

Altavista Town Council Work Session Minutes from February 27, 2024

The February 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, February 27th, at 5:00 PM.

Mayor Mike Mattox called the meeting to order and presided.

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

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

Mayor Mattox informed Town Council of an amendment to this agenda: adding a closed session; and asked Town Council if they had questions, comments, or concerns pertaining to the Work Session Agenda, of which there were none.

Councilman Tracy Emerson made a motion, seconded by Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett, to approve the agenda as amended; the motion carried with a 7-0 vote from Town Council.

2. Presentations

▪ Green Hill Cemetery: Request for a Monument

Mr. Trey Finch, Finch & Finch Funeral Services, presented Town Council with two options for their consideration as a placement in the "teardrop" section of the cemetery. He shared the cost for each option, and stated that the area of interest would be designed by Council's input.

No decision was made by Council at this time.

▪ VDOT Project Update: Main Steet and Seventh Street Sidewalk Connection

Mr. Jay Brown, VDOT Director of Program Management in Lynchburg, gave Council an update on the progress of this project; as well as, an overview of the most current construction costs associated, which had increased from the initial estimated budget of \$935,790 in 2019, due to inflation, a wider scope of work required from ADA requirements of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and unexpected utility relocation.

Mr. Brown shared an option for a three-phase approach for Council's consideration; that included the Town completing a portion of the work for the project, to keep costs down. He informed Council that the Town could apply for additional TAP funding (Transportation Alternatives Program) for Phase I, which was \$1.5 million.

Councilman George asked his fellow Council members, that due to the significant increase in the cost of this project, if it was necessary to have the additional sidewalks. He said that he did not believe there was enough pedestrian usage in that area to justify the need.

Vice Mayor Bennett asked if the Town could wait on Phase I and II, and only move forward with Phase III, adding a pedestrian crosswalk at the intersection of Main Street and 7th Street.

Mr. Brown answered no, not at that point in the process, because the beginning scope of work, community input and design work, had already been completed, which included both Phase I and Phase II in the plan. He stated that the Town would lose a lot of money if done that way.

Council made no decision at this time. They asked Mr. Brown to bring back at a later meeting, the costs that the Town had spent, to date, planning this project.

- Davenport: Comprehensive Financial Review

RT Taylor, Davenport Public Finance, presented Town Council with a current Comprehensive Financial Review of the Town's Enterprise Fund and General Fund. This information is intended to assist Council with making feasible decisions during the FY2025 budget process.

These documents not only review historical operating trends and peer comparisons, but also offers a proforma with the Town's identified projects (in the draft CIP) and helps determine if current rates were sufficient, or if there was a potential need for additional funding.

Councilman Mitchell asked the population of each locality used in the peer comparison.

Mr. Taylor stated that he would forward the information to Council as soon as he had the data. He concluded by stating that he would amend the financial analysis based on Town Council's and Staff's input, and present the updated information and proforma to Council at a future meeting, to help them determine the most feasible path for the FY2025 Budget and CIP.

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

- Altavista Police Department: Flock Camera System

APD Chief Tommy Merricks introduced Shane McGregor, Flock Safety Co. Representative, to share the details of what the Flock Camera System was, and how it assisted law enforcement.

Mr. McGregor stated that Flock's LPR Camera System (license plate recognition) was utilized all over the United States, and currently had seventy law enforcement partners in the state of Virginia. He said the cameras were lightweight and easy to install on new poles or a locality's existing polls, but not VDOT owned poles/property.

Mr. McGregor stated that Flock LPR Cameras were used to find stolen vehicles, and vehicles related to warrants and missing persons. He said Flock continuously received information from the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), and if a vehicle in question passed an LPR camera, the locality it was in would be notified within 12 seconds. He stated that the system could also be utilized by manually requesting a vehicle search.

Councilman Emerson informed Council that the Campbell County Sherriff's Office used the Flock LPR System to locate vehicles. He said that a vehicle was recently stolen from Lynch Station, and it only took four hours to find (in Newport News) by utilizing the system. He said CC Sherriff's Office had four Flock LPR Cameras ordered for that area.

When asked by Council the cost of the cameras/system, Mr. McGregor said that each camera was \$3,000 per year to lease, and included system software. He informed Council of a Virginia State Police Grant Program (HEAT) that, if awarded, could help pay for the cameras.

Chief Merricks stated, if grants were not procured, that revenue from the Town's School Zone Speed Camera Program could be considered to pay for the Flock Cameras.

With a motion by Councilman Tracy Emerson, seconded by Councilman Wayne Mitchell, Town Council voted 7-0 to place this item on the March 12th Council Meeting Consent Agenda; to authorize Chief Merricks to move forward with implementing the Flock Camera System in the Town of Altavista.

