

Minutes of the regularly scheduled meeting of the Saltville Town Council held on March 9, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. in the Town Hall

Council: Monica Johnson, Jeff Comer, Eugene Call, Bryan Morris, Steve Surber
Gary Call arrived during the Little League discussion

Mayor: C. Todd Young

Staff: Brian Martin, Town Manager
Paul Cassell, Town Attorney
Erik Puckett, Police Chief
R.B. Henderson, Public Works Director
Bryan Lynch, Fire Chief
Steve Johnson, Clerk/Treasurer

Councilwoman Johnson made a motion to approve the minutes of the February 9, 2021 regularly scheduled meeting, and Councilman Morris seconded. All were in favor.

Councilman Morris made a motion to approve the minutes of the February 24, 2021 special-called meeting, and Councilman Eugene Call seconded. The motion carried 4-0-1 with Councilwoman Johnson abstaining.

Councilman Morris made the motion to approve the minutes of the February 25, 2021 special-called meeting, and Councilman Eugene Call seconded. The motion carried 4-0-1 with Councilwoman Johnson abstaining.

Citizens' Time

No one submitted anything to be read aloud.

Approval of the Agenda

Councilman Morris made a motion to approve the agenda, and Councilman Eugene Call seconded. All were in favor.

Old Business

1. EMS, Inc. contract

Town Manager Brian Martin asked for a vote on the proposed contract extension for EMS, Inc., the water/sewer contractor, since their old contract was expiring. The proposed contract is for the same rates as the current one.

Councilman Morris made a motion to approve the contract for another three years at the current rate structure. Councilman Eugene Call seconded, and the motion carried 5-0.

New Business

1. Little League update

Preston Frye, the Little League President, spoke on the following:

- 1) So far, 111 kids have signed up for the Little League program.
- 2) There are five T-ball teams, two coach-pitched teams for baseball and softball, two kid-pitched teams for baseball and softball, and one majors team.
- 3) There was a renovation to the boys' field last fall.
- 4) They are currently fund raising with Krispy Kreme donuts to purchase a new backstop.
- 5) Carter's Pharmacy, Fred's, and Saltville Auto donated funds for new catcher's equipment.
- 6) The bathrooms will be prepared for the upcoming season after being winterized last fall.
- 7) The girls' softball field press box needs to be updated like the boys' was, and that is in the process.
- 8) To thank the town for all of the help it has provided over the years, the Saltville Little League presented the Mayor a plaque.

2. The Smyth County Tourism Director topic was tabled.

3. Lily Pad outdoor event

Mr. Martin introduced Missy Turner, the owner of the Lily Pad, who is wanting to have a Low Country Boil in front of her business. It will be on May 15th from 4 – 9, and a band will play from 6 -9. She asked for permission from the Council to have this event and use a portion of the town's parking area. Social distancing will be in play, and she has provisional approval from the ABC Board.

Councilman Morris commented he thought it was a good idea and made the motion to approve this and for Mr. Martin to determine what space needed to be blocked off. Councilwoman Johnson seconded, and all were in favor.

4. Mount Rogers Regional Cigarette Tax Board

Mr. Martin said the General Assembly recently approved for counties to levy a cigarette tax like towns do. The Mount Rogers Cigarette Tax Board will encompass the entire third district of Virginia. All towns within the district will have an opportunity to become a member of this Board which would eliminate the town having to purchase the stamps themselves.

He said this topic would be expanded upon in future meetings.

5. Cemetery and town mowing

Chief Puckett said everyone is waiting to see when the vaccine shots will be available for the inmates allowing them to leave the jails to do work. Councilman Morris said he would like to see the mowing advertised for bids but have the ad include that the town reserves the right to stop the contract when the inmates are able to return. Mr. Martin suggested having three different bids for the town properties divided as follows: cemetery; Salt Trail; and everything else. The Mayor said he would like to see the bids on a cost per month basis for each of those three options.

Councilman Morris agreed and said he would like to see a special-called meeting around April 1st to open the bids since mowing season is coming on quickly. The ads for bids could run until the 31st, and the bids could be opened on April 1st. Councilwoman Johnson commented that the mowing list used last fall should be double-checked since there were over fifty properties to mow. The specifics need to be ironed out.

Councilman Morris made the motion to put this out for bid with the caveat that this will stop when the inmates are able to return. Bids will be taken until March 31st, and there will be a special-called meeting that night at 7:00 p.m. to open them. Councilman Eugene Call seconded, and all were in favor.

