

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Norton City Council was held Tuesday, March 15, 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; Jeffery Shupe, City Finance Director; and Stephen McElroy, City Engineer

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

Upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilwoman Davis, and passed by the following vote: YES – Mays, Fultz, Caruso, Davis, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, ABSTAIN – None, council moved to adopt the minutes of the March 1, 2022, council meeting as presented.

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

The city manager requested council consideration of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Norton Department of Social Services (NDSS) and Southwest Virginia Children's Advocacy Center of Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc.

Mr. Ramey said this MOU and the next MOU (Agenda Item 6B - Consideration of a Memorandum of Understanding between Norton Police Department and Southwest Virginia Children's Advocacy Center of Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc.) outline the measures/protocol all parties will follow to provide family violence prevention, intervention, and treatment services in Wise, Lee, Scott and Dickenson counties and the City of Norton. The city manager confirmed that City Attorney William Bradshaw had reviewed both documents and had given endorsement approval.

Norton Department of Social Services Director Abe Rutherford was in attendance to address questions from council concerning the first MOU, while First Sergeant Greg Mays was present to answer questions about the MOU involving the police department.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays to authorize the execution of both MOUs, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by unanimous vote, council moved to authorize the execution of the Memorandum of Understanding between Norton Department of Social Services and Southwest Virginia Children's Advocacy Center of Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc., and the Memorandum of Understanding between Norton Police Department and Southwest Virginia Children's Advocacy Center of Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc. (Inserts)

Provided in packets for council consideration was a cooperative agreement between Norton Police Department and Family Crisis Support Services, Inc.

The city manager said the agreement shows that both parties have agreed to follow measures which will enable both agencies to provide better services to victims of violent crimes and homelessness. The procedures agreed to ensure that victims of violent crimes and homelessness will receive information and referral about available services, and protect their rights. The city attorney had reviewed and approved the agreement.

Norton Police Department First Sergeant Greg Mays was present to address questions from council.

Upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilwoman Davis, and passed by unanimous vote, council moved to authorize execution of the cooperative agreement between Norton Police Department and Family Crisis Support Services, Inc. (Insert)

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Norton Police Department and Southwest Virginia Drug Task Force was also placed in packets for consideration by council.

The agreement, which becomes effective July 1, 2022, is between the Wise, Lee, and Scott county sheriff's departments and the Big Stone Gap and City of Norton police departments in conjunction with the Virginia State Police, Bureau of Investigation. The purpose of the MOU is to delineate the responsibilities of personnel, formalize the relationships between the agencies for policy guidance pertaining to task force operations, and maximize interagency cooperation. Member agencies shall contribute \$5,000 in annual dues which are due by July 1 of each year.

First Sergeant Greg Mays was present to address questions from council.

Upon a motion by Councilwoman Davis, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by unanimous vote, council moved to authorize execution of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Norton Police Department and Southwest Virginia Drug Task Force. (Insert)

Mr. Ramey advised that city administration had received notification from Virginia Resources Authority (VRA) of a funding offer from Virginia Department of Health for the Southside Waterline Replacement Project and he requested council authorization to accept the funding offer.

The city manager explained that the department of health authorized a funding package of up to \$365,588 from the Virginia Water Supply Revolving Fund for the Southside Waterline Replacement Project. The funding consists of a principal repayment loan of up to \$255,912 and a principal forgiveness loan of up to \$109,676. Payments on the principal repayment loan will begin six months after the estimated project completion date for a term up to 20 years. He said the goal is for the loan closing to take place by June 30, 2022.

City Engineer Stephen McElroy explained that replacement of cast iron/galvanized waterlines will take place on Locust and Roberts avenues and the Lost Creek area, and will eliminate two highway crossings. The 3,400-foot waterline replacement project will serve approximately 30 residents and improve water quality, fire flow, and reliability.

Following a discussion about project and loan details, the city manager said if everything goes well, the goal is to replace the lines and eventually pave the streets once the lines have been installed. He advised that the pre-bid conference for the waterline project was held earlier today.

Mr. Ramey and City Finance Director Jeffery Shupe confirmed that American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding could also be used as a source of additional funding if the cost of the waterline replacement project exceeds the \$365,588 in loan funding.

Mayor Fawbush asked if council had any questions.

There were no questions from council.

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, ABSTAIN – None, council moved to authorize the city manager/finance director to accept the funding offer of up to \$365,588 from the Virginia Department of Health for the Southside Waterline Replacement Project, as stated above. (Insert)

A Resolution Declaring the Month of April 2022 as Child Abuse Prevention Month in the City of Norton was provided in council packets for consideration.

Councilwoman Davis nominated Cara Madrigal to be appointed to the Department of Social Services Advisory Board for a four-year term to expire January 31, 2026.

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

The mayor declared Cara Madrigal appointed to the Department of Social Services Advisory Board for a four-year term to expire January 31, 2026.

In comments from the city manager:

Mr. Ramey reported that all four properties sold at last week's delinquent real estate tax sale at prices that covered the delinquent taxes and the majority of the expenses of the tax sale. He said high bids for the four properties totaled around \$52,000, with about \$12,000 of that amount being returned to the city.

Mr. Ramey advised that the following grant applications have been submitted: the Norton Elementary and Middle School Resource Officer (SRO) Grant, the grant for the potential parking area for the Labyrinth Climbing Area, and the \$4,500 FY2023 Virginia Commission for the Arts Creative Communities Partnership Grant for the Pro-Art Association and The Country Cabin.

The city manager updated council on state legislative bills of interest by distributing handouts concerning the bills.

Mr. Ramey gave council a copy of a map of High Knob city staff has been working on with consultants and the latest Retail Sales Tax Report.

