

DAMASCUS TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes for January 4, 2016

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
Gavin Blevins, Town Manager
Thomas Dene, Town Attorney
Tuesday Pope, Town Clerk
Linda Rouse, Town Treasurer
Lt. Turner, Damascus Police Dept.

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 December Minutes.

- Mr. Greer made a motion to approve the December 7th Regular Council Meeting Minutes as presented, 2nd by Mr. Williams. The motion passed (6-0).

Mayor McCrady asked for approval of the agenda.

- Ms. Brand made a motion to approve the agenda as presented, 2nd by Mr. Williams. 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: Real Estate tax collection rate improved .56 to 91.19% for 2015 and up .38 to 93.97% for all years. Personal for 2015 is @73.46% up 3.12 from December. All years is 83.82%. We will continue to work past due accounts and send late notices periodically going forward in 2016.

Grants: Byrne Law Enforcement Grant submitted & approved @ \$6821. PD purchased 5 Laptops, 5 Scopes, 3 Body Cams, & the remaining \$2600 went toward the purchase of a vehicle. Also working on the VML Safety Grant to be submitted this week. If approved, funds to be used to purchase 4 playground mats for under the swings @ \$1076 plus shipping.

Budget: Recommend we set dates for workshops for 2016-2017 budget on MWF from 4:00 to 5:00 as needed beginning February.

* Mr. Williams suggested, and the Council agreed, to hold the budget workshops on the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Mondays and Wednesdays only, from 4-5pm, during the months of February, March, April, and May if needed. This meeting schedule is to be posted in the Clerk's office, outside the Town Hall, and on the website.

Todd Owens, Owens CPA & Associates, will present the 2014-15 Audit Report at the February 1st Council Meeting.

Streets, Lights and Maintenance:

Mr. Greer referred to a report on the department’s operations for the month of December, which was submitted by the Public Works Supervisor, Joe Fritts. The operations report included: painting Town Hall chamber room; installing Christmas decorations; leaf pick-up; heavy rain that led to clogged drain pipes and ditches/flooding; replacement of an electrical box in the park; major water pipe leak behind the gazebo; construction of a salt shed; and equipment/vehicle repairs.

Mr. Fritts also reported theft and vandalism to the Christmas decorations in the park. Lt. Turner caught the vandals in the act of destroying some of the Town’s large decorations. The two damaged fixtures were purchased commercially years ago, and will cost \$600-\$750 to replace. The loss by theft included heavy electrical cords, and light sets and sensors, estimated at \$300.

Mr. Greer added that the salt shed is about 60% complete, and the facility furnace will be installed during the current week.

Parks and Recreation:

Mr. Williams reported the Town’s Christmas festivities on December 11th & 12th went well. Also, the next Trail Days meeting will be on Jan. 11th at 6:30pm; and many vendor applications have already been received. This year, there will be an exciting new option available to those who wish to tent camp during Trail Days, provided by The Show Sherpa. For more information, visit theshowsherpa.com.

Mayor McCrady stated that the Town needs to adopt regulations and/or ordinance amendments requiring permits to be obtained in advance for people who have made arrangements with property owners to set up vendor booths on private properties in Town during Trail Days.

Events: Updates & Announcements – Melissa Barrett gave a ‘Trail Town Christmas’ festival update, which included fantastic weather, good live music, and \$373.57 profit.

Planning Commission:

Mr. Blevins reported that during the December meeting, the Planning Commission decided to make a new recommendation to Council that would help offset the expenses incurred to meet the advertising requirements in the Town Code for transient lodging conditional use permit applications. The P.C. recommends increasing the fee from the current \$50 to \$125 to cover the cost of advertising in the newspaper, sending letters to adjoining property owners, as well as other overhead expenses. A public hearing must be scheduled before Council action can be taken.

Police and Fire Advisory:

Mr. Hayes deferred to Lt. Turner, who delivered the following P.D. activity report for the month of December:

<u>Operations:</u>

In December 2015, Damascus Officers handled 96 calls for service, issued 29 citations, and made 2 criminal arrests.