6. Resolution

Mr. Martin said there was a resolution in the packets pertaining to the transfer of the ownership of the water meters along Robinson Cove Road and Lick Skillet Road. As of now, if there is an issue there with the water, the town has to contact the county first even though this is town water. For whatever reason, this was set up this way in 2004 with the new system installed in that area. Both town and county crews have to be involved. This resolution is in the hands of the county, too, and says they will give the town these particular customers to stop the redundancy, and the town's resolution says we will take these customers. This will cost the town nor the county any money.

Councilman Morris made the motion to approve this resolution, and Councilman Eugene Call seconded. All were in favor.

7. EMS, Inc. report

Gary Johnson spoke on the following:

- 1) He thanked the Council for renewing the contract.
- 2) The DEQ report for February has been submitted.
- 3) The recent rains led to inflow/infiltration issues, and the Lane Group is still smoke testing.
- 4) The VDH monthly report and the Water Treatment Leak Loss report for February were submitted.
- 5) Regarding the Phase I Project, more of the drive-by meters were looked at, and the consensus is that they're going to work well.
- 6) There was a bad leak last week that led to a boil notice for two days. The proper sampling was performed and sent to VDH. Councilwoman Johnson asked for quicker notice when the boil order was lifted since she got a lot of inquiries from people wanting to know. Mr. Martin said a NIXLE would be sent out the next time.

Committee Reports

Councilwoman Johnson has had discussions regarding the Salt Trail, so she and Sarah Gillespie of the Smyth County Chamber of Commerce have set up accounts with Facebook and Instagram

showcasing the Trail and have also set up an email pertaining to the Trail. This drives home the point that the town has ownership of the Salt Trail name and should lead to more grant opportunities.

The recent Keep Southwest Virginia Beautiful meeting dealt mainly with a recycling program being headed by Eastman. There are different locations currently collecting plastics. The town and the county may want to consider joining this program. The list of interested participants ranges from Norton to Galax. KSVB usually has quarterly meetings but is now meeting once a month. DEQ is even getting involved with this recycling program.

The same church that had the drive-thru Halloween and drive-thru Christmas is wanting to do the same for Easter and is in touch with VDH to make sure the regulations are followed.

There was a cleanup on Highway 107 and other small areas since the last meeting, and the volunteers involved picked up a lot of trash. The Mayor mentioned that on April 24th there will be volunteers from the Wellness Center doing an all-day cleanup. Several other organizations are going to pitch in as well.

Public Works Director's Report

R.B. Henderson spoke on the following:

- 1) The leak about which Mr. Johnson spoke occurred when a section of water line had a separation of the joint. An eight-inch gate valve had to be installed so the water from the Lick Skillet tank can be turned off if needed.
- 2) On Wiley Drive, another section of terra cotta pipe failed and had to be replaced. He said it would make sense to go ahead and replace the whole line since this is a recurring problem. Councilman Morris made a motion to replace that line, and Councilman Gary Call seconded. All were in favor.
- 3) A company, Lusk Disposal Service, came by last week with a proposal to haul off the town's sludge. Currently, Waste Management does this. It looks like the town could save a few thousand dollars each year, but Lusk would require a three-year contract whereas Waste Management does not. This could be discussed during budget talks.
- 4) Councilman Gary Call asked about the trucks for United Salt going into people's yards and creating a mess like what just happened to Larry Ratcliff's property. It seems to be a GPS issue with the trucks. The state police worked this complaint, and they told Mr. Ratcliff to file it with his insurance. There are signs everywhere, but they aren't always followed.

- 5) Councilman Morris asked about the town crew picking up trash, and Mr. Henderson said the trash truck is used for this on Mondays and Fridays for the playground, ball fields, etc.
- 6) Councilwoman Johnson asked about the speed bumps on Fifth Avenue since one is now gone. Mr. Henderson said when the asphalt plants re-open, that speed bump will be replaced.
- 7) Councilman Surber mentioned that there are several street lights that need to be replaced since they've been burned out for a while. Police Chief Puckett said he would have his officers do a street light survey that will be turned in to AEP to have non-working lights replaced. The Mayor asked for a list of the lights replaced to be given to each Council member.
- 8) The Mayor asked that when the town crew is in their trucks and see any trash lying around that they stop and pick it up with their grab bars to be thrown away.

