

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Norton City Council was held Tuesday, November 5, 2019, at 6:00 p.m., in the Municipal Council Chambers with Vice Mayor Mark Caruso presiding.

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

Also Present: Fred L. Ramey, Jr., City Manager

Absent: Joseph Fawbush

The invocation was given by the city manager and was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by First Sergeant Greg Mays.

Due to the tabling of the October 1, 2019, minutes at the last meeting, transcripts from the October 1st and October 15th meetings were on council's November 5th agenda to be adopted.

Upon a motion by Councilman Fultz, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by the following vote: YES – Mays, Fultz, Caruso, NO – None, ABSENT – Fawbush, ABSTAIN – Belcher, council moved to adopt the minutes of the October 1, 2019, meeting as presented.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by the following vote: YES – Mays, Fultz, Belcher, NO – None, ABSENT – Fawbush, ABSTAIN – Caruso, council moved to adopt the minutes of the October 15, 2019, meeting as presented.

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

Council was presented a Resolution for Creating a 2020 Census Complete Count Committee to Plan and Conduct Local Educational Initiatives and Publicity and Promotional Activities to Increase Community Awareness and Participation in the 2020 United States Census (2020 U.S. Census).

2020 U.S. Census Partnership Specialist Carol Caruso presented council, via a PowerPoint Presentation, a summary of the goals for the 2020 Census. She said the primary objective of the census is to count everyone once and in the correct location. Ms. Caruso said an accurate count is important to the city for several reasons, three of which are redistricting of federal, state, and local levels, distributing federal monies to state and local governments, and providing statistical information for grant applications. She noted the paper census will be available April 1, 2020, and for the first time, citizens can complete the census survey online. Ms. Caruso told council the bureau estimates that 20 percent of Norton's population will not be counted, but the city can increase the response rate and reduce the undercount ensuring a better enumeration for 2020 by adopting the resolution and forming a Complete Count Committee. Ms. Caruso said the bureau is using traditional methods and new media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to keep citizens informed about the 2020 Census. She said the governor is asking localities to adopt the resolution to increase the probability of a more accurate population count.

After a brief discussion, Vice Mayor Caruso read the resolution.

Upon a motion by Councilwomen Belcher, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by unanimous vote, council moved to adopt the Resolution Creating a 2020 Census Complete Count Committee to Plan and Conduct Local Educational Initiatives and Publicity and Promotional Activities to Increase Community Awareness and Participation in the 2020 United States Census (Insert).

Council had been presented in their packet with a letter from Family Crisis Support Service, Inc., (FCCS) requesting exemption from all local real estate and personal property taxes for the agency.

Mr. Ramey said Virginia Code Section 58.1-3651, gives localities the opportunity to consider exemption from local taxation by classification or designation by ordinance adopted by the local governing body. He noted this request came before council in 2004 and the previous council determined to increase the annual appropriation to the agency to cover the cost of the taxes. Mr. Ramey said FCCS Director Mary Beth Adkins is in attendance to address council and answer any questions members may have about the request.

Ms. Adkins informed council that the needs of citizens in Southwest Virginia have grown and that FCCS is not allowed to use any state or federal grants to pay local taxes. She said to pay the agency's taxes funds must be taken from a private account or donation which means there are clients not receiving assistance. Ms. Adkins noted that these funds are not reimbursable and the agency is in the process of acquiring another facility in Norton to serve the growing need in the area.

After a brief discussion, it was the consensus of council to table Family Crisis Support Service, Inc.'s request for tax exemption from all local real estate and personal property taxes until the November 19th meeting to allow the city attorney to give his opinion to handle the request through discretionary funding each year or through the adoption of an ordinance.

The city manager provided an update on the city's Downtown Revitalization Program advising council that downtown business owners have used the initial \$45,000 set aside for the Façade Improvement Program. Mr. Ramey said the store frontage improvements represent a total public and private investment of \$272,653.57 in the business district and he is requesting additional funding to continue the façade improvements for pending applications.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilwoman Belcher, and passed by unanimous roll call vote, council moved to approve \$30,000 from unappropriated reserves to continue the Downtown Façade Improvement Program.

