

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Norton City Council was held Tuesday, January 19, 2021, at 6:00 p.m., in the Municipal Council Chambers with Mayor Joseph Fawbush presiding.

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

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

Absent: Delores Belcher

The invocation was given by Councilman Robert Fultz and was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Police Chief James Lane.

Upon a motion by Councilman Fultz, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by the following unanimous vote: YES – Fultz, Mays, Caruso, and Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – Belcher, council moved to adopt the Organizational Meeting minutes of January 5, 2021, as presented. Next, upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilman Caruso, and passed by unanimous vote, council moved to adopt the regular January 5, 2021 council meeting minutes as presented.

The next agenda item was a special presentation recognizing city employees who have reached certain milestones in their years of service.

Mr. Ramey said 11 city employees are to be acknowledged for their service to the citizens of Norton and that their combined employment with the city represented 200 years of commitment to the community.

Those being honored were: Elizabeth Fleming, Mike Martin, and Jacob Austin for 10 years of service; Winfred Collins, Jeff Rose, Bucky Culbertson, and Steve McElroy for 15 years of service; Jeff Shupe for 20 years of service; and Marie Muir, Rebecca Coffey, and Carlos Fields for 30 years of service.

Mayor Fawbush expressed council's appreciation to each employee for their years of service, presented individual service pins to those in attendance, and a group photo was taken with council.

Mayor Fawbush then presented Carlos Fields with a plaque honoring his recent retirement from the city after 30 years of faithful service to the citizens of Norton. A photo was taken with council and members thanked Mr. Fields for his dedication. Following the pin presentations and retirement award, the employees were honored with applause.

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

Next on council's agenda was an update from city administration and Norton City Schools on a Wi-Fi Project partnership.

Mr. Ramey told council that in 2020 city and school administrators had to rethink how each organization operated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He said Norton City Schools Superintendent Dr. Gina Wohlford and Norton Elementary and Middle School (NEMS) Principal Dr. Scott Addison contacted him in March 2020 to discuss issues the school division was facing and a possible joint venture with the city. Mr. Ramey then asked Dr. Addison and City Engineer Stephen McElroy to discuss their perspectives on the project.

Dr. Addison stated that through studies resulting during the pandemic, the state learned that 20 percent of students living in rural areas did not have access to highspeed Internet. He said Norton City School system discovered that 97 percent of Norton students had access to the Internet but that 16.9 percent of Norton students used their parents' cell phones which created connectivity issues, and that four percent of students had no access to the Internet at all. Dr. Addison explained that both entities had Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding that could be used to add Wi-Fi connectivity in all the city parks to ensure that all students had access to the Internet for virtual learning during the Coronavirus pandemic. He said that the Wi-Fi service provides for 50 megabytes download and 5 megabytes upload and that the project was made available through a partnership with Scott County Telephone Cooperative. Dr. Addison told council that the Wi-fi service has been paid for five years through grant funding and the joint Wi-Fi project was a great solution for ensuring the continued education of Norton students. He noted that when John I. Burton High School was upgraded Wi-Fi was made available in the school parking lot.

Mr. McElroy, via a PowerPoint presentation, told council that the city received a grant from United Way and was able to provide Wi-Fi at city hall in addition to the five city parks. He then went through the technical details of adding Wi-Fi at each park and noted that the project had a third partner with the Norton Redevelopment and Housing Authority (NRHA). Mr. McElroy stated that Norton Housing Authority Director Johnny Black allowed the city to place a power pole and new electrical service in Pine Hill Park and permitted the city to place equipment on an old laundry building and tie into the existing electrical service at the Ramsey Park. He then explained how users log in to use the Wi-Fi service.

Mr. Ramey said the project needs to be publicized by both the city council and the school board and he requested that council and the school division share their thoughts on the announcement.

Mayor Fawbush stated that the project was fantastic and he thanked everyone for working to establish Wi-Fi connectivity for Norton students.

City Auditor Tamara Greear of Rodefer Moss and Company, PLLC., was present to provide council with a synopsis of the city audit for the year ending June 30, 2020, and to provide members with a copy of the draft financial audit.

Ms. Greear informed council that the city received an unqualified or clean opinion. She stated that internal controls were evaluated and that the city and school board had no material weaknesses and no significant deficiencies. In addition, she explained that Norton City Schools ended the fiscal year with a surplus of \$192,843, and that the city ended the year with a deficit of \$210,533. Ms. Greear then proceeded to go over several categories with council and advised she will present the school board's audit at their next meeting.

Following a brief summation of the audit, Ms. Greear asked if council had any questions.

Mr. Ramey added that the audit is a complicated process that continues throughout the year.

At this time, Councilman Caruso stepped out of the meeting.

Mr. Ramey noted that the audit process was smoother this year between the city, social services and the school system and he thanked Ms. Greear for her assistance throughout the year working on this audit.

At this time, Councilman Caruso returned to his seat.

Ms. Greear added that the draft audit does not include subsequent refinancing of the Virginia Public School Authority (VPSA) Financing Bonds, Series 2012C, but that this information will be disclosed with the final audit and that a COVID-19 Disclosure is included with the audit.

Mayor Fawbush thanked Ms. Greear for her audit presentation and the summary sheet she provided council this year.

Mr. Ramey briefed council on COVID-19 and provided an update on the CARES Act funding.

Via a PowerPoint presentation, the city manager provided council with data related to COVID-19 within the city and he also presented Wise County's numbers. He told council that the city received authorization to add essential workers to the vaccine list and shared a vaccine update as of January 15th for the state and the city. Mr. Ramey stated that 268,330 vaccines had been administered in the Commonwealth and that 319 citizens had received the vaccine (49 fully).