Due to snow, the council workshop scheduled for 8 a.m., Saturday, March 12, 2022, was canceled, so he asked council to think about a possible date to reschedule the workshop.

The city manager reminded council to save the date/time of 2 p.m., Saturday, June 11, 2022, for the 1951 Norton Little League All-Star Baseball Team Commemorative Marker unveiling program.

The following comments were made by council members:

Councilman Fultz commented that it is sad that each year council declares a Resolution for April to be Child Abuse Prevention Month. He said the world would be a better place without child abuse, but he is glad council is willing to acknowledge and bring enough attention to the issue with the hope that child abuse will stop and these types of resolutions will no longer be necessary.

Stating that he has received complaints from Laurel Avenue residents, Councilman Caruso said the trash issue at the trailer park on Laurel Avenue is becoming untenable for many of the residents and he is officially relaying the complaints to council. He said he doesn't know how to fix the problem concerning the amount of trash that accumulates in and around the trailer park dumpster and bears getting into the trash other than sending the trash truck to the trailer park dumpster daily to collect the trash.

Mr. Ramey said the city has done that in the past, but he is not sure if daily collection of trash from the trailer park dumpster is still taking place.

Mr. Caruso asked the city manager to have city workers collect the trash at the trailer park dumpster daily, see if daily trash collection makes a difference, and report back. He said when he drove to Laurel Avenue, the area was an absolute mess and looked like a tornado had hit that area. The doors to the dumpster were open even though the doors are bear-proof and four, five or six bags of trash had been strewn across Laurel Avenue and into the woods.

He said another Laurel Avenue resident told him that he had never seen Laurel Avenue paved in the over 40 years he had lived there and the potholes were damaging his vehicle. Councilman Caruso said he did not notice the potholes, but asked for Laurel Avenue to be added to the city paving list.

Noting the city has many streets that have not been paved in 40 years, the city manager said Laurel Avenue and Chapman Street are toward the top of the city's list of roads needing to be paved.

Discussion ensued about the possibility of having Laurel Avenue paving done at the same time or in conjunction with the Destination Center and Laurel Avenue Bridge Replacement projects.

Mr. Caruso asked if the city can patch the potholes on Laurel Avenue until paving can be done.

The city manager said he would have the city street department take a look at the potholes and see what can be done.

Councilman Caruso said the city needs to have a "No Large Trucks" sign at the bottom of High Knob, so large trucks don't get stuck on the mountain.

Mr. Ramey said unless the sign has been torn down, there is a sign on Virginia Department of Transportation right-of-way along Route 619 near the bridge.

Mr. Caruso noted that the sign needs to be more visible.

Councilman Caruso also suggested that this might be a good year to put a significant amount of revenue back into unappropriated reserves.

The city manager said the next council work session would be a good time to discuss Mr. Caruso's suggestion.

The councilman suggested having the parks and recreation department sponsor two garbage cleanups a year, one in the fall and the other in the spring. He said kiosks on High Knob need updating, parts have faded, and new maps need to be installed.

Mr. Caruso said he had a citizen ask if the city could use its billboards to support/advertise the High Knob Music Festival.

Mr. Ramey said the city is in the process of designing a billboard that will feature the Best Friend Festival and the High Knob Festival since both festivals are scheduled in June.

Councilman Caruso proposed that the city use ARPA funding to provide up to a \$5,000 grant for Norton businesses to replenish funds used for business licenses.

Mr. Caruso also proposed using city ARPA funding to help the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth Program, which has depleted its program funding, provide an educational stipend for a City of Norton youth who needs assistance transitioning into the workforce. He asked council for permission to allow the city manager to work with Tiffany Goff, director of workforce programs for the Southwest Virginia Workforce Development Board, to establish an up to \$2,500 educational stipend to help that student until workforce program funding is available.

Discussion followed about how WIOA youth program funding is allocated and how the number of applicants impacts the funding.

Council members Mays and Davis stated that funding of this nature needs to be looked into on the front end.

Mayor Fawbush said his concern is setting a precedent for things like this in the future. He asked if the city could use offset funds or funding from downtown businesses, like the business license grant discussed earlier, to pay the business where the student is doing the internship.

Councilman Fultz said as an educator, he would have to know more about the student and that student's attendance, etc., to make a decision for the city to fund the educational stipend.

The city manager suggested involving Norton Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Gina Wohlford, in this discussion to see if there are any educational funding sources that could help this student. Council members agreed with the city manager's suggestion.

Mr. Ramey said he would set up a meeting/conference call with Dr. Wohlford to see what funding is possible.

Councilman Caruso said it is also time for the City of Norton/Norton City Schools Leadership Team to start budget/planning meetings.

The city manager commented that he and Dr. Wohlford had already briefly discussed three budgeting scenarios the school system is considering.

Councilman Fultz wanted to clarify if Councilman Caruso's request for council consideration of the proposed up to \$5,000 grant rebate on businesses licenses was for downtown businesses only.

Councilman Caruso said it would be for all Norton businesses, not just downtown businesses.

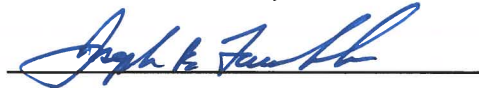
Mayor Fawbush said council needed to reschedule the March 12th council workshop.

The consensus of council was to conduct a rescheduled workshop at 4 p.m., Wednesday, March 23, 2022, in council chambers.

The mayor said he was looking forward to attending a meeting in Abingdon on Wednesday, March 16, 2022, with Evolves Central Appalachia (Evolve CAPP), a new coalition formed by federal and state Departments of Energy, about mining rare earth elements and critical mineral use. He said millions of dollars in grant funding is available and he hopes to learn more about promising economic development opportunities at this meeting.

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