

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Norton City Council was held Tuesday, August 16, 2022, at 6:00 p.m., in the Municipal Council Chambers with Mayor Joseph Fawbush presiding.

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

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

Absent: William Mays

The invocation was given by Norton City School Board Chairman Cody McElroy and was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance, led by Norton Police Department First Sergeant Greg Mays.

At this time, Mayor Fawbush asked council to amend the agenda to include under Item 6-C-1 an Update on the Maple Avenue Sewer Line Project.

The consensus of council was to amend the agenda to include an Update on the Maple Avenue Sewer Line Project, as stated above.

Upon a motion by Councilwoman Davis, seconded by Councilman Caruso, and passed by unanimous vote, YES –Fultz, Davis, Caruso and Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – Mays, ABSTAIN – None, council moved to adopt the minutes of the August 2, 2022, council meeting as presented.

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

Mayor Fawbush and the city manager welcomed Dr. Kristen Westover, president of Mountain Empire Community College (MECC), and Dr. Amy Greear, vice president of institutional advancement at MECC, who were at the meeting to update council on activities currently taking place at the college.

Mr. Ramey said Dr. Westover and Dr. Greear were also going to discuss a new program the college has implemented called the MECC Promise Program.

At this time, Councilman Mays took his seat on council.

Dr. Kristen Westover said enrollment is trending about the same as last year. She explained that while high school graduating class numbers continue to decline, enrollment is being maintained by gaining students in the over-25 demographic and students who want to reskill and re-enter the workforce.

Noting the college has been celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, she gave council members MECC 50th anniversary commemorative pins.

The college president asked council to entertain a commitment to ensure that Norton and the region continue with economic vitality through education and investment in education.

Via PowerPoint, she provided a brief overview of MECC which serves the City of Norton and Wise, Lee, Scott, and Dickenson Counties. The college serves approximately 3,000 credit and 2,600 noncredit students annually. In 2021-2022, 216 students from Norton attended MECC, and 16 John I. Burton High School Class of 2021 graduates attended MECC last fall. She said MECC consistently ranks first among the 23 institutions in Virginia's community college system in

percentage of students receiving financial aid. She said over half of MECC's program-based students receive zero Expected Family Contribution (EFC) and about 98 percent of MECC students receive some form of financial aid. Dr. Westover said the MECC Foundation has played a key role in trying to close that gap and make college affordable for area students.

At this time, Dr. Westover turned the presentation over to Dr. Greear.

MECC's vice president of institutional advancement said as part of the college's 50th Anniversary the MECC Foundation Board made a commitment to fund a high school promise program which guarantees that any high school graduate meeting the qualifications would receive two years of college tuition free.

She discussed the educational attainment rate of the area and noted that enhancement of this rate is important for area economic development. Dr. Greear provided council with MECC's 2020 educational statistics for students from Norton. She said MECC hopes to increase the skill levels and the number of skilled employees entering the workforce.

Dr. Greear asked council to recognize and support the MECC Promise Program and discussed the following program criteria: students must maintain a 2.0 Grade Point Average (GPA); must maintain continuous enrollment up to two years or 72 credit hours, or completion of the applicant's first associates degree; reside in the service area and provide proof of residency; complete a Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) and submit all required documentation annually; must complete an MECC Scholarship Application annually; and last dollar scholarship for tuition only. She said only high school graduates are eligible for the MECC Promise Program.

Dr. Westover said the 2021-22 average unmet need for John I. Burton High School students for three years was approximately \$7,144. She explained that the goal is to increase the educational attainment of the region and support future economic development and skilled job requirements in Southwest Virginia.

Dr. Greear said the GENAN Foundation based in Charlottesville, Virginia, made a significant investment in the region by giving \$750,000 to support the kickoff for the college's Promise Program Scholarship. She requested an average annual gift of \$10,000 from the City of Norton to be used starting with the Class of 2023. She said any funding not spent would be returned to the city or would be carried over to fund the second year for students, whichever council decides. She said MECC Foundation would support any students beyond the \$10,000. The city's \$10,000 donation could impact about 30 students from Norton. Regional support of the program could impact 230-300 students.

Explaining that MECC is not trying to take students away from four-year colleges or universities such as UVA Wise, she said the population the college is trying to reach is students who are going directly to employment.

Dr. Westover noted that MECC has strengthened its relationship with UVA Wise over the last four or five years through MECC Foundation's commitment to the Appalachian Intermountain Scholars (AIMS) Program. The AIMS scholarship helps those students who know they want to go to UVA Wise and attend a four-year college.

The MECC president explained the justification for the funding request is that the funding provides John I. Burton High School students with the same mechanism for educational attainment that is currently available to students in East Tennessee and other areas of Virginia. The funding also increases the educational attainment rate of Norton and the Southwest Virginia region and prepares students to fill current and future jobs in the region.

Dr. Greear said the same funding request proposal will be taken to all county boards of supervisors in the region within the next month or so.

Following a question-and-answer session, the city manager advised council the request for program support was being presented tonight and following FY 2024 budget preparation, the earliest city contribution would not be provided until July 1, 2023.

