

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Norton City Council was held Tuesday, February 1, 2022, at 6:00 p.m., in the Municipal Council Chambers with Mayor Joseph Fawbush presiding.

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

Also Present: Fred L. Ramey, Jr., City Manager and Interim City Clerk

The invocation was given by Rev. Roger Sloce, and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Norton Police Department First Sergeant Greg Mays.

Upon a motion by Councilwoman Davis, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by the following vote: YES – Mays, Fultz, Davis, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, ABSTAIN – Caruso, council moved to adopt the minutes of the January 18, 2022, council meeting as presented.

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

Mayor Fawbush and Mr. Ramey said this is one of their favorite council meetings of the year because council recognizes people who have served on various boards and city employees who have achieved employment milestones.

The city manager said Frank Gravely, who has served on many boards throughout the years, was being recognized for eight years of service on the Norton Department of Social Services Advisory Board. Mr. Gravely served on the board since 2014 and could no longer serve on that board due to a term limitation of two consecutive terms.

On behalf of Norton Department of Social Services (NDSS) and council, the mayor presented Mr. Gravely with a plaque in recognition of eight years of dedicated service (January 2014-January 2022) on the NDSS Advisory Board and a picture was taken. A round of applause was given by council in appreciation of Mr. Gravely's service.

Mr. Gravely thanked city council for asking him to serve, the NDSS Advisory Board committee, NDSS Director Abe Rutherford, Libby Fleming, the social services staff members in the audience and those not in attendance.

The mayor and council members applauded and thanked Mr. Gravely for his service.

The city manager explained that each year City of Norton employees are recognized with a service pin for reaching employment milestones. Thirteen city employees were recognized for 10, 15, 25, and 30 years of service for a combined service total of more than 280 years.

On behalf of council, Mayor Fawbush presented service pins to the employees who were present at the meeting. Those receiving service awards were: 10 years - Melissa Jackson and Brian Fleming; 15 years - Scott Craft, Rusty McReynolds, and Wes Ward; 25 years - Harold Huff, Kelli Willis, Shelby Shortt, James Lane, and Jason Hill; and 30 years - Tim Boardwine, Kim Taylor, and Judy Miller. Receiving service pins but not in attendance at the council meeting were: Melissa Jackson, Scott Craft, Rusty McReynolds, Harold Huff, and Kim Taylor.

Individual pictures were taken during the pin presentations and applause was given in appreciation of the employees and their service. Mayor Fawbush, the city manager and council thanked the employees for their service and for attending the council meeting.

A public hearing was held to solicit public input on a proposed amendment to Section 6.1 of the City Code related to recording the city's Reapportionment Ordinance.

The city manager explained that Article 7 Section 5 of the Constitution of Virginia specifically requires that any locality that conducts elections by district must change its district boundaries every 10 years in the years ending in one. Redistricting is the process of redrawing the boundaries of districts that elect representatives who serve specific geographic areas. Redistricting occurs every 10 years following a U. S. Census and state and local governments have the responsibility of overseeing the redistricting process.

Mr. Ramey said City Attorney William Bradshaw recommended that the city conduct a public hearing to amend Section 6.1 of the City Code to include a description of the election district boundaries and a map of the city's election district which must be officially recorded in the city council minutes.

The ordinance states that there shall be one election district and voting precinct, whose boundaries shall be the city limits of Norton, Virginia. A description of the boundaries and a Geographic Information System (GIS) map showing the election district boundaries shall be prepared and recorded in the official council minutes. The Clerk of Council shall send a certified copy of the ordinance, including a description of the boundaries and a GIS map showing the boundaries of the district to the local electoral board, the Secretary of the Commonwealth, the Department of Elections and the Division of Legislative Services. The ordinance shall become effective 30 days from the date of adoption.

Included in packets for council consideration was the Ordinance Amending and Reenacting Section 6.1 of the Code of the City of Norton Relating to Recording of the City's Reapportionment Ordinance, along with a description of the boundaries and a GIS map showing the election district boundaries.

