

DAMASCUS TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes for February 1, 2016

Regular Council Meeting

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

Absent: Melissa Barrett

Also Present: Jack McCrady, Mayor
Gavin Blevins, Town Manager
Thomas Dene, Town Attorney

Tuesday Pope, Town Clerk
Linda Rouse, Town Treasurer
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 January Minutes.

- Ms. Brand made a motion to approve the January 4th Regular Council Meeting Minutes as presented, 2nd by Ms. Seymore. The motion passed (5-0).

Mayor McCrady asked for approval of the agenda.

- Mr. Williams made a motion to approve the agenda as presented, 2nd by Ms. Brand. The motion passed (5-0).

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 collection rate improved .61 to 91.80% for 2015 and up .24 to 93.97% for all years. Personal is up 2.84% to 76.30 for 2015 and .62 to 84.44% for all years.

GRANTS: VML sent confirmation of receipt of our Safety Grant Application and decisions will be mailed no later than April 15th. If approved, funds will be used to purchase 5 mats for swings @ estimated cost of \$956.78.

ELECTRONIC PAYMENT OPTION: I have contacted the new account representative with Value Payment Systems to complete our payment processing service agreement to provide our taxpayers the electronic payment option in May 2016. This is the same company used by Washington County.

* This will not cost the Town, as the fees are passed on to the users.

AUDIT: Todd Owens CPA & Associates have completed our June 30, 2015 annual audit and report is expected first week in February 2016.

* They will present the 2014-15 Audit Report at the March 7th Council Meeting.

BUDGET: The first budget meeting will be Monday, February 8th @ 4:00 PM.

WEBSITE: I received an email from Nathalie Graham @ Mountain Laurel Inn and she was very complimentary of the improvements to our website and wants to renew for this year. Thanks to Gavin, Rocky, & Jay for their hard work!

* There have been many compliments received from business owners who advertise on the Town website.

Streets, Lights and Maintenance:

Mr. Greer referred to a report on the department's operations for the month of January, which was submitted by the Public Works Supervisor, Joe Fritts. The operations report included: road maintenance during snowstorms, finishing the construction of a salt shed, and vehicle repairs due to an accident in the scraper/salt truck that occurred during a snowstorm. The truck will need more repairs, and VML will be sending an appraiser.

Parks and Recreation:

Mr. Williams suggested the Council make a declaration stating that May 14, 2016 be recognized as Gene Espy Day. Mr. Espy was the 2nd person to complete a thru-hike of the Appalachian Trail; and attends Trail Days each year to hold presentations about his experiences hiking the AT, autograph and sell his book 'The Trail of My Life', grand marshal the hiker parade, and enjoy the camaraderie of other trail enthusiasts. This year will be the 65th anniversary of Mr. Espy's first visit to Damascus while hiking the AT in 1951, when the Police Chief at the time, Corney McNish, offered him the shelter and amenities of the Town's jail.

- Mr. Williams made a motion for the Council to officially recognize May 14, 2016 as "Gene Espy Day", 2nd by Mr. Greer. The motion passed (5-0).

Events: Updates & Announcements – Vickie Van de Vuurst reported on the upcoming costume and dinner party for the season finale of Downton Abbey, which will take place on March 5th at the Mtn. Laurel Inn.

Planning Commission:

Mr. Blevins reported that the Planning Commission has made the recommendation that the Council prohibit the boarding up of windows in the business district. A public hearing must be held before any action can be taken.

Also a reminder that a public hearing must also be held before action can be taken on the recommendation that was brought to the Council (during the January Council meeting), which 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.

The two public hearings will be scheduled to take place on March 9th at 7 and 7:15pm.

Police and Fire Advisory:

Mr. Hayes deferred to Chief Dowell, who delivered the following P.D. activity report for the month of January:

Operations: In January 2016, Damascus Officers handled 131 calls for service, issued 31 citations, and made 2 criminal arrests.

Yearly Statistics for 2016 are as follows: 131 calls for service, 2 Arrests, 13 Offenses, and 31 issued Citations.

Traffic Enforcement Activities: During January Officers responded to 1 motor vehicle accident in Town, and issued 31 traffic summons.

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 the Washington County Sheriff's Office on a string of Breaking and Entering occurrences. Our department had officers working night shift in the county, in unmarked vehicles, patrolling and stopping vehicles that looked out of place or subjects out walking in the early morning hours in areas of the B&E's. The joint effort is still ongoing, with informants and leads as of today.

Damascus Police Department, along with the Washington County Sheriff's Office, stopped a vehicle on an investigation stop, recovered two Meth Labs, and made two arrests. Officer Hogston and Lt Turner worked the arrests, while myself, Det. DeBusk, and the DEA worked on the Meth Lab clean up. Multiple charges came out of this stop, and more are still pending.

