

DAMASCUS TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes for November 2, 2015

Regular Council Meeting

Council Members Present: Tim Williams, Mitchel Greer, Shirley Brand, Susan Seymore, Melissa Barrett, and Tom Hayes

Absent: None

Also Present: Jack McCrady, Mayor
Linda Rouse, Town Treasurer
Thomas Dene, Town Attorney

Tuesday Pope, Town Clerk
Roger Dowell, Police Chief

7:00pm: Mayor McCrady called the meeting to order, led the Pledge of Allegiance and gave the invocation.

Mayor McCrady asked for approval of the October Minutes.

- Mr. Williams made a motion to approve the October 5th Regular Council Meeting Minutes, with one correction to a name, 2nd by Ms. Brand. The motion passed (6-0).
- Ms. Brand made a motion to approve the October 21st Special Called Council Meeting Minutes as presented, 2nd by Mr. Williams. The motion passed (6-0).
- Mr. Hayes made a motion to approve the October 29th Special Called Council Meeting and Public Hearing Minutes as presented, 2nd by Ms. Seymore. The motion passed (6-0).

Mayor McCrady asked for approval of the agenda.

- Ms. Brand made a motion to approve the agenda, with one correction to a date, 2nd by Mr. Williams. The motion passed (6-0).

7:05 – Mayor McCrady opened a Public Hearing to provide information to and solicit comment from the public regarding a proposed amendment to Article VIII of the Damascus Zoning Ordinance. If adopted, the amendment will allow transient and semi-transient habitation in the R-1 zoning district as a principal permitted use. The Zoning Ordinance currently restricts transient and semi-transient habitation in the R-1 zoning district to a conditional use, which requires a conditional use permit from the Damascus Board of Zoning Appeals.

Jim Cartwright, 225 E. Laurel Ave, and Chairman of Planning Commission, stated that since he has been on the Planning Commission, they have not denied the process of allowing semi-transient lodging in an R1 district, so they do not feel the need to delay the process by forcing the applicants to also go before the BZA for approval.

Robert Van de Vuurst, 210 Legion St, and Board of Zoning Appeals member, disagreed with Mr. Cartwright's suggestion that the ordinance should be changed. He reasoned that just because the applicants have not been denied before, does not rationalize eliminating the set procedures because they were put in place to protect the residents of the Town.

Mr. Dene stated that if the ordinance is amended, all applicants would still be required to follow set protocol, and that only the advertising requirements would change.

Mayor McCrady closed the Public Hearing and returned to the Open Session.

Mr. Williams stated that he thinks the protocol should remain as it is because removing the notification of neighbors and advertising requirements, could take away the voice of those who reside in that immediate neighborhood or area.

Ms. Brand stated that she agreed with Mr. Williams.

Mayor McCrady stated that there is a need to require the set protocol be met for the protection of Town residents, and neighborhoods. He added that the Town shouldn't continue to incur any advertising expense for the process to be met; this should be the responsibility of the property owner who is submitting the zoning application.

Mr. Dene replied that provisions can be included to ensure the Town is compensated for any fees that are incurred.

- Mr. Williams made a motion to refer back to the Planning Commission for review of expenses under the existing zoning ordinance and then bring a recommendation before the Council, 2nd by Ms. Brand. The motion passed (6-0).

Committee Reports

Budget, Finance and Administration:

Ms. Seymore deferred to the Town Treasurer, Linda Rouse, for the monthly Treasurer's report.

Ms. Rouse submitted the following report:

TAXES: Both real estate and personal property tax notices were mailed on Tuesday, October 27th, and are both due November 20th. M & W Printers did have a programming issue with the address field on the real estate tickets, so the mailing was a few days later than anticipated.

BUSINESS LICENSES: We issued licenses for the following new businesses in Sept & Oct: White Birch Juice @ 108 W Laurel Ave., Hair Envy @ 604-2 Douglas Dr, and Damascus Discount Tobacco & More @ 124 E Laurel Ave.

