

**TOWN COUNCIL WORK SESSION**

Monday, May 18, 2020 at 6:30 P.M.

Online via WebEx

**1. Closed Meeting – Personnel**

*Councilman Gillispie moved, seconded by Councilman Thompson that Town Council go into Closed Meeting for the purpose of consideration or interviews of prospective candidates for employment with the Town, pursuant to Section 2.2-3711. A. 1. of the Code of Virginia.*

Vote: Yes – Councilmen Sealock, Cockrell, Gillispie and Thompson

No – N/A

Abstain – N/A

Absent – Councilmen Holloway and Meza

ROLL CALL

*Councilman Gillispie moved, seconded by Councilman Thompson that the Mayor and Council certify that to the best of each member's knowledge, as recognized by each Mayor and Council member's affirmative vote, that only such public business matters lawfully exempted from Open Meeting requirements under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act as were identified in the motion by which the Closed Meeting was convened were heard, discussed or considered in the Closed Meeting by the Mayor and Council, and that the vote of each individual member of Mayor and Council be taken by roll call and recorded and included in the minutes of the meeting of the Mayor and Town Council.*

Vote: Yes – Mayor Tewart, Councilmen Sealock, Cockrell, Gillispie Holloway, Meza and Thompson

No – N/A

Abstain – N/A

Absent – N/A

ROLL CALL

**2. Tourism Research and Options for Consideration** – Vice Chair of the Joint Tourism Advisory Committee, Kerry Barnhart, presented Council with research and recommended steps on how to move forward with tourism. Ms. Barnhart gave a detailed overview of what tourism is and the role of the Joint Tourism Advisory Committee. She presented council with recommendations for tourism objectives and various structural options based on tourism in other localities. The structural options included in-house management, outsourcing options, and a possible grant model.

Councilman Cockrell questioned if any of the suggested models were more common or successful. She also asked which structural model Ms. Barnhart would pick if given the choice. Ms. Barnhart explained that all the different models have great potential to work with the right design and plan. She added that initially she was against outsourcing, but after completing her research and seeing how well it works for other localities, she now feels that if Council chooses, it could be a viable option.

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Councilman Meza thanked Ms. Barnhart for her clear and thorough research. He asked if she felt any of the suggested structures would work better for the Front Royal - Warren County tourism budget. He also inquired if she had gotten a sense of possible difficulties that could occur. Ms. Barnhart explained that, in her findings, the budgeted amount did not influence which structural model worked best. Success was primarily based on the commitment to tourism rather than the funding. She added that everyone she spoke with experienced an initial tension between governing bodies that had to be 'worked through.' She also noted that those who outsourced tourism mentioned public scrutiny and the importance of transparency.

- 3. Review of FY20 Revenues** – Town Staff presented Council with updated information related to key revenues through the end of April. Interim Town Manager, Matt Tederick, commended Council on their decision to allocate funds to contingency as early as they did.

Mayor Tewalt asked about the impact the suspension of non-payment disconnects had on the number of citizens with delinquent utility accounts. Finance Director, BJ Wilson, noted that while some citizens are experiencing financial hardship, mostly those with delinquent accounts prior to COVID-19 are still delinquent and those with current accounts prior to COVID-19 are still making payments. He added that by offering payment plans to those in need, the Town should be able to collect most of the delinquent bills. Mr. Tederick suggested the Town start advertising options as soon as possible and resume non-payment disconnects and the assessment of late fees and penalties on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

Councilman Cockrell questioned if all current budget shortfalls are directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Wilson explained that some shortfalls, such as connection fees are directly related, however, many of the shortfalls are seasonal and related to weather. He noted some accounts such as water and sewer will start to recover, due to summer being their 'busy season.'

- 4. Removal of Credit Card Fees** – Town Staff explained that should Council decide to permanently waive credit card fees, the Town would need to write an ordinance amendment and absorb \$240,000 in the FY21 Budget. Mr. Wilson noted that since the temporary waiving of the fee, online payments have increased by 30%.

Councilman Cockrell expressed her desire to allow citizens to pay online using their bank account. Mr. Wilson explained that many citizens use online bill pay through their bank. Councilman Meza added that the Town also offers automatic bank drafting. Councilman Cockrell suggested Town Staff advertise all the different payment options available.

Councilman Holloway asked where the \$240,000 would come from in the budget. Mr. Wilson stated that they would need to complete a budget amendment to transfer funds out of contingency. Councilman Meza noted that all businesses pay credit card fees and either directly pass them on to customers or hide them by increasing rates – but the customer pays either way. Councilman Gillispie suggested Council resume the charging of credit card fees on July 1<sup>st</sup> as they had originally planned. Councilmen Meza, Holloway and Cockrell agreed.

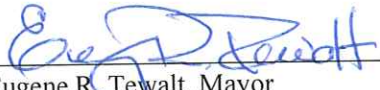
- 5. **Open Discussion** – Mr. Tederick suggested Council hold a Special Work Session to further discuss tourism and the FY21 budget. Council agreed and scheduled a Special Work Session on Thursday, May 21<sup>st</sup> at 6:30pm.

Councilman Meza asked if there had been more discussion or planning about closing Main Street to provide outdoor seating space for downtown restaurants. Mr. Tederick explained that Town Staff was prepared to rent tents, tables, and chairs to assist restaurants. He noted that Visitor Center Manager, Tim Smith, was working on a survey to send out to small businesses regarding the possible street closure. Mr. Tederick stated that he had already spoken to some of the downtown business owners and there were concerns related to parking. He added that the location of the Town Hall drive thru could present a challenge. Councilman Holloway requested Town Staff move forward with the street closure to help businesses as soon as possible. Councilman Meza agreed.


Mayor adjourned the work session at 9:01 P.M.

**PRESENT:** Mayor Tewart, Vice Mayor Sealock, Councilman Cockrell, Councilman Gillispie, Councilman Holloway, Councilman Meza, Councilman Thompson, Interim Town Manager Tederick, Town Attorney Napier, Deputy Clerk of Council Lynn, Director of Finance Wilson, and those members of the public and press who were listening online.

APPROVED:

  
 Eugene R. Tewart, Mayor

ATTEST:

  
 Tina L. Presley Clerk of Council  
 Written by Mary Ellen Lynn Deputy Clerk of Council

Councilman Gillispie moved, seconded by Councilman Meza approved the Work Session minutes of May 18, 2020 on June 8, 2020.

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