

Town Council's April 5th, 2022, Work Session – continued from March 29th Work Session

The April 5th, 2022, Town Council “continued” Work Session was held in Council Chambers of the J.R. Burgess Municipal Building, 510 Seventh Street, on Tuesday, April 5th, at 5:00 PM.

Mayor Mike Mattox called the meeting to order and presided.

Town 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
Mrs. Tobie Shelton, Treasurer/Finance Director
Mr. Thomas Merricks, APD Chief of Police
Mr. Tom Fore, Public Services Director
Ms. Sharon D. Williams, Community Development Director
Mr. Jeff Arthur, Public Works Manager
Mrs. Crystal Hailey, Assistant Town Clerk

Absent:

Mr. John Eller, Town Attorney

1. Agenda Adoption

This meeting was a continued work session from March 29th, originating from Council's March 22nd regular scheduled work session. With a motion made by Councilman Tracy Emerson, seconded by Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett, the agenda was approved that evening with a unanimous 7-0 vote.

Town Manager Gary Shanaberger took this opportunity to introduce Altavista's new Assistant Town Manager Matthew Perkins, who previously worked for the Central Virginia Planning District Commission. Mr. Shanaberger shared he previously worked with Mr. Perkins on a project at his last place of employment and believed he was a good person and stated he looked forward to working with him again.

Mr. Perkins thanked the Town Manager and Town Council for the opportunity to work for Altavista and stated he looked forward to being a part of the community.

2. Citizen's Time

There were no citizen comments on this date.

3. Items Referred from Previous Meetings

- Altavista's Town Manager Gary Shanaberger, and Finance Director Tobie Shelton, presented Town Council with information they requested at their last work session.

Mr. Shanaberger thanked Town Staff for their efforts and hard work in “crunching the numbers” over the past week on the draft budget and CIP. He said the first item they wanted to present was regarding potential employee compensation increases for FY2023.

Mr. Shanaberger stated he and Mrs. Shelton ran at least ten (10) different scenarios, using the 10% range directed by Council at their previous meeting. He said, they narrowed the options down and he shared the two he believed were the most feasible for consideration.

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- Option 1: 10% plus 2%

Mr. Shanaberger said this option would give a 10% general wage increase to all town employees; and (nine) employees holding 20+years of service would receive an additional \$100 for each year they had worked for the Town of Altavista.

Mr. Shanaberger informed Council that he worked with Mrs. Shelton, Tom Fore, and Chief Merricks to determine appropriate pay for new police officers and town entry-level positions that would be competitive in the job market.

- Option 2: 8% plus 3%

Mr. Shanaberger stated this option would give all town employees an 8% wage increase, which would cover the current (8%) inflation rate, and entry-level positions would benefit from the +3% instead of 2%. He said the years-of-service bonus would remain the same as previously mentioned.

Mr. Shanaberger said there was only a \$6,000 difference between Option 1 and Option 2, and shared his favor with Option 1, totaling \$339,555. He said localities/employers were facing unprecedented times in a competitive job market and he believed either of the proposed options would help the Town of Altavista be more competitive.

Mayor Mattox asked Council for their thoughts on the two options presented.

Councilman Mitchell referenced the 3% wage increase already allocated in the draft budget and asked if the 10% increase was above the initial proposal or included it.

Mayor Mattox reminded Council, and was confirmed by Mrs. Shelton, that the initial 3% was merely a placeholder in the draft budget until Council could consider all options.

Vice Mayor Bennett thanked staff for the hard work that went into researching and developing the two proposed wage increase options. He concurred with the Town Manager regarding the town needing to be more competitive in the job market and shared his favor with choosing either option, stating he believed the Town of Altavista employed a lot of good workers and it was important to pay them a fair wage.

Mayor Mattox stated he understood that the proposed wage increase would affect the town's budget, but the town would not run as efficiently without good employees and citizens that looked out for one another. He stated that he believed it was important for the town to take care of its employees and was in favor of the wage increase.

