

Altavista Town Council Regular Meeting – October 10, 2023

The Altavista Town Council held their October 2023 Regular Meeting in Council Chambers of the Town Hall/J.R. Burgess Municipal Building, 510 Seventh Street, on Tuesday, October 10th, at 6pm.

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

Council Members

Present: Vice Mayor Reginald Bennett
Mr. Tracy Emerson
Mr. Timothy George
Mr. Jay Higginbotham
Mayor Michael Mattox
Dr. Scott Lowman

Absent Member(s): Mr. Wayne Mitchell

Town Staff present:

Mr. Gary Shanaberger, Town Manager
Mr. Matt Perkins, Asst. Town Manager
Chief Tommy Merricks, Altavista Police Dept.
Mrs. Tobie Shelton, Treasurer/Finance Director
Mr. Tom Fore, Public Services Director
Mr. Paul Hill, Asst. Public Services Director
Mr. Jeff Arthur, Public Works Manager
Mr. John Eller, Town Attorney
Mrs. Crystal Hailey, Assistant Town Clerk

Mr. Tom Fore delivered the Invocation.

After the Invocation, Mayor Mattox led the meeting in the Pledge of Allegiance to the US Flag.

2. Agenda Adoption

Mayor Mattox informed Town Council of an amendment to the agenda.

- Added a Closed Section – Section #12

Mayor Mattox asked if Council had any questions regarding the agenda, of which there were none.

Councilman Tracy Emerson motioned to approve the October 10, 2023, Meeting Agenda as amended; seconded by Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett, the motion carried, with a 6-0 vote for approval.

3. Recognitions and Presentations

Town of Altavista Personnel Changes – September 2023:

- Milestone
Tommy Merricks, Altavista Police Chief, five (5) years of service to the Town of Altavista
Jimmy “Brad” Brown, Wastewater Plant, twenty-five (25) years of service to Altavista
- New Hires
Autumn Evans, Business and Community Engagement Coordinator
Coleman Farmer, Police Department Recruit
- Departure
Tristan Baldwin, Public Works
Joshua Whorley, Utilities Department

4. Citizen’s Time

Ann Mabry, 320 Myrtle Lane, shared some suggestions to update Bedford Avenue Park:
(1) add “regular” parking spaces, (2) add a picnic table, and (3) add park benches

5. Town & Community Partner Updates

There were no partner updates on this date.

6. Consent Agenda

- Town Park Amenity Donation Approval
- TOA Monthly Financial Reports - September 2023
- BIL Initial Offer – Lead Service Line Inventory
- Avoca – Repair and Maintenance Items under \$5,000, Approved by Staff
- Meeting Minutes – Town Council’s September regular meeting

Vice Mayor Bennett made a motion, seconded by Councilman Tracy Emerson, to approve the October 10th Consent Agenda as presented; the motion carried, with a 6-0 vote in favor of approval.

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7. Public Hearing

No public hearings were conducted on this date.

8. New Business

▪ FY2025 Budget/CIP Calendar

Altavista's Director of Finance and Administration, Tobie Shelton, presented this item and reminded everyone that annually, Town Council approves a budget calendar that includes deadlines for department heads to submit information to the Finance Director, dates for advertising and conducting public hearings, and a timeline to review and adopt the next fiscal year's budget and capital improvement plan (CIP).

Mrs. Shelton shared the proposed budget calendar for FY2025 with Council and informed them of a few modifications to the schedule. She stated Staff would begin work on revenue forecasts and department operations requests in November, much earlier in the budget process, with CIP discussions in December. As in the past, Staff provided the option for a Continued Budget Work Session on the Wednesday following work sessions in February and March; only to be utilized if Council believed they were necessary to complete the budget process.

