

Altavista Town Council Work Session Minutes from January 23, 2023

The January 2024 Work Session for Altavista's Town Council was held in Council Chambers of the J.R. Burgess Municipal Building, 510 7th Street, on Tuesday, January 23rd, at 5:00 PM.

Mayor Mike Mattox called the meeting to order and presided.

Council Members present: Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett
Mr. Timothy George
Dr. Scott Lowman
Mayor Michael Mattox
Mr. Wayne Mitchell

Absent: Mr. Tracy Emerson
Mr. Jay Higginbotham

Also Present: Mr. Gary Shanaberger, Town Manager
Mr. Matthew Perkins, Asst. Town Manager
Mrs. Tobie Shelton, Admin. and Finance Director
Mr. Tommy Merricks, Altavista Police Chief
Mr. Tom Fore, Director of Public Services
Mr. Paul Hill, Asst. Director of Public Services
Mr. Jeff Arthur, Public Works Manager
Mr. John Eller, TOA Town Attorney
Mrs. Crystal Hailey, Assistant Town Clerk

1. Agenda Adoption

With no amendments needed, Mayor Mattox asked Town Council if they had questions, comments, or concerns pertaining to the Work Session Agenda, of which there were none.

Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett made a motion, seconded by Councilman Wayne Mitchell, to approve the agenda as presented; the motion carried with a 5-0 vote from Town Council.

2. Presentations

Town Partners, agencies, and non-profits were given an opportunity to present Town Council with their FY2025 budget requests. Each representative gave a brief overview of their activities or involvement with the Altavista community in the 2023 calendar year. They also shared their plans for this calendar year (2024) and the 2025 fiscal year.

- Maria McCracken, Altavista Area YMCA - \$100,000 requested (same as FY2024)

Ms. McCracken stated that the Town's donation was 2.5% of the YMCA's annual \$4.5 million operating budget, and was a vital asset in their ability to continue offering multiple youth sports activities, programs, and to operate the facility for a town of 3,200 citizens.

Ms. McCracken stated that the YMCA strived to be a good steward of the Town's annual donation, and she thanked Town Council and the Town for their continued support.

- David Green, Altavista On Track - \$55,176 requested (same as FY2024)

Mr. Greene shared an excerpt from AOT's Mission Statement: "to help revitalize Altavista's Downtown District, to help foster economic growth and opportunities, and to provide leadership to enhance community identity and pride".

Mr. Green referenced a \$20,000 Downtown Incentive Grant that AOT received from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to help "new" downtown businesses. He informed Council that he and AOT President Scott Lowman worked with the DHCD to amend the grant to include existing businesses; to which they were successful, and were able to assist two existing small businesses update their front facades.

Mr. Green informed Council that the DHCD awarded AOT an additional \$20,000 to continue the said program. He stated that Zachary Whitlow, with DHCD, indicated that Altavista having a Virginia Main Street Program (AOT) was a favorable asset to the Town when submitting DHCD grant applications.

Mr. Green stated that AOT's Annual Gibley Jog continued to be a successful event, boasting its seventeenth year. He said they also had good feedback from their 2023 Downtown Fall Festival, which had over two-hundred attendees. Mr. Green stated that AOT continues to work with Town partners, such as the Staunton River Memorial Library (Altavista) and the Spark Innovation Center, to benefit the Altavista business community.

Altavista Town Council Work Session Minutes from January 23, 2023

- Katie Lane, Altavista Senior Center - \$1,500 (an increase of \$500 from FY2024)

Ms. Lane informed Council that the Campbell County Library System and the Campbell County Recreation Department recently created the C.E.Q.O.L. Program (Citizen Engagement and Quality of Life), which included Campbell County's (four) local senior centers.

Ms. Lane stated that the additional \$500 being requested for FY2025 was partly due to inflation, and also that the Altavista Senior Center had ten more members than in the previous year. She shared a "packet" with Council that included an outline of the senior center's upcoming events and activities, as well as food and gas receipts, that she stated was primarily from Altavista businesses.

Ms. Lane said the Altavista Senior Center strives to support its community by utilizing local businesses as much as possible; and conducting their field trips at local places, such as the Avoca Museum and the National Center for Healthy Veterans.

- Stephanie Keener, Small Business Development Center - \$6,000 requested (same as FY2024)

Ms. Keener thanked the Town of Altavista for their continued support of the SBDC. She informed Council that the Lynchburg Regional SBDC currently had eleven members from the Town of Altavista, an increase from the previous year.