Council had been presented in their packet with a request from the Commissioner of the Revenue to refund an over assessment of 2016 thru the first half of 2019 Real Estate Taxes.

The Commissioner of Revenue determined that Riggs Oil Company's real estate was over assessed from 2016 thru the first half of 2019; therefore, a refund is due in the amount of \$7,064.50 to Riggs Oil Company.

Upon a motion by Councilwoman Belcher, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by the following unanimous roll call vote: YES – Mays, Fultz, Caruso, Belcher, NO – None, ABSENT – Fawbush, council authorized a refund to Riggs Oil Company in the amount of \$7,064.50 for over assessed real estate taxes from 2016 thru the first half of 2019.

In packets for council consideration was a check to U.S. Bank Operations Center, dated September 10, 2019, in the amount of \$105,101.26, to cover debt service for the Water Operating Fund.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilwoman Belcher, and passed by unanimous roll call vote, council moved to confirm the check to U.S. Bank Operations Center, as stated above.

Upon a motion by Councilwoman Belcher, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by the following unanimous roll call vote: YES – Mays, Fultz, Caruso, Belcher, NO – None, ABSENT – Fawbush, council moved to go into closed meeting for Personnel as per Section

2.2-3711 (A) (1), 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), and for the 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), of the Code of Virginia, as amended.

Vice Mayor Caruso declared council in closed meeting.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by unanimous vote, council moved to go back into open meeting.

Vice Mayor Caruso declared council back in open meeting.

The clerk polled each member of council as to the Certification of Closed Meeting with each answering yes. The clerk then read a Resolution of the Certification of Closed Meeting.

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

Vice Mayor Caruso opened the floor for nominations to the Norton Industrial Development Authority to fill the unexpired term of Charles Graham whose term expires May 10, 2021.

Councilwoman Belcher nominated Blake Salyer to be appointed to the Norton Industrial Development Authority to fill the unexpired term of Charles Graham whose term expires May 10, 2021.

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

Vice Mayor Caruso declared Blake Salyer appointed to the Norton Industrial Development Authority to fill the unexpired term of Charles Graham whose term expires May 10, 2021.

In comments from the city manager:

Mr. Ramey told council that paving at the farmers market is expected to start this week.

Mr. Ramey said the Tennis Court Project is nearing completion and the fencing is being installed. He noted there are two low areas on the court area that will need to be addressed when temperatures permit. Mr. Ramey said until the project is completed city administration recommends locking the tennis courts once the fencing is installed.

He stated property reassessment notices will be mailed November 12th and citizens can make appointments with the property assessor beginning on November 22nd. Mr. Ramey said the last day to make an appointment with the property assessor to discuss the reassessment will be November 27th.

Mr. Ramey told council the Regional Climbers Coalition met in Norton last week and used the Norton Friends & Farmers Market building to host their meeting. He said approximately 40 members of the coalition attended the meeting and Sugar Hill Cidery prepared dinner for the attendees.

Mr. Ramey said Scoutmaster Teddy Huff invited council to attend the annual Boy Scout Flag Retirement Ceremony at 2:00 p.m., Saturday, November 9th, in Coeburn.

Mr. Ramey said the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) asked him to be a presenter at the annual grant management workshop in Hampton, Virginia. Mr. Ramey informed council DHCD's workshop conflicts with council's meeting on Tuesday, November 19th. He said City Finance Director Jeff Shupe will fill in for him at the November 19th meeting unless council chooses to cancel the regularly scheduled meeting.

Mr. Ramey informed council that the Regional Legislative Reception is scheduled for Wednesday, January 22, 2020, at the Library of Virginia in Richmond. He noted the reception is changing for 2020 and there will be a different facility and base hotel for the reception.

Mr. Ramey said the Cloudsplitter Ultra 100 Trail Race director is moving the race back one week next year. Next year's race is scheduled for October 17th and 18th.