- November 1: Begin revenue forecasts, instruct department managers to assess where we are in the current year, begin planning/researching FY 2025 operation requests; distribute budget papers to department managers
- December 1: Department's operation requests due; Continue revenue forecasts
- December 4: Begin CIP Process - DH make changes and additions; Send email to Council requesting wants/needs to meet goals
- January 2: Written requests from outside agencies and nonprofits due
- January 5: Department's and Council's CIP requests due
- January 9: 6:00 p.m. Council receives draft operations document w revenue
- January 23: 5:00 p.m. Outside agencies/non-profits requesting funding should attend Council Work Session
- February 13: 6:00 p.m. Budget discussions on CIP, COLA, and utility rates
- February 27: 5:00 p.m. Council budget discussion
- February 28: 5:00 p.m. Continuation of Work Session (if needed to discuss budget)
- March 26: 5:00 p.m. Council budget discussion
- March 27: 5:00 p.m. Continuation of Work Session (if needed to discuss budget)
- April 9: 6:00 p.m. First reading of Budget/Designate Public Hearing for May 14th
- April 17: First Public Hearing Advertisement
- April 24: Second Public Hearing Advertisement
- May 14: 6:00 p.m. Public Hearing on the FY2025 Budget
- June 11: 6:00 p.m. Council Meeting to approve FY2025 Budget

After review of the draft document, Councilman Emerson motioned, seconded by Councilman George, and Town Council approved the proposed FY2025 Budget/CIP Calendar as presented.

▪ Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP)

Assistant Town Manager Matt Perkins informed Town Council that the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) recently opened the window to submit applications for their mid-cycle grant programs, however, applications were due Tuesday, October 24, 2023.

Mr. Perkins stated, though there were four available categories, Staff believed, after discussion with DRPT Program Management Staff, that there were two viable projects that could be pursued by Altavista.

- DRPT's TRIP Zero and Reduced Fare Program: this is funding for transit agencies for the purpose of supporting the deployment of zero fare and/or reduced fare pilot programs, designed to support low-income communities.
- DRPT's TRIP Passenger Amenities and Facilities Program: funding to support projects, with the goal of improving passenger related infrastructure.

Mr. Perkins stated, under the second program, that Staff had identified one of ACTS' stops to be upgraded to a sheltered bus stop. He said both programs aimed to increase a system's ridership and accessibility; and that both grant programs had non-state match requirements.

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Mr. Perkins stated, since the funds were intended to support ACTS, Staff intended to leverage proceeds from the sale of the Town's 2015 BOC transit vehicle, and a FY2024 monetary gift from a local benefactor, to use as the required non-state fund match for the aforementioned grant. He stated Staff was also considering utilizing funds that may be available from the sale of the Town's 2018 BOC transit vehicle.

Mr. Perkins informed Council that the Zero and Reduced Fare Program was a four year program model that, between the program grant and the Town's fund match, transit fares would be at a reduced rate or free. He said the DRPT intended for the Town to be pursuing additional grants in the first three year timeframe, so that at the end of the fourth year, the fares of the ACTS program would continue being free, and self-sustaining to continue indefinitely.

Mr. Perkins said Staff was seeking Town Council's approval to pursue the grant opportunities for both the Zero and Reduced Fare Program and Passenger Amenities and Facilities Program

Councilman Higginbotham asked how much money the Town had to put towards the programs.

Mr. Perkins stated, from the \$25,000 sale of the 2015 BOC transit vehicle, the Town returned \$16,000 to the FTA, and retained \$9,000 for the ACTS program. He reminded Council of the \$7,500 anonymous donation to be used towards "free ridership", and stated the two amounts equaling \$16,500, if Council approved, would be used as the fund match for the grant program.

Mr. Higginbotham suggested using the aforementioned \$9,000 towards a new transit vehicle.

With no further discussion, Councilman Tracy Emerson motioned, seconded by Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett, and Town Council approved, 5-1, with opposition from Councilman Higginbotham, to authorize Staff to pursue DRPT grant opportunities, for both the Zero and Reduced Fare and Passenger Amenities, and Facilities Programs..

