

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Norton City Council was held Tuesday, September 20, 2022, at 6:00 p.m., in the Municipal Council Chambers with Vice Mayor Mark Caruso presiding.

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

Absent: Sarah Davis and Joseph Fawbush

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

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 Mays, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by the following vote, YES – Mays, Fultz and Caruso, NO – None, ABSENT – Davis and Fawbush, ABSTAIN – None, council moved to adopt the minutes of the September 6, 2022, meeting as presented.

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

Vice Mayor Caruso welcomed AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) Southern Region Team River 4 to Norton and to the council meeting. He commended the AmeriCorps teams for their work and contribution to improving the economy of the area.

Noting that this is always an exciting time of year when council gets to meet a new AmeriCorps team, the city manager asked City Trail Coordinator Shayne Fields to brief council on the work the 9-member team has been doing since arriving on September 12<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Fields said Team River 4 is the seventh AmeriCorps NCCC Southern Region team the city has had the pleasure of sponsoring. He informed council that the team has been working on a section of an intermediate-grade mountain bike trail. Mr. Fields then introduced River 4 Team Leader Alexa Rodriguez of Queens, New York, and asked her to introduce the team.

Ms. Rodriguez introduced herself and said the team previously worked in Martin, Kentucky, helping with disaster relief efforts following recent flooding. She then discussed why she joined AmeriCorps and what she likes about Norton.

The team leader asked team members to introduce themselves, state where they are from, why they joined AmeriCorps, and what they like about Norton. Team members included: Jesse Limmer, Long Island, New York; Aidan O'Hara, West Chester, New York; Ariana Riedel, Orange County, California; Anna Schkeryantz, Hamilton County, Indiana; Joel Estevez, Gibsonton, Florida; Isabel Davis, Phoenix, Arizona; Mallory Brown, Tampa Bay, Florida; and Ciro Altamirano, Stratford, California.

Assistant Team Leader Jesse Limmer shared a PowerPoint presentation on the work the team did during the first week in Norton with before-and-after trail photos. In addition to 90 feet of trail development and learning how to use trail building tools, the team worked with the Norton Fire Department and American Red Cross visiting 172 homes and installing 19 smoke alarms in 12 homes throughout the community as part of Sound the Alarm.

On behalf of Team River 4, Ms. Rodriguez expressed appreciation for the opportunity to address council and she said the team would debrief council about the team's progress prior to departing on October 10<sup>th</sup>. A picture of the team was then taken with council.

The vice mayor, the city manager and council members thanked the team for attending the meeting and informing council about the work they are doing.

The city manager asked for council consideration of whether the City of Norton wishes to remain a member of the Cumberland Airport Commission. Included in council packets was a letter dated August 25, 2022, from the Cumberland Airport Commission requesting confirmation of council's decision on membership.

Mr. Ramey said he contacted the commission to better understand the goals and objectives of the commission request so council had as much information as possible. He presented council with a brief history of the commission which was created by a 1958 Act of the Virginia General Assembly and copies of the act were included in council packets. He noted that the act has never been revised or amended since that time, but the commission has changed.

The city manager said commission membership in 1958 included Wise, Dickenson, Lee and Russell Counties, the City of Norton, and the towns of Appalachia, Big Stone Gap, Wise, Pound, Coeburn, St. Paul, Clintwood, Haysi, Jonesville, Pennington Gap, Ewing, Rose Hill and Lebanon. He explained that Lee County officials indicated in 2015 that membership in the commission was no longer desired, although no formal documentation was submitted. In 2021, Wise County expressed to the commission its desire to amend the 1958 Act eliminating parties that no longer wished to be part of the commission and to consider membership and financial participation of member municipalities and counties. This action led to the commission sending letters to participating members to express the commission's desire to update the act and to ask members if they desire to continue membership.