Yearly Statistics for 2015 are as follows: 1345 calls for service, 106 Arrests, 118 Offenses, and 249 Citations issued.

Traffic Enforcement Activities:

During December 2015, Officers responded to 1 motor vehicle accident in Town, issued 10 traffic summons, made 1 DUI arrest, and notified 2 subjects that they were suspended.

Speeding complaint areas include:

South Shady Avenue, Douglas Drive, Damascus Drive, and Beaverdam Ave., with special attention being placed on Crosswalk Areas.

Special Report:

Damascus Police Department assisted Glade Spring Police Department with their annual Christmas parade.

Damascus Police Department participated in the annual Damascus Christmas Parade on Dec. 11th, and it's believed to be one of the largest and best turn out for the town. We hope to keep up this tradition and keep bring more people to the town by having a night Christmas parade.

Damascus Police Department worked DUI / DUID coalition this month and Officer Reid stopped a vehicle that was transporting Marijuana along with a new drug to this area called "Molly" (which contains Meth) to the Tennessee jail for an inmate. Officer Reid made the arrest of that female on felony as well as misdemeanor charges.

Damascus Police Department assisted the Washington County Sheriff's Office and Virginia Game Wardens, with setting up a decoy deer and helping with road checks.

Special Notes:

K9: Lt Turner and K9 King, as well as Officer Hogston and K9 Luna, are narcotic training on a regular basis and Officer Hogston and K9 Luna will be going to WV to get certified as a team in January.

Officers: During the 2nd week of December, patrolman Michael Reid graduated the 104 Law Enforcement Academy.

VDOT Work Crew:

The VDOT work crew is currently on hold.

Police Vehicles:

The Chilhowie Police Department traded a 2009 Charger for the Damascus Police Department's 2010 Explorer; and we also purchased a 2005 Ford Expedition to be used undercover.

Auxiliary:

Currently reviewing applications and looking to hire an additional 3 to 4 Auxiliary Officers.

Lt. Turner also reported that two 17yr-olds were caught vandalizing the Town Park, and had been drinking alcohol. Both will be charged with vandalism and underage consumption.

Special Committees:

VISTA report by Jay Prevatt:

1. Will soon be applying for a NCCC crew to help out in the Mt. Rogers area, as well as applying for Leave No Trace training grant.
2. Is partnering with the Round Table, the Clinch River Valley, and the Creeper Trail Club to have a litter clean-up day along the Creeper Trail on MLK Day (Jan. 18th) – the press release went out today.
3. Has sent out photos of the installed, engraved bricks to the purchasers, who were very happy to receive those; and hope to move forward with another (smaller) section of bricks along the Community Pathway, in the near future.

Damascus Business Group update by Gavin Blevins:

Enrollment is now open for the 2016 DBG. Mr. Blevins would like to explore expanding the initiatives and offerings for joining the group.

Manager's Report

Mr. Blevins submitted the following Town Manager's Report:

Beaverdam Creek Trail

1. VDOT is reviewing the Erosion & Sediment Control plan to determine what regulations may have changed since the plan was originally designed.
2. I have been working with Hill Studio to prepare cost estimates for revisions to the plan in case VDOT cannot work with us to have corrections to the plan made to meet regulation.
3. I have received a call from VDOT concerning additional funding that may possibly be used. Still waiting to hear back on an update.

Rally Damascus

1. The struggle continues to get the maps to the printer, but we are continuing this pursuit.
2. The Rally team has determined a use for the remaining \$450 of the grant funds: bicycle racks, approx. 2 that will hold 5 bikes each according to recent pricing. Appropriate locations still have not been selected by the group, therefore I would like permission from the council to purchase the bicycle racks, cost to be refunded through the Rally grant, locations selected by the Town Council.
 - Mr. Greer made a motion to use the remaining \$450 of the grant funds to purchase 2 bicycle racks that will hold 5 bikes each, as requested.
Ms. Brand 2nd the motion, which passed (6-0).