Dr. Westover and Dr. Greear thanked council for the opportunity to speak before council.

Mayor Fawbush and council members thanked Dr. Westover and Dr. Greear for the presentation and voiced their support of the MECC Promise Program.

The next agenda item was a request by Norton City Schools Superintendent Dr. Gina Wohlford requesting a supplemental local appropriation of \$10,000 from the city. The request was made by letter to the city manager dated August 8, 2022.

Norton City Schools Board Chairman Cody McElroy presented the request to council, and Dr. Wohlford was in attendance to address questions from council.

Mr. McElroy said the \$10,000 appropriation would be assigned to the 2022-2023 General Fund for the new John I. Burton High School outdoor basketball courts. He said the new basketball court project is located at the former high school tennis court site and is a collaborative project with the city.

Mayor Fawbush asked if council had any questions.

Upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by unanimous roll call vote, YES – Mays, Fultz, Davis, Caruso and Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, ABSTAIN – None, council moved to adopt Norton City Schools Supplemental Local Appropriation of \$10,000 from the city's General Fund - Unappropriated Reserves and a budget amendment of \$10,000 to the city's FY23 General Fund Budget.

The city manager updated council on the city's Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area (DORA) and discussed two upcoming events that could potentially be held within the city's DORA.

Noting that council felt the DORA license application would help support events and downtown businesses, Mr. Ramey said the application was approved and a few items had to be completed before council could officially approve the first DORA event. The city manager told council that two ABC licensees (Lincoln Road Coffee Lounge and Doughmakers) located within the primary (700 Block of Park Avenue) DORA obtained cups with business designations, the cups were submitted to the Virginia Alcoholic Beverage Control Authority and have received approval as meeting state guidelines. He said Sugar Hill Cidery is working on this, but he had not been informed of state approval yet.

He said he met with the owners of Lincoln Road and Doughmakers last week and they think having a DORA during the High Knob Outdoor Festival would help their businesses, would give them a chance to get use to the process, and would enable them to prepare for larger events such as the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) Flag Rock Hill Climb. Mr. Ramey said they were supportive of having a DORA for the High Knob Outdoor Festival.

The city manager said the next item requiring completion was the development of signage for the DORA. He showed council two designs, one for entrance into the DORA and the other for exiting the DORA, which were approved by the state. Mr. Ramey said signage logistics planning has been somewhat of a challenge.

Councilman Robert Fultz, Jr., left the council meeting at this time.

Following a discussion, Mr. Ramey said city administration believes having a DORA during the High Knob Outdoor Festival would be beneficial to help work out the kinks before the larger

DORA event. He said he thinks city administration is ready for the city's first DORA event, however, official approval is contingent upon council.

The city manager said another requirement of the DORA permit was to provide enough trash containers for the DORA. He advised that the city had met that requirement and will use the city's Paint-a-Can contest receptacles during DORA events.

Following a brief discussion, upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilwoman Davis, and passed by the following roll call vote, YES – Mays, Davis, Caruso and Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – Fultz, ABSTAIN – None, council moved to approve the High Knob Outdoor Festival from 2-9 p.m., Saturday, August 20, 2022, and the SCCA Flag Rock Hill Climb from 6-9 p.m., Friday, August 26, 2022, as the city's first two DORA events.

Providing council with an update on the Maple Avenue Sewer Line Project, Mr. Ramey informed council that a significant sewer problem was discovered that is difficult to repair. He said the issue was discussed with council at the August 9th work session and at that time city administration believed the best method of repair was to replace and relocate the sewer line. Since the work session, the city received two bids which were less than the \$150,000 estimated cost of the project. He said the low bid was \$143,060 and was from a contractor the city has worked with previously.

The city manager advised that because of the depth of the line, its location under US 23 and its potential to be an ongoing problem, paying more money now to address the issue would be a better long-term investment. He asked City Engineer Stephen McElroy, who was present at the meeting, to explain the repair project to council via PowerPoint.

Mr. McElroy showed where the sewer line crosses US 23 and the location of the sewer line failure on Roberts Avenue. He explained the failure is in a manhole that is about 18 feet deep and runs parallel to Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) storm drainage that was installed with the bypass project. He said the sewer line is readily available on Maple Avenue near the 1st Street Intersection from which a new line would be installed that would service three homes and abandon the failed line. Noting that the depth is a concern, the city engineer explained that US 23 is a limited-access right-of-way which would result in having to bore outside the fencing on both sides of the highway if future repairs were necessary. He noted that the cost of the bore, which is a steep bore, would be double the cost of installing the new line.

The city engineer advised council this is the best approach and a very good bid that is in line with current bid prices. He requested council authorization to move forward with the recommended repair.

The city manager said the sewer line repair is an emergency repair that is estimated to take two weeks and would be followed by paving since the water line has been replaced for that street as part of the Southside Water Line Replacement Project. He explained that council identified the Southside Water Line Replacement Project as a potential American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) project, so council could authorize city administration to move forward with the emergency sewer line repair with the intent of using ARPA funding, but with the option to use other funding, should council so choose.

