

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Norton City Council was held Tuesday, June 1, 2021, at 6:00 p.m., in the Municipal Council Chambers with Mayor Joseph Fawbush presiding.

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

Also Present: Fred L. Ramey, Jr., City Manager and Interim City Clerk

The invocation was given by Councilman Robert Fultz, and was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Norton City Police First Sergeant Greg Mays.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by the following unanimous vote: YES – Fultz, Mays, Davis, Caruso, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, ABSTAIN – None, council moved to adopt the minutes of the May 18, 2021, meeting as presented.

The city manager said the city has a tradition of recognizing employees who reach career milestones and tonight is honoring Norton Parks and Recreation Director Michele “Shelly” Knox who is retiring after 35 years of direct service to the city. While presenting a slideshow featuring photos of Shelly throughout her employment, he explained that Ms. Knox was a city lifeguard and a lifeguard for the Youth Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) in Norton prior to her employment as the city parks and recreation director, so her civic service to the city is more than 35 years.

On behalf of city council and the citizens of Norton, Mayor Fawbush presented Ms. Knox with a plaque for 35 years of dedicated service as parks and recreation director. He thanked Ms. Knox for her service to the city and said she will be missed. A photo was taken with council and members thanked her for her service and honored her with applause.

The mayor said he believes city employees remain employed with the city until retirement because they are happy and are compensated fairly. He said the city has been fortunate to have Ms. Knox as an employee and that she has taken the city’s parks and recreation department a long way during her tenure.

Ms. Knox thanked council and said the city has been a good place to work.

Council had been presented in their packets with a draft Proclamation Recognizing the Kiwanis Club of Norton’s 100th Anniversary during June 2021 and a flyer highlighting many of the fundraising and community projects the club sponsors.

Mr. Ramey said council has recognized several big anniversaries during the past two years (the City of Norton and Suthers Masonic Lodge #259 celebrated their 125th anniversaries in 2019), and the Kiwanis Club of Norton, having formed January 18, 1921, is celebrating 100 years of service this year. The city manager said the Kiwanis Club of Norton has always supported city programs and events, particularly for youth, and the club contributed financially toward the city’s electronic sign in the municipal parking lot and sponsors the city’s summer camps as well as the Best Friends Festival Pancake Breakfast. Mr. Ramey thanked the Kiwanis Club and all civic organizations that provide important services to Norton.

Mayor Fawbush read the draft proclamation.

The consensus of council was to adopt the Proclamation Proclaiming the Month of June 2021 as the Kiwanis Club of Norton’s 100th Anniversary in the City of Norton. (Insert)

The mayor presented Kiwanis Club President Barbara Caruso with a framed proclamation, a photo was taken with council, and applause was given for a century of service by the Kiwanis Club of Norton.

President Caruso reminded council that the club's annual pancake breakfast fundraiser is being held from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m., Saturday, June 12, 2021, at the farmers market building in Norton. She said the Kiwanis Club of Norton will have a banquet June 26, 2021, at Hotel Norton, and if anyone is interested in joining the Kiwanis Club of Norton meetings are held every Tuesday at noon at Fishtails in Norton. She noted that this year was difficult in terms of fundraising due to COVID-19, but hopefully fundraising efforts will improve and the club can resume providing important service to the community.

During the Mayor's Call for Visitors, Christopher Nixon of 306 Poplar St., addressed council about loud music being played at night during the work week in his neighborhood. He said Norton police told him the city does not have a noise ordinance or a curfew, and the best thing to do was to come to a council meeting and see what can be done to address the issue.

Mr. Ramey said he would have to look into what can be done and get back with Mr. Nixon. He said the city does have ordinances regarding noise after a certain hour, but the ordinance is difficult to enforce when officers arrive at the property and the noise or music isn't loud at that time.

The mayor said the city will check the city code and consult the city attorney to see what can be done, but to continue to call the police during these incidents.