Councilman Higginbotham shared his concerns with the comparison data presented being skewed because there were cities included with towns. He specifically referenced the Chief of Police position and stated comparing the job to a county sheriff or city chief was not a fair comparison because of the higher number of officers directed and citizens served under those positions.

Mr. Higginbotham also referenced the town's ACTS bus drivers and asked why there was information on only two localities for this position.

Margaret Smith, The Berkley Group, explained that the other localities looked at for data did not offer a bus service, therefore they had to use the only two that did for the analysis.

Vice Mayor Bennett stated he believed if the Town of Altavista was paying their employees a fair market wage, the town would not be losing so many of its employees to other localities, and specifically regarding police officers.

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Mr. Higginbotham shared his belief that the starting wage for police officers at the entry-level position should be increased to be competitive in the local job market.

Mayor Mattox asked Mr. Higginbotham if he believed the police chief position should be removed from the data analysis.

Mr. Higginbotham stated he believed Council could make a more informative decision with data that was not skewed by unusable data.

Councilman Emerson suggested keeping the existing analysis and making a decision from the data that was viable, and not consider the data that wasn't relevant.

Councilman George asked if the \$100 per year for every year of service of twenty years of more was a one-time bonus, or a reoccurring benefit.

Town Manager Gary Shanaberger stated, at that time, the option was considered as a one-time bonus, but could be considered by Council to continue in the future for employees with a 20yr anniversary.

Councilman Lowman stated that The Berkley Group's wage analysis was merely a snapshot of the current job market and did not play a major part in Council's decision regarding the 10%, or 8%, general wage increase for town employees. He stated that increase would only move the Town of Altavista closer to the market average to help the town be more competitive in the current job market and hopefully retain good employees.

Mayor Mattox asked Council if they had any additional comments or questions regarding this item, to which there were none.

Mr. Shanaberger asked Town Council which option they would like staff to include in the FY2023 Draft Budget, or if they needed additional time for consideration.

There was a consensus of Town Council to use option #1 (10% plus 2%) as presented by the Town Manager and Finance Director for the Town of Altavista employee wage increase in the FY2023 Budget; and the 20+ years of service bonus, all totaling \$339,555.

- Review the FY2023 Draft Budget and FY2023-2027 Draft CIP

Finance Director Tobie Shelton stated, taking the wage increase into consideration, she informed Council that, including CIP items, the Enterprise Fund would see a surplus in FY2023; however, the General Fund would require a \$1 million transfer in from reserves to balance the budget, if all proposed CIP items remained in the draft for adoption.

Mrs. Shelton shared with Council a list of items from the General Fund draft CIP for their consideration to either keep in, postpone to a later fiscal year, or remove altogether. She referenced two additional items from previous meetings: a take-home car for police officers and the request by Avoca to have a full-time Events Coordinator. She stated neither were in the current draft budget and both needed to be discussed whether to include the items.

Town Council reviewed the CIP list and discussed each item individually, starting with a dog park for English Park. Mayor Mattox asked for Council's input on whether a dog park was needed. He stated, under the present circumstances of needing to balance the FY2023 Budget, it would be hard for him to vote to keep this item on the CIP list.

Councilman Higginbotham referenced Avoca's request for a full-time Events Coordinator and asked if that position would be in place of their existing part-time assistant.

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Mrs. Shelton confirmed that Avoca's existing part-time assistant position was accounted for in the draft budget. she stated it was the full-time Events Coordinator that needed to be discussed and decided whether to move forward with the position, which was currently only a placeholder in the draft budget. she stated, if approved, this position would work from Town Hall, per Council.

Council returned to discussing the proposed dog park CIP item.

Councilman Mitchell stated he would rather see the town find other ways to make English Park "dog friendly", than to spend money on an actual dog park.

Councilman Emerson shared his favor to move the dog park item to a future fiscal year.