Special Notes:

K9: Lt. Turner and K9 King, as well as Officer Hogston and K9 Luna, are training on a regular basis. Officer Hogston and K9 Luna will be going to WV to get certified as a team in February (were unable to in January due to inclement weather).

VDOT Work Crew: The VDOT work crew is on hold due to funding issues.

Police Vehicles: We have had several vehicle problems in the month of January including brakes, rotors, a brake line, and two batteries. The Charger got stuck and while being pulled out, the weld broke on the push bumper. The COLD weather has been rough on vehicles.

Auxiliary: Currently reviewing applications and looking to hire an additional 2 Auxiliary Officers.

Chief Dowell also presented a letter of resignation from Officer Hogston, with his two week notice beginning today.

Special Committees:

VISTA report by Jay Prevatt:

1. The website work days at the Town Hall with Gavin and Rocky have been very productive.
2. Partnered 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 turnout was very good, with 15 volunteers coming out to help.
3. As the second and current VISTA position comes to an end (April 23rd), and the next one prepares to step in, the ATC is experiencing a funding issue for the position. They are working on ideas and trying to find a solution, but it is possible that the VISTA position in Damascus will not continue for a third year.

Manager's Report

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

Beaverdam Creek Trail

VDOT reviewed the Erosion & Sediment Control plan to determine what regulations may have changed since the plan was originally designed; I received a comment sheet, but there are some questionable items and I have initiated discussion into those comments so that I can determine a plan of action.

Hill Studio has prepared a cost estimate to revise the Erosion & Sediment Control Plan: \$8,500. I am looking into what contract agreements between the Town and Hill Studio to determine accurate scope of services as they pertain to this issue.

Rally Damascus

1. The struggle continues to get the maps to the printer, but we are continuing this pursuit.
2. The Town has purchased the last bicycle racks (2), which will be installed as soon as the snow clears and the public works department has time to rest.

Regional Planning Grant/ Mount Rogers Regional Initiative

The Mount Rogers PDC and consultant (Arnett Muldrow & Associates) had very successful input sessions in the region. As the consultants review and analyze input from the region, we will know what next actions need to be taken to collect whatever data may still be required.

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

Submitted with confirmation received.

CDBG Grant

Due to delays in the Environmental Review process, we were forced to request a 90 day extension to the contract negotiation period. On the 27th of January, I received a copy of the letter from DHCD granting the Town the 90 day extension we requested. I am still currently requesting and receiving proposals for the services requested Transition Screening/Phase 1 Assessment. I will need permission from the Council to procure these services based on the lowest estimate for service required by DHCD.

- Mr. Williams made a motion for the Town Manager to procure the services as requested, 2nd by Mr. Greer. The motion passed (5-0).

Attorney Report

Mr. Dene reported the legislative charter amendment for changing the election date continues to move forward.

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

- I. Discussion and consideration of the resignation of Officer Gregory Chris Hogston from the Damascus Police Department, per VA Code Sec. 2.2-3711 (A)(1).
 - Ms. Brand made a motion to approve the item(s) for closed session, at the appropriate time, 2nd by Ms. Seymore. The motion passed (5-0).

Old Business

Nothing at this time.

New Business

Nothing at this time.

Council Members Reports

1. Ms. Brand requested, and the Council agreed, that all items for discussion at a Council meeting be included in the agenda packet, which is sent to Council members on the Friday before.
2. Ms. Seymore reported on a 'creative placemaking' concept, and would like to see a group formed to implement some of these concepts in Damascus. More information will be reported on a later date.
3. Mayor McCrady reported that recent snowplowing has caused some yard damage to a home on Appalachian Trail Dr. and Mock Ave., and asked that the Public Works department spread straw on the area.
4. Mayor McCrady also reported receiving a letter requesting an extension of time for the Trivette property clean-up to be completed, as ordered by the Town, due to the inclement weather. It was the consensus of the Council to grant the requestor a ten day extension, beginning today.

Citizens Comments

None at this time.

Announcements

- * Town Hall will be CLOSED on the following days in February:
 - Feb. 15th - President's Day

Consent Agenda

- Mr. Hayes made a motion to pay the bills for invoices exceeding \$500, 2nd by Ms. Brand; The motion passed (5-0).
- Mr. Greer made a motion to pay the bills, 2nd by Ms. Brand; the motion passed (5-0).
- Ms. Brand made a motion for closed session, 2nd by Ms. Seymore. The motion passed (5-0).
- Mr. Hayes made a motion to return to open session, 2nd by Mr. Greer. The motion passed (5-0).
- Mr. Hayes made a motion to certify, 2nd by Mr. Williams; the motion passed (5-0).
- Mr. Williams made a motion to adjourn, 2nd by Mr. Greer; the motion passed (5-0).

Jack McCrady, Mayor

Tuesday Pope, Clerk