- FY2025 Draft Budget, and FY2025-2029 Draft Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

Finance Director Tobie Shelton shared with Council a Draft Operational Budget for FY2025, and a Draft CIP for FY2025-2029; which included information on both the Enterprise Fund and the General Fund, as well as the Highway Fund and the Cemetery Fund, which she said did not change from the previous fiscal year. Mrs. Shelton said that neither budget was built with COLA or agency requests (received at a previous meeting). She stated that the packet did include individual project sheets as a more detailed reference of each Draft CIP item.

Mrs. Shelton began with the draft Enterprise Budget, which she said included a 10% increase in water and sewer rates, a 10% increase in health insurance premiums, and a decrease in the Town's contribution level to the Virginia Retirement System (VRS), from 10.66 % to 10.25%.

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Mrs. Shelton informed Council of new additions to the FY2025 Enterprise Budget:

- Utilities Department Employee - cost split between the Enterprise and General Fund
- Part-time Operator II – Water Department
- Part-time Operator I – Wastewater Department
- Operational costs for maintaining the Riverview Pump Station
- Annual cost of maintaining the Town’s sewer lines – which was previously captured in the CIP Budget, but Staff believed this should be part of the “operations” budget.

She also informed Council of cost increases in a few of the line items:

- utilities/electrical
- chemicals for water and wastewater
- contractual services

With no questions from Council, Mrs. Shelton moved on to the General Fund Draft Budget, and stated that it was built with no tax increases, no COLA, and no agency requests. She said, mirroring the Enterprise Fund, the General Fund also had a 10% increase in health insurance premiums, and a decrease in the Town’s contribution level to the Virginia Retirement System.

Mrs. Shelton informed Council of a few additions to the FY2025 General Budget:

- Utilities Department Employee - cost split between the Enterprise and General Fund
- Part-time APD Officer position added
- \$30,750 added by APD to lease three new police vehicles
- \$5,000 for replacement of solid waste containers - previously captured in the CIP Budget
- \$50,000 Professional Consulting - in development of the Frazier property

She also shared share the line items that showed significant increases:

- \$25,000 legal cost (Vista/Legget Project and Frazier property)
- \$35,000 landscaping
- \$30,000 Avoca repairs & maintenance
- \$31,400 Community Development: miscellaneous and professional services-zoning
- \$18,000 Public Works fuel costs

Mrs. Shelton shared scenarios that Staff identified as potential options to assist Town Council in the process of balancing the FY2025 Budget. She stated that the budget worksheets not only mentioned the funds in reserve that could potentially be utilized to help balance the budget, but also included scenarios for increasing existing rates, and/or implementing new fees. She said the worksheets also showed multiple percentages for COLA options.

Councilman Emerson referenced the PCB Project and the projects current surplus of funds. He suggested Council consider utilizing a portion of that surplus amount (approximately \$400,000) to help balance the Enterprise Fund shortfall.

Mayor Mattox shared his belief that the Town needed to address the budget short-falls by increasing revenue sources, not using reserves that are meant for emergencies.

Councilman Mitchell concurred with Mayor Mattox, and stated that using reserve funds was merely putting a “band aid” on the situation, not addressing the issue. He said that inflation affected costs across the board on budget line items, and he did not believe they would decrease anytime soon.

Councilman Tim George asked Staff to present Council with a scenario for lodging tax increase

There were no further questions or comments from Council regarding the draft budget.

Mrs. Shelton said that Council would continue budget discussions at their March 12th meeting, when Staff would be seeking input and direction, as the budget should be finalized by the March 26th work session, because the “first reading” was scheduled for the April 9th meeting.

6. Updates from Town Staff

APD Police Chief Tommy Merricks referenced the need to replace three of his department’s vehicles in the next fiscal year. He informed Council of the option to lease vehicles (with Enterprise), that would save the Town money upfront, as well as over time, taking advantage of current pricing, not future costs.

There was a consensus of Council for Chief Merricks to schedule a presentation from the Enterprise Representative of the leasing program for a future Council meeting.

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7. Matters from Town Council

Councilman Tim George asked Staff for an update on the previously discussed item of surface treating the lower end of the Green Hill Connector Trail.

Asst. Public Services Director Paul Hill informed Town Council that this project had been placed on the FY2025 Draft CIP.

8. Council Closed Session: Section 2.2-3711 (A)(1)

Town Council convened in closed session from 7:11 - 7:27pm.

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 7:28 p.m.

Michael Mattox, Mayor of Altavista

Gary Shanaberger, Town Manager/Town Clerk