Mr. Ramey advised that he reviewed the city council minutes relating to the city's membership in the commission. He said commission creation discussions first occurred in 1956 and the first request for funding occurred in 1958 when Cumberland Airport Authority Chairman George Wharton appeared before council requesting that the city's share of the airport expenses be placed in the next year's budget. He explained that the city's portion of the \$50,000 budget was 13 percent or \$6,500.

The city manager and City Finance Director Jeffery Shupe confirmed that the current city contribution to the commission totals \$2,645 annually.

Mr. Ramey told council the commission letter was reviewed by City Attorney William Bradshaw.

Councilman Fultz asked if the city would be asked to contribute a greater share if members opt out of commission membership.

Mr. Ramey advised that is a good possibility.

Councilman Fultz said the act probably needs some updating.

Vice Mayor said he had discussed the matter with Mayor Fawbush and the mayor is for staying in the Cumberland Airport Commission.

Following a brief discussion, upon a motion by Councilman Fultz, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by the following vote, YES – Mays, Fultz and Caruso, NO – None, ABSENT – Davis and Fawbush, ABSTAIN – None, council moved to confirm that council, on behalf of the City of Norton, desires to remain a member of the Cumberland Airport Commission.

Vice Mayor Caruso said the vote authorizes the city manager to endorse the letter to the commission affirming that the City of Norton wishes to remain a member of the Cumberland Airport Commission and to seek an update on any changes to the commission charter and by-laws and provide those changes to council.

The city manager advised that he would send a copy of the endorsed commission letter to Chris Starnes, the city's representative on the commission, showing the city's decision to remain a member of the commission.

Included in council packets were resolutions authorizing submission of two Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) grant applications with the department's Systemic Initiatives Program.

Mr. Ramey explained that through this program federal and state funding is used to implement safety improvements across the Commonwealth that reduce roadway fatalities and serious injuries.

Via PowerPoint, the city manager discussed the two proposed project applications: one is for installation of high visibility signal backplates on all light heads at nine controlled intersections (Hawthorne Drive/Commonwealth Drive, Park Avenue at Tipple Hill, Park Avenue/Route 74, Park Avenue/ 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Park Avenue/7<sup>th</sup> Street, Park Avenue/8<sup>th</sup> Street, Park Avenue/9<sup>th</sup> Street, Park Avenue/11<sup>th</sup> Street and Kentucky Avenue/11<sup>th</sup> Street); and the other is for installation of flashing yellow arrows at three city intersections (Park Avenue at Tipple Hill, Park Avenue/11<sup>th</sup> Street and Kentucky Avenue/11<sup>th</sup> Street).

The estimated grant project cost is \$158,900 for the high visibility signal backplates and \$92,000 for the flashing yellow arrows.

He advised that the city has also applied for funding for a new downtown control system and is hopeful the application will be funded.

Mr. Ramey said the two safety improvement applications require a resolution of support from the local government prior to submittal.

Vice Mayor Caruso asked if council had any questions or comments.

Councilman Mays said he thought the projects were very good projects and would be visible especially during foggy weather.

Following a brief discussion, Councilman Fultz said he would like to see blinking green, yellow and red lights installed locally like the ones he saw in Mexico.

The city manager said highway safety guidelines originate from the federal highway system and states can adopt those guidelines. He indicated that he was not sure if that type of system had been approved for use.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by the following roll call vote: YES – Mays, Fultz and Caruso, NO – None, ABSENT – Davis and Fawbush, ABSTAIN – None, council moved to adopt a Resolution Authorizing the City Manager to Submit a VDOT FY2023-2024 Highway Improvement Program Grant Application for the Installation of High Visibility Signal Backplates and a Resolution Authorizing the City Manager to Submit a VDOT FY2023-2024 Highway Improvement Program Grant Application for the Installation of Flashing Yellow Arrows, as indicated above. The motion also authorized the city manager or mayor to execute all agreements and/or addendums for these two HSIP Systemic Initiatives projects. (Inserts)

Included in packets for council consideration was a transfer to Norton City Schools dated August 10, 2022, in the amount of \$250,000 to cover August 2022 accounts payable expenditures.

