

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Norton City Council was held Tuesday, July 19, 2022, at 6:00 p.m., in the Municipal Council Chambers with Mayor Joseph Fawbush presiding.

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

Also Present: Jeffrey Shupe, Director of Finance

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

The invocation was given by Rev. Freddie Powers and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Norton Police Department First Sergeant Greg Mays.

Councilwoman Davis requested that the June 21, 2022, Council Minutes be amended to include her request for the total revenue in the police department's seized funds account/accounts.

Upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilwoman Davis, and passed by unanimous vote, YES – Mays, Fultz, Caruso, Davis, Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, ABSTAIN – None, council moved to adopt the minutes of the June 21, 2022, council meeting as amended to include Councilwoman Davis's request for the total revenue in the police department's seized funds account/accounts.

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

City Director of Finance Jeffery Shupe advised the first agenda item under new business was an update on Mountain Empire Transit's METGo! Pilot Program, a pilot on-demand bus system currently operating in the Norton-Wise area. Mr. Shupe had distributed copies of local newspaper articles on the pilot program provided by the city manager.

Following an introduction by Mr. Shupe, Mountain Empire Transit (MET) Director Mitch Elliot and MET Operations Manager Will Wright informed council about the program and its success.

Mr. Elliot said the federally funded grant program was one of two implemented in the Commonwealth of Virginia, one here and another in Eastern Virginia. He said the local rural program has done "tremendously well." The on-demand program operates in the Norton-Wise area Monday through Friday, and hours of operation have increased to 7 p.m. and will possibly expand to include Saturdays in September.

Via PowerPoint, Mr. Wright explained the free transit system and how it works. He discussed the local need for on-demand transportation and pointed out that prior to METGo! a 24-hour notice was required for transportation to a doctor appointment or to the grocery store. He said the local bus system started June 28, 2021, with two vehicles and is the first rideshare service in the Wise-Norton community with no 24-hour wait for transportation service.

The METGo! app can be downloaded on a cellphone, laptop, or computer. He said the Family Crisis Support Service Homeless Shelter is connected to METGo! with an inside portal that can be used to schedule transportation to job interviews.

He said high demand caused the expansion of the METGo! service area to the Wise County Fairgrounds and Dorchester areas. Many people use the system to travel to and from work and popular destinations for METGo! include Sykes, the Wise County Magistrate Office, UVA-Wise, Wise County Public Schools, Walmart, and the Norton Municipal Building.

Upon a motion by Councilman Mays, seconded by Councilman Caruso, and passed by unanimous roll call vote, YES – Mays, Fultz, Davis, Caruso and Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, ABSTAIN – None, council moved to approve the FY2020-2021 Norton City Schools FY2020-2021 financial encumbrances totaling \$568,368.35.

Council had been presented with a Resolution Approving the Planning District One (PD1) Community Services Board Performance Contract for FY2023 and FY2024.

Mr. Shupe explained the Code of Virginia requires every city and county be part of a public service board that plans/provides directly or contractually publicly funded services for mental health, mental retardation, and substance abuse. The finance director said for the LENOWISCO region that board is Planning District One (PD1) Community Services Board, and Norton's representative on that board is former Councilwoman Delores Belcher and current Councilwoman Sarah Davis previously served on the board.

He said the Commonwealth of Virginia requires that each locality provide a two-year performance contract and a copy of the PD1 Behavioral Health Services' biennial Performance Contract for FY2023 and FY2024 was included in council packets. Additional amendments and the PD1 Behavior Health Services 2021 Annual Report were also provided for council review.

Mr. Shupe introduced Planning District One Behavioral Health Services Financial Officer Kim Howell, who was present to address questions from council.

Ms. Howell expressed her appreciation for the opportunity to speak to council and shared highlights from the PD1 Behavior Health Services 2021 Annual Report. She said with funding from the LENOWISCO localities, PD1 had a total economic impact of over \$18 million in 2020-2021 with 4,254 individuals served. She also thanked council for its continued support.

Councilwoman Davis asked if PD1 has a 24-hour manned helpline crisis number.