Ms. Keener stated that, in calendar year 2023, Altavista businesses attended seventeen Virginia SBDC trainings, with some being online classes. She said the businesses were not only restaurants and retail, as were mostly in the past, but also included financial services and healthcare businesses. Ms. Keener said that she liked seeing a variety of Altavista's businesses taking advantage of the services, training, and resources that the SBDC had to offer.

Ms. Keener shared her enthusiasm for Altavista's Spark Innovation Center, and stated that the SBDC partnered with the center to lead a class for Spark's 2024 "Build Your Business" Program. She stated that the SBDC also reconnected with Altavista's Main Street Program, Altavista On Track, and she looked forward to working with AOT on future projects.

- Caleb Lafoon, Avoca Museum & Historical Society-\$87,140 (increased \$5,000 from FY2024)

Mr. Lafoon thanked Town Council for supporting Avoca. He also thanked Town Manager Matt Perkins, and Altavista's Public Works Department for the work they do for Avoca.

Mr. Lafoon informed Council that Avoca hosted over sixty (60) events during the 2023 calendar year, of both civic (community) and private events. He referenced Avoca's new Strategic Plan for 2024, and shared a brief overview of Avoca's future goals, which included increasing the educational and civic events that Avoca offered to the community.

Mr. Lafoon shared that Avoca's Strategic Plan also included expanding existing historic exhibits, and the possible expansion of the museum's property. He stated that a feasibility study for the desired expansion would be conducted, and was close to being fully funded. He said he would have more information for Council regarding this item in the next few months.

Mr. Lafoon referenced the \$5,000 increase in Avoca's FY2025 request over last year's request, and said the additional funds would be used to add the town's TGIF summer events to Avoca's annual events calendar. He said, while the event was previously held at Avoca, the event was actually hosted by the Altavista Area Chamber of Commerce, but was no longer viable.

Mayor Mattox asked Mr. Lafoon what specifically the funds would be used to do, to which Mr. Lafoon answered that the additional \$5,000 would be utilized to secure bands (music entertainment) for the TGIF events.

Mr. Lafoon stated that Avoca had great relationships with Altavista On Track, the YMCA, the Altavista Senior Center, and the Altavista Library (Staunton River Memorial Library), and said that he looked forward to continuing Avoca's partnership with these groups on educational, civic, and community programs and events.

With no other organizations presenting, Town Council thanked each group present on this evening for their time and presentations for Council's consideration.

3. Citizen's Time

There were no citizen comments on this date.

4. Unfinished Business

There were no unfinished items to discuss at this time.

5. New Items for Discussion

▪ FY2025 Draft Operational Budget – General Fund

Director of Finance, Tobie Shelton, presented Town Council with the FY2025 Draft Operational Budget, pertaining to the Town's General Fund, for their review and reference during the fiscal year 2025 budget process. She stated, while the draft showed a surplus of \$379,430, it did not include the aforementioned agency requests or any CIP items.

Mrs. Shelton informed Council that the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for FY2025 was still being developed, and it was Staff's intent to present the draft CIP to Council at their February 13th regular meeting. She said that the draft budget also did not include COLA, and she shared cost scenarios from 1% to 7% adjustments for Council's consideration.

Mrs. Shelton asked Council if they had questions or items that they wanted more details about.

Councilman George asked what COLA percentage was being recommended for FY2025.

Town Manager Gary Shanaberger stated that Staff was not making a recommendation at that time. He informed Council that the CPI (Consumer Price Index) and inflation rate had been fluctuating around 4% over the past year. He also stated that Davenport would be at the February Work Session to present a current financial analysis.

Councilman Mitchell referenced the draft document's surplus amount being less than the previous fiscal year, and asked if the decrease was due to inflation.

Mrs. Shelton answered yes, and stated that increases in both utility costs and gas prices were considered in the draft operations budget presented that evening.

Councilman Lowman referenced the pay increases given to town employees for the past two years, in order to bring Altavista closer to market averages, and asked if the Town's pay scale was now up to date with the current market.

Mr. Shanaberger stated that it was important to maintain competitive wages and a good work environment in order to keep quality employees. He said that water and wastewater departments and police departments were extremely competitive fields amongst localities, so it was important to continuously evaluate those salaries.

Mrs. Shelton asked Council if there was any additional information that they wished to have, pertaining to the General Fund operations budget, for consideration during the budget process.