Police Chief's Report

Chief Puckett spoke on the following:

- 1) Chris Hogston won Officer-of-the-Year from the Marion VFW. As has been in the past with those who win this, he'll get another twelve hours of leave time added to his allotment.
- 2) The Chief's Conference will be in Richmond from March 16th – 18th. Traffic laws have changed a lot as have warrant procedures and ECOs and TDOs.
- 3) The ad ran for the full-time position and one application was received from Robbie Cruise, a certified former officer with the department. Councilman Morris made the motion to offer him the position, and Councilwoman Johnson seconded. All were in favor.
- 4) The monthly stats are included. The Mayor asked if any of the citations were for littering, and the Chief said no.
- 5) Regarding Officer Cruise, Councilman Comer asked if the SRO was what he was going to do or was that going to wait. Chief Puckett said Officer Cruise has requested being the SRO. Councilwoman Johnson then said it was just voted on at the Board of Supervisors meeting that the county would be taking over the SRO position at Saltville Elementary and doing the grant writing for that position. The Board was told that the town requested this. Chief Puckett said the town's grant writer was currently working on this position, so he's a little confused.

Councilman Morris mentioned this was initially discussed at the March 13, 2018 meeting and read the following: *The Mayor said he and Chief Wilcox had been discussing the recent school shooting in Florida and the fact that the elementary school did not have a resource officer.*

Saltville Elementary has kids that are Pre-K through the fifth grade, and their safety is of the utmost importance. The town needs to step up and supply the resource officer for the building. Councilman Surber made the motion for the town to pay for a resource officer for the elementary school, and Councilwoman Wyatt seconded. All were in favor.

Councilman Morris said the town made a commitment three years ago to fund the SRO, and he did not care what the county voted on tonight. He thinks the town should keep a Saltville Police Officer at the elementary school. The principal, Mitzi Frye, has said she wants a Saltville officer there since it was a good way for the kids to interact with someone from the Saltville department, and she was excited to see Officer Cruise possibly come back and be the SRO again. He also said he was concerned that things were being done without the approval of the Council, but he hoped the Council shared his opinion that the department wouldn't be defunded and that no police positions would be eliminated and the SRO position wouldn't be eliminated.

Councilwoman Johnson said she didn't believe that Saltville Board member Roscoe Call would just ask the county out of the blue to take over the SRO position without someone on the Council asking him to bring it up. Councilman Gary Call asked why someone would be upset that the county wants to basically give the town some money by supplying the SRO. As long as an officer is there, the kids will be safer. Councilwoman Morris replied that the issue was that someone from the town took it upon themselves to go to the Board of Supervisors and ask for something that wasn't discussed or voted upon by the Council itself.

Councilwoman Johnson said she just wanted to know how this came about, because if the county is going to write the grant for the SRO position, then why is the town paying to have its own grant writer work on this, too. Chief Puckett asked for guidance on what he needed to tell the town's grant writer. Mr. Martin said if the Council as a body were to instruct him, he would reach out to the county's administrator tomorrow and try to find out if their motion tonight was to give the town money to fund this position or have one of their deputies be the SRO. The Mayor said the county puts an officer in every school except for Saltville Elementary and asked if the Council wanted an SRO there that the county is funding.

Councilwoman Johnson reiterated that her only problem is that the town is currently paying its grant writer to find the funds to pay the SRO. She said she appreciated Roscoe Call for helping the town, but the town has to protect its own financial interests. There can't be two grant applications submitted for the same position. Councilman Eugene Call said he would like to see Mr. Martin reach out to the county. Councilman Morris repeated that he did not want to see the town lose its own SRO from the Saltville department, and thought the towns of Marion and Chilhowie should fund their own SROs as well since it's the best form of community policing to have. It would be great if the county would give the town funds to have a town SRO at the elementary school, but he said he didn't want to sacrifice the commitment the town made to the elementary school and the town's citizens three years ago when the Council voted to put a Saltville officer there. If the county wants to give the town money for the position, then that's great. If they don't, the town is still stepping up to keep an officer there.

Councilman Eugene Call said he would like to see the county fund the SRO position with a Saltville officer, but he did not think that Ms. Frye would turn down a county deputy in that position either. Councilman Morris agreed and stated that she would not turn down a county officer but preferred one from the town.

Chief Puckett mentioned that the department is budgeted seven officers with one assigned as the SRO. He asked whether or not the department would only have six officers now if the county does put a deputy at the elementary school. The Mayor replied that the budget has not been set yet, so that question was probably premature. Councilwoman Johnson asked Mr. Martin to look into this matter more since the town's grant writer and now the county's grant writer were now working on the same application. If a special meeting is needed after Mr. Martin finds out more information, then so be it.

