

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Norton City Council was held Tuesday, February 2, 2021, at 6:00 p.m., in the Municipal Council Chambers with Mayor Joseph Fawbush presiding.

Prior to roll call, Mayor Fawbush read a letter from Councilwoman Delores J. Belcher stating that she was resigning her council position effective Sunday, January 31, 2021 due to an illness in her family. In the letter, she stated that she was proud to have served with fellow council members and work with city administration and staff.

On behalf of council, Mayor Fawbush stated that it has been a pleasure working with Councilwoman Belcher, that she has been a very dedicated council member, and that she has worked very hard for the citizens of Norton. He then asked for the consensus of council to amend the agenda to include under Item H-4 the discussion to fill the unexpired vacancy of Councilwoman Delores J. Belcher which expires on December 31, 2022.

It was the consensus of council to amend the agenda, as stated above.

Mayor Fawbush stated that he was providing Mrs. Belcher's letter to the clerk to filing.

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

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 Police Chief James Lane.

Prior to the meeting, clerk Rebecca Coffey advised Mayor Fawbush that she had corrected the meeting time of the January 19th minutes in council packets to reflect the correct starting time of 6:00 p.m.

Upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by unanimous vote, council moved to adopt the regular January 19, 2021, council meeting minutes, as corrected.

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

The city manager said the city's special projects coordinator Katie Dunn could not be present at tonight's meeting due to weather conditions around her home. The presentation of the planned 2021 Community Calendar of Events/Activities was tabled until the March 2, 2021 meeting.

Next on council's agenda was an update on the city's 2020 SMART SCALE applications.

Via a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Ramey provided a history of the applications submitted in 2020 to the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) for road programs. The applications were developed as part of the Strategically Targeted and Affordable Roadway Solutions (STARS) Report that was funded by VDOT and focused on the corridor from Hawthorne Drive Intersection through 14th Street. Mr. Ramey said that city council was able to use the VDOT STARS grant to narrow down potential projects for the SMART SCALE applications. He said council adopted a resolution in support of the SMART SCALE pre-applications in July and two formal applications was presented in December 2020. Mr. Ramey said the first application was for the section of Hawthorne Drive Intersection to 11th Street and the second application included the area of Park Avenue and 14th Street. He said on January 19th a draft list of round four SMART SCALE projects were released for funding and the city's first application Hawthorne

Drive Intersection to 11th Street project was recommended for funding. Mr. Ramey told council the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) will evaluate projects for inclusion in the Six-Year Plan (SYIP) with a draft SYIP to be released. The Bristol VDOT District office will hold public hearings to solicit community input on the draft SYIP, and then a final SYIP will be submitted to the CTB in June for adoption and funded projects will be added to the Six-Year Plan. Mr. Ramey noted that the city's project ranked fifth in the Bristol District and the earliest the city will notice any work on the funded project will be during year three when VDOT is acquiring rights-of-way.

After a brief discussion, Mr. Ramey informed council city administration is already planning for the next round of SMART SCALE funding which will take place in two years.

Mr. Ramey provided an update on COVID-19 cases and funding on the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act).

Via a PowerPoint presentation, the city manager provided council with the total number of COVID-19 cases in Norton and said that the city is beginning to see a bend in the curve. He also presented Wise County's numbers which also indicated a bending of the curve but with an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases. The city manager told council that the majority of emergency medical technicians have received the second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, and that 628 citizens have been vaccinated (108 fully) and 3,436 have been vaccinated in Wise County (390 fully).

Mr. Ramey stated that no changes have been made in the CARES Act funding since the last presentation and that city administration is waiting to see if any changes are made in reporting until December 31, 2021. He said LENOWISCO is taking applications for round four of the Small Business Recovery Assistance Program but there is not a great deal of interest. Mr. Ramey told council that the city had expended \$24,673.75 in round one of CARES funding under the Municipal Utility Relief Program. He said the city had received 28 applications for round two and the deadline to expend the funds has been extended to December 31, 2021.

In their packets, council received a request from the Commissioner of the Revenue to refund erroneously assessed 2020 personal property taxes. The refund, in the amount of \$35.36, is due to Community Home Care for overpayment due to an incorrect vehicle value.

Upon a motion by Councilman Fultz, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by unanimous roll call vote, council moved to approve the refund to Community Home Care, P. O. Box 659, Kingsport, TN, in the amount of \$35.36.

Included in council packets was a Resolution Supporting the Commonwealth of Virginia House Budget Amendment and Senate Budget Amendment (Item 69#3h).

Mr. Ramey said the resolution supports efforts to increase the Commonwealth's per diem payment for inmates held in local or regional jails. He said the city's contribution to local and regional jails has increased due to COVID-19 and will impact next year's budget. Mr. Ramey said the anticipated reimbursement is an 18.75 percent increase in funding.

Upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by unanimous roll call vote, council moved to adopt the Resolution Supporting the Commonwealth of Virginia House Budget Amendment and Senate Budget Amendment (Item 69#3h). (Insert)

Council had been presented in their packets with a Resolution Recognizing February 13th – 20th, as National Entrepreneurship Week.