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

Fawbush, ABSTAIN – None, council moved to confirm the transfer to Norton City Schools, as stated above.

At this time, Councilwoman Davis took her seat on council.

Upon a motion by Councilman Fultz, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by the following roll call vote, YES – Mays, Fultz, Caruso and Davis, NO – None, ABSENT – Fawbush, 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; and for Consultation with Legal Counsel and Briefings by Staff Members or Consultants Pertaining to Actual or Probable Litigation Where Such Consultation or Briefing in Open Meeting Would Adversely Affect the Negotiating or Litigating Posture of the Public Body as per Section 2.2-3711 (A) (7), as amended.

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

Vice Mayor Caruso declared council back in open meeting.

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

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

In comments from the city manager:

Mr. Ramey told council that late last week the city received authorization to advertise the multi-use trail from John I. Burton High School to the Destination Center and the bid opening could happen by the end of October.

The city manager said Wise County has applied for a grant to conduct a countywide Housing Needs and Market Assessment Study that will include the City of Norton and he was asked to provide a letter of support for the grant application. He said if this grant is awarded, the information gathered in the study will be an immense help with the city's upcoming comprehensive housing update.

He advised that he and Vice Mayor Caruso will attend the Virginia Municipal League Conference the first week in October. Mr. Ramey said the mayor has indicated that the October 4<sup>th</sup> council meeting will take place with City Finance Director Jeffery Shupe filling in for the city manager.

Mr. Ramey provided council with the latest Retail Sales Tax Report.

He said the Halloween Bash is scheduled for Saturday, October 29, 2022, and asked for council to think about a possible date in November for a council workshop to discuss American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) funded projects.

The following comments were made by council members:

Councilwoman Davis updated council on planning details for the First Responder Cookout scheduled for 4 to 6 p.m., Saturday 24, 2022, at the City Park.

Noting that Norton Police Chief James Lane and Norton Sheriff Jason McConnell received awards of valor from the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police on September 13<sup>th</sup> during a ceremony in Roanoke, she once again asked if the city could recognize Jason McConnell for his heroic actions on May 7, 2021. She requested that the city police department develop a system of accommodations so its officers can be formally recognized for acts of valor. She said she thinks recognizing people's accomplishments builds morale and this is something that should be addressed.

Vice Mayor Caruso said there are letters of accommodation that council could sign, but beyond that would be the ribbon system. He said the decision to institute a system of recognition would have to be made by the police department.

Councilman Fultz reported that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will operate the High Knob Tower aid station for the Cloudsplitter.

Councilwoman Davis said she and Councilman Fultz met with Cloudsplitter Director Susan Howell via Zoom during which she learned that there are other areas such as Edith Gap and Devil's Bathtub gate that need coverage.

She said she plans to meet with Chris Barker of the Job Corps on September 30<sup>th</sup> to discuss the possibility of operating a Cloudsplitter aid station.

Councilman Fultz said the Job Corps would be a good fit for operating the Devil's Bathtub aid station during the Cloudsplitter.

Councilman Mays said he enjoyed having the AmeriCorps team members at the council meeting, adding that they were delightful. He said he is looking forward to their work as well as the First Responder Cookout.

Vice Mayor Caruso reminded council that September is Emergency Preparedness Month. He urged citizens to know the risks as determined by the LENOWISCO Hazard Mitigation Plan and if they have any questions about how to prepare, go to [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov).

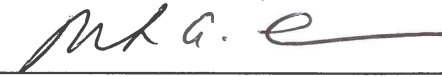
He commented on the shortage of blue gill at the reservoir and in Virginia and requested that blue gill be stocked at the reservoir when available.

The vice mayor said he was at the reservoir and picked up trash from an overflowing garbage can near the pier caused by people and not a bear.

The vice mayor thanked council and city administration for what they do and spoke about the progress taking place in Norton and the area.

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

CITY OF NORTON, VIRGINIA

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

ATTEST:

  
\_\_\_\_\_

Fred Ramey, Jr., Interim Clerk of Council