9. Unfinished Business

▪ Vista / Leggett Feasibility Study

Town Council received an update from Mike Griffin, Vice President of CJMW Architecture, Lynchburg, and Crystal Morphis, Creative Economic Development Consultants, on the progress of the feasibility study.

Mr. Griffin stated that he was awaiting a conceptual cost estimate from a local contractor, a finalized parking analysis from another consultant, and his team was currently preparing an operational proforma for each proposed scheme for the theatre and Leggett buildings.

Ms. Morphis shared current and projected market data pertaining to the proposed designs for this project, such as the Campbell county's taxable sales over the past four years, current consumer spending, and projected spending growth for Altavista's immediate surrounding area. She said the team looked at market data from a couple of locations in similar size to Altavista, that also had theatres, and/or music venues.

Ms. Morphis said stated that she acquired perspectives from local business owners, and some were neutral with their thoughts on this project. She said some were considered "lifestyle" business owners, that did not have consistent hours of operation, which could make it difficult for the downtown district to sustain a strong entrepreneurial infrastructure; or to support Altavista as a "destination" place, if they were unwilling to extend their hours during timeframes that people would be going to movies or events in the evening.

Ms. Morphis shared recommendations for the Town to consider as part of the Vista/Leggett renovation. She said investing in downtown streetscapes, wayfinding signs, and public art would be visually appealing and welcoming to visitors, as a "destination".

Ms. Morphis said that marketing the entire Downtown District, not only the Theatre, was very important. She suggested having special tours, "pop-up events", and food truck rallies to encourage foot traffic in the downtown area.

At this time, Mr. Griffin shared with Council three different renderings of possible options for the Vista Theatre and old Leggett building; one with each having separate uses, and two with the Leggett building "supporting" the theatre, with restaurants and/or retail shops.

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Councilman Higginbotham asked if the theatre floor should remain at an incline, or would it be changed to a flat floor in the seating area of the event space.

Mr. Griffin stated that it would depend on the design the Town chose. He said a flat floor offered more versatility, and an incline was most suitable for movie and music venues, as shown in one of the proposed designs, the “Altavista Performing Arts Center”. He said that design was the least feasible, due to the revenue depending solely on the main event venue.

Councilman Lowman stated there were multiple grant opportunities available, such as Tobacco Commission grant funding, that would help lower the cost of this renovation, depending on the elements installed in the two facilities.

Mr. Griffin stated that having multiple revenue sources between the theatre and Leggett building would help the Town secure a sustainable venue on a long-term basis.

Vice Mayor Bennett referenced the vacant restaurant across from the theatre, that was recently purchased by an existing business owner with the intent to reopen the restaurant. He said one of the design choices included having restaurants in the Leggett building, but he suggested not having too much competition in one area.

Ms. Morphis stated that “clustering” was important to economic development, and that people tended to like having food and shopping choices.

Project Consultant Robert Lee stated that the aforementioned business owner stated during recent visioning/interview sessions, that they would welcome additional businesses to the area.

Councilman Emerson referenced The Reeves in North Carolina, a venue similar in size to the Vista Theatre, and asked what their event schedule consisted of.

Ms. Morphis stated that The Reeves typically held events each week, Wednesday through Saturday, consisting of open-mic night, local music classes, and live music events. She informed Council that the current owners were five years into their venture and were just recently starting to break even with revenue over expenses.

Councilman Emerson shared his favor in the theatre being a multi-event space, and having a bar/restaurant on the first floor and loft apartments on the second floor of the old Leggett building, in order to have a steady revenue stream to offset expenses.

Mr. Emerson said that he believed having the event center’s entrance on the Leggett side of the two buildings, with a transition into the event space and an exit on the Vista side of the event center was the most viable option.

Councilman Lowman and Councilman Higginbotham both concurred.

Councilman Higginbotham referenced The Academy in Lynchburg, and stated the concept was similar to that event center.