Regional Planning Grant/ Mount Rogers Regional Initiative

The Mount Rogers PDC and consultant (Arnett Muldrow & Associates) are working to schedule input sessions for the branding and economic framework, the agenda as follows:

January 13th

10am-Noon meeting in Independence

Independence & Troutdale representatives
Grayson Tourism/Economic Development rep
Blue Ridge Crossroads SBDC rep
Grayson Highlands, Mt Rogers National Recreation Area/ Forest Service
Area recreation- based businesses

3pm-5pm meeting in Chilhowie

Glade Spring, Saltville, Chilhowie & Damascus reps
Washington, Smyth Tourism/ Economic Development rep
Virginia Highlands Community College Reps relevant to outdoor recreation &
business development (SBDC)
Area recreation-based business

January 14th

10am- Noon meeting in Marion

Marion, Rural Retreat reps
Hungry Mother State Park Rep
Wythe County Tourism/ Economic Development resource
Area recreation- base business

I am willing to make arrangements for those who need transportation from Damascus area to Chilhowie for the meeting on January 13th, 3-5 PM that Damascus folks are expected to attend.

Virginia Tourism Grant: Nothing at this time.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

During the Environmental Review process, it was discovered that the Town is going have to seek assistance for an environmental analysis to be conducted within the project area prior to the completion of the Environmental Review Record, and publication of a FONSI and Request for Release of Funds.

A letter has been sent to the DHCD to request an extension of our contract negotiation period to account for this setback.

ARC Grant Application

No news since last month, "the grant application has been submitted and the full application is available for viewing at Town Hall- the Town awaits approval by DHCD and ARC".

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.

* Ms. Seymore reported an upcoming grant opportunity for the Creeper Trail.

* (*Falling*) Gabian Baskets update - Mr. Blevins has been in contact with DCRS, who installed the baskets in the late 1980s. The expected lifespan of these objects is around 10 years, so they have done well to last this long. Because the location of these baskets is in the creek, any repair work will have to be approved through the Army Corps of Engineers.

Attorney Report

Mr. Dene reported the legislative charter amendment is still underway for changing the election date.

Also, the Virginia Dept. of Human Resource Management has sent an agreement for reporting employee information to the IRS, as required by the Affordable Care Act.

- Ms. Brand made a motion to approve and sign the agreement, as proposed. Mr. Williams 2nd the motion; which passed (6-0).

Mr. Dene reported the following items for closed session discussion:

- I. For consultation with Legal Counsel regarding institution of legal proceedings relating to the Town's procurement of a survey for the proposed 'Damascus waterfront project', where such consultation in an open meeting would adversely affect the negotiating or litigation posture of the Town, per VA Code Sec. 2.2-3711 (A)(7).
 - Mr. Greer made a motion to approve the item(s) for closed session, at the appropriate time, 2nd by Ms. Brand. The motion passed (6-0).

Old Business

Nothing at this time.

New Business

Mayor McCrady reported that the Christmas parade had a great turn out of spectators and participants. However, the parade line-up was not directed by the Police or Fire Department, and going forward the Town's Events & Entertainment Committee needs to take charge of that aspect of the event.

Council Members Reports

1. Mayor McCrady stated that the Police Dept. needs to deliver letters to property owners/tenants from the Town Manager about removing broken down/abandoned vehicles that are parked in Town. There is also a need to move forward with fining people who use vehicles and trailers on their property for trash collection and holding because it is a health hazard; and there are several dilapidated homes and buildings in Town that the Town Manager needs to look into sending nuisance letters on.
2. Mr. Williams expressed his appreciation and gratitude toward Mr. Doug Neely, who repaired the ice machine in the Fire Dept. free of charge.
3. Mr. Hayes stated the need for the Fire Department to clean up the area at the back of the rear parking lot and around their storage building/container. The lot is owned by BB&T, and a neat appearance should be maintained.

Citizens Comments

None at this time.

Announcements

- * Town Hall will be CLOSED on the following days in January:
 - Jan. 1st - New Years Day
 - Jan. 15th - Lee- Jackson Day
 - Jan. 18th - Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Consent Agenda

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

Jack McCrady, Mayor

Tuesday Pope, Clerk