

MINUTES OF THE TIMBERVILLE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

June 8th, 2023

The regular monthly meeting of the Timberville Town Council was held Thursday June 8th, 2023 at 7:00 p.m. in the Town Council chambers with Mayor Donald Delaughter presiding.

MEMBERS: Carl Turner-Present Sharon Jones-Present
Clarence Fox-Present Sarah Berry-Present
Debbie Jessup-Present Isaac Kelley-Present

PRESENT: Austin Garber, Town Manager Cecilia Valdez-Marketing/Events
Melinda Hooke, Clerk/Treasurer Chris Coffman-Maintenance Supervisor
JR Dodd, Chief of Police Derrick Calhoun-Maintenance
Quinton Callahan, Town Attorney Trenton Knight-Maintenance
Beverly Garber, Town Historian Nathan Turner-Maintenance
Jeremy Hooke, Police Sergeant Luke Paczewski-K9 Officer
Michele Dean, Assistant Treasurer Shane Turner-Patrolman
CK Ray-Patrolman

GUESTS: Robin Delaughter Jennifer Coffman
Colleen Gray Susan Calhoun
Gretchen Hazard Kaylyn Williams
Tony Dean Jenny Turner
Greg Turner Kevin Farmer

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Mayor Donald Delaughter led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: A motion was made by Sarah Berry and seconded by Debbie Jessup to approve the May minutes. The motion carried with all members voting in favor.

Roll Call Vote:

Isaac Kelley-Yes Debbie Jessup-Yes
Sarah Berry-Yes Clarence Fox-Yes
Sharon Jones-Yes Carl Turner-Yes

TREASURER'S REPORT:

General Fund	\$88,778.65
Water/Sewer Acct.	\$248,353.89
Loan Balance	\$756,533.96
Money Market Acct.	\$1,191,732.57
ARPA Funds	\$1,013,351.10

BILLS FOR PAYMENT: A motion was made by Sharon Jones and seconded by Sarah Berry to pay the bills as presented. The motion carried with all members voting in favor.

Roll Call Vote:

Isaac Kelley-Yes Debbie Jessup-Yes
Sarah Berry-Yes Clarence Fox-Yes
Sharon Jones-Yes Carl Turner-Yes

POLICE REPORT: Chief Dodd sent out his monthly email to Council. K9 Koda was originally certified in drug detection and tracking. Recently, K9 Koda was certified in Fauquier County, in tracking and finding people and apprehend by bite if necessary. This was at no cost to the town.

Town Attorney Quinton Callahan explained the yearly renewal of the adoption of Virginia Traffic Code.

A motion was made by Isaac Kelley to adopt the Virginia Traffic Code Section 5-1.1 to be effective July 1, 2023. Debbie Jessup seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote:

Isaac Kelley-Yes	Debbie Jessup-Yes
Sarah Berry-Yes	Clarence Fox-Yes
Sharon Jones-Yes	Carl Turner-Yes

PUBLIC WORKS: Austin Garber asked if Council had a preference of how to pay for the water leak and asphalt repairs from Spar Mine. Council did not have a preference. Mayor Delaughter stated that staff did a good job getting the bill reduced by \$9000. Austin stated that Melinda Hooke and Chris Coffman worked to get the initial bill reduced by \$9000 and an extra \$10,000 from an insurance claim.

The engineer sent the easement plait for the Spar Mine Water Line Project. Austin Garber will review the plans and meet with the engineer next week to hopefully keep the project moving. This is the largest project on the ARPA list. Austin stated he wants to get this project completed so we know how much we will have to spend on other projects on the ARPA list.

Austin updated Council on the McCauley Drive Sidewalk project and the increased cost due to inflation prices. The representative from VDOT recommended to bump the amount up to \$100,000 to cover any extra costs that may arise. The town's portion would be an extra \$20,000 of the \$100,000. Mayor Delaughter stated that if we do not continue with the extra block, prices will only continue to increase. Sharon Jones stated that she thinks it is imperative that they do it due to things going up in cost. Sharon Jones made a motion to spend the extra \$20,000 on the project if needed. Sarah Berry seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote:

Isaac Kelley-Yes	Debbie Jessup-Yes
Sarah Berry-Yes	Clarence Fox-Yes
Sharon Jones-Yes	Carl Turner-Yes

Austin Garber started the transportation alternatives grant pre-application for the sidewalk on Memorial Park Drive. Austin wanted to go ahead and get it started due to the length that it takes for those types of projects.