He said he provided members with July and August Monthly Financial Reports for council's review. Mr. Ramey advised council the city has gone through the pre-audit and expects the audit team to begin the FY2018-19 audit soon.

Mr. Ramey told council of the following upcoming events in the city: The Dairy Queen Turkey Trot 5k is scheduled for Thursday, November 28th, the city's Christmas Tree Lighting is planned from 5:00-8:00 p.m., Saturday, December 7th, and the Christmas Parade has been moved to the second Sunday in December this year and it begins at 6:00 p.m., Sunday, December 8th.

At this time, City Finance Director Jeff Shupe told council if members have any questions regarding the July and August Monthly Financial Statements, please contact him to discuss.

The following comments were made by council members:

Councilwoman Belcher said she has noticed the façade improvements at some of the downtown businesses and at the Burger King located in the Virginia-Kentucky Shopping Center and Valero Gas Station. She commented it is exciting to see business owners making improvements to their properties signals an improving economy.

She recognized city employees for their continued good work and thanked the city's emergency personnel for efforts to keep citizens safe.

Councilman Fultz commented things are looking good.

Councilman Mays concurred with Councilwomen Belcher and Councilman Fultz.

Vice Mayor Caruso asked the city manager that he would coordinate with Wise County and prepare a meeting agenda for the legislative reception.

The city manager advised he would work with Wise County Administrator Mike Hatfield on scheduling the meetings at the legislative reception.

Vice Mayor Caruso stated he noticed in council's Additional Information Packet that the city received the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development's (DHCD) 2020 Community Business Launch Grant.

Mr. Ramey said the city received a \$45,000 grant from DHCD for the second Norton Business Challenge.

Vice Mayor Caruso said he also noticed in the Additional Information Packet that the city received approval from the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) for the Josephine Pump Station Project.

Mr. Ramey said DEQ approved a loan for the city to purchase a generator for the Josephine Pump Station. He said there is a possibility DEQ will receive funding in the spring

from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and they are hopeful a portion of those monies can be used as grant funds. He said, at that time, DEQ will inform city administration the exact funding package DEQ can offer the city to purchase a generator for the Josephine Pump Station. After receiving the exact funding package, council will consider the offer and determine whether to move forward on the project.

Vice Mayor Caruso asked the city manager if city administration had asked Wise County for financial assistance in the purchase of the generator since the Josephine Pump Station served county residents.

The city manager stated that since Wise County residents are city sewer customers city administration has not asked the county for assistance with the project; however, Mr. Ramey said city administration can send a request to the county administrator asking the county to consider funding assistance to help in the purchase of the generator for the Josephine Pump Station Project.

Vice Mayor Caruso said the Norton Electoral Board did a great job with the election today and that the voting process was very smooth. He noted the city's polling station created a very welcoming environment with the feather styled American flags displayed along the sidewalk.

He reiterated the importance of the 2020 Census to the city. He said 20 percent of Norton residents estimated to be uncounted represents a possible \$14 million loss in federal funding to the city.

Vice Mayor Caruso thanked the city manager for the smooth process in preparing him to preside over tonight's council meeting.

Vice Mayor Caruso commented the tennis courts look good and noted the collaborative project between city council and the school board is evidence of what can be accomplished when the two bodies work together.

He thanked the city's emergency responders for their courage and dedication to the citizens of Norton. He said he now listens to a scanner and doing so makes him appreciate all emergency personnel that answer and respond to all the E911 calls.

Vice Mayor Caruso thanked the city's Public Work's Department for an early morning repair of a city water and sewer line. He noted it was cold and about to rain and he was impressed with their attitude about getting the job done.

Vice Mayor Caruso thanked the employees of the city's refuse department for the great job they do each day collecting the city's garbage. He said the garbage crew was also out in the rain doing their job and their efforts are appreciated.


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

CITY OF NORTON, VIRGINIA



Mark Caruso, Vice Mayor

ATTEST:



Rebecca K. Coffey, Clerk of Council

Rebecca K. Coffey, Clerk of Council

