. McElroy to discuss the WIFI Hotspot Project.

Mr. McElroy told council that there have been a few delays in the WIFI Hotspot Project due to lags in receiving equipment but the project is going well. He said the city applied for a \$1,500 grant through United Way to also install a hotspot at city hall.

Mr. Ramey said city administration remitted the second quarterly CARES Act Report to the state yesterday and noted that two staff in city hall tested positive for the Coronavirus. He said city administration took the proper action related to the two COVID-19 cases. Mr. Ramey told council that the second half of real estate and personal property taxes are due October 15th and that council may want to consider taking action similar to this past spring and postpone the due date of these taxes to November 15th.

Mayor Fawbush stated that there was an error in calculating 2020 personal property taxes and additional staff will be required to correct the miscalculations but corrections cannot be made by October 15th.

Councilman Caruso agreed and said giving citizens another month to pay taxes would be helpful to city taxpayers. Councilman Caruso made the motion that penalty and delinquency rates on delinquent real estate and personal property taxes for the current year provided in City Code Section 23-2 as presently written be set at zero and suspended until November 15, 2020, and to authorize the city manager to advertise a public hearing related to this formal action. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Belcher, passed by unanimous roll call vote, and council moved to set the penalty and delinquency rates on real estate and personal property taxes at zero and suspended until November 15th, council also authorized the city manager to advertise a public hearing related to this formal action as stated above.

The next agenda item was discussion of 2020 Halloween, 2020 Christmas Parade, and 2021 Independence Day Celebration holidays.

Mr. Ramey told council that city staff is receiving calls regarding the observance of Halloween and that city administration would like to discuss council's position on proceeding with the holiday. He said some localities are asking citizens not to celebrate Halloween outside the family unit and other localities have offered guidelines. Mr. Ramey said council discussed the Christmas parade at the September 15th council meeting but staff has not heard back from parade participants. He noted that two towns have decided to go forward with their Christmas parades and other communities are waiting 30 days before making a decision.

Mayor Fawbush said he would like to move forward with Halloween and provide guidelines to citizens and let the citizens decide if they want to participate in Halloween.

Councilman Fultz noted that Halloween has always been a participate or not participate holiday.

Council members were in agreement with Mayor Fawbush to provide citizens with guidelines and allow the citizens to decide if they want to participate in Halloween.

Mr. Ramey said city administration will place Halloween observance on the city's social media and website and advise The Coalfield Progress and city staff answering phones.

Mayor Fawbush stated that council can discuss the Christmas parade at the October 20th meeting.

Council was in consensus and authorized the city manager to execute an agreement with the fireworks vendor to schedule the fireworks display on July 3, 2021, for the Independence Day Celebration.

Also included in packets for council consideration was a check to W-L Construction & Paving, Inc., dated September 1, 2020, in the amount of \$115,580.49 for paving.

Upon a motion by Councilwoman Belcher, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by unanimous roll call vote, council moved to confirm the check to W-L Construction & Paving, Inc., as stated above.

Mr. Ramey noted that this is only part of the city's paving projects and city administration hopes to start back in the spring.

Upon a motion by Councilman Fultz, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by the following roll call vote: YES – Fultz, Mays, Belcher, Caruso, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, council moved to go into closed meeting for Personnel as per Section 2.2-3711 (A) (1) of the Code of Virginia, as amended.

Mayor Fawbush declared council in closed meeting.

Upon a motion by Councilwoman Belcher, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by unanimous vote, council moved to go back into open meeting.

Mayor Fawbush declared council back in open meeting.

The clerk polled each member of council as to the Certification of Closed Meeting with each answering yes. The clerk then read a Resolution of the Certification of Closed Meeting.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilwoman Belcher, and passed by unanimous vote, council moved to adopt A Resolution of the Certification of Closed Meeting. (Insert)

Mayor Fawbush opened the floor for two nominations to the Norton Tourism Committee for a four-year term to expire September 30, 2024.

Councilman Caruso nominated Mike Craft and Chris Jones to be reappointed to the Norton Tourism Committee for a four-year term to expire September 30, 2024.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by unanimous vote, council moved that the nominations cease.

Mayor Fawbush declared Mike Craft and Chris Jones to be reappointed to the Norton Tourism Committee for a four-year term to expire September 30, 2024.

In comments from the city manager:

City Administration provided council with a copy of the FY19 Audit.

Mr. Ramey said he informed council at the September 15th council meeting that the State Fire Marshall's office and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) had issued the blasting permits for the highwall removal on US 23. He said there have been six blasts so far and the contractor came by the office yesterday and thanked the Norton Police Department for assisting with traffic.

Mr. Ramey said the Cloudsplitter Ultra 100 Trail Race will take place October 17th and 18th and that 193 participants had registered.

Mr. Ramey said one of the city's vendors incorporated the city logo into a new face mask and he distributed the new face covering to council members.

Mr. Ramey said for council's review he placed the latest COVID-19 pandemic metrics from LENOWISCO Health District, upcoming election information from the city registrar, and the High Knob traffic counts at each member's desk.

The following comments were made by council members:

Councilman Fultz asked if there was a theme for this year's Christmas parade. Mr. Ramey said yes and that he would report back to Councilman Fultz on the theme. Councilman Fultz stated that October 7th is the last day of the first nine weeks and noted that Norton City Schools was the first school in the state to open.

Councilman Mays stated that he heard the school system was working on virtual snow days.

Councilman Fultz said that is correct and now the school division knows definitively the last day of school.

Councilwoman Belcher said she noticed the traffic count for High Knob is higher.

Councilwoman Belcher stated that the number of COVID-19 cases has increased and she is hopeful everything will work out. She noted that she heard our area is late for contracting COVID-19.

Councilman Caruso said he was informed that the Town of Appalachia no longer has a police department and asked Police Chief James Lane if that was accurate.

Chief Lane said the county is currently in discussions with the Town of Appalachia to take over policing the town.

Mr. Ramey explained that part of this issue is financial.

Councilman Caruso said the audit is getting larger and he requested a maximum 2-page executive summary of the audit from the auditors for council members.

Mr. Ramey said the auditor did a summary presentation but she did not do one in writing.

Mayor Fawbush provided council with a handout that had a list of topics he would like to discuss at a future meeting. The list included: discussion of a downtown sidewalk ordinance; pop-up vendors obtaining a business license and providing sales tax information; Airbnb's obtaining a business license and paying transient occupant tax; pressure washing all the old downtown sidewalk and the rock wall that runs along 900 block of Park Avenue S.W; the creation of a Norton downtown business association; and repairing the benches in Veteran's Park. Mayor Fawbush asked council to look at these ideas and be thinking about what they would like to have included in a downtown sidewalk ordinance and the other items mentioned.

Mr. Ramey noted that wood for the benches in Veteran's Park had been ordered and came in last week and that Davis Nursey was looking at the landscaping to see what can be done to improve the area in Veteran's Park.

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

CITY OF NORTON, VIRGINIA



Joseph Fawbush, Mayor

ATTEST:



Rebecca K. Coffey, Clerk of Council