

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Norton City Council was held Tuesday, December 1, 2020, at 6:00 p.m., in the Municipal Council Chambers with Mayor Joseph Fawbush presiding.

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

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

The invocation was given by Councilman Robert Fultz and was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Police Chief James Lane.

Upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by the following unanimous vote: YES – Fultz, Caruso, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, ABSTAIN – Mays and Belcher, council moved to adopt the minutes of the November 17, 2020, meeting as presented.

During the Mayor's Call for Visitors, 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 illuminate the flag on Flag Rock.

Ms. Nauss explained how the light was attached to the pole and stated that the illuminated flag can be seen from downtown Norton and the Overlook. She thanked Norton City Trail Coordinator Shayne Fields for his assistance in lighting the pole and said she will continue to sell the remaining stickers. Ms. Nauss noted that any money raised above the \$375 needed to fund the project will be given to the city to maintain the project or for any other projects in the Flag Rock Recreation Area.

On behalf of council, Mayor Fawbush presented Ms. Nauss with a plaque from the city and thanked her for her project to illuminate the flag on Flag Rock. A photo was taken with council and Ms. Nauss received a round of applause.

A public hearing was held to receive input regarding the proposed issuance of bonds related to the Clear Creek Phase III Waterline Replacement Project.

Mr. Ramey said that in October 2019 council accepted a funding package from Virginia Department of Health (VDH) 2020 Drinking Water Construction/Financial Assistance for the Clear Creek Phase III Waterline Replacement Project. He said VDH offered a grant/loan funding package totaling \$183,956, with a loan term of 30 years and an interest rate of 2.5 percent. Mr. Ramey said the awarded bid was over projections but with modifications to the project and additional city funding the project can move forward. He said city administration is working with bond counsel to complete the necessary paperwork and tonight's public hearing is regarding the Resolution Authorizing the Issuance and Sale of a General Obligation and Water and Sewer Revenue Bond in an Amount Not to Exceed \$85,978, of the City of Norton and Providing for the Form, Details and Payment Thereof. Mr. Ramey handed out an updated resolution and said council's approval of the resolution will authorize city administration to move forward and complete the bond process. He told council the bond process will require the city to establish a reserve account which will be discussed during the budget process.

After a brief discussion, Mayor Fawbush opened the public hearing.

Receiving no public comments, Mayor Fawbush closed the public hearing.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilwoman Belcher, and passed by the following roll call vote: YES – Mays, Fultz, Belcher, Caruso, and Fawbush. NO – None. ABSENT – None, council moved to adopt the updated resolution handed out at the meeting and authorized city administration to execute all documents related to the Resolution Authorizing the Issuance and Sale of a General Obligation and Water and Sewer Revenue Bond in an Amount Not to Exceed \$85,978, which is the loan portion of the funding, of the City of Norton and Providing for the Form, Details and Payment Thereof. (Insert)

The President of Mountain Empire Community College Dr. Kristen Westover presented council with an update on activities at the college.

Dr. Westover told council that COVID-19 had postponed in-person classes at the college but most classes were made available online except the health sciences, workforce programs. Commercial Driver's License lineman program, and performance-based classes. She said the college received CARES Act funding for individuals who were unemployed due to the coronavirus, and that this funding is allowing these individuals to receive training in a new field. Dr. Westover noted that 140 students were currently enrolled in the college due to CARES Act funding. She said Home Craft Days was virtual this year and the college was involved with some major economic development projects this year as well. Dr. Westover noted fall enrollment was down slightly and the college is having very few events.

Mayor Fawbush thanked Dr. Westover for her update.

In their packets, council had been supplied with copies of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City of Norton, Norton City Schools, and Girls Incorporated of Bristol.

Mr. Ramey said Children's Incorporated will provide homework assistance, STEM activities and other programs for students after school and that currently 18 students are enrolled in the program. He said Norton Elementary and Middle School (NEMS) gym would not be available due to fall sports and Norton School Superintendent Dr. Gina Wohlford asked if the school system could use a room at the Norton Community Center for the after-school program. Mr. Ramey explained that because this program is considered a daycare several inspections of the Community Center had to be conducted, and that the MOU would need to be a tripartite agreement between the three entities.

After a brief discussion, it was determined that language needed to be added to the MOU allowing the city to cancel the agreement if the program interfered with Parks & Recreation activities at the facility, and an annual expiration date needed to be added for each school year. Mr. Ramey said he could have the city attorney add these two items to the MOU.

Upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilwoman Belcher, and passed by unanimous vote, council moved to approve the Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Norton, Norton City Schools, and Girls Incorporated of Bristol with the two additions stated above, and to authorize the city manager to sign the MOU. (Insert)

Included in council's packets was a Resolution of the Governing Body of the City of Norton authorizing a United States of America, United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Development (Rural Development) loan/grant application to purchase two police vehicles.

Mr. Ramey said he is asking council's authorization to apply for a loan/grant to purchase two emergency vehicles to stay in line for available funding from Rural Development.

Upon a motion by Councilwoman Belcher, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by unanimous roll call vote, council moved to adopt the Resolution of the Governing Body of the City of Norton authorizing city administration to submit a Rural Development loan/grant application to purchase two police vehicles. (Insert)

The next agenda item was discussion regarding the city's Vacant Home Demolition Program.

