

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Norton City Council was held Tuesday, November 16, 2021, at 6:00 p.m., in the Municipal Council Chambers with Mayor Joseph Fawbush presiding.

Present: William Mays, Joseph Fawbush, Mark Caruso and Sarah Davis

Absent: Robert Fultz, Jr.

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

The invocation was given by City Manager Fred Ramey and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Norton Police Department First Sergeant Greg Mays.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilwoman Davis, and passed by the following vote: YES – Mays, Davis, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – Fultz, ABSTAIN – Caruso, council moved to adopt the minutes of the October 19, 2021, council meeting as presented.

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

The first agenda item under new business was council consideration of a Resolution Approving the City of Bristol, Virginia, Becoming a Member of the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail Authority.

The city manager said it was anticipated that jail authority representatives would be at tonight's meeting to introduce the resolution to council; however, the Virginia Resources Authority which currently holds the bond on the regional jail authority has not completed its review of all the associated documentation and there is some concern about a petition by a citizens group which opposes Bristol joining the regional jail authority.

At this time, Councilman Robert Fultz took his seat on council.

Mr. Ramey provided council with a history of the regional jail authority which was formed in 2003 and the terms for Bristol joining the authority.

The city manager said the authority board unanimously approved a resolution with service and support agreements accepting Bristol into the regional jail system and acceptance of Bristol into the regional jail system also requires 100 percent approval by all participating authority jurisdictions.

Mr. Ramey stated that the City of Bristol will pay a premium of \$2.75 on a guaranteed 200 inmates for 10 years. He said a premium amount of \$200,750 per year will be paid directly to each of the member localities at the year-end reconciliation and will help offset Norton's share of the debt service.

Mr. Ramey noted that if any member chooses to leave the authority, all member jurisdictions must unanimously agree and the departing entity must continue to pay its share of the debt service until the debt is paid in full.

Following a brief discussion, action on the resolution was tabled until a later date.

Council was presented in their packets with a Resolution Requesting the Addition of Industrial Drive Northeast Under the Virginia Department of Transportation Urban Maintenance Inventory System.

The city manager said this is typically done when the city adds new streets, but the city recently discovered that the road, often referred to as the "back way to Walmart," had

inadvertently not been added to the VDOT road inventory system. He said the addition of this road, which is less than .2 of a mile, to the VDOT maintenance system would slightly increase the city's annual reimbursement from VDOT. He stated that the omission of Industrial Drive Northeast from the VDOT maintenance inventory system was discovered when VDOT and the city were looking at Project Intersection maps.

Mayor Fawbush noted that Industrial Drive, N.E., is a heavily traveled road.

There were no questions or comments from council concerning the resolution.

Upon a motion by Councilwoman Davis, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by the following unanimous roll call vote, YES – Mays, Fultz, Caruso, Davis, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, ABSTAIN – None, council moved to adopt the Resolution Requesting the Addition of Industrial Drive Northeast Under the Virginia Department of Transportation Urban Maintenance Inventory System.

Via a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Ramey provided council with the latest COVID-19 vaccination and case trends for the City of Norton and Wise County.

Citing an October 21, 2021, Bristol Herald Courier article, the city manager reported that the Southwest Virginia/Northeast Tennessee region has a vaccination rate of 44 percent which is near the lowest rate in the nation.

Virginia Department of Health (VDH) new COVID-19 case statistics for October 14-20, 2021, showed no new cases for Norton, a 13.2 positivity rate, with 40.6 percent fully vaccinated. VDH statistics for the same period for Wise County showed 130 cases, an 18.2 positivity rate, and 40.6 percent fully vaccinated.

VDH new COVID-19 cases for October 21-27, 2021, for Norton totaled 10 with a positivity rate of 9.3 percent, while Wise County totaled 124 new cases with an 11.5 percent positivity rate.

LENOWISCO Health District COVID-19 case statistics for October 11-31, 2021, in Norton totaled 25 (9 being 0-18 years), while Wise County cases totaled 266 (82 of those 0-18 years). October 2021 case totals for Norton were 53 (17) and 456 (121) for Wise County.