Town Manager Gary Shanaberger informed Town Council they had been invited to tour The Academy on Thursday, October 19th. He asked that any member attending should be at the Town Hall at 12:00 noon, to travel to Lynchburg for the tour.

With no further discussion pertaining to this matter, Mayor Mattox thanked Mr. Griffin and Ms. Morphis for their work and presentations.

- Bedford Avenue Park – continued Amenities Discussion

Assistant Town Manager Matt Perkins and Public Services Director Tom Fore both spoke to Town Council on this item/matter. Mr. Perkins referenced the large rocks recently placed at Bedford Avenue Park to deter vehicles from parking on the grass. He stated, and Mr. Fore confirmed, that as previously directed by Town Council, all of the rocks had been removed.

Mr. Perkins stated, with Council taking additional time to evaluate the current parking configuration at Bedford Avenue Park, as well as considering challenges presented by citizens that lived in that immediate area, he said that Staff was seeking Council’s direction on any other items they wished to discuss regarding the Bedford Avenue Park.

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Councilman Emerson stated that he did not believe any of Altavista's parks were isolated to be used by one neighborhood, but were there to be enjoyed by everyone. He shared his favor with adding additional parking spaces to Bedford Avenue Park, and any other park that needed them.

Vice Mayor Bennett shared his favor with having additional parking spaces at Bedford Avenue Park. He also suggested placing a picnic table at this park, potentially beside the handicap parking space; and adding a park bench to both the tennis court and pickleball court.

Mayor Mattox stated that the Town had only heard from a couple of citizens that reside in the Bedford Park neighborhood and he suggested the Town poll more citizens in the adjacent neighborhood for their input on this matter.

Councilman Higginbotham concurred with his fellow Council members that additional parking was needed at Bedford Avenue Park. Mr. Higginbotham recommended that Council allow Staff to evaluate the parking area and give their input on the appropriate amount of parking spaces that could be added safely, whether it be one, two, or three additional spaces.

Councilman George said he was in favor of adding additional parking spaces to Bedford Avenue Park; along with adding a picnic table and one or two park benches to the park.

Assistant Public Services Director Paul Hill reminded Council there were picnic tables at this park previously, but there were constantly vandalized and broken, so they were not replaced.

Councilman Lowman stated that parking on Bedford Avenue could be dangerous at times due to large "chip" trucks and speeding vehicles, and he shared his favor with adding additional parking on the back side of the park, next to the existing handicap space. Mr. Lowman also stated, if citizens were being polled for this matter, he suggested polling all Altavista citizens, not just citizens from the Bedford Avenue area.

Mr. Perkins asked for clarity whether Council wanted Staff to poll the Bedford Avenue neighborhoods for their input on this matter.

Town Council was in consensus not to poll any citizens regarding this matter.

Public Services Director Tom Fore asked Council to allow Staff to evaluate the current parking situation and area in question at Bedford Avenue Park, and make a recommendation for how many additional spaces would be viable.

Mr. Perkins assured Town Council that Staff would stay within Altavista's standards as stated in the Town Code, when designing a parking plan for Bedford Avenue Park. He stated that Staff would work together to bring Council back a plan for their consideration and the cost for each additional amenity.

After consideration of all suggestions pertaining to Bedford Avenue Park, Councilman Tim George made a motion, seconded by Vice Mayor Bennett, to authorize Staff to draft a plan to include the following items: additional (regular) parking spaces, a picnic table, "No Parking on Grass" signs, and a park bench, potentially for the tennis court; the motion included allowing Staff to determine the most viable placement option for each amenity, and how many parking spaces would be viable for the amount of room the parking area had. The motion carried, with a 6-0 vote in favor of the approving the motion.

- **Park Amenity – Consideration for Placement of Donated Concrete Cornhole Boards**

Assistant Town Manager Matt Perkins and Assistant Public Services Director Paul Hill presented this item to Council.

Mr. Perkins referenced the October 10th Consent Agenda approved earlier in the evening, that included an approval for the Town to accept a newly gifted park amenity - one set (two boards) of concrete cornhole boards. He said Staff was seeking Council's input and direction of where to place the cornhole boards.

