

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

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 – Fultz, Caruso, Davis, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, ABSTAIN – Mays, council moved to adopt the minutes of the February 15, 2022, council meeting as presented.

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

The city manager thanked council for attending the restoration unveiling ceremony for the U.S.S. Constitution cannon in the community garden outside the Municipal Building prior to the council meeting. He noted that it was almost a year to the day (March 9, 2021) that the cannon was removed from its location outside the Municipal Building and the restoration project began under the direction of parks and recreation/general maintenance employee David Rose. Mr. Ramey commended the talent and commitment of Mr. Rose and advised that City Engineer Stephen McElroy and Mr. Rose were present to discuss the cannon restoration project.

Via PowerPoint, the city engineer showed photos of the extensive restoration process and told council that the U.S.S. Constitution Museum was consulted and provided historically accurate construction drawings from 1907 with cannon specifications and paint colors. He said the city ordered white oak for the axles and pine for the carriage sidewalls, but was unable to find kiln-dried lumber, so the wood had to be dried indoors with constant airflow before construction of the carriage could begin.

The city manager said the project involved a great deal of workmanship by Mr. Rose and he was proud the city was able to do most of the restoration in house, noting that the new city shop provided the city with adequate room to complete the project indoors.

Mr. Rose said he enjoyed the restoration and couldn't have completed the project without the input and encouragement of the city engineer. He explained that the work was time consuming, because much of the work was done by hand rather than on a machine.

Council members thanked and commended Mr. Rose for his hard work and dedication to the restoration project.

Following a discussion about cannon construction details and how the cannon was in need of repair, Councilman Caruso suggested the city should share photos of the completed cannon restoration with the U.S.S. Constitution Museum.

The city manager noted that the City of Norton wasn't the only municipality that undertook the restoration of a U.S.S. Constitution cannon last year. He reported that one locality was restoring two U.S.S. Constitution cannons.

Mr. McElroy said he planned to share photos and local news coverage of the cannon restoration with the museum.

Council had been presented in their packets two erroneously assessed 2020 and 2021 real estate taxes.

The city manager said in a letter dated February 10, 2022, Commissioner of the Revenue Judy Miller requested permission to refund Realtec Developers, Inc., \$345.60 (\$172.80 for the second half of 2020 real estate taxes and \$172.80 for the first half of 2021 real estate taxes). The letter stated per a report from Norton Fire Chief Todd Lagow the house located at 333 Roberts Avenue, S.W., was a total loss following a fire on January 9, 2020. Ms. Miller said the taxes were paid by Realtec Developers, Inc., and a refund is due.

Upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by the following vote: YES – Mays, Fultz, Caruso, Davis, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, ABSTAIN – None, council authorized a refund to Realtec Developers, Inc., totaling \$345.60 (\$172.80 for the second half of 2020 real estate taxes and \$172.80 for the first half of 2021 real estate taxes).

Mr. Ramey advised that the city was notified that a United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Development (USDARD) loan/grant to purchase a police vehicle and an emergency response vehicle the city applied for in the fall of 2021 was recently approved.

The city manager requested council consideration of a Resolution of the Governing Body Authorizing the City Manager/Finance Director to Accept and Endorse All Associated Paperwork for Loan/Grant applications of \$60,000 and \$90,000 from USDARD for the Purchase of a Police Vehicle and an Emergency Response Truck.

There were no questions from council.

Upon a motion by Councilwoman Davis, 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 adopt a Resolution of the Governing Body Authorizing the City Manager/Finance Director to Accept and Endorse All Associated Paperwork for Loan/Grant applications of \$60,000 and \$90,000 from the United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Development for the Purchase of a Police Vehicle and an Emergency Response Truck. (Insert)

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

Citing the February 26, 2022, Bristol Herald Courier, he reported new COVID-19 cases in Southwest Virginia had declined for the third straight week and had dropped 28 percent. According to the paper, there were 28 new COVID-19 cases in Norton from February 18-25, 2022, and a positivity rate of 34.1 percent.

Mr. Ramey shared the following LENOWISCO Health District case statistics for Norton: January – 236 cases (65 ages 0-18 years) and February (Feb 1-27) – 137 cases (35 ages 0-18 years).

The city manager reported the following Virginia Department of Health (VDH) COVID-19 statistics for Norton as of February 25, 2022: Cases (1,282), 1,198 on Feb. 11, 2022; Hospitalizations (40), 37 on Feb. 11, 2022; Deaths (22), 21 on Feb. 11, 2022; Increase in Cases Over 7-Day Period (26); and 7-Day Average Number of Daily New Cases Reported (8).

The city manager said there were no new updates on American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding and projects.

He reminded council that a work session is scheduled for 8 a.m., Saturday, March 12, 2022, in council chambers.