Due to costly bids received on the construction of the bathroom at the American Legion Park, town staff will act as general contractor to build it. Austin Garber stated that he feels by doing it this way, the town can stay in the budgeted amount. He said that the estimates that were received were \$232,000 and \$330,000.00. He estimates the town can save around \$130,000. Mayor Delaughter stated that for the size of bathroom that is proposed to be constructed, it should not cost what the estimates were. He stated he was glad staff were going to take on the project.

Austin Garber was contacted by resident Gretchen Hazard who lives on the North end of the bridge across from the liberty station. Ms. Hazard's insurance company is requiring her to remove some buildings on her property. One of the buildings is the oldest structure in Timberville. Austin contacted the Harrisonburg Rockingham Historical Society and the town historian on how to save the building. It is estimated that it was built around 1750-1780. Austin asked Sharon to let the museum know. Sharon stated that if it can be dismantled, they could store it at the museum.

The dedication for the Kayak Launch is tomorrow, June 9th at 11:00 at the kayak location. Austin encouraged everyone to come. He thanked Cargill for their generous donation.

Austin asked Cecilia Valdez if our Facebook account is set to public so that if you do not have Facebook, you can still view it. She stated that it was. She said she went to the news section on our website and the town can send emails that way and residents can sign up for notifications. It may not be a newsletter but you can see the town's site to get information and you do not need a Facebook account.

BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY: Austin Garber talked to the owner of the brick building on McCauley Drive and there is not a whole lot of interest in someone purchasing the property. Austin has encouraged him to get a local estimate on demolition. The owner currently only has estimates from Northern Virginia.

Austin stated he is throwing around some ideas on how to preserve the brick from the building. He stated it has some historical significance.

ZONING ACTIVITY:

-5068 Appletree Court-Accessory Building
-291 Center Street-Deck Stairs
-263 S. Main Street-Variance for Garage

-345 First Avenue-Access Structure
-15228 American Legion Dr-Pool

PARKS AND RECREATION: A lot of clean-up went on at the Plains District Memorial Park today by town maintenance staff.

Austin Garber stated there was vandalism in the bathroom at the sports complex and they are reviewing surveillance video to see who was going into the bathroom.