Councilman Mays suggested increasing the estimated cost for the emergency sewer line repair to \$150,000 to account for possible pricing increases.

Upon a motion by Councilwoman Davis, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by the following roll call vote, YES – Mays, Davis, Caruso and Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT –

Fultz, ABSTAIN – None, council moved to authorize city administration to move forward with the emergency Maple Avenue sewer line repair at a cost up to \$150,000 with the intent of using ARPA funding, but with the option to use other funding.

In packets for council consideration was a transfer to Powell Valley National Bank, dated July 22, 2022, in the amount of \$128,047.35, for bond payment for the viaduct bridge loan.

Upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by unanimous roll call vote, YES – Mays, Davis, Caruso and Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – Fultz, ABSTAIN – None, council moved to confirm the transfer to Powell Valley National Bank, as stated above.

Upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilwoman Davis, and passed by the following roll call vote: YES – Mays, Davis, Caruso and Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – Fultz, ABSTAIN – 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.

Mayor Fawbush declared council in closed meeting.

Councilman Fultz returned to the meeting.

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

In comments from the city manager:

Mr. Ramey said Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) letters were mailed to 39 property owners on the Sentry Road/Wise County side of Route 619 explaining the anticipated closure schedule of Route 619 during the upcoming Flag Rock Hill Climb. He said the letter was a collaborative effort between the city administration, SCCA, and the Blue Ridge Region of the SCCA. The city manager said address information for property owners on the Scott County side of Route 619 has been requested but has not been received. The same SCCA letter explaining traffic control during the hill climb will be mailed to those property owners when that information is received.

The city manager told council the city plans to place electronic signs on Route 619 a couple of days prior to the event to inform people about the traffic flow pattern for the hill climb, as well as placing the information on the city's social media and in a Coalfield Progress ad. He noted the city is trying to do everything possible prior to the hill climb to inform everyone about the traffic flow closure schedule on Route 619 during this SCCA event.

Mr. Ramey distributed an event press release to council members that described and promoted the Friday night, August 26, 2022, event. The city manager said he hopes articles about the hill

climb event will be published in local papers this week and the city will initiate SCCA Flag Rock Hill Climb promotions on its social media. He said he is going to ask the SCCA to provide a promotional video that the city could put on its social media that would show people why they should attend the hill climb event.

Councilman Caruso inquired about start and end times for the Saturday hill climb.

A discussion about specific event times followed.

Mr. Ramey said the Saturday hill climb is expected to begin at 8:30-9 a.m. and would end between 5 or 5:30 p.m., which would be dependent upon the event of rain and the number of entrants. If it rains, the city manager explained that the event may only be half a day.

The city engineer said SCCA wants to have seven or eight heats per day (Saturday, August 27, and Sunday, August 28). He also said if the event is like the one in Pineville, Kentucky, there will be a lunch break around noon to 1 p.m.

The city manager said the target was to be finished by 6 p.m.

The city manager provided council members with the latest Retail Sales Tax Report and reminded council about the High Knob Outdoor Festival activities scheduled throughout the week of August 15-20, 2022.

The following comments were made by council members:

Noting she had mentioned this to council previously, Councilwoman Davis requested to have a picnic or event for Norton's first responders/emergency personnel and their families to give them a break from the trauma they encounter while responding to emergency incidents.

Councilman Fultz pointed out that everyone cannot be there at once because some personnel will be on duty.

Following a brief discussion, the consensus of council was for Councilwoman Davis to proceed planning the event. Possible dates and number of attendees for the event were discussed. The consensus of council was to have the event on September 24, 2022, pending no schedule conflicts.

Councilman Fultz said he received an email from Cloudsplitter Coordinator Susan Howell requesting his church conduct the High Knob aid station again during this year's Cloudsplitter. He said he has not replied to the email because he has retired as pastor and is no longer in charge of making those decisions for the church. He said he consulted Dr. Scott Addison, who is leading the church, and Dr. Addison said the church does not have enough people to staff the aid station.

He said volunteers will also have to be found to man the Edith Gap and Bark Camp aid stations as volunteers for those aid stations have indicated that they will not be working those stations this year. He suggested that city council and candidates running for council volunteer to staff the Tower High Knob aid station during this year's Cloudsplitter. He noted that John I. Burton High School National Honor Society members might be able to volunteer like last year.

The city manager explained that the High Knob Tower aid station is one of the hardest and is important for the runners because it is located at a key intersection. He noted that city staff/administration wants to support council if this is council's decision but pointed out that staff is already spread thin working the event.

Councilman Fultz suggested possible volunteer recruits/options for these aid stations.

A discussion about what working and staffing aid stations involves followed.

Councilman Fultz said he would respond to Ms. Howell's email.

Mayor Fawbush asked if the consensus of council was to have the regularly scheduled meeting on September 6, 2022, the day after the Labor Day. The consensus of council was to

have the regularly scheduled council meeting at 6 p.m., Tuesday, September 6, 2022, in council chambers.

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