

Town Council Regular Meeting February 8th, 2022

The Altavista Town Council held their February 2022 meeting in Council Chambers of the Town Hall/J.R. Burgess Municipal Building, 510 Seventh Street, on Tuesday, February 8th, at 6 p.m.

1. At six o'clock p.m., Mayor Mike Mattox called the regular meeting to order and presided.

Council Members

Present:

- Vice Mayor Reginald Bennett
- Mr. Tracy Emerson
- Mr. Timothy George
- Mr. Jay Higginbotham
- Dr. Scott Lowman
- Mayor Michael Mattox
- Mr. Wayne Mitchell

Town Staff present:

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

Pastor David Sage, Grace Community Church, gave the invocation for this evening.
After the invocation, Mayor Mike Mattox led the meeting in the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Agenda Adoption

Mayor Mattox asked Town Council if they had any questions, comments, or concerns in regard to the February meeting agenda, to which there were none.

Councilman Tracy Emerson made a motion, seconded by Councilman Wayne Mitchell, to approve the February 8th, 2022, Altavista Town Council Meeting Agenda as presented.

Motion carried

Vote:	Mr. Wayne Mitchell	Yes
	Mr. Tracy Emerson	Yes
	Vice Mayor Bennett	Yes
	Mayor Mike Mattox	Yes
	Mr. Jay Higginbotham	Yes
	Mr. Timothy George	Yes
	Dr. Scott Lowman	Yes

3. Recognitions and Presentations

A. Personnel Changes

The Town of Altavista's personnel changes during January 2022:

New Hire Listing:

Gary Shanaberger, Town Manager, Administration Department
Alan Adkins, Sr. Maintenance Specialist, Public Works Dept.

Departure Listing:

George Sandridge, Main Street Coordinator, Administration
Bryan Mawyer, Water Plant Manager, Utilities Department/Water

Jeff Arthur, Altavista Public Works Manager, introduced two new employees in attendance that evening: Jonathan Rice and Alan Adkins, both in Buildings & Grounds. He stated Ben Mitchell was also a new hire starting with the Streets Department.

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B. The Berkley Group - Updates

Town Manager Gary Shanaberger updated Town Council on three Berkley Group items.

- Town Council 2022 Retreat/Work Session
Mr. Shanaberger stated Kimble Payne confirmed his availability for the June 7th meeting, and the Altavista Train Station had been reserved for that date.
- Employee Compensation Market Analysis
Mr. Shanaberger stated the analysis was scheduled to be complete by March 15th.
- TOA Employee Handbook Update
Mr. Shanaberger informed Council that the handbook update was expected to be complete by mid-May.
Councilman Mitchell asked how often a handbook update was necessary.
Mr. Shanaberger stated that minimal changes could be made through addendums, however, according to The Berkley Group, a full review should be done every three to four years to ensure the town stays in compliance with legal matters.

4. Citizen's Time (Non-Agenda Items Only)

Mayor Mattox asked if there were any citizen(s) present wishing to address Council with a comment, concern, or item regarding a subject that was not listed on the February 8th, 2022, Council Meeting Agenda. No citizens came forward with comments on this date.

5. Town/Community Partner Updates

A. Altavista Area Chamber of Commerce (the Chamber)

Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Grace Mattox shared with Council a few of the Chamber's recent events; and updates on upcoming events the Chamber was working on.

- Ms. Mattox stated the Chamber, together with Altavista On Track (AOT), held a ribbon-cutting event for Three-Into-One Community Project on January 26th. She said they also had a ribbon-cutting planned in the following week for M&M Cleaners.
- Ms. Mattox stated the Chamber had two Coffee & Conversation Events coming up; one at Radio Shack and one at Finch & Finch Funeral Home to unveil their new reception room.
- Ms. Mattox informed Town Council of an "After Five Jive" event to be held on April 14th at the Avoca Museum. She stated the event would be an opportunity to introduce the community to the new Executive Director, Caleb Lafoon.
- Ms. Mattox referenced the Chamber's annual year-end dinner. She said the dinner would be held this year (2022) on Saturday, April 30th at Leesville Lake Marina.