Ms. Howell confirmed that PD1 has a crisis support number that is manned 24/7, 365 days a year, and is going to connect with the new 988 suicide hotline. She said she will send council educational material about the new regional 988 hotline that is being manned by Frontier Health.

She asked if council had any additional questions.

There were no additional questions from council.

Mayor Fawbush thanked Ms. Howell for her discussion with council.

Upon a motion by Councilwoman Davis, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by unanimous vote, YES – Mays, Fultz, Davis, Caruso and Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, ABSTAIN – None, council moved to adopt a Resolution Approving the Planning District One (PD1) Community Services Board Performance Contract for FY2023 and FY2024. (Insert)

The city director of finance presented council with a breakdown of budget amendments to the City of Norton FY2021 Budget. He said encumbrances totaled \$87,263 which is less than one percent of the city budget, so a public hearing was not required. He advised that city administration is asking council to amend the budget to include the list of encumbrances provided in council packets ending June 30, 2021.

Upon a motion by Councilman Caruso, seconded by Councilman Mays, and passed by unanimous roll call vote, YES – Mays, Fultz, Davis, Caruso and Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, ABSTAIN – None, council moved to amend the FY2021 Budget to include encumbrances totaling \$87,263.

Mr. Shupe provided council with an update on the status of the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) Flag Rock Hill Climb: Chasing the Woodbooger.

At the April 19, 2022, council meeting, city council authorized city administration to work with the Blue Ridge Region of the SCCA on a proposed Flag Rock Hill Climb event tentatively planned for the weekend of August 27 and August 28, 2022. The next day a land use permit application for the event was submitted to the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). In June, the city manager received confirmation from VDOT that the SCCA land use permit application had been received and two additional pieces of information were requested. One was a signage layout showing the signage to be used for all road closure areas and advanced warning systems, and the second was a copy of the SCCA's certificate of insurance for the event. Mr. Shupe said both of those items were submitted to VDOT.

Mr. Shupe advised that late last week city administration was notified that the land use permit had been approved and was being mailed to the SCCA. He said city administration believes that tonight city council can officially consider authorization of the first Sports Car Club of America Flag Rock Hill Climb for the weekend of August 27 and 28, 2022, and authorize city administration to work closely with SCCA representatives to finalize the event details.

Chris Sturgill of Backroads of Appalachia was in the audience and said he would address any questions council might have.

A discussion about scheduling a coordination meeting for the event followed.

Mr. Sturgill said contingent on tonight's vote by council, registration for the event will open July 20 and be limited to 50 entrants. He said there is so much excitement about the event that there is the potential for a request to have two events in Norton each year, one in the spring and one in the fall.

Norton Fire Chief and Emergency Management Coordinator Todd Lagow said an initial planning meeting is scheduled for 9 a.m., Friday, July 22.

Councilman Caruso asked about local support in terms of workers and safety.

Mr. Sturgill said those are being addressed and he is planning on reaching out to interested college students who will be trained and fill in the gaps where needed. He advised that with the excitement on social media there are workers who want to come from all over just to see this event because this is going to be one of the premier events in the eastern United States.

Councilwoman Davis discussed a variety of planning details.

Upon a motion by Councilwoman Davis, seconded by Councilman Fultz, and passed by unanimous roll call vote, YES – Mays, Fultz, Davis, Caruso and Fawbush, NO – None, ABSENT – None, ABSTAIN – None, council moved to officially authorize the first Sports Car Club of America Flag Rock Hill Climb for the weekend of August 27 and 28, 2022, and authorize city administration to work closely with SCCA representatives and other entities to finalize the event details.

Mr. Sturgill thanked council and said an email about open registration would be sent tonight.

The mayor and council members thanked Mr. Sturgill for attending the meeting and answering their questions.

Also included in packets for council consideration was a transfer to Norton City Schools dated June 14, 2022, in the amount of \$744,396.25 to cover the General Obligation School Bond, Series 2012 payment.

Following a brief explanation, Mr. Shupe asked if there were any questions.

