



**MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
TOWN OF CLIFTON FORGE, VIRGINIA
TUESDAY, JUNE 11, 2024, 7:00 P.M.
CLIFTON FORGE TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS
547 MAIN STREET**

INVOCATION

The invocation was given by Pastor Carl “Shorty” Wolfe.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Irvine called the meeting to order with the following members present: Councilman Carl “Shorty” Wolfe; Councilman Debbie Lauder milk; Mayor Jeff Irvine. Also present were Town Manager Chuck Unroe and Town Attorney Mike Lockaby. Absent from the meeting were Vice Mayor Dale Burdette and Councilman Ben Nicely.

PUBLIC HEARING-The Council for the Town of Clifton Forge will conduct a Public Hearing on Tuesday, June 11, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. to consider disposition of property located on County Road and owned by the Town of Clifton Forge.

Mr. Mike Nicholas, former Clifton Forge resident, and current property owner in Clifton Forge, told Council he had reached out to the Town of Clifton Forge to express interest in the property on County Road. Mr. Unroe advised Council that the assessed value of the property is 1500 dollars. He stated that Mr. Nicholas may consider a trade, the town lot for easement and right of way along the river.

Diana Kling Smith, 224 Highland Street, asked if the terms of the public hearing have changed because they were discussing trading instead of selling the property. Mr. Lockaby advised the contract would come before the Council for approval, and that a public hearing was not necessary.

With no further public comments, Mayor Irvine closed the public hearing.

PUBLIC HEARING – Proposed FY 2024-2025 Operating and Capital Budgets

- A) To consider the adoption of an Ordinance Imposing and Levying Taxes Within the Town of Clifton Forge, Virginia upon Real Property for the Fiscal Year Beginning July 1, 2024, and ending June 30, 2025, and upon Personal Property and Machinery and Tools for the Calendar Year Beginning January 1, 2024, and ending December 31, 2024.
- B) To consider the adoption of an Ordinance to Amend Section 86-95, Water Service Charges and Fees beginning July 1, 2024, to increase the monthly rate per EDU to \$41.80.
- C) To consider the adoption of an Ordinance to amend Section 86-556, Sewer Service Charge and Fees beginning July 1, 2024, to increase the monthly rate per EDU to \$71.20.
- D) To consider the adoption of a Resolution Adopting the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Operating Budget and Capital Budget for the Town of Clifton Forge, Virginia, and Appropriating the Requisite Funds for said Budget.

RECOMMENDATION: Conduct first reading and move to second reading on June 25, 2024.

John Moser, Church Street, expressed his disapproval of the rise in water and sewer rates. He said that he'd been told that once the new sewer plant was paid for, the sewer rates would be lower or stay the same. He stated that the cost is going up, and there are leaks in the town not getting fixed.

Elwood Dasher, 621 Roxbury Street, stated that they weren't supposed to have water meters in the first place. He inquired as to why the water lines on Roxbury Street have not been flushed.

Mr. Unroe said that he had just returned from a Small Towns Conference sponsored by the Virginia Municipal League. There were over 100 small towns represented at the conference. He said that he spoke with the manager of Hillsville, Virginia and Davenport and Company, municipal financial advisors who help small towns get where they need to be financially. Chemicals, salary, and maintenance have increased five times over what we were paying two years ago. The water and sewer rates have not changed in two years. The classes required for employment at the water plant have become so difficult that people expect a higher rate of pay to accept employment. The Town had to make an additional spot at the water plant to satisfy state requirements. Mr. Unroe went on to say that it costs the Town more to treat fresh water than it does to treat wastewater. The

Town still has to pay its fair share of the contract for the sewer (what the town contributes). Inflation since the pandemic is unheard of. The federal reserve is acting to slow inflation and the economy down. The 35th Annual Water Report from VACO showed that, in 2023, there were significant impacts to the water rate change, 7.2 percent increase for water and 6.5 percent increase for sewer. Since 2012, 3.4 increase per year for water and 3.6 increase for sewer. A one dollar increase for water and sewer services is well under the averages across the Commonwealth and well under the inflation rates we should be asking for.

Mayor Irvine advised that, per capita, Clifton Forge had a population with the lowest income. After four years of water and sewer hikes, the rates never went down. He talked about Alleghany County going up ten dollars on their garbage collection and the county doing reassessments.