Mayor Mattox asked Town Council if they had any questions for Ms. Mattox.

Councilman Mitchell asked Ms. Mattox if she could send email reminders to Town Council on upcoming events. She stated she would be happy to do so.

Mayor Mattox thanked Ms. Mattox for her continued good work for Altavista.

B. Altavista On Track (AOT)

Altavista On Track's Board President Reverend Ed Soto gave Town Council a brief update on Altavista On Track's most recent and upcoming events.

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- Reverend Soto stated, with the recent departure of their previous Executive Director, the AOT Executive Board continues its efforts to fill the vacant position. He stated, with assistance from Community Development Director Sharon Williams, the job description had been updated to include management of the Spark Innovation Center.

Reverend Soto informed Council that he and Ms. Williams also collaborated to create a job description for a part-time Community Coordinator; an interim position until a new Main Street Coordinator/AOT Executive Director could be hired.

- Reverend Soto stated that AOT recently awarded Ms. Kaitlyn Smith with a Downtown Business Investment Grant. He said Ms. Smith was the new owner of the Styling Boutique at 603 Broad Street and was changing the name to Perfect Canvas Salon. He stated AOT intended to partner with the Chamber of Commerce for a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the business's location.
- Reverend Soto informed Council of AOT's upcoming planning session with the National Main Street Strategic Planning Commission, with representatives Zachary Whitlow and Matt Wagner presenting AOT with a market analysis that would give AOT input for the future, and direction for any changes they might need to make.

Reverend Soto stated that AOT intended to continue seeking additional fundraising opportunities. He said he would be happy to answer any questions Town Council may have.

Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett referenced AOT's old "Popup Program, now the Downtown Business Investment Grant Program. He stated, per Community Development Director Sharon Williams, the program had helped five businesses successfully by spending only about six thousand dollars, to which Ms. Williams confirmed the number was \$6,700.

Mr. Bennett reminded Council that the old program was a loan for up to \$10,000 and the program had not been successful. He thanked AOT's Board for revamping the program to be easily attainable and an asset to Downtown Altavista.

Reverend Soto stated AOT also revised the Façade Loan Program to a grant program and three businesses took advantage of the program in 2022, with four more applications currently pending approval.

Mayor Mattox thanked Reverend Soto the AOT updates and thanked the AOT Board for the good work they continue to do for the Town of Altavista and its community.

6. Consent Agenda

- January 2022 Financial Reports
- Approval of Bid Recommendation for the Lynch Creek Project
- Approval of Council Meeting Minutes:
 - November 23, 2021, Work Session
 - December 14, 2021, Regular Meeting
 - January 11, 2022, Regular Meeting

Mayor Mattox asked Town Council if they had any questions, comments, or concerns in regard to the February 8th Consent Agenda, to which there were none.

Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett made a motion, seconded by Councilman Tracy Emerson, to approve the February 8, 2022, Council Meeting Consent Agenda as presented.

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Motion carried.

Vote:	Mr. Wayne Mitchell	Yes
	Mr. Tracy Emerson	Yes
	Vice Mayor Bennett	Yes
	Mayor Mike Mattox	Yes
	Mr. Jay Higginbotham	Yes
	Mr. Timothy George	Yes
	Dr. Scott Lowman	Yes

7. Public Hearings

There were no public hearings scheduled for this date.

8. New Business

A. 2023 CIP Purchases

Altavista's Public Services Director Tom Fore referenced Council's request at their January 25th Work Session for staff to present Council with the list of Public Service Equipment and Vehicles proposed for the FY2023 CIP Budget for their consideration of pre-ordering the items to save on continuing inflation costs. Mr. Fore presented Council with the list and asked for their input and direction.