Noting that the public hearing was duly advertised, Mayor Fawbush opened the public hearing.

Receiving no public comments, the mayor closed the public hearing.

There were no council comments concerning the amendment.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by the following unanimous vote, YES – Mays, Fultz, Fawbush, Caruso, Davis, NO – None, ABSENT – None, ABSTAIN – None, council moved to amend and reenact Section 6.1 of the City Code Related to Recording of the City's Reapportionment Ordinance. (Inserts)

The city manager said he invited Norton Special Projects Coordinator Katie Dunn to the council meeting to formally unveil the 2022 Norton Calendar of Events and Activities to council and discuss this year's events and activities.

Mr. Ramey said city events and activities have always been promoted, but city administration has tried to promote these community events/activities in a more formal manner with the creation of a calendar of events creatively designed by Ms. Dunn. The calendar is on the city website and printed versions are available. He said the city's calendar of events is one of the most highly downloaded items on the city webpage. He encourages people to visit the website because that is where they will find the most up-to-date information as events and schedules change.

Ms. Dunn distributed the 2022 Norton Calendar to council and explained that after two interesting years due to the COVID 19 pandemic the city is hoping to return to a level of normalcy in terms of community events. She said the city is trying to conduct monthly hikes this year and attendance has been good. Parks and Recreation continues to sponsor seasonal photo contests, and digital trail guides and outdoor chats are scheduled with some of the outdoor chats going digital. Lucian Undreiu, associate professor of physics at UVA-Wise, will conduct two night observations at High Knob Tower in March (March 3 and 18). A variety of running races

and cycling events including Gravelachia are scheduled, as well as annual events like the Best Friend Festival, Woodbooger Festival and the High Knob Music Festival. Additional events will probably be added as the year progresses.

The city manager told council that Ms. Dunn has been very active in getting some Virginia Tourism Corporation grants which have helped the city develop tourism marketing content such as professional videos and photography. He noted that the hiking videos she has personally done have received many online views and positive comments. Mr. Ramey said Mr. Dunn is doing an outstanding job in marketing.

Councilwoman Davis inquired if the 2022 Calendar of Events and Activities is available in brochure form.

The city manager explained that copies of the calendar and maps are distributed at various locations including area hotels, but because the calendar is fluid, the best place to view the calendar is on the city's website.

Councilman Caruso asked about the possibility of having some type of marketing display/kiosk in the Municipal Building lobby.

Mr. Ramey said the city had discussed buying equipment to show recreation/tourism videos in the lobby of the Municipal Building. He noted that some of the latest grant funds could possibly be used for purchasing equipment for this purpose, especially with the amount of quality video content the city currently has available.

Councilman Caruso suggested a cheaper marketing tool might be banners that list the city website address.

Ms. Dunn said the city is possibly looking at retooling and printing the High Knob Adventure Guide, that was developed as part of another grant, which will hopefully be placed at area hotels. The guide would highlight all of the events, the hiking trails and recreation areas, not just in Norton, but also in the surrounding communities. She noted that this regional guide would be useful for local residents as well as first-time visitors and would contain trip itineraries and a guide of outfitters and visitor information services.

The city manager said it takes time to develop a quality photography and videography inventory necessary for publication and social media. He said Ms. Dunn has done an excellent job developing this inventory.

Mr. Ramey noted that the city is taking a regional marketing approach and these maps and guides will be great marketing products to have available when the Destination Center opens.

The mayor, council members and the city manager commended Ms. Dunn and thanked her for the presentation.

The city manager discussed the city's continued support for fair housing in the City of Norton. He explained to council that in 2021 the city received a Community Development Block Grant from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to help fund projects and initiatives in the Southside community called the Southside Comprehensive Community Development Project. This grant requires the city to conduct at least one fair housing activity each year to affirmatively further fair housing until the grant project has been completed. In order to fulfill this annual grant requirement, the city manager reviewed past fair housing actions taken by council.