Ms. Lauder milk stated that two dollars a month came to 24 dollars a year. She said that if the Town is going to continue to provide quality water and sewer services, we need to do this. She said it is a small price to pay to keep water and wastewater running.

Mayor Irvine suggested waiting to give town employees two percent raises and seeing if the town could afford to after the six months to avoid raising water and sewer rates.

Mr. Unroe explained that the flow into the treatment plant is metered. He stated that the bill was 900 thousand to a million dollars a month. He said that the town was using some money from the federal government to curtail the costs and keep out the Department of Environmental Quality's sights. He said that the town pays for actual use of what we contribute.

Mr. Wolfe advised that the sewage that goes into the treatment plant is on a meter. He spoke in favor of employee raises, stating that they work hard. He said that we have the cleanest water in Clifton Forge than anyone in the state of Virginia. He said that the Town was in compliance with regulations, just short a Class A Operator. The state of Virginia states that two Class A Operators are required. The Town hired an additional Class A Operator. Mr. Wolfe said he doesn't think a dollar is too much to pay for water and sewer services. He explained that the sewer rates are higher because the Town ships to Alleghany County. He said that the chemicals, operator cost, and cost of living has gone up, and that the two-dollar raise is not a whole lot to pay. He thanked the audience.

Jerry Belcher, Clifton Forge resident, said that he had a problem with the water bill going up. He said that he is on disability and cannot get food stamps. He said he thinks it's ridiculous to go up on the water bill. It is hurting people who don't make much money. He does not approve of the water bill going up.

Elwood Dasher questioned why the sewer rates were so much more. Mr. Unroe explained that it costs more to treat clean water than wastewater.

June 11, 2024

John Moser, Church Street, said that he was on disability and has three kids. He commented on the rust in the water. He asked Council if they wanted him to neglect his kids in order to pay higher bills. He said that 5,000 gallons a month was not much.

Diana Kling Smith, Clifton Forge resident, stated that nobody likes to see bills go up. She told Mayor Irvine that she doesn't understand how he can be in favor of not giving town employees a raise to keep from raising the water bill. She said the town has been unmaintained for decades, and they were now trying to play catch up. The extra money would go towards fixing things and making water safe and drinkable. She said the county's rates have gone up and are more than Clifton Forge pays. She wishes that we as a town and community could understand better the need and reasons to raise the rate, and that the Council, the Town Manager, and the Finance Department are doing the best they can to keep rates as low as possible.

Mayor Irvine stated that he had suggested postponing pay raises for six months, and that he did not care what Alleghany County's rates are.

Ms. Kling Smith said that she was for the employees.

Mr. Wolfe stated that inflation only hurts the poor people. He said he came from poor people and feels for them. He said that, inevitably, we as a Town must pay our bills somehow. He advised citizens that the Ministerial Association will pay someone's water bill once a year until they run out of money.

With no one else to speak, Mayor Irvine closed the public hearing.

CONSENT AGENDA/ CORRECTION AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Council Meeting

May 14, 2024

RECOMMENDATION: Approve the minutes for May 14, 2024

Ms. Laudermilk motioned to approve the minutes for May 14, 2024, with a correction. The pastor giving the invocation was changed from David Hanks to Shane Hiner.

This motion was seconded by Mr. Wolfe.

Councilman Nicely: Absent

Councilman Wolfe: Yes

Councilwoman Laudermilk: Yes

Vice Mayor Burdette: Absent

Mayor Irvine: Yes

ACTION ITEMS

1) Department Reports

- Code Enforcement-No report available due to vacant position
- Police Department
- Public Works
- Library
- Water Plant
- Fire Department

RECOMMENDATION: Approve the reports as submitted and written.

Motion to approve: Councilwoman Laudermilk

Seconded by: Councilman Wolfe

Councilman Nicely: Absent

Councilman Wolfe: Yes

Councilwoman Laudermilk: Yes

Vice Mayor Burdette: Absent

Mayor Irvine: Yes

2) Ordinances

- To consider an Ordinance Repealing, Amending, and Readopting Ordinances Relating to Erosion and Sediment Control for the Town of Clifton Forge, VA.
- To consider an Ordinance Reenacting Chapter 2, Article V., Division 2, of the Code of the Town of Clifton Forge of 2015, as Amended, Changing the Name of the Industrial Development Authority of the Town of Clifton Forge, Virginia, to the Economic Development Authority of Clifton Forge, Virginia.

