

Altavista Town Council Regular Meeting – September 12, 2023

The Altavista Town Council held their September 2023 Regular Meeting in Council Chambers of the Town Hall/J.R. Burgess Municipal Building, 510 Seventh Street, on Tuesday, September 12th, 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
- Mr. Wayne Mitchell
- Dr. Scott Lowman

Town Staff present:

- Mr. Gary Shanaberger, Town Manager
- Mrs. Tobie Shelton, Treasurer/Finance Director
- Chief Tommy Merricks, Altavista Police Dept.
- Mr. Tom Fore, Public Services Director
- Mr. Jeff Arthur, Public Works Manager
- Mrs. Crystal Hailey, Assistant Town Clerk

Pastor Sam Knaus, First Baptist Church, 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 to Section #8. New Business: Bedford Avenue Park – parking discussion
- Mayor Mattox asked if Council had any questions regarding the agenda, of which there were none.

Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett motioned to approve the September 12, 2023, Altavista Town Council Meeting Agenda as amended, and was seconded by Councilman Tracy Emerson. The motion carried, with a 7-0 vote in favor of approval.

3. Recognitions and Presentations

Town of Altavista Personnel Changes – August 2023:

- Milestone
Crystal Hailey, Assistant Town Clerk, Five (5) years of service to the Town of Altavista
- New Hires
None
- Departure
Jimmie Campbell, WTP/WWTP, Maintenance Specialist

4. Citizen's Time

There were no citizen comments at this time.

5. Town & Community Partner Updates

There were no partner updates on this date.

6. Consent Agenda

- TOA Monthly Financial Reports - August 2023
- Meeting Minutes – Town Council's August regular meeting and work session
- Altavista Police Department Surplus
- Annual Delinquent Tax Listing for Advertisement

Councilman Tim George made a motion, seconded by Councilman Tracy Emerson, to approve the September 12th Consent Agenda as presented. The motion carried, with a 7-0 vote in favor of approval.

7. Public Hearing

Rezoning Request for the 800 Block of Novelty Street and the corner of Amherst Avenue, Altavista

Assistant Town Manager Matt Perkins presented this item to Town Council. He informed Council that the Altavista Planning Commission held a public hearing on Tuesday, September 5th, regarding this matter and recommended the Town Council approve this rezoning request.

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Mr. Perkins introduced Dr. Thomas Brooks, Acres of Virginia, representing the submitting agent JCJ Holdings, LLC, to share with Council a brief summary of JCJ Holdings' request.

Mr. Brooks informed Town Council that JCJ Holdings intended to spend approximately \$1.5 million to reconstruct the aforementioned property, which included renovating the homes located on the property with new HVAC systems, new vinyl windows, new roof shingles, and new vinyl siding, all for energy efficiency; the houses would also receive upgraded plumbing and electrical, to bring them up-to-code with state regulations/requirements. He said that interior renovations would include new paint, flooring, interior doors, kitchen and bathroom countertops and fixtures.

Mr. Brooks informed Council that JCJ Holdings' plan had been reviewed by Altavista's Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager, and revisions were made of their recommendations. He stated that he believed the newly renovated houses would be an asset to the town's economy, because the tenants would be patrons of stores and restaurants in Altavista.

Mayor Mattox asked Town Council if they had any questions for Mr. Brooks, or concerns about the proposed rezoning request and/or renovation project.

Councilman Mitchell inquired whether JCJ Holdings had completed any other projects similar in size to the proposed project for the Novelty Street area of Altavista.

Mr. Brooks stated that JCJ Holdings owned and rented several single family homes in Altavista, but currently had no other large renovation projects planned for Altavista, except the Novelty Street Project. He said, however, they recently completed a renovation to property located on Langhorne Road in Lynchburg, similar in size to the project they were proposing for Altavista that evening; and also, a large-scale renovation project was also "in the works" in Danville, Virginia.

Councilman Emerson asked, if the rezoning request was approved, was there an estimated timeframe when the Novelty Street Project would start; as well as, a date of completion.

Mr. Brooks informed Town Council that JCJ Holdings had their own construction crew and management team for these projects, to ensure they were completed in a timely manner. He said it was hard to predict a start date until the design plan had been finalized, which would be reviewed again by the Town of Altavista for any final adjustments needed.

Assistant Town Manager Matt Perkins stated that the Campbell County Fire Marshall also needed to review and approve the proposed plan, before JCJ Holdings could move forward.

Mr. Brooks stated, with having adequate knowledge of the process himself, he assured Town Council that JCJ Holdings' plan was sufficient for the Fire Marshall and would go through as proposed.

Vice Mayor Bennett asked what the "standard" cost to rent one of the houses would be once they had been renovated.

Mr. Brooks said the houses would be nearly brand new homes, and would probably rent for \$1,000 per month, which was the average cost of other properties JCJ Holdings owned and rented in Altavista.

Councilman Higginbotham asked if JCJ Holdings had considered installing natural gas to heat the houses being renovated on Novelty Street.

Mr. Brooks shared that his experience with using natural gas had not been favorable, and that JCJ Holdings was most likely going to use electric HVAC systems in the aforementioned homes.

Mr. Higginbotham also asked why this matter had taken so long to come before Town Council.

Mr. Brooks stated that he did not want to dwell on why the process had been slow to get started, but rather to focus on Town Council's current review of the matter. He said that the Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager had been very nice to work with, and helpful in moving the process forward.

Neither Councilman George nor Councilman Lowman had any questions for Mr. Brooks, but both shared their support for the rezoning request and the proposed renovation plan for Novelty Street.

Mayor Mattox opened this public hearing at 6:25pm., and opened the floor for citizen comments.