Mr. Ramey said that council has endorsed a commitment to fair housing practices, has indicated that it endeavors to ensure equal opportunity to all persons residing in the city to live in decent housing, and has indicated that it will prohibit discrimination in the sale, purchase, rental or financing of housing against any person on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, familial status, disability, veteran status, gender identity, sexual orientation or source of

funds. Furthermore, council designated the city manager with the authority to investigate any fair housing discrimination complaints and work with the Virginia DHCD to address those complaints. Mr. Ramey asked if there were any questions from council regarding fair housing in the city, and there were not questions or comments from council.

He said he is extremely excited to update council in the very near future about projects that have started in the Southside community.

Via a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Ramey provided council with COVID-19 vaccination rate and case trends.

He shared statistics from a January, 29, 2022, Bristol Herald Courier article indicating that if the Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia region were a state, it would rank last in the United States for percentage of population fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Virginia ranked 10<sup>th</sup> nationally at 68.8 percent fully vaccinated, while Tennessee ranked 45<sup>th</sup> nationally at 52.6 percent fully vaccinated.

The city manager said the same date the paper reported Virginia Department of Health COVID-19 vaccination rates for Norton as 1,980 fully vaccinated (49.7 percent) with 781 having received a booster (19.6 percent). The paper also stated that 47.8 percent of Ballard Health region's residents were fully vaccinated as of January 28, 2022.

Discussion about vaccination statistic accuracy and if all vaccination sites such as drug stores report their vaccinations to the Virginia Department of Health followed.

Mr. Ramey reported the following Virginia Department of Health (VDH) COVID-19 statistics for Norton as of January 28, 2022: Cases (1,058), 878 on Jan. 14, 2022; Hospitalizations (38), 38 on Jan. 14, 2022; Deaths (20), 20 on Jan. 14, 2022; Increase in Cases Over 7-Day Period (81); and 7-Day Average Number of Daily New Cases Reported (12).

He also presented COVID-19 case and vaccination comparison analysis of Norton and Falls Church, Virginia.

Updating council on the status of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding and projects, the city manager told council that city administration received the Interim Final Rule from the United States Treasury and is continuing to learn about ARPA funding guidelines.

Mr. Ramey advised the city remains under contract with engineering consultants on utility projects approved by council and has moved forward with an approved preliminary design of the potential Splashpad Project.

The city manager the city is looking forward to the arrival of the new Norton Rescue Squad ambulance, garbage truck and dump truck.

The city manager advised that city administration developed a comprehensive list of potential ARPA projects which includes: Public Facilities, Information Technology Upgrades, Neighborhood Improvements, Streets which could include paving, Complete Downtown Streetscape Efforts, Complete Federal Lands Access Program Projects (Destination Center, 12<sup>th</sup> Street Multi-use Trail and the Tower Trail), 11<sup>th</sup> Street Park Upgrades, Southside Housing and Neighborhood Project, and Utilities. He said council found the comprehensive list of potential ARPA projects helpful during the January 22, 2022, council work session.

He said city council is taking council suggestions from the workshop into consideration and will work those suggestions into future documents that will be reviewed by council.

Councilwoman Davis asked if a backhoe is on the list of potential projects.

The city manager confirmed that the need for a new backhoe was something that was discussed by council and is definitely needed, whether purchased with ARPA funding or through

a financing program. He said the city has two backhoes that are always in use by the street and water/sewer departments.

Mr. Ramey suggested that council conduct one work session per month throughout the spring.

The consensus of council was to conduct a work session at 8 a.m. Saturday, February 26, 2022, in council chambers.

Included in packets for council consideration was a transfer to Norton City Schools, dated November 24, 2021, in the amount of \$100,000.00 to cover November 2021 payroll expenditures.