Mayor Mattox recommended several areas be reviewed, such as taxes and Town services.

Town Manager Gary Shanaberger referenced an item discussed by Council during last year's budget cycle - garbage collection (currently a free service to Altavista citizens). He informed Council that most surrounding localities charged for this service; with the lowest being Farmville at \$11.00 per month.

There was consensus of Town Council to have Staff compile revenue scenarios for potential increases to each of the following categories: Property Tax, Real Estate Tax, Vehicle Decals, and Garbage Collection.

Councilman Lowman referenced another topic previously discussed by Town Council - the option of the Town of Altavista going to bi-annual tax billing. He asked if that was a subject that Council wanted to revisit.

Councilman Mitchell shared his disfavor with the option. He stated that localities that had to take that route usually did so because they could utilize the one-time bulk of funds for a needed project. He said that he did not believe that Altavista needed to do the same because it had funds in reserve for such times.

Dr. Lowman stated, when he lived in Bedford County, he appreciated the option to pay taxes twice per year because that county's taxes were higher than most surrounding localities.

Mrs. Shelton reminded Town Council that Altavista citizens could make payments to their town tax accounts any time during the year. She said the payment(s) would show as a credit to their account until taxes were disbursed in October.

Mayor Mattox stated that bi-annual tax billing would be double work for Town Staff, and he did not believe that getting the additional funds one time was worth Staff having to manage tax billing twice per year from that point forward.

Altavista Town Council Work Session Minutes from January 23, 2023

Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett stated that the one-time extra tax revenue, if Council chose to do so, would not affect Town Citizens, like increasing taxes would.

There was a consensus of Council not to consider this action at this time.

Councilman Lowman asked if Staff had considered automating/outsourcing any of its reoccurring tasks, such as tax billing.

Mrs. Shelton stated that Staff was looking into ways to help lower the time it took to perform some time-consuming tasks. She said that “mailing” the tax and utility bills was the only step in the process of those two tasks that could be considered for outsourcing.

Public Services Director Tom Fore referenced the new water meters that were currently being installed to all Town utility accounts. He stated, while the new meters were more accurate and less timing consuming to read, there would be additional work initially for Staff to train on the new meters and system.

There were no other questions or comments from Town Council pertaining to this matter.

6. Updates from Town Staff

- Public Services Director Tom Fore referenced a waterline break that Public Works worked on for thirteen hours (and fixed) on the Sunday before that evening; and another break being worked on that same day. He shared his appreciation to Public Works Manager Jeff Arthur and his crew for their hard work and dedication they continue to give the Town of Altavista.

Mayor Mattox concurred, and also thanked Mr. Fore for his work with Altavista, and for sharing his knowledge/expertise with other communities, which benefited the entire region.

- Town Manager Gary Shanaberger referenced the Vista/Leggett Revitalization Project, and informed Council that Gentry Locke had recommended the Town obtain a “Preliminary Historic Review” for the two buildings, which would be beneficial in acquiring historic tax credits. He said Gentry Locke recommended Hill Studios in Roanoke to conduct the study. Mr. Shanaberger stated, if approved, the funds for the study (\$3,500) would be disbursed from this project’s reserve fund. He asked that acceptance of the request be placed on the February 13th Council Meeting Consent Agenda.

Town Council showed unanimous consensus to accept the Town Manager’s request, and recommendation from Gentry Locke, and to place this item on the February 13th Consent Agenda for official approval.

- Mr. Shanaberger also shared that he would be working on the details for the 2024 Town Council Work Retreat over the next thirty days, and asked that Council inform him of any topics they wished to discuss during the retreat work session.

7. Matters from Town Council

Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett referenced the recent heavy rains, and the work that the Altavista Public Works Department conducts during all types of weather. He thanked Public Works for the work they do for the Town of Altavista.

Mayor Mattox also thanked Public Works and Town Staff for their work.

8. Council Closed Session: Section 2.2-3711 (A)(3), Section 2.2-3711 (A)(5), and Section 2.2-3711 (A)(7)

Town Council convened in closed session from 6:10 - 6:55pm. Notice was given to Staff by Town Manager Gary Shanaberger that no actions were taken by Council during or after the closed session

9. Adjournment

With no further business to discuss Mayor Mattox adjourned this meeting at 6:56 p.m.

Michael Mattox, Mayor of Altavista

Gary Shanaberger, Town Manager/Town Clerk