Mr. Martin said he would contact the county's administrator to determine where the request came from and whether the request is for funding to go to the town using a town officer or will the county be funding one of their deputies for the SRO position. If the county is going to submit the SRO grant application, then he'll work with Chief Puckett to determine the next course of action.

Fire Department Report

Chief Lynch spoke on the following:

- 1) There were fourteen calls in February with nine in the town and five in the county.
- 2) Regarding purchasing or leasing vehicles that Councilwoman Johnson has asked about at a couple of prior meetings, he said he would have that information in a couple of months.
- 3) Three members attended the CMC Rec Training forty-hour class and are now rope-rescue technicians. This is more specialized training, so other departments don't have to come in and do these types of tasks.

Rescue Squad Report

They had to leave on a call, but Mr. Martin had a letter from the squad asking for the town to re-instate the funding in the current budget. Councilman Morris, who made the motion to stop

their funding due to the establishment of an Emergency Medical Services Department, said he would not rescind his motion.

Town Manager's Report

Mr. Martin spoke on the following:

- 1) The Chamber of Commerce and Keep Southwest Virginia Beautiful have put on the Earth Day cleanup in past years, so those organizations will work with the Wellness Center for the cleanup on April 24th.
 - 2) The Mayor said the new Emergency Medical Services Director, Kyle Brewster, will start on March 15th.
 - 3) The first budget session will be March 15th at 6:00 p.m.
 - 4) He met with Northwood Principal Jerad Ward and county employee Mike Sturgill regarding the baseball field. The county wants to, at School Board expense, block out the ends of the dugouts and paint them. Behind home plate, the fencing will be removed and modern netting installed, and the foul poles will be replaced. Councilwoman Johnson asked if the field will look like the other schools' in the county, and Mr. Martin said yes.
- Councilman Eugene Call made a motion to move forward with the project, and Councilman Gary Call seconded. All were in favor.
- 5) There are a couple of minor things to do regarding the Phase II project including replacing a couple of flow meters.
 - 6) Senator Warner has an Infrastructure Bill with respect to more rural areas of the state. This might help with an access road for United Salt coming from Highway 107.
 - 7) The town can extend the contract of the grant writer now if it wants to. She's currently working on projects for the Salt Trail. The contract automatically renews unless the town wishes otherwise.
 - 8) Another body has said they will take possession of the old town shop site so the town can re-apply for the grant that has been rewarded but then rescinded. The deed will include a reversionary clause for the town to take re-possession of the property whether it gets the grant or not.
 - 9) The Chamber has a couple of ribbon cuttings planned this month for businesses in town.
 - 10) The U.S. Census Annual Boundary Adjustment Survey was completed.

11) Neil Kilgore, of the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, is helping the town with potential funding for signage along the Salt Trail. Councilman Morris said there used to be signs at the parking lot at the Glade Spring end of the Trail stating the hours, etc. Those are since gone, and the rumors are that nefarious activities are going on there at night, so the sign there definitely needs to be replaced. Mr. Martin said he would have some signs made.

12) He wrote a letter of recommendation for the group, *Go Virginia*, for their agricultural business collaborative to diversify the region's agricultural economy.

13) Councilwoman Johnson said the town's website needed to be updated with Councilman Comer's name and Curtis Crawford is no longer with the Rescue Squad, and there are a couple of other things. It behooves the town to keep this information updated.

Councilman Comer asked for Mr. Martin to send the School Board a letter thanking them for the ball field upgrades.

Closed Session

Councilman Morris made a motion to enter Closed Session in accordance with the Code of Virginia, Section 2.2-3711(A)(1) to discuss actions of Councilmembers; and Section 2.2-3711(A)(7) 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. Councilman Eugene Call seconded, and all were in favor.

After exiting Closed Session, Councilman Morris made a motion to certify that the Closed Session was conducted in conformity with Virginia law regarding those matters that are exempted from open meeting requirements and nothing was discussed other than what was mentioned in the motion to convene Closed Session. Specifically, the Council only discussed Section 2.2-3711(A)(7). Councilman Eugene Call seconded, and the roll call vote was 6-0 in the affirmative.

Councilman Morris made a motion to authorize Mr. Martin to sign the temporary construction easement requested by the School Board. Councilman Eugene Call seconded, and all were in favor. Councilman Morris then made a motion to authorize Mr. Martin or the Mayor to sign the temporary easement agreement with AEP. Councilman Eugene Call seconded, and all were in favor.

Lastly, Councilman Eugene Call made the motion to adjourn, and Councilwoman Johnson seconded. All were in favor.