Councilman Caruso said he was glad Mr. Nixon brought the issue before council because the city needs to look at noise ordinances within the city. He said the city previously looked at noise ordinances in the city when large trucks were crossing the viaduct and the noise from compression breaks was disturbing patrons at the former Holiday Inn. He said he thinks this is a good time to readdress the city's noise ordinances.

The mayor said the next agenda item was a public hearing to solicit input on an Ordinance Adopting the FY 2021-22 City of Norton Budget which includes \$10,538,821 designated for the General Fund, \$3,383,823 for the Enterprise Fund, and \$1,570,467 for the Social Services Fund.

The city manager said there have been no changes to the budget other than the one percent Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) increase for non-state-supported positions from four to five percent that was made at the last council meeting. The city manager provided a PowerPoint overview of the FY 2021-2022 Budget noting that the General Operating Fund budget of \$10,538,821 has increased by \$493,297 over last year's budget. He said the Enterprise Fund budget of \$3,383,823 shows an increase of \$43,341 compared to last year, while the Social Services Operating Fund increased by \$139,971.

The city manager noted that the city's allocation to the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail Authority is \$74,859 less than what was expected.

Mr. Ramey said the recommended budget includes no revenue enhancements; however, it does include \$247,900 in surplus funds to balance the budget. There are no proposed rate increases and no changes to the Water Improvement Fee structure or sewer percentages in the Enterprise Fund. He said the city is seeing a reduction in commercial water usage due to overall usage trend and the impact of COVID-19. The city manager explained that the city has been using minimal water purchases the last couple of years.

The budget includes an increase in salaries and fringe benefits, a five percent increase for both state-supported and non-state-supported positions, an increase in Workers' Compensation Insurance, and a one percent rate decrease for the city's insurance plan. The Norton Social

Services Operating Fund also has a local appropriation decrease of \$2,527. Other budget highlights include a local contribution increase for Norton City Schools, a slight increase in the General Fund Debt Service, as well as minimal paving and a capital project for a vacant home demolition program

Mr. Ramey said COVID-19 impact on the revenue forecast is still unknown and there has been delay in solid information concerning American Rescue Plan funding.

After the overview, Mayor Fawbush opened the public hearing.

There being no public comments, the mayor closed the public hearing and said the city budget will be considered for adoption at the June 15th council meeting.

During comments from council, Councilman Mays commended the city manager, Finance Director Jeff Shupe and all department heads for working diligently to remain within budget.

The mayor concurred with Councilman Mays' comments.

Under new business, the mayor said Richardson Ambulance Service, LLC, has requested to provide non-ambulatory transportation in the City of Norton.

Mr. Ramey said the request came in an email a month or so ago from Richardson Ambulance Service Chief Executive Officer Chris Lloyd and Mr. Lloyd was present to explain his request to council. The city manager noted that Mr. Lloyd made it clear that Richardson Ambulance Service has no interest in doing emergency transports and compete with rescue squads.

Mr. Lloyd introduced himself, provided a brief history of the ambulance service, and explained his request to council. He said Richardson Ambulance Service has been in business for 10 years, is based in Marion, Virginia, and provides non-ambulatory transportation service within Smyth, Washington, Wythe, and Montgomery counties in Virginia. He said the service has about 100 employees and his business is growing largely due to Medicaid expansion. He said his request tonight is to be given resolution grant authority to provide non-emergency transportation from or to facilities within the City of Norton. He said his service doesn't come to Norton often, but he sees the trend increasing and is preparing ahead of time by requesting permission to provide those services in Norton as required by the Code of Virginia. He said his business provides transportation for medical appointments, discharges from hospitals, and facility-to-facility transfers.

Councilwoman Davis asked if Richardson Ambulance Service would provide non-ambulatory transportation if a person in Norton needs transportation to Charlottesville.

Mr. Lloyd said his business coverage area includes Charlottesville, the state of Virginia, and other states as long as the origination or point of destination is in Virginia.