Included in packets for council consideration was a transfer to Norton City Schools, dated February 23, 2022, in the amount of \$250,000 to cover February 2022 payroll expenditures.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilwoman Davis, and passed by the following roll call vote: YES – Mays, Fultz, Caruso, Davis, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, ABSTAIN – None, council moved to confirm the transfer to Norton City Schools, as stated above.

Upon a motion by Councilwoman Davis, seconded by Councilman Caruso, and passed by the following 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.

Mayor Fawbush declared council in closed meeting.

Upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by unanimous vote, 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 Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilwoman Davis, 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 Southwest Virginia Health Authority for a two-year term to expire December 31, 2025.

Councilwoman Davis nominated Steve Childers to be appointed to the Southwest Virginia Health Authority for a two-year term to expire December 31, 2025.

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

The mayor declared Steve Childers appointed to the Southwest Virginia Health Authority for a two-year term to expire December 31, 2025.

The mayor opened the floor for two nominations to the Appalachian Community Action and Development Agency, Inc., for four-year terms to expire April 1, 2026.

Councilman Caruso nominated Sarah Davis and Jeffery Shupe to be reappointed to the Appalachian Community Action and Development Agency, Inc., for four-year terms to expire April 1, 2026.

Upon a motion by Councilman Fultz, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by the following vote, YES – Mays, Fultz, Caruso, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, ABSTAIN – Davis, council moved that the nominations cease.

The mayor declared Sarah Davis and Jeffery Shupe reappointed to the Appalachian Community Action and Development Agency, Inc., for four-year terms to expire April 1, 2026.

In comments from the city manager:

Mr. Ramey advised council that city administration is planning to submit another grant application later this week for extension of the Norton Elementary and Middle School Resource Officer (SRO).

He asked if council had any questions or concerns.

There were no comments or questions from council.

Mr. Ramey said he thought this would be the last year the city would receive grant funding for the SRO at the elementary/middle school.

Providing council with an update on state legislative bills of interest, the city manager distributed an article on school construction money and the ability to have a local-option sales tax and a handout on the grocery tax. He reported that the local share of the grocery tax remains intact, but anything could happen during the next two weeks.

February 2022 financial statements were provided for council review.

Mr. Ramey reminded council that a delinquent real estate tax sale for four properties is scheduled for 10 a.m., Thursday, March 10, 2022, in council chambers and distributed a list of those properties to council.

The city manager informed council that the 1951 Norton Little League All-Star Baseball Team Commemorative Marker unveiling is scheduled for 2 p.m., Saturday, June 11, 2022. He said this will be a big day for the City of Norton because the Best Friend Festival is happening and he thought the John I. Burton High School Hall of Fame Dinner might be changed to that date as well. He said there may also be a class reunion of John I. Burton High School 1950s and early 1960s classes that date.

Councilwoman Davis inquired if the 1951 commemorative marker committee had approved the wording for the marker.

Mr. Ramey said the members changed some of the wording and he is hopeful the marker will be completed by the third week in May. He said the marker will be two-sided and contain a code that will take users to the City of Norton webpage to learn more about the important history associated with the marker.

He said the city has the opportunity to start its own color scheme for historic markers in the city and this is something for council to consider for the future.

The following comments were made by council members:

Council members commented that it is nice to have the cannon restored and returned to the community garden in front of the Municipal Building.

Councilman Fultz reported that Rural King is supposed to open March 12, and he is looking forward to eating at the new German restaurant coming to the city.

Councilman Caruso said he hiked five miles along the Flag Rock Area trail system and he highly recommends the gorgeous hike.

He inquired about reenergizing the tourism committee and provided council with his wording recommendation for the Jimmy Fawbush memorial plaque that would be installed at the limited mobility fishing pier at the Norton Reservoir. He read his recommendation for what should be on the plaque and requested that council take action on moving forward with the purchase, design and installation of the Jimmy Fawbush memorial plaque at the Norton Reservoir pier.

Councilman Caruso asked the mayor for permission to make a motion to purchase and install a plaque honoring the late Jimmy Fawbush and his contribution to the reservoir and fishing at that location.

Upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilwoman Davis, and passed by the following vote, YES – Mays, Fultz, Caruso, and Davis, NO – None, Absent – None, ABSTAIN – Fawbush, council moved to authorize the purchase and installation of a memorial plaque honoring the late Jimmy Fawbush and his contribution to the Norton Reservoir and fishing at that location. (Insert)

The mayor thanked Mr. Caruso, adding that he has monetary contributions that could be used for the plaque honoring his late brother.

Councilman Caruso said he thinks the city needs to work on its historic walk, a yurt and a cabin, and get tourism back on track for 2022.

Mayor Fawbush said he asked Spearhead Trails Executive Director Melissa Rose to provide council with an update on Spearhead Trails. He asked the city manager to contact Ms. Rose and see when she could provide that update.

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