Councilman Higginbotham stated, since the concrete boards were so heavy and not easy to move around, he suggested allowing Staff to determine the best place for the boards.

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Mr. Hill informed Council that, wherever the boards were placed, needed to be level, or made to be level, for the boards to be laid and played correctly.

Vice Mayor Bennett suggested the boards be placed in an area that was suitable to hold additional cornhole boards if there was a need for more in the future.

There was a consensus of Town Council for Staff to determine the most suitable area to place the Town's newly acquired concrete cornhole boards.

10. Town Staff Departmental Reports and Project Updates – September 2023

- TOA Finance Reports
- Utilities – Project Updates
- Public Services Monthly Report
- Community Development Report
- Altavista Police Department Reports
- Town Council Monthly Meeting Calendars

These items are always included and delivered in Town Council's monthly agenda pre-packet.

- Assistant Town Manager Matt Perkins informed Council that the broadband Wi-Fi extended to English Park had been tested several different ways and confirmed it was working correctly.

Councilman Lowman asked where the service originated from.

Mr. Perkins stated that the new broadband internet service originates from the Spark Innovation Center, goes to the library tower, then to the Booker Building, with seven antennas directing inward to English Park.

- Councilman Higginbotham suggested the Town investigate the possibility, and compare the cost, of switching the security cameras at English Park from the Town's current supplier to the new broadband service.
- Mr. Perkins then referenced AOT's Rivertown Festival, held on the previous Saturday. He thanked the Altavista Public Works Department and the Altavista Police Department for their hard work.

Councilman Lowman, AOT President, also thanked the Altavista Police Department and Public Works Department for their work with the aforementioned event. He stated the event would not have been possible with the hard work and efforts of both Town Departments.

- Assistant Public Services Director Paul Hill informed everyone that the restoration work for the washout on Pittsylvania Avenue, next to the bridge, was complete.
- Mr. Hill also referenced the Cemetery Connector Trail, and informed Council that he continued to work with Crews Construction on the pipe and drainage matter, and stated he should have a more detailed update on the project at the November regular meeting or work session.
- Public Services Director Tom Fore informed Council that the two misters located in the overflow pond at the wastewater plant were both operational and working correctly.

11. Matters from Council

- Councilman Scott Lowman suggested that the Town consider looking into grants that could assist with expanding their broadband internet service further into the surrounding area of Altavista's Downtown District.
- Councilman Jay Higginbotham referenced the Town of Altavista conducting trash removal services for the Town of Hurt, and asked that the contract be reviewed for cost feasibility, and consider whether or not to renew the contract.

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- Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett asked that an item be placed on a future work session pertaining to large “chip” trucks traveling on Bedford Avenue, which he believed was not allowed.
- Mayor Mattox stated he had never heard a bad word spoken about APD Chief Tommy Merricks, and he thanked Chief Merricks for his exceptional service to the Town of Altavista, which was concurred by Town Council with a standing ovation.

12. Closed Session: (7:29-7:44pm)

Section 2.2-3711 (A) (6): discussion or consideration of the investment of public funds where competition or bargaining is involved, where, if made public initially, the financial interest and/or negotiations of the governmental unit would be adversely affected.

Per Town Manager Gary Shanaberger, there were no actions taken by Town Council from this Closed Session.

13. Adjournment

With no further items for discussion, Mayor Mattox adjourned this portion of the meeting at 7:45pm; and as previously mentioned, would be continued on Thursday, October 19th, at 12:00 noon, for a tour of The Academy of Arts Center, in Downtown Lynchburg; with “No” Town business to be discussed.

Notice was given to Staff by Town Manager Gary Shanaberger that no Town business was discussed on October 19th, and the continued meeting was adjourned after the tour at 3:15pm.

Michael Mattox, Mayor

Gary Shanaberger, Town Manager/Town Clerk