Vice Mayor Bennett questioned needing so much money (\$70,000) to have a dog park. He stated all that was needed would be fencing, and possibly benches for dog owner, not lighting, because he did not believe the dog park should be used after dark. Mr. Bennett shared his favor in having a dog park in Altavista, but not spend as much money for the initial project. He asked staff to investigate the cost for a basic dog park.

Mayor Mattox stated he did not believe that a dog park was a high priority for the town at this time and shared his favor in removing the item from the CIP list.

Councilman Higginbotham agreed with Mr. Emerson to move the item to a future CIP.

Councilman George agreed with the Vice Mayor and shared his favor with keeping the dog park on the FY2023 CIP but scaling down the project and not including lights.

Councilman Lowman favored the dog park project being moved to a future fiscal year.

There was a consensus of Town Council to remove the dog park CIP item from FY2023's draft budget and place it on in FY2024 for further discussion and consideration.

Mayor Mattox moved to the next draft CIP item for consideration, extending the walking/biking trail at Lane Access Road to cross Pittsylvania Avenue into English Park.

Councilman Emerson asked if the trail would go down Lane Access Road towards the wastewater plant.

Councilman George answered it would not. He stated the plan was to create a trail (pedestrian lane) that crossed over Lane Access Road up to the first entrance of English Park (3rd Street).

Public Services Director Tom Fore confirmed that a pedestrian lane was planned for the left side of Pittsylvania Avenue (from Main Street) and added that the proposed plan also included extending the existing sidewalk on the right side until reaching 3rd Street. He said the project would also connect the two extensions with a pedestrian crosswalk.

Mr. Fore referenced the draft CIP items listed by Mrs. Shelton for Council's consideration of postponing or removal and stated the list was staff's best guess at which items could be considered to reduce the draft CIP and help towards balancing the budget.

Mayor Mattox stated, to save time, he asked Council which items listed did they believe needed to stay on the CIP for fiscal year 2023.

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Councilman Emerson suggested not fixing the broken water fountain at Shreve Park and removing it from the CIP.

Mrs. Shelton said, when the fountain stopped working, it was not removed due to it being a memorial for Dr. David Shreve that was donated by his family.

Vice Mayor Bennett asked Council, if something breaks at one of the other town parks, would they fix it, or throw it away. He said he believed it would be a waste of taxpayer money if park amenities were not maintained after being installed.

Councilman Higginbotham shared his concern with the fountain, if working, being a liability issue for the town.

Mr. Bennett reminded Council there were fountains in parks and places all over the world and they were not considered a liability. He stated the fountain at Shreve Park was a showpiece when working and placed there in honor of Dr. Shreve. He shared his favor in keeping the fountain.

Councilman Mitchell shared his thoughts on some of the proposed CIP items listed for discussion. He reminded Council the full-time Events Coordinator was in the draft budget as a placeholder, and he believed painting the Booker Building should remain in the draft CIP. Mr. Mitchell said he also appreciated Tom Fore reducing the cost of clearing the bank at English Auto by doing half of the project in FY2023 and the other half in FY2024. He said he was in favor of moving all of the other items to a future CIP.

Councilman Higginbotham referenced the full-time Events Coordinator requested by Avoca and reminded Council, if the position was granted, the town would save \$9,400 by removing the part-time Avoca position from the budget.

Town Manager Gary Shanaberger stated the Events Coordinator position proposed by Avoca needed to be discussed further before consideration could be determined whether to leave the item in the FY2023 CIP.

Mayor Mattox went through the other CIP items listed for consideration and asked Council to give their input on each item whether to leave in the FY2023 CIP, postpone to a future CIP, or remove the item.

Public Services Director Tom Fore referenced the ongoing Street Light Upgrade project and stated he placed the item on the list for consideration to postpone due to currently being short-staffed. He said they still had seven lights to upgrade from FY2022's CIP.