RECOMMENDATION: Conduct first reading and move to second reading

Motion to approve: Councilwoman Laudermilk

Seconded by: Councilman Wolfe

Councilman Nicely: Absent

Councilman Wolfe: Yes

Councilwoman Laudermilk: Yes

Vice Mayor Burdette: Absent

Mayor Irvine: Yes

3) Resolutions

- To consider a Resolution to Correct the Terms of Office of the Directors of the Industrial Development Authority of the Town of Clifton Forge, Virginia.

RECOMMENDATION: Approve the resolution.

Motion to approve: Councilwoman Laudermilk
Seconded by: Councilman Wolfe

Councilman Nicely: Absent
Councilman Wolfe: Yes
Councilwoman Laudermilk: Yes
Vice Mayor Burdette: Absent
Mayor Irvine: Yes

- 4) To consider approval of the Town Manger's Employment Contract

RECOMMENDATION: Approve the contract for the Town Manager.

Motion to approve: Councilwoman Laudermilk
Seconded by: Councilman Wolfe

Councilman Nicely: Absent
Councilman Wolfe: Yes
Councilwoman Laudermilk: Yes
Vice Mayor Burdette: Absent
Mayor Irvine: Yes

- 5) To consider approval of holding a Called Meeting to conduct the second reading of the proposed budget on Tuesday, June 25, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of Clifton Forge Town Hall.

RECOMMENDATION: Approve the Called Meeting on June 25th, 2024, to hold the second reading of the budget.

Motion to approve: Councilwoman Laudermilk
Seconded by: Councilman Wolfe

Councilman Nicely: Absent
Councilman Wolfe: Yes
Councilwoman Laudermilk: Yes
Vice Mayor Burdette: Absent
Mayor Irvine: Yes

MANAGER'S COMMENTS

Mr. Unroe stated that Brad Church resigned two and a half weeks ago, and while it was true that he had accepted another job, there were underlying issues. He said that a person

can only be beat up so much, and that it was more than Mr. Church was able to cope with. Mr. Unroe said that Mr. Church was enrolled in the classes he needed to be in, and the speculation that he was not certified was inaccurate. He told Council that we will be advertising for the Code Enforcement position this week. He will be asking that applicants be certified in building maintenance inspections or take and pass necessary classes within 12 months. Mr. Unroe said that the Town will continue to enforce the code with Public Works and the Police Department. He advised citizens to send addresses and/or locations of nuisance properties to Town Hall.

A bike rack was donated to the Town from Friends of Blue Ridge. This will enhance the opportunity for people to move through town and have a place to store their bicycles. It is a nice addition to Downtown.

Smith Creek Waterline-There is a low bidder for the project. Thrasher Engineering is certifying the bid documents and will notify the town within the next month once the process is completed. The contract will then be awarded, hopefully by the end of June. We hope to see boots on the ground in August. This project is being paid for by the Virginia Department of Transportation and original AARPA money.

Sidewalk repair-Public Works is conducting sidewalk repair starting with Alleghany Street and moving throughout the city. The Town has 100,000 dollars to use towards sidewalk repair. This will provide a huge change to commercial and residential districts.

West Ridgeway Paving Project-The paving project will be handicap accessible, going from Roxbury Street/Ridgeway Street to the west end of town by Scott Hill. The contractor has to have the project completed by June 25, 2025, or funds will not be available. Ten thousand dollars is being paid by the town, and the rest is being paid for by VDOT.

DOXO-There was a statement at the meeting in May that the Town uses DOXO for citizens to make online utility payments. Mr. Unroe explained that this is not true, and that DOXO is a third-party agreement that pays your bills for you. He said that the employees in the Finance department caution customers of the seven to ten business days for their payment to post to their account if paying using DOXO. He advised that DOXO was not part of the Town's services, and that the Town does not and never has had, an online payment option. Mr. Unroe said there were three ways to pay your utility bill: in person, by mail, or in the drop box.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

John Moser, 706 Church Street, said that he has no problem with people getting raises. He does have a problem with wasteful spending. He stated that the Town had lost a Code Enforcement Officer, a firefighter, and a policeman. He suggested putting GPS on town vehicles to keep track of where they are at. Councilwoman Laudermilk advised him to be respectful when he started speaking of a former Clifton Forge police Officer.