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

Due to the city manager not being able to attend tonight's council meeting, Mayor Fawbush recommended tabling the items listed to be discussed in closed session until the next meeting. The consensus of council was to table the listed closed session items.

In comments from the city manager:

Mr. Shupe advised the city's Designated Outdoor Recreation Area (DORA) application for the Flag Rock Hill Climb August 27 and 28 has been submitted to the Virginia Alcohol Beverage Commission Board and city administration expects approval in the next couple weeks. He said once the DORA application is approved, council may have to define the DORA boundaries for the hill climb event at a future council meeting.

The finance director said following council authorization at the June meeting the Flag Rock Road from the entrance to the parking area and a portion of Route 619 near the upper reservoir paving projects have been completed.

He said contractors doing the primary paving for the city have indicated that the paving probably will not happen until fall, late September or early October, due to their scheduling.

Mr. Shupe said he would have to consult with the city manager and the director of public works to see which roads have been identified for this year's paving.

Councilman Caruso requested a list of those roads be given to council members.

The finance director provided council with an update on several projects. The finance director said Norton Industrial Development Authority opened the Project Intersection-Phase 2 bids on June 2, 2022, and the low bid was approximately \$7.2 million. He said even though the bids came in much higher than expected, through the efforts of LENOWISCO and Lonesome Pine RIFA, the project is moving forward with work expected to begin within 30 days. During this phase, which is expected to last about nine months, there will be additional pads developed and water, sewage and storm drainage will be installed. The bid opening for the Destination Center is scheduled for Thursday, July 21, 2022.

Mr. Shupe advised that council needs to begin planning for the 2023 Fourth of July celebration because vendors have indicated that the cost of fireworks is expected to increase and there are fewer fireworks technicians. He said the sooner the 2023 Fourth of July celebration date is set the sooner the cost can be determined. Mr. Shupe asked for council consideration on a date and recommended Saturday, July 1, 2023.

The consensus of council was to schedule the 2023 Fourth of July fireworks celebration on Saturday, July 1, and authorize city administration to sign a contract for that date.

Mayor Fawbush asked the cost of this year's fireworks display.

Mr. Shupe said the cost for this year's fireworks display was \$19,500 and the cost for the same show for 2023 has increased to between \$20,000 and \$21,000. He said the vendor is not going to do any show for less than \$20,000. He also said the display may be shortened by two or three minutes.

Council members discussed having the same number of fireworks in a shortened amount of time.

The finance director said a copy of the latest Retail Sales Tax Report was placed at each member's desk.

The following comments were made by council members:

Councilman Fultz said as organizers are planning the upcoming hill climb, he hopes they are mindful about helping Norton's brick-and-mortar restaurants/stores retain customer access to the businesses throughout the event. He asked that organizers be cognizant not to negatively impact normal business activity during the event and said council members are excited about the SCCA hill climb.

Councilman Caruso shared a list of citizen inquiries he had received. Those inquiries included: there seems to be a consensus that the flag at Flag Rock is smaller and a larger flag is needed; Coke Sign; school clock; hammock stands at Flag Rock; trees have grown so large at the upper campground that the view toward the valley is obscured; and a request for an additional 500 pounds of hand-sized blue gill for the reservoir.

He suggested the city write a press release about the SCCA hill climb. He said there are some citizens who are concerned about safety aspects and accessibility to the mountain.

Councilman Caruso requested an update on the Labyrinth parking lot, the long boarding event, and trail from Norton Elementary and Middle School to Ramsey.

Mayor Fawbush and Councilman Caruso said they had both driven Flag Rock Road since it was paved.

The mayor said the road is very nice and wider in some places, adding that some shoulder work is expected once the pavement settles.

Councilman Caruso agreed an excellent job was done and the road was smooth.

The mayor informed council the north side of the 900 block of Park Avenue streetscape is being finalized.


Councilman Caruso asked for the installation of a 5<sup>th</sup> Street sign and if road signage through the city is still in the plan.

Mr. Shupe said he would check and provide an update on the matter.

Mayor Fawbush said he would like to have the city's traffic lights and exits numbered.

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