Mr. Ramey provided council with copies of the 2001 Vacant Home Demolition Program and said it was last funded in 2012. He told council that the program allotted between \$5,000 and \$10,000 each year and the property owner had to rebuild within a reasonable timeframe after demolition. Mr. Ramey stated that the city would take a lean on the property until the owner fulfilled their obligation to rebuild.

After a lengthy discussion, it was the consensus of council to not make any changes to the current Vacant Home Demolition Program and have City Building Official Winfred Collins provide council with a new program that does not require a property owner to rebuild on the property. Also, each member would continue studying the two programs and provide their comments to the city manager.

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

Mr. Ramey said the city had received a total of \$694,654, in CARES Act funding, expending approximately \$295,300, committing roughly \$263,000, and leaving around \$135,000 to be spent by the December 30, 2020, deadline. He stated that city administration is working on programs that will utilize the remaining balance and any monies that have not been expended he recommends transferring to the Norton Industrial Development Authority (NIDA) to turn the remaining funds into Small Business Assistant Loans. Mr. Ramey told council that NIDA received a \$40,000 loan from the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA) and that he is requesting the loan be turned into a grant.

It was the consensus of council to transfer any unused CARES Act funding to the NIDA for use as Small Business Assistant Loans.

Mr. Ramey stated that the LENOWISCO Small Business Recovery Assistance Program has provided \$169,431.62, in funding to Norton businesses and estimates that \$106,765.98 may be available in the second round of funding. Mr. Ramey said any unused monies from localities in the region will be collected and made available to localities for a possible third and final round of funding.

Mr. Ramey said the state has made a new CARES funding program available called the Municipal Utility Relief Program. He said the program provides assistance to municipal utility customers experiencing economic hardship due to COVID-19 to pay arrears owed from March 1st through October 31st. Mr. Ramey said city administration has applied for Phase I of the application process but the program is very complicated and city customers may not even qualify. Mr. Ramey said he is requesting council's support of the application because the Virginia Department Housing and Community Development (DHCD) usually requires the governing body's support of funding applications.

It was the consensus of council to support city administration's request to apply for grant funding from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development's Municipal Utility Relief Program.

The next agenda item was the discussion of the 2020 Christmas events.

Mr. Ramey said he thought the city tree lighting event was special and that it had received over 15,000 views on Facebook. He then gave council a Christmas ornament commemorating the event. Mr. Ramey told council that since the city is not having a Christmas parade this year due to the pandemic staff will be conducting a Santa Station. He said basic decorations will be set up on Market Street and Santa and Mrs. Claus, along with a live Nativity scene, and various characters will be on 7th Street near the city Christmas tree handing out stockings filled with candy. Mr. Ramey said businesses are asked to decorate their windows and citizens are asked to drive down Market Street beginning at the Dairy Queen entrance to enjoy the Santa Station.

Also included in packets for council consideration was a transfer to Norton City Schools, dated September 28, 2020, in the amount of \$250,000 for September 30, 2020 payroll expenditures.

Upon a motion by Councilwoman Belcher, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by unanimous roll call vote, council moved to confirm the transfer to Norton City Schools, as stated above.

Upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilwoman Belcher, and passed by the following roll call vote: YES – Fultz, Mays, Belcher, Caruso, and Fawbush. NO – None. ABSENT – None, council moved to go into closed meeting for Personnel as per Section 2.2-3711 (A) (1) of the Code of Virginia, as amended, and Section 2.2-3711 (A) (3) of the Code of Virginia for 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.

Mayor Fawbush declared council in closed meeting.

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

Mayor Fawbush 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 Mays, seconded by Councilwoman Belcher, and passed by unanimous vote, council moved to adopt A Resolution of the Certification of Closed Meeting. (Insert)

At this time, Mayor Fawbush turned the meeting over to Vice Mayor Caruso.

Vice Mayor Caruso opened the floor for nominations to the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail Authority for a term to expire December 31, 2024.

Councilman Mays nominated Joseph Fawbush to be reappointed to the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail Authority for a term to expire December 31, 2024.

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

Vice Mayor Caruso declared Joseph Fawbush reappointed to the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail Authority for a term to expire December 31, 2024.

Vice Mayor Caruso turned the meeting back over to Mayor Fawbush.

In comments from the city manager:

Mr. Ramey said the Rural Development application has been completed, the agency has approved the city's procurement and a purchase order has been issued for the new fire truck.

He told council that the city has been approved for the Virginia Department of Transportation's State of Good Repair Grant in the amount of \$447,581 for milling and paving of Phase I of East Park Avenue.

The city manager provided council with the High Knob and Flag Rock Recreation Area traffic counts.

Mr. Ramey stated that photos of the new rescue squad vehicle were just received and he would place the photos in this week's City Manager's Report.

He reminded council that the Santa Station is from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m., Friday, December 4th.

The following comments were made by council members:

Councilman Caruso asked the city manager if the Regional Legislative Reception would be held in January.

Mr. Ramey said the meeting probably will not be held this year.

Mayor Fawbush said we have finished another calendar year and small cities have shown that we can grow. He said Norton is the smallest city in Virginia but our city has the biggest heart in the Commonwealth.

It was the consensus of council to cancel the December 15th council 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