FULL TIME EMPLOYEE LIFE INSURANCE: The Town's group life insurance policy through Nationwide Employee Benefits comes up for renewal on Dec. 1, 2015. Due to our transition from 10 full time employees to 9, it places us in the 2-9 employee market. This transition negatively impacted our rates because we will be changed to age rating rather than rated by the volume of coverage. We are currently paying \$7.75 per month for 7 employees (\$651 per yr). We need to add Chris Hogston & Michael Reid to the plan. The quote from our current provider, Nationwide is \$114.50 per month (\$1374 per yr) so double. The proposal we received from United Healthcare for the same coverage for 9 employees would be \$9.85 per employee @ \$88.65 per month (\$1063.80 per yr.) Our budget is 1000 so slightly over. I recommend we change to United Healthcare. The coverage would be the same @ 25,000 basic life and 2x for accidental death. This information was provided by our existing agent, Kristi Shepard with CSE in Abingdon.

Ms. Rouse also reported an updated estimate from United Healthcare after adding two employees, the cost decreased to around \$74 a month.

- Ms. Brand made a motion to accept United Healthcare life insurance proposal, 2nd by Mr. Williams. The motion passed (6-0).

Streets, Lights and Maintenance:

Mr. Greer reported that the Public Works Department has been busy with leaf pickup on a daily basis, painting curbs along Laurel Ave, painting inside the Town Hall, and continuing to work on the new facility building and property.

Parks and Recreation:

Mr. Williams reported that the next Trail Days Committee meeting will be on Monday the 9th at 6:30pm. * This was later cancelled.

Events and Entertainment Committee Update – Ms. Barrett reported that plans are in the works for the 2nd annual *Trail Town Christmas* event; and the next committee meeting will be on the 5th.

Planning Commission:

Mr. Greer reported the resignation of Erin Onesiom from the Planning Commission, in October, and recommend Gino Di Dio be appointed to the open seat for the remainder of the unexpired term (ending July 2016).

- Ms. Brand made the motion to appoint Gino Di Dio for the remaining unexpired term of Ms. Onesiom on the Damascus Planning Commission, 2nd by Ms. Seymore. The motion passed (6-0).

The next Planning Commission meeting will be held Tuesday at 6 p.m.

Police and Fire Advisory:

Mr. Hayes thanked the Police Department for a job well done on Halloween, and deferred to Chief Dowell, who submitted the following P.D. activity report for the month of October:

Operations:

In October 2015, Damascus Officers handled 109 calls for service, issued 43 citations, and made 13 criminal arrests.

Annual Statistics for 2015 are as follows: 1149 calls for service, 96 Arrests, 103 Offenses and 210 Citations Issued.

Traffic Enforcement Activities:

During October, Officers responded to two motor vehicle accidents in Town; issued forty-three traffic summons, and notified five subjects that they were suspended; made three DUI arrests.

Speeding complaint areas include: South Shady Avenue, Douglas Drive, Damascus Drive and Beaverdam Ave., with special attention being placed on crosswalk areas.

Investigations Report:

Damascus Police Department assisted the Washington County Sheriff's Office and searched a residence on Wideners Valley after Patrolman Hogston recovered various drugs. After gaining consent to search the house, Lt Turner and Patrolman Hogston took two to jail while Chief Dowell, Det. Debusk, and WCSO searched the residence and recovered other items.

Lt. Tuner finished a large embezzlement/identity theft case which was taken to the Grand Jury, and returned a true bill with sixteen indictments.

K9 King and Lt. Turner respond to assist Washington County on a drug call at John Battle High School, where four cars were searched.

Chief Dowell presented a draft of the park signs reflecting the new winter hours of operation, and it was the consensus of the Council to move forward with ordering them.

Special Notes:

K9: Chris Hogston is gone to West Virginia for K9 training with K9 Luna.

Halloween- Went well, Town was very busy with trick-or-treaters and had no incidents.

Law Memorial : Still working on donations for the memorial project.

Officers: Patrolman Michael Reid is still attending the academy.

VDOT Work Crew: The VDOT work crew has been used a couple of times this month to pick up trash.

Police Vehicle Status: All police vehicles are in good status.