Councilman Caruso asked if there are other Medicaid transportation businesses providing this service in Norton.

The city manager explained that Medicaid transportation in the area is contracted through ModivCare, formerly known as LogistiCare, and ModivCare contracts with the most cost-effective transport company for each transport.

Councilman Caruso asked if other transportation businesses have been given permission to provide this service in Norton and if LifeCare Medical Transports, Inc, is one of those businesses.

Mr. Ramey said yes, and he only knows of two or three businesses that have been given permission from council to do so. He said the most recent was Mercy Ambulance Service in Washington County. He explained that council adopted a resolution for Mercy to provide this type of service in Norton, adding that Mercy wanted to locate in a facility in Norton and offered to provide emergency assistance to Norton Rescue Squad should the need arise. He said the other two were from Wise and Dickenson counties and others might not have sought permission from

council to provide this service in Norton. He noted that the Wise County Board of Supervisors has given Richardson Ambulance Service permission to provide this service in the county.

Mr. Ramey then distributed a draft resolution that had been reviewed by City Attorney William Bradshaw and asked for council consideration to have the resolution placed on the June 15 council agenda.

Councilwoman Davis asked if there is a possibility that Richardson Ambulance Service would open a facility in Norton.

Mr. Lloyd said the possibility exists if the need for the service is shown in Norton.

Councilman Fultz asked how many bases are currently operated by Richardson Ambulance Service.

Mr. Lloyd said there are four bases, the closest of which is located in Glade Spring.

Following the recommendation of Councilman Mays, council's consensus was to consider the resolution as written rather than place the resolution on the June 15th council agenda.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilman Caruso, and passed by unanimous vote, council moved to adopt the Resolution to Allow Richardson Ambulance Service, LLC, to Provide Non-Ambulatory Transportation in Norton. (Insert)

Council members thanked Mr. Lloyd and welcomed Richardson Ambulance Service, LLC, to Norton.

In packets for council consideration was a draft Ordinance Placing Levies Upon Equipment and Enabling Software in a Data Center. Mr. Ramey said council has to formally establish, based on a Memorandum of Understanding with Lonesome Pine Regional Industrial Facilities Authority entered into in February 2021, a data center equipment tax of \$0.24 cents per \$100 of assessed value and the purpose of this ordinance is to establish a uniform tax rate for data center equipment which puts the region in position to attract this sort of business to the region.

It was the consensus of council to authorize the city manager to advertise a public hearing on the Ordinance Placing Levies Upon Equipment and Enabling Software in a Data Center at the June 15th council meeting.

The city manager provided an update on COVID-19 and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020 as of May 28, 2021.

Via a brief PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Ramey reported four new COVID-19 cases in the city, for a total of 290 cases and no additional deaths. He said Wise County had an increase of 39 new COVID-19 cases for a total of 3,237 cases with four additional deaths reported and reached 100 total COVID-19 deaths on May 21, 2021.

Mr. Ramey then provided a vaccine update as of May 28, 2021. He said 1,269 Norton residents had been fully vaccinated, 10,998 Wise Countians had been fully immunized, and 4,624,468 Virginians had received full inoculation.

Mr. Ramey reminded council that Virginia Department of Accounts analysts will conduct a conference call monitoring review June 22 of the \$694,654 in CARES Act funding the city received in 2020.

The city manager said the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act funding the city was supposed to have received by May 11, 2021, has not been received, but the city has completed the required paperwork.

He told council that the city submitted the paperwork for the additional \$600,000 in grant funding to the Commonwealth of Virginia for the LENOWISCO Small Business Recovery Assistance Program, and he believes the city will receive those funds.

He said the city is still allocating round two of the Municipal Utility Relief Program grant funding.

Upon a motion by Councilwoman Davis, seconded by Councilman Caruso, and passed by the following roll call vote: YES – Fultz, Davis, 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.