APD Chief Merricks referenced his CIP request to allow the Altavista Police Department (APD) to offer their officers to have take-home vehicles. He explained that he believed having take-home vehicles would be another way to help retain good officers. He stated the vehicles would only be offered to officers that lived within twenty-five miles of the police department and could only utilize the vehicles while on duty.

Mayor Mattox stated he favored the APD offering their officers a bonus if they lived within town limits.

Chief Merricks stated the bonus was for every year that an officer lived in town, but currently the APD did not have any officers that lived in town.

Councilman Mitchell asked Chief Merricks, between take-home vehicles and a "safe space" at Town Hall, which proposed item would he choose to keep in the CIP if Council could only pick one, to which Chief Merricks replied, the take-home vehicle request.

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After going through the list there was a consensus of Council to make the following revisions to the FY2023-2027 draft CIP:

Remain in FY2023

- Spark Innovation Center	\$600,000	Fund with Reserves
- Add TOA Events Coordinator - FT	\$ 44,300	Placeholder for further discussion
- Keep Avoca PT position as is	\$ 9,400	currently in budget
- Add APD take-home vehicle	\$ 7,500	\$ = current annual cost
- Booker Bldg., painting exterior	\$18,000	currently in CIP
- Clearing Bank between Elba & English Auto		divide into 2 years, \$25,000 each FY
- APD/Town Hall Safe Space	\$10,000	?? discuss further

Move to FY2024

- Study for RV Campground	\$10,000	for further discussion during next FY
- Dog Park in rear of English Park	\$70,000	review scope of work to decrease \$\$
- Walking/Biking Trail at Lane Access	\$60,000	includes crossing Pittsylvania Ave.
- Shreve Park Fountain renovation	\$30,000	discuss further if needed or remove
- Street Light Upgrade	\$32,500	ongoing project
- PW-purchase road plates	\$41,000	PW currently borrows if needed

Move to FY2025

- RV Campground in English Park	\$50,000	
- Street Light Upgrade	\$32,500	ongoing: FY2025 to completion year

Remove from CIP List

- Annual Festival Funding	\$20,000	previously Uncle Billy’s Day funding
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Mayor Mattox asked Finance Director Tobie Shelton, considering the CIP revisions, how much would still need to be transferred from the Reserve Fund to balance the FY2023 Budget.

Mrs. Shelton answered approximately \$300,000.

Mayor Mattox asked Council if there were any additional items that Council could consider postponing or removing from the draft CIP.

Councilman Mitchell asked Tom Fore, Public Services Director, to explain a requested item, “tub grinding brush”.

Mr. Fore stated it was used to grind down debris picked up from homeowners after storms.

Councilman Mitchell referenced an Economic Development item in the draft CIP named “other charges” and asked Finance Director Tobie Shelton why the dollar amount was so much lower than the previous year.

Mrs. Shelton stated that the funds in that account from the previous year were not all used, so accordingly, the request for the FY2023 budget was less.

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Councilman Mitchell referenced a Parks & Recreation proposed CIP item, an RV campground in English Park, with \$10,000 for a feasibility study in FY2023, and \$50,000 to implement the project om FY2024. He asked Council to consider moving the item to the next two fiscal years.

Vice Mayor Bennett stated, due to a recent request from a citizen to develop a campground on their recently purchased property, he shared his favor with postponing the town's CIP item.

There was a consensus of Town Council to move the \$10,000 feasibility study for an RV campground to FY2024, and to move the \$50,000 implementation of the project to FY2025.

Councilman Mitchell also referenced the \$90,000 draft CIP item in FY2025 for the Altavista YMCA and asked for clarification of what the item incurred.

Finance Director Tobie Shelton reminded Council of their previous approval to pay half of the cost to upgrade the lights at the YMCA ballfields. She stated, as directed by Council, staff would continue to investigate if any grants are available to help cover the cost of the upgrade.

Councilman George suggested staff also contact Campbell County to inquire if they would be willing to assist the town with the cost of the project.