Advanced Water Meter System	\$1,075,000
Meter Truck Replacement	\$40,000
Mobile 6" Pump	\$60,000
Auger for Skid Steer	\$6,000
40hp Pump Replacement	\$40,000
Autoclave	\$30,000
60 hp Digester Blower	\$18,000
Return Sludge Replacement Impeller	\$5,000
Purchase New Power Buggy	\$48,000
Replace Scagg 60" Zero Mower	\$12,000
<u>Purchase a New Polaris Ranger 1000 UTV</u>	<u>\$16,500</u>
TOTAL	\$1,350,500

Councilman Jay Higginbotham recommended placing the Advanced Water Meter System on the next Work Session Agenda for further discussion. He also suggested removing the Skid Steer Auger from the list.

Mr. Higginbotham stated, since there was a second UTV proposed in the FY2024 CIP, he suggested purchasing both in FY2023 to save in potential cost increases; and to purchase Honda UTVs rather than Polaris.

Mayor Mattox shared his favor with the Advanced Water Meter System and stated he believed it was long overdue. He stated the system would, not only save water, but also help the town be more efficient by utilizing manpower for other projects.

Vice Mayor Bennett stated he believed one of Council's main objectives when considering CIP items was whether they could benefit town citizens. He stated the Advanced Water Meter System would benefit both the town and its citizens.

Mr. Bennett stated, with technology evolving, he believed the old systems would soon be obsolete and the town would need to move to the advanced system eventually. He shared his favor with the advanced system's capability in discovering water leaks quickly, which would help the customer and the town save money.

Councilman Tracy Emerson reminded Council that the Advanced Water Meter System was an approved item under ARPA's requirements of use for infrastructure. He stated this was a good opportunity for the town to utilize ARPA funds to implement a desired item sooner than its initial proposed timeframe in the FY2027 CIP.

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Councilman Wayne Mitchell shared his favor of the Advanced Water Meter System, but stated he would also be open to receiving additional ideas for the town's ARPA funds.

Councilman Scott Lowman stated he considered the Advance Water Meter System as a long-term investment for the town and he was in favor of utilizing the available ARPA funds to acquire the system.

Councilman Tim George asked what the life-expectancy was for the new water meters.

Mr. Fore stated the meters had a 10-20 year life-expectancy, depending on the amount of use they incurred.

Regarding the FY2023 Draft CIP Equipment/Vehicle Order List, there was a consensus of Town Council to leave the Advanced Water Meter System, remove the Skid Steer Auger, and add an additional UTV.

B. Utilities Department Fund Request – Sediment and Solids Handling Improvement Project

Background:

The Facility Assessment and Improvement Plan (FAIP) included a Sedimentation and Solids Handling Improvement Project. The FAIP stated “The addition of automated sludge removal from sedimentation basins would reduce the volume of water being sent to waste and ease operations. It proposed the installation of a vacuum system, which will minimize the resuspension of solids. The preliminary engineering phase of this project should also include an investigation into channel hydraulics and necessary improvements should be made as a part of this project. The handrails and kick plates around the basins show signs of degradation and should be replaced. As part of a larger rehabilitation, concrete repair to the sedimentation basins, brick repair to the baffling wall, and the replacement of the existing slide gates should be completed. The solids holding tank controls should be upgraded to include continuous discharge to the WWTP during low-flow time periods. This would be accomplished by interlocking the discharge with a maximum flow rate at the WWTP so that backwash was not discharged during periods of high flow at the WWTP. This would improve operations at both facilities. The improvements would also help automate levels in the holding tank, improving mixer performance and reducing the risk of mixer burnout”.

Public Services Director Tom Fore asked Council to consider allowing staff to submit a grant application for the Sedimentation and Solids Handling Improvement Project, included in the town's current FAIP, with the Virginia Department of Health's Office of Drinking Water through their Financial and Construction Assistance Program. He stated, if the application was successful, the grant would cover 50% of the project's borrowed funding.