Mr. Ramey said next week city administration will solicit participation interests in another Norton Business Challenge to encourage entrepreneurship in the city.

Mayor Fawbush said he wants the city to recognize existing downtown businesses to show the city's appreciation for them locating their business within the city. He asked council and the city manager to consider how they would like to acknowledge and thank the owners for establishing their businesses in Norton.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by unanimous vote, council moved to adopt the Resolution Recognizing February 13th – 20th as National Entrepreneurship Week. (Insert)

Also included in packets for council consideration was a transfer to Norton City Schools, dated December 7, 2020, in the amount of \$105,177.50 to cover the General Obligation School Bond, Series 2012 interest payment.

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

Upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by the following roll call vote: YES – Fultz, Mays, 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) (7) of the Code of Virginia 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 amended.

Mayor Fawbush 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.

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 Caruso, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by unanimous vote, council moved to adopt A Resolution of the Certification of Closed Meeting. (Insert)

At this time, Councilman Caruso stated that pursuant to the litigation council discussed in closed meeting regarding the opioid crisis, Councilman Caruso made a motion to authorize the mayor to submit a letter of support for House Bill 3733 (HB 3733) and Senate Bill 1469 (SB 1469) for the establishment of an Abatement Authority. Councilman Mays seconded the motion, and the motion passed by unanimous vote. Council moved to authorize the mayor to submit a letter of support to the city's state delegate and senator supporting House Bill 3733 and Senate Bill 1469.

In addition, Councilman Caruso made a motion to authorize City Attorney William Bradshaw to file in the Wise County/City of Norton Circuit Court a petition for a writ of election to fill the unexpired term of Councilwomen Delores J. Belcher who resigned her position effective Sunday, January 31, 2021. Seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by unanimous roll call vote, council moved to authorize City Attorney William Bradshaw to file a petition in

the Circuit Court for a writ of election to fill the unexpired vacancy of Councilwoman Delores J. Belcher on Norton City Council.

Mayor Fawbush opened the floor for nominations to the Norton Highway Safety Committee for a two-year term to expire January 31, 2023.

Councilman Mays nominated Steve McElroy, Joshua Ball, Gary Call, and Cody McElroy to be reappointed to the Norton Highway Safety Committee for a two-year term to expire January 31, 2023.

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

Mayor Fawbush declared Steve McElroy, Joshua Ball, Gary Call, and Cody McElroy to be reappointed to the Norton Highway Safety Committee for a two-year term to expire January 31, 2023.

In comments from the city manager:

Mr. Ramey stated that all council member's Statements of Economic Interest were filed with the clerk by the February 1st deadline.

The city manager told council that he received a letter yesterday advising the city's Southside Comprehensive Community Development Block Grant Application in the amount of \$1.5 million was awarded, and that the Virginia Department of Housing loan/grant totaling \$365.588 will allow the city to proceed with the Southside project.

Mr. Ramey said city administration is recommending that council authorize staff to explore refinancing a portion of the city's Enterprise debt to reduce the term and save money. He said the city's financial advisors, Davenport & Company, Inc., would submit the city's information to the Virginia Resources Authority for a no obligation proposal. Once the proposal is received, council can accept the proposal or withdraw the city's application.

It was the consensus of council to authorize city administration to explore refinancing a portion of the city's Enterprise debt to reduce the term and save money.

The city manager handed out a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that the Lonesome Pine Regional Industrial Facilities Authority (RIFA) has been working on to make the region more competitive with other areas of the Commonwealth. He said each locality would establish the same regional data center tax rate and each Commissioner of Revenue would agree to the same depreciation schedule. He asked council to review the MOU, and if acceptable to members, he will place the MOU on the February 16th council agenda.

Mr. Ramey told council the city is required to file a report after years five and nine from the date of issuance of the federal Woodbooger service mark and that the city attorney has filed the report. He added that the city's executive assistant Jana Brickett is creative and is always looking for ways to support small businesses when she travels. Mr. Ramey told council the city needs more entrepreneurs being creative like the company that created this Woodbooger bar of soap Jana recently purchased from a small business. He then passed the bar of soap to council members to examine.

He provided council with the latest Financial Report.

The city manager said a pilot/aerial photographer came to city hall and showed him some pictures he had recently taken of the city. He said he purchased two photos and then shared the photos with council.

The following comments were made by council members:

Councilman Fultz wished Dee Belcher the best and said she will be missed.

Councilman Mays said he has served on several boards with Dee Belcher and she is an amazing council person and he wishes her the best.

Councilman Caruso said he echoes both councilman Fultz's and Mays's sentiments regarding Dee Belcher and added the energy she brings into each meeting, committee, and board is outstanding. He said she will be missed.

He said again he would like to reiterate his thanks to city employees who provided various city services during the recent snow event and for the outstanding job performance each employee provided to Norton citizens.

Mayor Fawbush stated that he concurred with each members' comments and said Dee puts her heart and soul into everything she does and she enjoys living in Norton and serving on council. He said he would like to invite Dee back to council in the near future and recognize her for her service to the city and the citizens of Norton.

Mayor Fawbush asked the city manager about the city's status on deicing salt.

The city manager advised that the city has an adequate supply of deicing salt.

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