Mayor Mattox referenced the town's \$100,000 annual contribution to the Altavista YMCA and suggested there be a committee developed, with a representative from the town, the YMCA, and two other individuals that were either involved or interested in athletic programs, to have closer communication with the YMCA and follow where the funds were being used.

Mayor Mattox also referenced the Business Development Center and stated he did not believe the organization had been of great service to Altavista over the past few years. He suggested decreasing the town's annual contribution of \$6,000 back to the previous amount of \$3,000.

Council Lowman stated, with the Spark Innovation Center opening soon, the organization may be able to offer more service to the town and assist with acquiring grants.

There was a consensus of Town Council to keep the annual contribution at \$6,000 for now and review the matter during the next fiscal year, which was after the Spark Center opened.

Mayor Mattox stated he would rather use the funds to assist a new business with rent and utilities for their first few months, rather than contributing to an organization that may or may not be beneficial to the town.

Vice Mayor Bennett reminded Council that AOT (Altavista On Track) already had such a program available to help new businesses with rent and utilities.

Councilman Mitchell said the town should consider offering more grant and/or loan programs if funding was available.

Councilman Higginbotham asked if Gwen Wells and Jerome Snyder ever paid back their RBEG (Rural Business Development Grant) they received from the town.

Altavista Finance Director Tobie Shelton stated Mr. Snyder paid off his debt to the town, but Ms. Wells had not. She said Town Attorney John Eller was now handling this matter.

Councilman Mitchell asked if there were any funds remaining in the USDA Grant Program.

Community Development Director Sharon D. Williams answered approximately \$38,000 was still available through the town's loan program funded with a USDA Grant. She stated when funds were repaid to the town from, they belonged to the town for future programs.

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Mayor Mattox stated, once the USDA loans were repaid, it would be a great opportunity for the town to develop their own grant and/or loan programs for the small business community.

There were no further comments regarding this matter.

Councilman Higginbotham referenced Town Attorney John Eller and the email correspondence that Council recently conducted regarding a salary adjustment for Mr. Eller. He suggested Town Council discuss the matter further in a closed session that evening.

There was a consensus by Town Council to do so.

Mayor Mattox reminded Council that no more than two Council members could gather or correspond, as it would then be considered a “meeting” of Council. He encouraged them, if they had a comment or question for another Council member to do so individually.

Councilman Lowman referenced the blue directional signs on Hwy 29 and asked how much it would cost for Altavista to utilize the signage.

Town Manager Gary Shanaberger stated had been in contact with VDOT, which directed him to the appropriate sign representative and shared that contact information. He stated, after the FY2023 Budget process was complete, he would be working on multiple new projects and the fore-mentioned signs for marketing Altavista was on the list to investigate. He said he would keep Council posted on its progress.

Mayor Mattox asked Public Services Director Tom Fore when Altavista's two water tanks were due to be painted. He stated, since Altavista won so many state championships in various sports, he suggested one of the water tanks be painted Altavista school colors, orange and black.

Mr. Fore informed Council that the Dearing Ford Road water tank would be painted in January of 2023 and the Clarion Road water tank was scheduled for January 2024. He said he was scheduled to meet with the painting contractors that next day and would ask if the orange and black paint scheme was possible.

Mayor Mattox asked Town Council if they had any additional questions or comments in regard to the FY2023 Draft Budget and FY2023-2027 Draft CIP, to which there were none.

4. Matters/Updates from Town Staff

Mayor Mattox asked Town Staff if they had any items they wished to discuss with Council

Assistant Town Clerk Crystal Hailey referenced Councilman Higginbotham's suggestion for Council to hold a closed session regarding the Town Attorney's salary. She asked Mayor Mattox if he would be adding a closed session to the meeting that evening.

Mayor Mattox asked the Town Manager if a closed session that evening or if they had to wait until the next Council meeting.

Vice Mayor Bennett asked if the matter needed to be discussed/determined before the FY2023 Budget was finalized and adopted.