There was a unanimous consensus from Town Council in favor of Mr. Fore's request and to allow staff to submit the grant application to the Virginia Department of Health's Department of Drinking Water for the Sediment and Solids Improvement Project.

9. Unfinished Business

No unfinished business items were scheduled for this date.

10. Reports and Communication

- A. January 2022 Departmental Reports
- B. Council Monthly Calendars - January and February 2022
- C. Informational Items

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The Manager's Report, Departmental Reports, and Council Calendars were delivered to Town Council on an earlier date, with their February Regular Council Meeting Agenda Pre-Packet.

Mayor Mattox asked for an update on the Brownfields Grant Projects, specifically pertaining to the old Lane property and its remediation/cleanup.

- Mr. Fore stated that he and Sharon Williams, Community Development Director, continued to keep in contact with the property owner for progress reports. He stated, currently, they were awaiting verification on whether the remaining structure had asbestos roof materials. He stated the property owner was also in the process of removing the two overhead bridges and the brick debris still on the property.

Mr. Fore said that he inquired about the old brick and, if it was clear of contaminants, the town may be able to utilize the brick and crush it for trail surface purposes.

Councilman Higginbotham stated, if the brick had ever been painted before 1960, there was a chance of lead paint contamination and recommended the town not use the brick.

- Mr. Fore stated the property at 531 Main Street, previously NY Pizza, had been checked and reported not contaminated, clearing the current owners to move forward with their intended use for the facility.
- Mr. Fore continued and referenced the Vista Theater and stated that project had also been remediated of any unwanted contaminants.
- Mr. Fore informed Town Council there was still approximately \$250,000 remaining in the initial Brownfields "Planning" Grant. He stated he intended to utilize a portion of the remaining funds to have a new conceptual layout of the old Lane property once the remediation process was complete.

Councilman Mitchell asked if the funds could be considered as such for the Vista Theater project, to which Mr. Fore stated the funds could also be used for the planning phase of that project.

Mayor Mattox asked Town Council if they had any more questions, comments, or concerns regarding the January monthly reports, to which there were none.

11. Matters from Council

Mayor Mattox asked Town Council if they had any additional concerns or items for discussion.

- Councilman Mitchell referenced the Altavista Economic Development Authority (AEDA) and their recently adopted initiative for the Town of Altavista to find more ways to tackle the "blight" issue the town faces. He reminded Council of the town's desire for land developers to bring additional housing to Altavista, however, this was sometimes difficult due to the blight issues.

Mr. Mitchell asked if there were ways the town could consider helping to remediate blight.

Community Development Director Sharon D Williams stated the town currently had two programs to help deter blight in local downtown businesses. The first being the Altavista Advantage Loan Program, funded partially through the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture), offering a 60-month loan with 75% federal funds and 25% town funds.

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Ms. Williams stated, once the loans were repaid from their recipients, the funds regained were then available for the town to create their own loan program to further their efforts on blight control and allocate the funds under town rules and regulations.

Ms. Williams stated staff was currently working to get the town's Acquire, Renovate, Sell (ARS) Program approved by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), which was also part of the town's effort to deter and diminish housing blight. She reminded Council of existing town property that could be used in the program.

Vice Mayor Bennett stated he was told by a few homeowners that they did not want to spend money to renovate their homes/property for fear of their Real Estate Taxes increasing. He asked if there were programs that would encourage homeowners to do so.

Mr. Bennett reminded Council that the town did not currently have a specific "Building Code" and suggested Council consider adding one to the Town Code, which would also require a qualified staff member (Code Enforcement Officer) to enforce the new code.

Ms. Williams informed Town Council that both Campbell County and the Town of Altavista had programs where tax breaks were offered to a homeowner that rehabilitate/renovate their home and/or property.

