

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Norton City Council was held Tuesday, October 20, 2020, at 6:00 p.m., in the Municipal Council Chambers with Mayor Joseph Fawbush presiding.

Council Members Present: William Mays, Robert Fultz, Jr., Joseph Fawbush, Mark Caruso, and Delores Belcher

Also Present: Fred L. Ramey, Jr., City Manager, and Jeffery L. Shupe, Finance Director

The invocation was given by Councilman Robert Fultz and was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Fire Chief Todd Lagow.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilwoman Belcher, and passed by the following unanimous vote: YES – Mays, Fultz, Belcher, Caruso, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, council moved to adopt the minutes of the October 6, 2020, meeting as presented.

During the Mayor's Call for Visitors Mr. Ben Foy, Jr., board member of Rolling Thunder, Inc., Chapter 4 of Tennessee (Rolling Thunder, Inc., TN4) came forward and presented council with a Missing in Action/Prisoner of War (MIA/POW) flag for Veterans Park.

Mayor Fawbush thanked Mr. Foy for the flag and a photo was taken with Mayor Fawbush.

Next, the city manager said another guest, Gold Award Scout Candidate Angela Nauss of Girl Scout Troop 1066, was in attendance to provide an update on her Girl Scout Community Project to light the flag on Flag Rock.

Ms. Nauss said she had decided on the type of light to purchase to illuminate the flag on Flag Rock and showed council the sticker she had designed to sell as a fundraiser for the project. She told council the sticker reads, "We lit the flag at Flag Rock, Norton, Virginia," and she is requesting a \$5.00 donation for each sticker.

After a brief discussion, council members made donations for car stickers and thanked Ms. Nauss for her project.

Wise County Master Deputy Clerk Mary Hagy, who works in the land records department at the Wise County/City of Norton Clerk's Office, was the next visitor to speak to council regarding working with David Fitzgerald, the Chief Executive Office of BLOQABLE, L.L.C., of Arlington, Virginia, on a software program for land records recorded in the clerk's office. Ms. Hagy said the program has been in development for two years and Mr. Fitzgerald was in attendance to discuss the project with council.

Mr. Fitzgerald said Wise County and the City of Norton currently have 12,000 land records which the clerk's office would like to turn into smart records. He said once the smart records are created through the software he is proposing to develop, the real estate information would be available online for research by citizens and professionals and reduce visits to the record room by 60-75 percent. Mr. Fitzgerald advised that he needed \$50,000 to fund the software development and that the total cost is \$150,000. He told council with the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the clerk's office applied for pandemic funding, as well as, other federal and state grants which were all awarded. Mr. Fitzgerald said the City of Norton typically pays 10 percent of the cost for the Wise County Courthouse and Norton's share of the software development would be \$15,000-\$20,000.

After a lengthy discussion, Mr. Fitzgerald asked council to review the information he provided Mr. Ramey and that he did not need a decision from council tonight regarding funding assistance of the software project.

Mayor Fawbush thanked Mr. Fitzgerald for his presentation.

A public hearing was held to receive public input on a proposed Temporary Ordinance Amending Norton City Code Section 23-3 (C) of the city code Delaying Imposition of Interest and Penalties on Taxes Due October 15, 2020 until November 15, 2020.

Mr. Ramey said at the October 6<sup>th</sup> council meeting, members discussed the impact of COVID-19 on city personnel and citizens from an economic standpoint and that council voted to set the penalty and delinquency rates on real estate and personal property taxes at zero and suspended until November 15<sup>th</sup>, and that council also authorized the city manager to advertise a public hearing related to this formal action at tonight's meeting. Mr. Ramey informed council that the hearing has been duly advertised.

Mayor Fawbush opened the public hearing.

There being no public comments, Mayor Fawbush closed the public hearing.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by the following unanimous roll call vote: YES – Mays, Fultz, Belcher, Caruso, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, council moved to adopt the Temporary Ordinance Amending Norton City Code Section 23-3 (C) of the city code Delaying Imposition of Interest and Penalties on Taxes Due October 15, 2020 until November 15, 2020. (Insert)

Mr. Chris Jones, Mr. Noah Thacker, and Mr. Buddy Delp, committee members of the High Knob Music Festival (HKMF), were present to provide an update on renovations to the High Knob Recreation Area.

Mr. Ramey said council made a donation to the HKMF Committee to make improvements to the High Knob Recreation Area and that the committee worked to raise the additional funds and with the U.S. Forest Service to get the upgrades approved.

Mr. Jones first showed a video of volunteers and others working on the improvements made at the High Knob Recreation Area and told council volunteers worked over 1,000 hours. He said the committee was able to install a new electrical system and build a new 20x36 stage. Mr. Jones said major sponsors for the project were Wise and Scott Counties, the City of Norton, the Town of Big Stone Gap, the Humphrey's family, Old Dominion Power, and the late Dottie Chittester. He stated that the 2020 music festival had to be canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic but next year's performers are already booked and that the festival has a large following on Facebook.