501 3C:

I have the Articles of Inc. for the Auxiliary, and am working on the 501 3C application now.

Manager's Report

Mayor McCrady went over the following report submitted by Mr. Blevins:

Beaverdam Creek Trail

Contacting environmental agencies and waiting on clearance to complete VDOT's EQ555. Working with Tennessee Valley Authority, as well as VDOT and Hill Studio to gain final environmental clearances so that the project can be put out to bid.

Rally Damascus

Awaiting updated business maps so that the printing can begin and kiosk information finalized for print. The printing is the last segment to be completed.

Regional Planning Grant/ Mount Rogers Regional Initiative

The Mount Rogers PDC and consultant (Arnett Muldrow & Associates) are working to schedule input sessions throughout the project region.

Virginia Tourism Grant

The project budget is being redesigned to account for the money that was received from the grant, funding being somewhat under the amount requested. A finalized budget revision will be approved in November.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

Contract Negotiations have taken place. The Town has up to 90 days to pull the required documents and answers together to fulfill DHCD's requirements. Once negotiations are met, the Town will get under contract for the funds.

ARC Grant Application

The grant application has been submitted and the full application is available for viewing at Town Hall.

VML Safety Grant

Work will begin soon to obtain funding through VML to update equipment in the park – preliminary scope will be toward replacement of the safety mats.

This grant cycle is December/January.

Attorney Report

1. Concerning the possibility of a charter amendment or legislative request that would reflect the new November 2nd election date for Town elections, Mr. Dene will send a letter of request to the General Assembly for the Town's charter to reflect the Ordinance that has been adopted for changing the date.
 - Ms. Brand made a motion to direct the Town Attorney to send the aforementioned letter of request to the General Assembly, 2nd by Mr. Williams. The motion passed (6-0).
2. The surveyor still has not finalized the plat as agreed upon. Also, still in need of an elevation study from him.

New Business

Nothing at this time.

Old Business

Nothing at this time.

Council Members Reports

1. Mayor McCrady has inquired with VDOT about changing the parking along Reynolds St. (across from the Police Department) and along the side of the Dollar General Store to allow for more parking spaces in town.
 - Mr. Williams made a motion to authorize mayor to pursue further communication with VDOT about expanding parking options in Town, 2nd by Mr. Greer. The motion passed (6-0).
2. Ms. Brand asked about the status of the nuisance properties that were brought before Council, and requested the Town Manager to contact a county agent as the may be successful at pursuing contact with the owners of these properties.
3. Ms. Barrett asked about the status of a Town basketball court and skateboard park.

Mayor McCrady responded that the Town withheld \$6000 of donations to the library last year, so those funds can be used to rebuild a basketball park. A public hearing needs to be held once a location is decided upon.

4. Ms. Seymore reported attending a Crooked Road meeting this month and they are excitedly planning for their 2016 'Mountains of Music Homecoming' events. She would also like to see the Town host more events like this, especially the November thru March months, to try to bring more people into Town businesses during the slow season.

5. Mr. Greer has received a request from Scott Patterson, who will be holding the 'Damascus In Lights' holiday decorating contest from Nov. 28th thru Dec. 19, asking for the Maintenance Department to hang a street banner (which he will provide) across Laurel Ave promoting the event.

- It was the consensus of the council to approve Mr. Patterson's request.

Citizens Comments

None at this time.

Announcements

- * Town Hall will be CLOSED on the following days in November:
 - 11th – Veterans Day
 - 25th (Half Day), 26th and 27th – Thanksgiving Holiday

The Veteran's Memorial Committee will be holding their Veterans Day Service at 2pm on Sunday, November 15th at the Veterans Memorial Park.

Consent Agenda

- Ms. Brand made a motion to pay the bills for invoices exceeding \$500, 2nd by Mr. Greer; The motion passed (6-0).
- Mr. Hayes made a motion to pay the bills, 2nd by Ms. Brand; the motion passed (6-0).
- Ms. Brand made a motion was to adjourn, 2nd by Mr. Williams; the motion passed (6-0).

Jack McCrady, Mayor

Tuesday Pope, Clerk