LENOWISCO Health District COVID-19 case statistics for November 1-7, 2021, in Norton totaled 13 (3 being 0-18 years), while Wise County cases totaled 81 (21 of those 0-18 years).

Mr. Ramey reported the following VDH COVID-19 statistics for the City of Norton as of November 12, 2021: Cases (616), 544 as of October 15, 2021; Hospitalizations (31), 28 as of October 15, 2021; Deaths (15), 13 as of October 15, 2021; Increase in Cases Over 7-Day Period (22); and 7-Day Average Number of Daily New Cases Reported (3).

Updating council on American Rescue Plan Act funding and projects, Mr. Ramey told council the city continues to work with engineering consultants on the following projects: the Hawthorne Drive Infrastructure Utility Replacement, the 10th Street Sewer Line Replacement, and the 400 Block of Park Avenue Waterline Replacement. He said these projects could possibly qualify for ARP or Infrastructure Act funding.

He said the city continues to participate in discussions with a firm regarding the design of a potential Splashpad Project.

Mr. Ramey said the city is still awaiting the interim final rule from the United States Treasury on ARP funding as was reported to council at the November 14, 2021, city council workshop.

Updating council on Norton Rescue Squad's request to purchase a new small ambulance, the city manager said rescue squad personnel have secured a second quote of \$128,698 for a new Ford Transit F350 ambulance and are here tonight to present this quote for recommendation to council. He said city administration believes ARP funds could be used to assist with the cost of the new ambulance.

At this time, Mr. Ramey asked Norton Emergency Management Coordinator Todd Lagow and Norton Rescue Squad Captain Buddy Cash to update council on their ambulance selection.

Mr. Lagow explained that the rescue squad was looking for a small, light-weight ambulance that would easily traverse rural areas and narrow roads. He said a heavier suspension package is needed so an F350 was chosen rather than an F250. He noted that the delivery time for the new ambulance is about a year.

Mr. Lagow said the price for the new ambulance includes lights, but does not include a cot, which is estimated to cost \$18,000 and will be purchased from a separate vendor. He said the rescue squad has applied for a state grant for the purchase of the cot, which if received, will pay half (\$9,000). He explained that if the cot were purchased from the ambulance vendor the cost for the cot would be \$20,000, so he advised purchasing the cot separately.

Councilman Mays asked if the old small ambulance would last a year.

Mr. Lagow said the old small ambulance has already been removed from service, because the cost to repair the vehicle had become too expensive.

Mr. Mays said the retired ambulance served well over the years.

Mr. Lagow noted that the old ambulance provided 20-plus years of service to the community.

The city manager said the rescue squad board of directors fully supports tonight's purchase request. He also pointed out that even though the rescue squad board offered to assist with the cost of the new small ambulance, his recommendation was for the city to pay for the largest portion of the cost, if not the entire cost of the new ambulance.

Upon a motion by Councilwoman Davis, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by the following unanimous roll call vote: YES – Mays, Fultz, Caruso, Davis, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, ABSTAIN – None, council moved to authorize Norton Rescue Squad to move forward with the purchase of a Ford Transit F350 ambulance for \$128,698 and up to \$9,000 for the cot with the city's intent being to use American Rescue Plan Act funding with the purchases.

In packets for council consideration was a transfer to Norton City Schools, dated October 26, 2021, in the amount of \$300,000 to cover October 2021 payroll expenses.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilman Caruso, and passed by the following roll call vote: YES – Mays, Fultz, Caruso, Davis, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, ABSTAIN – 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 unanimous roll call vote: YES – Mays, Fultz, Caruso, Davis, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, council moved to go into closed meeting to discuss Personnel as per Section 2.2-3711 (A) (1) of the Code of Virginia as amended; 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 as per Section 2.2-3711 (A) (3); and for Discussion Concerning a Prospective Business or Industry or the Expansion of an Existing Business or Industry Where No Previous Announcement Has Been Made of the Business's or Industry's Interest in Locating or Expanding its Facilities in the Community as per Section 2.2-3711 (A) (5).

Mayor Fawbush declared council in closed meeting.

Upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by the following vote, YES – Mays, Fultz, Caruso, Fawbush, Davis, NO – None, ABSENT – None, council moved to go back into open meeting.

Mayor Fawbush declared council back in open meeting.