Mr. Buddy Delp, treasurer of the HKMF, reported that the electrical upgrade cost \$4,155.46 and the new stage cost \$6,092.28 to construct for a total expenditure of \$10,247.74. He said the major sponsors collectively donated \$10,920.00.

Mr. Jones said the HKMF committee also fed the AmeriCorps team twice and advised council that their next project is to build a handicap deck, which the U.S. Forest Service has approved, and a roof for the stage. Mr. Jones then gave council members a postcard of volunteers working on the improvements at the High Knob Recreation Area with a list of sponsors and a decorated HKMF glass bottle. He then thanked council for their support.

Mayor Fawbush and council members thanked Mr. Jones for the update and the work performed at the High Knob Recreation Area.

The city manager advised that Code Section 8-38 of the Norton City Code requires council's approval of working officers for the Norton Fire Department. He stated that Fire Chief Todd Lagow was in attendance to present these appointments for council's consideration.

Chief Lagow, via a PowerPoint presentation, shared various fire department statistics with council and noted that the number of incidents for 2020 had decreased. He said he contributes the decrease to the COVID-19 pandemic which probably resulted in less travel causing fewer accidents. He said the fire department is partnering with Norton Rescue Squad (NRS) more on Emergency Medical Service (EMS) calls and the fire departments average response time is 23.67 seconds. Chief Lagow then presented council with his recommendations for the department's working officers and said there were no changes from last year.

Councilman Caruso stated that he would like to see the loud siren reinstalled.

Chief Lagow and Mr. Ramey stated that the siren could be reinstalled.

After a brief discussion and upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilwoman Belcher, and passed by unanimous vote, Council moved to approve the list of working officers for the Norton Fire Department for fiscal year 2020-2021, as presented by Fire Chief Lagow.

Mayor Fawbush and council thanked the Norton Fire Department for their service to citizens of Norton and the firefighters received a round of applause.

The next agenda item was an update from city administration and the fire department on current department equipment and potential funding sources for the possibility of purchasing a new fire truck.

Mr. Ramey said each year council has a capital meeting to discuss needs and for the last several years council and city administration have discussed replacing several of the fire trucks that are over 20 years old. He said that council, as part of the FY21 budget process, asked Fire Chief Todd Lagow to begin researching the specifications of a new pumper truck that could replace one of the existing trucks. Chief Lagow formed a committee of fire department members to study council's request and the members are prepared to provide an update.

Chief Lagow, via a PowerPoint presentation, presented council the committee's goals, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) recommendations, age of the department's current trucks and the equipment on each vehicle, and the department's recommendation for replacement. Chief Lagow told council that the department's biggest concern is fire suppression. He said the committee is recommending a Class A Pumper that has a 1,250 gallon per minute (GPM) pump or greater and that the truck needed to be a multi-use vehicle. Chief Lagow then showed council a drawing of the proposed fire truck and a sample from Chesterfield County. He told council that truck 37 would move to Station 2 and the van would transfer to public works to use with their sewer camera. Chief Lagow said the Class A pumper will align with the mission of a modern fire department due to firefighters response to car wrecks, hazmat incidents, fires, and EMS calls. The committee believes the Class A multi-purpose pumper will serve the citizens of Norton well and the department will continue to look for grant funding to replace the department's older fire trucks.

Mr. Ramey added that when the city purchased the three new fire trucks in 1992 the total cost was \$720,000. He said the truck that Chief Lagow presented this evening cost approximately \$740,000. Mr. Ramey said when the committee began developing specifications of a new fire truck, city administration began looking at new funding sources. Mr. Ramey said the United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Development (USDA/RD) has approved a loan/grant application for \$650,000 that includes a loan of \$600,000 at five percent for twenty years and a \$50,000 grant. He said if council should authorize city administration to move forward, council would have to finalize the budget and find additional funding sources for the remaining \$90,000. Mr. Ramey said the fire department is having problems with their current fire trucks and he estimates that it will take 60-90 days to get funding in place, procurement,

and approximately 12 months to build the fire truck. Mr. Ramey said the first payment on the new fire truck would not be due until the later part of FY22 and the payment would be around \$38,000 annually.

After a brief discussion, it was the consensus of council to move forward.

Mr. Ramey said city administration will look for funding the remaining \$90,000 and move forward with the process, and once funding is in position, council will need to authorize a public hearing.

Chief Lagow and members of the fire department thanked council for their support.

Mr. Ramey provided a funding update on the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) and city administration's plans moving forward.