Mayor Fawbush declared council in closed meeting.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, 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 city manager polled each member of council as to the Certification of Closed Meeting with each answering yes. Mr. Ramey 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)

The mayor opened the floor for nominations to the City of Norton Board of Zoning Appeals for a five-year term to expire May 2, 2026.

Councilman Caruso nominated Gordon Sandt to be reappointed to a five-year term to expire May 2, 2026.

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

The mayor declared Gordon Sandt nominated to the City of Norton Board of Zoning Appeals for a five-year term to expire May 2, 2026.

Mayor Fawbush opened the floor for nominations to the Community Corrections Resource Board for a two-year term to expire May 31, 2023.

Councilwoman Davis nominated Norton Police Chief James Lane to be reappointed to the Community Corrections Resource Board for a two-year term to expire June 30, 2023.

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

The mayor declared Norton Police Chief James Lane reappointed to the Community Corrections Resource Board for a two-year term to expire June 30, 2023.

In comments from the city manager:

The city manager requested council authorization to advertise a public hearing for the FY21 Budget Amendments provided to council on their desks. It was the consensus of council to authorize the city manager to advertise a public hearing for the FY21 Budget Amendments.

Mr. Ramey informed council that the last class of the Norton Business Challenge, referred to as Pitch Night, was held May 26 with four participants vying for available funding. He said the city is hoping to announce winners at the June 15th council meeting, and he welcomed Business Challenge participants and owners of Appalachian Books, Carli and Lloyd Tomlinson, who were attending the council meeting.

The city manager said paving of East Park Avenue from Tipple Hill to the dental office at 8th Street, NE., is expected to begin this month, will be managed by the Virginia Department of Transportation, and should be completed by the end of June. He noted that the city can reapply for funding to continue the paving on East Park Avenue to the corporate limits at Esserville.

He said the city is also advertising city paving projects, one of which is Virginia Avenue from 8th Street to 10th Street with paving hopefully taking place in July or early August. Another city paving project will be the Norton Elementary and Middle School parking lot.

The city manager updated council on progress at Veterans Park. He said the Blue Star Memorial has been relocated to the front of the park, Lincoln Road Coffee's deck has been installed, and a kick-off event was scheduled for 6-10 p.m., Friday, June 4. He also said the city is working on ordering festival lighting for the park.

He provided council with the latest High Knob traffic counts, noting there is an error in the traffic count because the traffic counter battery died and requires replacement. He informed council of the following upcoming events: the Flag Rock Group Trail Run on June 3, Monthly Hike and Outdoor Yoga Class on June 5, and an Oil Painting Class on June 7. Other important events are the Get Fit Camp from June 7-10th and the Best Friend Festival from June 7-12th.

The following comments were made by council members:

Councilwoman Davis inquired if the city is going to trim the bottoms of trees located within the decking in Veterans Park. The city manager said the trees will be trimmed June 2 according to the recommendations of a landscaping expert.

She also noted how moving the Welcome Home Parade for Norton Police Chief James Lane was for everyone, residents and visitors alike.

Councilman Fultz agreed noting that he was impressed by the number of first responders throughout the region who participated in the event. He said he was also pleased with the businesses that allowed their employees to attend the parade. He then asked when the High Knob Music Festival is scheduled.

Mr. Ramey said the festival will be held from 11 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., Saturday, June 19.

After viewing a Best Friends Festival schedule of events. Mr. Caruso said the city looks like it is back where the city needs to be. He also asked council if it is time for council members to no longer social distance during council meetings and return to their normal seating arrangement. It was the consensus of council for council members to no longer social distance and to return to their normal seating arrangement. He also commended the police department for things running smoothly during Chief Lane's recovery.

Mayor Fawbush reported that John I. Burton High School's Girls Tennis Team has earned the title of Region D Champions and have advanced to the state championship. He congratulated the team and Coach Chris Crabtree on this accomplishment. He also said he was pleased with the turnout for the parade and the number and quality of the emergency service vehicles in the parade. He said he was in awe of what the city has at its disposal in terms of public safety.


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