FINANCE: Mayor Delaughter addressed some of the questions from the May Council Meeting. He said there were good questions asked with one being the newsletter and that has been discussed already tonight. A question was asked about viewing the minutes. He stated Council Meetings are recorded so you can watch that in real time or go back and watch it at any time. For special meetings, those minutes are not posted until they are approved and people do not have access to see them. Clerk/Treasurer Melinda Hooke will work on getting those minutes done early depending on when the meetings fall. Mayor Delaughter stated that a comment was made that our taxes continue to “go up, go up, go up”. He would like people to realize how financially frugal the town has been. The assessed personal property rate in the year 2000 was 30 cents per hundred. Today the rate of personal property taxes is 30 cents per hundred. Council has not raised the rate. The Real Estate Tax Rate in 2000 was 17 cents per hundred. The Real Estate Tax rate currently is 10.5 cents per hundred. Mayor Delaughter said we have effectively reduced our rate 40% over the last 23 years because the town did not need the money so they reduced it to just what the town needs. Mayor Delaughter stated that running the town as break even may not be the most responsible thing to do, but that is what Council has done. He states that they have not “increased, increased, increased”. It has been lowered. He said what you own has went up in value and that is why you are paying more. He said the town has a \$1.8 million budget for revenue. That pays for the chief and five officers, Melinda, Austin, Cecilia and Michele. It pays for 10 people and covers other expenses. Out of the \$1.8 million, the citizens pay 15% of that through Real Estate, Personal Property and Vehicle License Fees. Everything else gets paid by business license, bank franchise, and meals tax. The mayor said if you take our meals and cigarette tax, those people are paying \$90,000 more than town residents. If you add in Walmart that is \$40,000 more. That generates more tax revenue than the people are asked to write out, the mayor said. Mayor Delaughter stated it is all his opinion, but the numbers do not lie and that tax rates are reasonable. He said another question came up about a 5% help for people over 70. He said he does not know if the town can legally do that. He thinks it would be nice to do that for people who are solely on social security and they do not have a pension and he would like to do that. The mayor asked the town attorney to check into that. He said the other folks would subsidize it but it is a small amount and it would be nice to do it for water and sewer fees. The mayor stated that one person asked if the town has a salary cap for town employees. The mayor stated that the town manager hands out a salary comparison of other local towns for each position. He said the town does not have a salary cap and he said when he tells you where we stand with other towns, you will know why we do not. The salary comparison was for 6 towns. The Timberville Town Manger is ranked 6 out of 6. With 1 being the highest paid and 6 being the lowest. The treasurer rates 6 out of 6. The mayor stated that Austin ranks 6 out of 6 and he does town manager and zoning administrator positions. He stated that Melinda does two positions as well, being the clerk and the treasurer. The other towns split those jobs. The assistant treasurer is 2 out of 6. The clerk is 5 out of 6. Police chief is 3 out of 6 and is the senior chief. The sergeant is 4 out of 6. The average officer salary is 4 out of 6. The maintenance supervisor is 2 out of 4 because there are many people who do Chris’s job. The head water operator is 3 out of 4. Skilled labor is 5 out of 5 and semi-skilled is 3 out of 4. The mayor stated that is the reason there is not a salary cap. In every business you must keep pay competitive, the mayor said. He said you give them a great place to work, a fair job, and treat them fairly and things go well. He said

he thinks the big discussion was the amount of raise to give. He said when you are talking about people on a fixed income on social security and they got an 8.7% cost of living increase. He said that increase is to pay the bills with the increase in inflation. He said why would we think working people who are paying that deserve 5% when the cost of living is 8.7%. He said we are looking at folks, using the maintenance department as an example, who redid the police department, sports complex, shelter roofing and concrete, walking paths and they saved the town \$250,000 in the last two years. Now you have the Council having a debate over roughly \$50,000 for the raise. The mayor stated the maintenance crew will save more than that on building the new bathrooms. He said they looked at a neighboring town who is getting an 8% raise. He looked at Rockingham Counties salary. They are starting at 5% COLA and then half a percent for each year served in their current position. He said they are averaging a 7.3% raise. Fire and Rescue are averaging 8.3%. He said that everyone else getting what they are and Council asking for 10% increase is not unreasonable. The mayor stated that it is tough to do, but if they can do it, they need to. He stated it would be \$2.40 a month extra for water and sewer and trash. The meals tax is 1% more and not subsidizing people with two trashcans. He stated that is all they are doing and are asking people to absorb \$2.40 more. He stated that the average person on social security earns \$1800 a month and with an 8.7% increase that is an extra \$158. He said the town is only asking for \$2.40 of that money. He said if the Council can get this budget passed and give the employees 10% like they deserve, next year there might not be the money to give. It may be a 2% or 3% raise.

Sharon Jones said that the mayor was not taking into consideration what some of these elderly people are paying for prescription medicine. The mayor stated he was not and he was taking into consideration that they got an 8.7% cost of living and everything went up based on cost of living. Sharon stated that Medicare went up also. She stated she remembers when she was in school, and a comment was made last month that it is only a couple of dollars. Sharon said she did not even have a \$1 in her pocket growing up. She said the town's employees are invaluable to her and she wishes they could increase everyone's pay double. She said that anything she ever asks anyone to do, they are so willing to do it for her. She said last month that she appreciated the citizens that came out and spoke. She was elected by the citizens of Timberville and she is representing the citizens. She stated she has gotten numerous phone calls stating they have never gotten a 10% raise. Sharon commented on the lady from Riverside Drive, Emma Strawderman who stated her friend committed suicide down at the park and she had no money. Sharon said so when you say it is only a few dollars to these people who are paying \$600-\$700 a month for prescriptions. They go to Walmart and they cannot buy food because it has doubled and they go the gas station where it is \$1.50 more than what it was two years ago. A couple dollars is very much to them. Sharon stated that is the way she feels about it and she wants the employees to have a raise. However, she cannot justify it because of the phone calls she has received and the citizens that came out and talked. So, she cannot justify a 10% raise.