Via a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Ramey said the city had received two payments for a total of \$694,654 and there is a remaining balance of \$189,000 to spend by the December 30, 2020 deadline. He said city administration would like to fund more small business assistance grants after paying for needed projects and that city administration is completing the required monthly reports. City Council was supportive of city administrations plans to fund small business assistance grants.

Included on council's agenda was discussion of the 2020 Christmas parade.

Mr. Ramey said in discussion with other localities regarding their Christmas parades, he said the towns are waiting until closer to December before making a decision. Mr. Ramey said the city's parade committee has reached out to John I. Burton Band Director Mr. Ryan Huntington to see if the school band could participate in the parade. Mr. Marty Hagy, a parade committee member, was in attendance and advised council that Mr. Huntington said area high school bands are not organized as a marching band and probably would not be organized by December 1<sup>st</sup>. Mr. Ramey said he just received an email from the Wise County/City of Norton Chamber of Commerce that stated that the towns of Pound and Appalachia will try to have a Christmas parade, the town of Wise is not having a Christmas parade but may do some decorating contests.

After a brief discussion, it was the consensus of council to move forward with the Christmas parade and to have city administration work with the parade committee to develop a plan to incorporate the city's tree lighting ceremony.

Also included in packets for council consideration was a check to U.S. Bank Operations Center, dated September 1, 2020, in the amount of \$103,279.39 for refunding water bonds.

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

Mayor Fawbush stated that Item 7-G, closed meeting for Personnel as per Section 2.2-3711 (A) (1) of the Code of Virginia, as amended, is tabled until the November 17, 2020, meeting as no discussions have been pursued for the appointment to the Norton Social Services Advisory Board.

In comments from the city manager:

Mr. Ramey said the Clear Creek Phase III bid opening came in over budget but city administration is working on additional grant funds and modifications so that the city can move forward with the project.

Mr. Ramey thanked all the volunteers and the city team who worked aid stations at the Cloudsplitter Ultra 100 Trail Race on Saturday, October 17<sup>th</sup> and Sunday, October 18<sup>th</sup>. He said 204 participants were registered for the event and that 25 states and the District of Columbia were represented. Mr. Ramey said the event went very well and the city received a lot of positive comments.

Mr. Ramey showed a promotional video of the 2020 AmeriCorps team to market the program and he hopes Councilman Fultz can get this video into many classrooms at the high school.

The city manager said for council's review he placed the latest COVID-19 pandemic metrics from LENOWISCO Health District and a Halloween in the Park flyer at each member's desk.

He handed out the monthly Retail Sales Tax Report and said the city had the following upcoming events: October 23 – Halloween in the Park; October 31<sup>st</sup> – Halloween 5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.; and November 3<sup>rd</sup> – Election.

The following comments were made by council members:

Councilman Fultz said it was a tremendous push forward by council on the fire truck. He said voted early and there was no waiting.

Councilman Fultz told council he intends to do more each year with the AmeriCorps team and that if the city is awarded another team in 2021, council needs to do something outside council chambers with the team.

Councilman Fultz said he cannot say enough about the city team who are involved with the Cloudsplitter Ultra 100 Trail Race to make it work. He said he worked the aid station in the parking lot at the High Knob Tower and that he met some really neat people and had some great conversations. Councilman Fultz said he had volunteers from his church, two doctors, and the John I. Burton Honor Society. He said there were 50 volunteers that worked the aid station and he is looking forward to 2021.

Councilman Caruso asked if the city knew what the economic impact was for the Cloudsplitter.

Mr. Ramey said an article stated the race had a \$35 million dollar impact but we are not in that category. He said the only way to know is to have participants complete a survey but he believes the largest economic impact is the coverage Norton is getting throughout the country which makes the city's expense worth it.

Councilman Caruso stated that he read through the police department's statistics and he asked Chief Lane to thank his employees for their efforts.

At this time, Councilman Fultz added that Spearhead Trails helped with the trails and the Edith Gap aid station for the Cloudsplitter.

Mayor Fawbush said he attended the ribbon cutting ceremony for Southern Roots Refurbishing.

Mayor Fawbush said he, his wife, and Norton Industrial Development Authority members Barbara Caruso and Ethel Daniels attended an award ceremony on Thursday, October 15<sup>th</sup>, in

Abingdon, Virginia, to accept the 2020 Excellence in Government award for the city's quick response to local businesses due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mayor Fawbush asked council to discuss whether or not to cancel the November 3<sup>rd</sup> council meeting since it is election day and two members are running for re-election.

It was the consensus of council to cancel the Tuesday, November 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting.

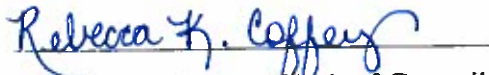
There being no further business to come before council, Mayor Fawbush declared the meeting adjourned.

CITY OF NORTON, VIRGINIA



Joseph Fawbush, Mayor

ATTEST:



Rebecca K. Coffey, Clerk of Council