Ms. Williams referenced the Virginia State Code and informed Town Council, if Altavista decided to adopt the state's Property Maintenance Code, the State Building Code Official had informed the Planning Commission that the town was not required to adopt the entire code, but only the portion that related to the town's ongoing efforts in deterring and managing blight within the town. She stated she believed it would be beneficial for Town Council to also hear from the State Building Code Official on the matter.

Ms. Williams stated there was an ordinance currently in Altavista's Town Code pertaining to "derelict structures", which would be considered either a nuisance or health hazard.

Ms. Williams informed Council, through the rehabilitation grant program the town was currently going through, the town had the opportunity to "stack" grants with one another, such as federal funds/grants towards removal of lead paint and Healthy Home Initiatives to assist with costs associated with ADA or "trip and fall" issues. She stated there was also a loan program that addressed home efficiency issues, such as coving the cost of replacing old windows with more energy efficient ones.

Ms. Williams confirmed, if the town moved forward with adopting a Property Maintenance Code, a Code Official would need to be designated within Town Staff, and that individual would need DHCD training to be certified to do so. She stated it had been the belief of Town Attorney John Eller that the town should adopt at least a portion of the state's Property Maintenance Code to protect the town from any possible litigation.

Councilman George referenced the fore-mentioned issue of derelict structures and asked, since the town did not have a Property Maintenance Code, how the matter was currently being addressed.

Ms. Williams reminded Council of the \$5,000 allocated annually for derelict structure removal. She stated the funds were available for citizens to apply for as a loan towards the cost of removing such a structure from their property, and then repaid to the town.

Ms. Williams stated the town also had a Nuisance Ordinance in place that started with a certified letter being sent to the property owner; if not complied with, would result in the town having a contractor tear down or clean up the property as needed and the bill being sent to the property owner for reimbursement. She stated, if not paid within the allotted timeframe, the town would place a lien on the property until the bill was satisfied.

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Ms. Williams said the method was effective, however, the town had been having issues recently with finding contractors to commit to doing the work. She informed Town Council that the town issued RFPs but had no response.

Vice Mayor Bennett suggested contacting the Town of Hurt, as they had recently sought out contractors for the same type of work, and he believed they found someone.

Ms. Williams stated she would inquire with the Town of Hurt for that information. She stated the Town of Altavista issued its RFPs on the Virginia Procurement site to ensure who the town hired would have the necessary insurance to protect the locality.

Councilman Higginbotham asked if town employees were able to do such work.

Ms. Williams stated the town does have capable employees but not the capacity to do such excessive work during regular hours.

Councilman Emerson suggested the town consider offering its Public Services employees overtime pay to accomplish the task when needed. He stated this solution may be less costly than hiring an outside contractor.

Mayor Mattox stated he believed this subject entailed a lot of questions and was worthy of further review. He suggested the item be placed on a future work session for further discussion and consideration of each suggestion by Council.

There was a consensus of Town Council to do so.

Councilman Mitchell referenced the fore-mentioned USDA Loan Program and the repaid funds belonging to the town for future program use of their choosing. He suggested the money be allocated to the AEDA for use towards a program to help deter the blight issue.

There was a consensus of Town Council to place the suggested item on a future work session for further consideration.

Mayor Mattox referenced the forementioned ARS Program and suggested staff contact the Claire Parker Foundation for insight/information on their recent renovation projects that may help the town with its ARS Program. He also suggested investigating the possibility of collaborating with the foundation on new renovation projects.

Ms. Williams stated that she would contact the Claire Parker Foundation as suggested.

- Councilman Emerson referenced the Altavista Elementary School located on Lynch Mill Road, and the daily traffic issue during the morning and afternoon when children were dropped off and picked up from school.

Mr. Emerson stated the traffic issue had been ongoing since the first day the school was opened and would continue to be so until the issue was fixed. He suggested the Town of Altavista collaborate with VDOT and Campbell County to address the issue.

There was a consensus of Town Council to do so.