Isaac Kelley stated that he has sympathy for people who have tough times because everyone has. However, he does not feel like \$2.40 a month is going to change the outcome of anyone in that situation. He stated they are on a good track trying to come up with a tax break or exemption form for people in that situation. He said being in a younger generation, obviously he thinks times are changing and the value of a dollar is not nearly valuable as what it used to be. He thinks the employees are very valuable to the town with all the money they save doing all the projects they do. If Council can keep the employees they have, Isaac feels they will more than save this raise and still be in the lower half of incomes compared to other towns. He states that he is scared because the employees they have now, that money is not everything, but he is scared to lose any employee at all. He said no one wants to work two jobs and be in the lowest pay of the surrounding towns. He said that 10% is a lot and people are not used to that, but people are not used to being in the last pay bracket. He said the things they have straightened out with taxes and 10% raise needs to 100% happen. He is very confident in this and states at the end of the year 10% is not a huge amount of money but it is about appreciation. He stated he was elected by the residents also and they are not going to be happy if they do not have a police department and a maintenance department. He thinks it is something that needs to be done to show appreciation and job security.

Sarah Berry stated that what she has heard numerous times is that "I've never heard of a pay increase of 10%, the most I ever got was 3% or 5%." She states that she understands that, but at the same time we

have never seen inflation like this and the cost of living has increased in recent history. Sarah states that everything is going to cost more, including having a well-staffed town. She states they need to compensate their employees for a job well done. She feels it is an investment in our town. She states it is a big capital improvement like what was done in the parks, in her opinion. Sarah said 10%, absolutely. Debbie Jessup stated she brought up these concerns during the budget meetings. She said that yes employees do deserve a raise. She was hoping to negotiate some of that during the budget meetings, but there was not any compromising. She said the Council is using ARPA money to fund a lot of our projects. She said even tonight with the increase in one of the bills. She said it was suggested to just pay it out of the ARPA funds. She said that ARPA money will no longer be there and at some point, the town has to make up the difference with whatever revenue we can generate. She feels that the town does not generate enough revenue to sustain a 10% increase and then be able to continue for the future. She said the mayor was talking about, this was just for this budget year, but the decision we make tonight is not just for this year. This decision tonight goes into our future and will affect our budget next year. She said you have to be able to sustain that amount and then hopefully offer them more in the future because everything will continue to go up. Debbie said so if they give 10% this year, but then next year they do not have the money, but sorry we cannot give you any raise. She said she does not feel like that is appropriate or justified. Her thoughts are the lack of revenue that is coming into town and increasing meals tax with very few restaurants in town. She feels like that revenue can decrease on prepared food and then the town will not have that money. Her thought is the future of what is going to happen and being able to sustain and being able to pay for that.

Clarence Fox said that with everything that has been said, he has had two people approach him within the last two months wanting to know why he is in favor of raising taxes. He was told that Real Estate and Personal Property taxes were going up and he told the residents that they were not. He told them the only taxes going up are meals tax by 1% and the water bill. He then explained to them about not going up on the water bill in the past and suddenly something happens; the town has to increase dramatically. Clarence said he is against raising taxes and does not want to increase personal property or real estate taxes. He said that the meals tax increase of 1% is 10 cents on a \$10 meal. He said you take your family out and it is \$50 and that is a 50 cents increase. He said it is not a whole lot of money. Clarence feels each year water and sewer needs to be increased so the town does not get behind and then a major increase happens. He said he finds it to be really disturbing that the people he spoke to had gotten the information wrong. Clarence asked where they are getting that information from and states it has to be from other Councilmembers. When Clarence talks with someone, he said he does not get in with whether he is for it or against it. He listens to their concerns and then he gives them the facts. He said he does not give his opinion upfront. He said he let the residents know what was going on and then they understood. He said as was said earlier, our employees are the lowest paid around. He said Timberville also has the highest residents per employee than any other town in Rockingham County. Clarence said there are two ways to fix that, hire more employees to take the load of the employees we already have. He said but what is going to happen, we need revenue for that, so stuff will have to increase. He said he thinks all the employees do an amazing job and they are very under paid for what they do. He said with the maintenance guys, if there is a leak in the middle of the night, they are out there below freezing temperatures and in 100-degree weather. He said they are out there working to keep the services up. He said they are saving the town money by doing the projects and not contracting them out. He feels they are taken for granted sometimes. He said hiring more employee cost even more money because you have double the salaries. He said were not talking about a whole lot of money with the increases. He said with the water and sewer there are programs out there that people can get to help pay their utility bills that are struggling. He said they need to do a little research and fill out some applications to get that assistance.