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

Upon a motion by Councilman Fultz, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by the following unanimous roll call vote: YES – Mays, Fultz, Caruso, Davis, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, council moved to go into closed meeting to discuss Personnel as per Section 2.2-3711 (A) (1) of the Code of Virginia as amended; and 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 as per Section 2.2-3711 (A) (3).

Mayor Fawbush declared council in closed meeting.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilman Caruso, and passed by the following unanimous vote, YES – Mays, Fultz, Caruso, Davis, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – NONE, council moved to go back into open meeting.

Mayor Fawbush declared council back in open meeting.

Mr. Ramey polled each member of council as to the Certification of Closed Meeting with each answering yes. The city manager then read A Resolution of the Certification of Closed Meeting.

Upon a motion by Councilwoman Davis, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by the following unanimous vote, YES – Mays, Fultz, Caruso, Davis, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – NONE, council moved to adopt A Resolution of the Certification of Closed Meeting. (Insert)

Mayor Fawbush opened the floor for nominations to the City of Norton Building Code Board of Appeals for a five-year term to expire January 17, 2027.

Councilwoman Davis nominated Mike Ball to be reappointed to the City of Norton Building Code Board of Appeals for a five-year term to expire January 17, 2027.

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

The mayor declared Mike Ball reappointed to the City of Norton Building Code Board of Appeals for a five-year term to expire January 17, 2027.

The mayor opened the floor for nominations to the Norton Redevelopment and Housing Authority for a four-year term to expire January 28, 2026.

Councilman Mays nominated Roger Sloce to be reappointed to the Norton Redevelopment and Housing Authority for a four-year term to expire January 28, 2026.

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

The mayor declared Roger Sloce reappointed to the Norton Redevelopment and Housing Authority for a four-year term to expire January 28, 2026

Mayor Fawbush opened the floor for four nominations to the Highway Safety Commission for two-year terms to expire January 31, 2024.

Councilman Caruso nominated James Lane, Frank Gravely, David Daniels and Mark Conner to be reappointed to the Highway Safety Commission for two-year terms to expire January 31, 2024.

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

The mayor declared James Lane, Frank Gravely, David Daniels and Mark Conner reappointed to the Highway Safety Commission for two-year terms to expire January 31, 2024.

In comments from the city manager:

Mr. Ramey told council that Mayor Fawbush attended today's grand opening of Wallis & Co., a new antique store located at 604 Park Ave., N.W.

The city manager mentioned three state legislative bills that he thought were of local interest: one would give localities the flexibility to raise funds for school construction and renovations; the second would repeal the Grocery Tax, thus eliminating the one percent local option sales tax; and the third would require localities to hold a binding referendum to approve any increase to the local property tax rate that is greater than one percent.

Mr. Ramey advised that the U.S. Forest Service is advertising the city's proposed trail project for public comment until February 24, 2022. He distributed copies of the U. S. Forest Service document to council.

He reminded council a work session has been scheduled for 8 a.m. Saturday, February 26, 2022, in council chambers.

The following comments were made by council members:

The mayor said he attended the ribbon cutting for Wallis & Co. in downtown Norton and the new store has some unique items and does online sales.

The city manager said Wallis & Co. hopes to conduct auctions in the future.

The mayor suggested updating individual and group council photos.

Mr. Ramey said he would contact a photographer and notify council members of the date the pictures will be taken.


The mayor said a school/council leadership meeting is scheduled for 4:30 to 5:30 p.m., February 3 at the school board.

Mayor Fawbush said the city's 2022 personal property tax rate may be something council wants to address during the budgetary process, because used vehicles are being valued at a higher rate and are based on National Automotive Dealers Association used vehicle values. He also pointed out that the recent increased value of homes may also change the assessed value of homes in the next reassessment.

The city manager suggested that council request a comprehensive personal property report from the commissioner of revenue prior to making a decision on changing the city's personal property tax rates.

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

CITY OF NORTON, VIRGINIA

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Joseph Fawbush, Mayor

ATTEST:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Fred Ramey, Jr., Interim Clerk of Council