Mr. Ramey polled each member of council as to the Certification of Closed Meeting with each answering yes. The city manager then read A Resolution of the Certification of Closed Meeting.

Upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by the following unanimous vote, YES – Mays, Fultz, Caruso, Fawbush, Davis, NO – None, ABSENT – None, council moved to adopt A Resolution of the Certification of Closed Meeting. (Insert)

The mayor opened the floor for nominations to the Cumberland Airport Commission for a four-year term to fill the term of Christopher Starnes which expired October 31, 2021.

Councilman Caruso nominated Christopher Starnes to be reappointed to the Cumberland Airport Commission for a four-year term to expire October 31, 2025.

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

The mayor declared Christopher Starnes reappointed to the Cumberland Airport Commission for a four-year term to expire October 31, 2025.

In comments from the city manager:

Mr. Ramey told council the installation of the city's downtown Christmas Tree started November 15, 2021, with the addition of two new bottom sections to be installed November 17.

He said Flag Rock Campground is closed for the winter season and city staff have been winterizing city facilities and utilities there.

The city manager said he met with Wise County administrators and a Bristol Casino Project representative on Friday, November 12, 2021, and shared a few meeting highlights with council. Mr. Ramey reported that the casino has applied for a permit to open a temporary casino sometime in 2022 in the location of the Piccadilly in the former Bristol Mall. He said the casino is expected to generate \$700,000 to \$1 million dollars per year in gaming tax revenue which will be shared with the regional communities. Mr. Ramey noted that this is the first time he has seen anything official that identifies the City of Norton as one of those communities.

Noting that he will provide a full report at the end of the year, the city manager said the Expo Center has been utilized extensively this year with a total of more than 30 events, including the farmers market. He said an event is scheduled for the night of November 19, 2021, and six events are tentatively scheduled in December.

The city manager provided council with the latest Retail Sales Tax Report, as well as High Knob and Flag Rock traffic counts.

Upcoming events include: the Christmas Tree Lighting, scheduled for 6 p.m., Saturday, December 4, 2021, with downtown businesses and the city conducting a holiday market from 5 to 8 p.m. at the Expo Center; and the Norton Christmas Parade at 6 p.m., Sunday, December 5, 2021.

The following comments were made by council members:

Councilwoman Davis said she is excited about the City of Norton Christmas tree and expressed her sorrow about Big Stone Gap, Virginia, Officer Michael Chandler, who died in the line of duty this past weekend. She extended her thoughts and prayers to the Chandler family.

Councilman Fultz said he had three thoughts concerning this tragic incident. First, he said he is brokenhearted for the community and region that something like this would happen here, particularly when you reflect on what happened to Norton Police Chief James Lane in May and what happened to Wise County Sheriff's Deputy Robbie Robinson in July. Secondly, he said how proud he was of the region and community for pulling together during times like these. Thirdly, he said he is glad people are saying the things they are saying and making the stand they are making, but he hopes people can do these things for the living and not just for the departed.

Prior to the council meeting, council was given a picture of Norton's new fire truck, which Todd Lagow said was scheduled to be delivered on Wednesday, November 24, 2021. Holding up the picture of the new fire truck, Councilman Fultz stated that the new fire truck looks good and noted what a huge accomplishment the new truck is.

Councilman Fultz said he is also looking forward to the Christmas tree lighting and the Christmas season. He said he appreciates the opportunity to serve the people in Norton and to work with some really good people on council.

Councilman Mays agreed with the comments provided by Councilwoman Davis and Councilman Fultz. He then recommended that council members attend Officer Michael Chandler's funeral service Wednesday, November 17, 2021, and represent Norton as a group.

Councilman Caruso agreed with the comments of his fellow council members.

Council members made plans to meet at 6 p.m., November 17, at the Municipal Building to travel together to attend the funeral services for Officer Michael Chandler.

Mayor Fawbush said the holiday season is his favorite time of the year as well and he is looking forward to the Christmas tree lighting and holiday market on December 4, and the Christmas parade on December 5.

He said it is a pleasure to serve with everyone on council and a great deal has been accomplished the last two years. He said he can't say enough good things about the city administration, city departments, and his fellow council members.

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