Carl Turner said he is not sure it is a good comparison to compare 8.7% to people on social security that is making a couple thousand dollars to 10% for people that are making \$70,000. He said that does not jive with him. He said the 5% on the water and sewer with the remaining balance at the end of this budget year, he thinks 3% is more cost affordable. He said with the 10% do not get him wrong, the employees do a "bang up job" and there is no doubt and they probably deserve it, but at the same time he has to think about the money for the people that voted for him.

Mayor Delaughter reminded again about what the increases were for in the proposed budget of 1% meals tax increase, 5% water and sewer and passing the cost on for the extra trashcan and a 10% increase for employees. Isaac Kelley made a motion to approve the 2023 budget. Sarah Berry seconded it. With a tie-vote, Mayor Delaughter broke the tie by voting yes. The motion passed and the 2023 budget was approved.

Roll Call Vote:

Isaac Kelley-Yes	Debbie Jessup-No	Mayor Delaughter-Yes
Sarah Berry-Yes	Clarence Fox-Yes	
Sharon Jones-No	Carl Turner-No	

PERSONNEL: None

PLAINS DISTRICT MEMORIAL MUSEUM: Sharon Jones reported the exhibit for July is the 25th anniversary of the museum. In April there were 33 volunteer hours with 91 guests. In May there were 77 volunteer hours and 123 guests.

Beverly Garber reported on different historical events in Timberville.

OTHER BUSINESS: Mayor Delaughter thanked Council for their hard work on the budget. He stated it was good to have healthy debate and that is what democracy is all about. He said the concerns that Debbie has are legitimate concerns and the town must grow. Debbie Jessup stated at the last meeting they talked about economic development authority and about how the town gets \$3500 a year for economic development purposes. She asked if they knew how much was in that account and what could be used for those purposes. Town Manager Austin Garber said there was around \$18,000 in that account. Debbie asked if that was something that the EDA has to get together to talk about. The mayor said that that the EDA did have to meet about that. Austin Garber told Debbie that if she had suggestions on what to spend it on, to email him and he can take them to the EDA. Debbie asked if there was a place that sets parameters on what that money can and cannot be used for. Town Attorney Quinton Callahan stated it was all within the IDA, which is the Industrial Development Act and is very broad. He states when it talks about economic development, there are a lot of things you can do with those funds. Debbie asked where that information could be found. Austin Garber stated it was in the Code of Virginia and he will send it to her. Debbie asked if there have been meetings in the past to determine any ideas or progress. Mayor Delaughter stated they have had training seminars for local businesses on different things to do with their business and social marketing. He said that it helped pay for a portion of the town's first website. It also helped get the Christmas Village going. Mayor Delaughter told Debbie that if she had any ideas to bring them to Austin Garber, since he is the Secretary/Treasurer for the EDA. Debbie asked if it could be used to market the town for future businesses. The mayor said it definitely can be used for that and that is really what it is for.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Gretchen Hazard from 124 N. Main Street stated that part of her property has the John Zigler house on it. She said when she contacted the town manager to ask about local engineers, he told her he could not recommend any. Ms. Hazard asked if there was a directory with local people or if there is an interest to have a directory. It was suggested to her by her new insurance company to look into the Shenandoah Valley Builders Association and they have a directory of business related those particular kinds of things. She thought Timberville could have a similar type of directory.

ADJOURNMENT: No further business, the meeting adjourned.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Melinda Hooke, Clerk

Donald Delaughter, Mayor