Next Mr. Ramey provided council with a summary of the expenditures pertaining to the CARES Act and he noted that the city has approximately \$32,000 remaining to spend by the December 31, 2021, deadline. He said Norton businesses had received a total of \$273,380 to date from the LENOWISCO Small Business Recovery Assistance Program and that currently \$202,776.52 had been submitted for drawdown during Round 3, and that Round 4 is currently open.

Mr. Ramey informed council that the city had received \$49,294.62 in CARES funding under the Municipal Utility Relief Program. He said 190 notices had been mailed to commercial and residential customers and that the city had received 75 applications for the program. Mr. Ramey stated that Finance Director Jeff Shupe will be contacting the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to ask if the application process can be reopened for submittal of additional applications, and that the water department will probably end up calling water customers that qualify for the program.

Also included in packets for council consideration was a check to the Wise County Treasurer, dated November 10, 2020, in the amount of \$289,557.09 for shared expenses.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by unanimous roll call vote, council moved to confirm the check to the Wise County Treasurer, as stated above.

Upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by the following roll call vote: YES – Fultz, Mays, Caruso, and Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – Belcher, council moved to go into closed meeting for Personnel as per Section 2.2-3711 (A) (1) of the Code of Virginia, as amended, and Section 2.2-3711 (A) (3) of the Code of Virginia for Discussion or Consideration of the Acquisition of Real Property for a Public Purpose, or of the Disposition of Publicly Held Real Property, Where Discussion in an Open Meeting would Adversely Affect the Bargaining Position or Negotiating Strategy of the Public Body.

Mayor Fawbush declared council in closed meeting.

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

After the Certification of Closed Meeting, Mayor Fawbush cited real property, and Councilman Caruso said he was pleased to announce that Wellmont Health System has offered to convey property formerly known as the old St. Mary's Hospital site located at 910 Virginia Avenue, N.W., to the City of Norton at no cost. And whereas planning has already started to find a future use for that property that will benefit the entire city, Councilman Caruso made a motion that Mayor Fawbush accept the property located at 910 Virginia Avenue, N.W., as referenced in the Quitclaim Deed on behalf of council and the City of Norton, Virginia, and to authorize the mayor to execute any documents related to the acceptance of the property conveyed from Wellmont Health System to the city for future development. The motion was seconded by Councilman Mays, and the motion passed by unanimous roll call vote. Council moved that Mayor Fawbush accept the property formerly known as the Old St. Mary's Hospital site located at 910 Virginia Avenue, N.W., on behalf of council and the City of Norton and to execute the Quitclaim Deed for said property.

Mayor Fawbush opened the floor for nominations to the Norton Social Services Advisory Board to fill the unexpired term of Jane Sandt to expire May 22, 2024.

Councilman Mays nominated Sundry Adams to be appointed to the Norton Social Services Advisory Board to fill the unexpired term of Jane Sandt to expire May 22, 2024.

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

Mayor Fawbush declared Sundry Adams appointed to the Norton Social Services Advisory Board, as stated above.

Mayor Fawbush opened the floor for nominations to the Norton Redevelopment and Housing Authority for a four-year term to expire January 28, 2025.

Councilman Caruso nominated Stephen Collins to be reappointed to the Norton Redevelopment and Housing Authority for a four-year term to expire January 28, 2025.

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

Mayor Fawbush declared Stephen Collins reappointed to the Norton Redevelopment and Housing Authority, as stated above.

Mayor Fawbush opened the floor for nominations to the Southwest Virginia Emergency Medical Service Council for a two-year term to expire January 31, 2023.

Councilman Fultz nominated Todd Lagow to be reappointed to the Southwest Virginia Emergency Medical Service Council for a two-year term to expire January 31, 2023.

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

Mayor Fawbush declared Todd Lagow reappointed to the Southwest Virginia Emergency Medical Service Council, as stated above.

In comments from the city manager:

Mr. Ramey reminded council that Statements of Economic Interest are due back to clerk by February 1st.

Mr. Ramey told council he provided for review copies of the City Administration Highlights for 2020, the latest Retail Sales Tax Report, and the latest High Knob Traffic Counts. He then told council that he would like to purchase a higher-quality traffic counter that can be used 12 months of the year.

The following comments were made by council members:

Councilman Fultz congratulated all city employees for a successful fiscal year and those employees recognized tonight for their years of service, and specifically Carlos Fields on his retirement.

Councilman Fultz offered his condolences to Mayor Fawbush and his family on the passing of his brother David Fawbush and to Councilman Caruso for the loss of his son-in-law Jordan Barnette.

He said he is cautiously optimistic for 2021 and the rest of 2020.

Councilman Mays echoed Councilman Fultz's comments.

Councilman Caruso said he is thankful to all the city employees for the work they do for the city and to those that respond to the city's E-911 calls. He said he is comfortable that the city's emergency calls are answered and that's what is special about Norton. You don't have to worry about things happening in the city from sewer leaks, to critical care pickup, or for police or fire responses.

He said he appreciates all the condolences for the passing of his son-in-law Jordan Barnette and for the sympathies for his daughter.

Councilman Caruso said he is cautiously optimistic for 2021 as well.


Mayor Fawbush said each council member has lost someone and that Norton is a community that everyone can depend upon each other when the need arises.

He said he is proud of Norton, its citizens, and everything that is taking place in the city.

Mayor Fawbush said he is optimistic for 2021.

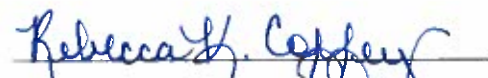
There being no further business to come before council, Mayor Fawbush declared the meeting adjourned.

CITY OF NORTON, VIRGINIA



Joseph Fawbush, Mayor

ATTEST:


Rebecca K. Coffey, Clerk of Council