Finance Director Tobie Shelton informed Council that the potential increase amount to the Town Attorney's salary was included in the FY2023 Draft Budget in order to advertise the draft budget the following week.

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Mrs. Shelton stated, however, whether Council discussed the item that evening or at their next scheduled meeting, they could only decrease the amount, not increase it after it had been advertised.

There was a consensus of Council to discuss the matter in closed session that evening if possible.

5. Matters from Town Council

Mayor Mattox asked Council if they had any additional questions, comments, or concerns.

- Councilman Emerson asked for an update on the wayfinding signs for English Park.

Public Works Manager Jeff Arthur said that Kim Cottle, project designer, continued to work with Hurt & Proffitt to finalize a map of the entire English Park trail system, including the Cemetery Connector Trail. He stated, on the map, the new section of the Jenks Trail would be recognized as the “Jenks Loop”, which continued to the DeBernard River Overlook.

- Councilman Mitchell shared his appreciation for Finance Director Tobie Shelton’s work on the draft budget. He also thanked the Town Manager, Asst. Town Manager, and Department Directors for their hard work and efforts in collaboration with the draft budget.
- Vice Mayor Bennett referenced Campbell County’s recent implementation of semi-annual tax billing and suggested the town consider the option. He also suggested the town look at other ways to increase town revenue, such as increasing Machine & Tool Tax, to which the majority of Council did not agree with.

With no further comments or questions from Council, Town Manager Gary Shanaberger confirmed that Council could enter into a closed session that evening if they so desired, and Council was in consensus to do so.

6. Closed Session

I move that the Altavista Town Council convene in closed session in accordance with the provisions set out in the Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended,

Section 2.2-3711 (A)(1) Discussion, consideration, or interviews of prospective candidates for employment; assignment, appointment, promotion, performance, demotion, salaries, disciplining or resignation of specific public officers, appointees, or employees of any public body.

The motion was made by Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett and seconded by Councilman Tracy Emerson.

Motion carried.

VOTE:	Dr. Scott Lowman	Yes	Mayor Michael Mattox	Yes
	Mr. Tim George	Yes	Vice Mayor Bennett	Yes
	Mr. Jay Higginbotham	Yes	Mr. Tracy Emerson	Yes
	Mr. Wayne Mitchell	Yes		

Town Council went into Closed Session at 6:55 PM.
Notice was given that Council was back in regular session at 7:00 PM.

FOLLOWING CLOSED SESSION:

A motion was made by Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett, seconded by Councilman Tracy Emerson, to adopt the certification of a closed meeting.

CERTIFICATION OF CLOSED MEETING

WHEREAS, the town council has convened a closed meeting on this date pursuant to an affirmative recorded vote and in accordance with provisions of The Virginia Freedom of Information Act; and

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WHEREAS, Section 2.2-3712 of the Code of Virginia requires a certification by the town council that such closed meeting was conducted in conformity with Virginia law;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED the town council hereby certifies, to the best of each member's knowledge, (i) only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements by Virginia law were discussed in the closed meeting to which this certification resolution applies, and (ii) only such public business matters as were identified in the motion convening the closed meeting were heard, discussed or considered by the town council.

VOTE:	Dr. Scott Lowman	Yes	Mayor Michael Mattox	Yes
	Mr. Tim George	Yes	Vice Mayor Bennett	Yes
	Mr. Jay Higginbotham	Yes	Mr. Tracy Emerson	Yes
	Mr. Wayne Mitchell	Yes		

Notice was given by the Town Manager that, during closed session, Town Council approved increasing the salary of Altavista's Town Attorney, John Eller, by \$500 per month, totaling \$2,500.

7. Adjournment

Mayor Mattox asked if there were any other comments or concerns from Council, to which there were none. With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 7:05 PM

Michael E. Mattox, Mayor of Altavista

Gary Shanaberger, Town Clerk/Town Manager