Ms. Williams reminded Council that in 2018 submitted an application to VDOT regarding this matter but was unsuccessful. She stated, after discussing the matter with the Interim Town Manager, Clarence Monday, staff would be resubmitting the VDOT application as part of a town Smart Scale project and she would keep Council updated to its progress.

Town Council thanked Ms. Williams for her work and due diligence on this item.

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- Councilman Emerson also referenced the decorative streetlights on Bedford Avenue and asked the town to consider adding the same lights in dark along from Sunset to Hillcrest.

Vice Mayor Bennett stated he believed the project was already in the draft FY2023 CIP for consideration.

- Councilman Emerson asked when the wayfinding signs for the English Park trail system would be installed.

Publish Services Director Tom Fore informed Town Council that staff was in the process of taking an audit of the existing signs and the project would be completed by mid-summer

- Vice Mayor Bennett referenced the town's 2021 Employee Christmas Dinner and stated he was told that the dinner was very appreciated, and he believed it gave great company morale. He suggested the town also consider hosting an annual Employee Appreciation Lunch in the summer for them and their families.

Mr. Bennett stated there were wonderful organizations in town that he believed would cater the event, such as the Altavista Moose Lodge. He requested the item be placed on a future work session for further discussion and consideration.

There was a consensus of Town Council to do so.

- Mayor Mattox thanked APD Chief Tommy Merricks for his recent help with directing traffic at the Altavista Combined School. He stated he believed it was also the responsibility of the Campbell County Sherriff's Office to help cover the task when needed.

Chief Merricks informed Council that the regular crossing guard was in the hospital so Campbell County Resource Officer Gary Penn was covering the morning shift and he was helping to cover the afternoon shift to keep his officers available for regular police work.

- Mayor Mattox referenced the Altavista-based industry Moore's Electric and their ownership team, Dale and Andy Moore. He thanked Moore's Electric for their recent \$20,000 contribution to their hometown of Altavista, to be used for the YMCA Stream Bank Restoration Project currently in progress.
- Councilman Higginbotham referenced the Booker Building in English Park and asked staff to investigate the cost for "squaring up" the exterior stage in the rear of the facility.

Public Services Director Tom Fore stated he would investigate the most viable option for accomplishing the request.

Councilman Mitchell stated the exterior stage was currently offset to face the largest amount of people during events and suggested not altering the stage.

Mr. Fore asked that Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Higginbotham join him at the Booker Building to review the exterior stage and offer their input for the best option to move forward.

- Councilman George referenced Dalton's Landing Boat Ramp/Canoe Launch. He informed Council of an email he recently received from Larry Dalton, site maintenance manager, that suggested a few items that needed to be addressed, such as gravel for mud holes and a few additional post needed.

There was a consensus of Town Council for the town's Public Works Department to collaborate with Mr. Dalton and address the maintenance items needed at Dalton's Landing

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12. 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 and/or consideration 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.

A motion was made by Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett, seconded by Councilman Tim George.

Motion carried.

VOTE:

<i>Mr. Wayne Mitchell</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Mr. Tracy Emerson</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Mr. Timothy George</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Mayor Mike Mattox</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Dr. Scott Lowman</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Mr. Jay Higginbotham</i>	<i>Yes</i>		

Town Council went into Closed Session at 7:07 p.m.

Notice was given that Council was back in regular session at 7:38 p.m.

FOLLOWING CLOSED SESSION: A motion was made by Vice Mayor 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

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:

<i>Mr. Wayne Mitchell</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Mr. Jay Higginbotham</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Mr. Tracy Emerson</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Mr. Timothy George</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Mayor Mike Mattox</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Dr. Scott Lowman</i>	<i>Yes</i>
		<i>Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett</i>	<i>Yes</i>

13. Adjournment

Mayor Mattox asked if there was anything else to bring before Town Council or any additional comments or concerns from Council, to which there were none.

Mayor Mattox adjourned the meeting at 7:40 p.m.

Michael Mattox, Mayor

Gary Shanaberger, Town Clerk,
Town Manager