June 11, 2024

Georgia Gray, 525 Roxbury Street, said that the alley was deteriorating and needed to be paved. She said it had been repaved several times in the past and inquired as to whom had paved it those times. Mayor Irvine asked if the bus came all the way around, and Ms. Gray said yes.

Elwood Deisher, 621 Roxbury Street, handed out a petition from citizens requesting the alley at Roxbury Street be paved.

Jerry Belcher, Roxbury Street, had complaints about grass and said he was afraid of snakes. He said that police need to patrol the area more, because a child was going to get killed. Three-year-olds are out playing in the street at 10:00 at night. He went on to say that something needs to be done about the alleyway, and the whole road should be paved.

Bill Atherholt spoke on The Wall that Heals and provided citizens with information. Ms. Laudermilk told him that she had passed the card with the information to the director of RVARC and he was putting it in their newsletter.

Lamona West spoke with regards to Juneteenth. She requested permission from the Council to fly the Juneteenth flag from June 20th through June 30th, and every year after.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilwoman Laudermilk thanked everyone for coming out. She said the Small Towns Conference was a really good conference. She came back with a lot of new knowledge, which will help them do better for the citizens. She said that losing Brad Church was a big deal, because the town now has no code enforcer due to harassment. She said that we need to check ourselves. She thanked Chuck for clarifying DOXO and said that he was doing a great job. She thanked Chuck for all of his hard work. Ms. Laudermilk thanked Bill Atherholt for his speech on The Wall that Heals and Lamona West for her speech on Juneteenth.

Councilman Carl “Shorty” Wolfe stated that there was a good crowd, most being from Roxbury Street. He said that he thought the alley on Roxbury was a street. Mr. Unroe advised that the alley was not a state identified road. Mr. Wolfe said that he was glad residents came out to bring the situation to light. He then stated that the water must go up, although he feels for the lower income citizens. He told Mike Nicholas that, as far as he was concerned, the property on County Road was his. Mr. Wolfe thanked Lamona West for speaking on Juneteenth and told the citizens to come keep coming back.

Mayor Irvine thanked everyone for coming out and voicing their opinions. He thanked Bill Atherholt for his speech on The Wall that Heals. He went on to say that Brad Church did a good job, but he will be replaced. He told everyone to have a good evening and he would see them on the 25th.

NEW BUSINESS

June 11, 2024

The Town Council considered approval of flying the Juneteenth flag from June 20, 2024, through June 30, 2024. They will discuss forthcoming years to decide on whether to approve flying the flag after this year.

Motion to approve: Councilwoman Laudermilk
Seconded by: Councilman Wolfe

Councilman Nicely: Absent
Councilman Wolfe: Yes
Councilwoman Laudermilk: Yes
Vice Mayor Burdette: Absent
Mayor Irvine: Yes

ADJOURNMENT

Councilwoman Laudermilk motioned to approve the adjournment, seconded by Councilman Wolfe.

Councilman Nicely: Absent
Councilman Wolfe: Yes
Councilwoman Laudermilk: Yes
Vice Mayor Burdette: Absent
Mayor Irvine: Yes

*The Council for the Town of Clifton Forge will hold a Called Meeting on Tuesday, June 25, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. to consider the budget for fiscal year beginning July 1, 2024, and ending June 30, 2025. *

UPCOMING EVENTS

- 1) Flag Day Celebration Historic Masonic Amphitheatre
June 14, 2024, 6:00 p.m.
- 2) Tour the Theatre Historic Masonic Theatre
June 15, 2024, 11:00 a.m.
- 3) Community Gathering Historic Masonic Theatre
June 20, 2024, 6:30 p.m.
- 4) Wendy's Hoedown in the Underground Historic Masonic Theatre
June 21, 2024, 7:00 p.m.
- 5) Movies at the Masonic (The League) Historic Masonic Theatre

June 11, 2024

June 22, 2024, 7:00 p.m.

6) Fridays in the Forge Amphitheatre Patio Party Historic Masonic
Amphitheatre

June 28, 2024, 6:00 p.m.

7) Gran Fondo Finish Line

June 29, 2024

11:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

8) Movies at the Masonic (TBA) Historic Masonic Theatre

July 5, 2024, 7:00 p.m.