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Citizen Harriett Hardy, 1617 Melinda Drive, Altavista, asked, if the rezoning request was approved, allowing the renovation project to move forward, were there any occupants currently in the said houses that would incur displacement; to which Mr. Brooks answered, there were not.

With no other citizen comments, Mayor Mattox closed the public hearing at 6:27pm.

Councilman Jay Higginbotham made a motion, seconded by Councilman Tracy Emerson, to accept the Planning Commission's recommendation to approve JCJ Holdings, LLC, request to rezone the 800 Block of Novelty Street and Amherst Avenue, from M-Industrial to R-2 Medium Density Residential. The motion carried with a unanimous vote in favor of approving the rezoning request as presented.

8. New Business

▪ Vista / Leggett Feasibility Study

Town Council received an update from Mike Griffin, Vice President of CJMW Architecture, Lynchburg, VA, regarding the progress of this study. He thanked the Town of Altavista for entrusting his firm with the task of producing a feasibility study for the Vista/Leggett Project.

Mr. Griffin stated, while it had been a busy day meeting with project stakeholders and gathering input from local business owners, the day was very productive, and filled with enthusiasm for this project. He said the initial walkthrough that morning of the downtown area provided his team with a broader scope of Altavista's history and its connection to the railroad, as well as the importance of having support from town partners in the Downtown District, such as the Staunton River Memorial Library.

Mr. Griffin stated that he was excited to hear about the successful projects that were completed in English Park, and he looked forward to seeing what future opportunities the Town would produce by utilizing the Staunton River.

Mr. Griffin informed Town Council that, during the afternoon "listening session" between his project team and about twelve (12) business and community leaders, he obtained a lot of positive feedback, not only about the Altavista, but also specific details pertaining to the Vista Theatre and Leggett business when they were operational, which was very helpful insight. He said that he heard a united voice about the importance of a strong community.

Mr. Griffin stated his team had begun reviewing the market research compiled a couple of years prior, pertaining to this project, and would compare the information to current data. He said that he would return with an additional update at Council's September 26th Work Session, and at the October 10th Council Meeting with a final draft of the feasibility study.

Town Manager Gary Shanaberger reminded Town Council that CJMW had a short timeframe to complete the feasibility study, and asked Council if they had any questions for Mr. Griffin, or any comments pertaining to the Vista/Leggett Project.

Councilman Higginbotham suggested the theatre's number of bathrooms be increased to more than the current number of two each, in order to accommodate a large number of visitors.

Mr. Griffin said, at the Lynchburg Academy of Arts, a recent CJMW restoration project, the number of bathrooms were increased, and actually exceeded the amount required by code, to accommodate that facility's large number of patrons. He said that his team would keep the same consideration in mind for this design.

Mr. Higginbotham also suggested, out of consideration for future performers of the facility, that the theatre stage, and rooms behind the stage, be spacious and designed "nicely".

Mr. Griffin thanked Councilman Higginbotham for his input, and stated that "back of the house" size and function were key components to a successful entertainment venue. He spoke of the alley behind the theatre and its current issues for bringing equipment in and out of the space, and stated that he and his team were working to find options for a solution.

Councilman Mitchell referenced Mr. Griffin's mention of the Lynchburg Academy of Arts, and asked if he had experience with smaller venues, similar in size to the Vista Theatre.

Mr. Griffin said his firm had forty plus (40+) years of historical renovation experience.

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Mr. Mitchell shared his excitement for the future outcome of the Vista and Leggett buildings after being renovated. He said that his hope was for the Vista facility to be utilized for not only movies, but also plays, music events, and dance recitals. Mr. Mitchell asked if parking was a concern for the theatre area, and was it being analyzed as part of the feasibility study.

Mr. Griffin answered yes, studying the amount of available parking was part of that process.

Mayor Mattox referenced the size of the original theatre, and asked how that space, and the Leggett building adjacent to it, could be best utilized by Altavista.

Mr. Griffin stated, while investigating the multitude of ways to use the two aforementioned spaces, whether as a combined performing arts venue, or in combination with other options, uses the two spaces together or separate, his team would narrow down those ways into a few of the most viable options for the Town of Altavista for Council's consideration. He stated that the scale of the renovation could be as small or as large as the Town wanted it to be.

Councilman George asked if CJMW had researched the original façade of the theatre.

Mr. Griffin informed Council that he recently acquired a photograph from a Campbell County publication showing the Vista Theatre, shortly after the venue opened in 1936. He said the marquise was very similar to the current one.

Councilman Lowman asked for clarity on CJMW's process for the feasibility study.

Mr. Griffin shared that his team received a sufficient amount of historical information and community input that day to use in their study. He said he would continue to communicate with Town Staff, give Council a progress report at the September 26th Work Session, and present a draft document for Council's review at their October 10th Regular Meeting.

Dr. Lowman referenced the original theatre seats that still remained inside the building, and asked if they would be used in the renovation.

Mr. Griffin answered "maybe". He said there was a possibility that the frames could be saved, and new seats added for use somewhere in the floor plan, but at that time, he was uncertain.

Councilman Emerson referenced the office spaces in the upstairs of the theatre and asked if there was a plan for those spaces.

Mr. Griffin stated that his team was currently focused on the main floor of the theatre, and the complexity of what to do with the Leggett building. He said the aforementioned office spaces would not remain in two out of the three options being looked at for the two facilities.

Mr. Emerson shared his favor with the theatre being a multi-use entertainment venue, for movies, plays, music, etc.; and stated that he looked forward to the project's completion.

Mr. Griffin stated that he and his team recognize the importance of the Vista Theatre to the history of Altavista, and they would strive to preserve that history in their design options.

Councilman Mitchell asked, due to its large size and chemical components, would the old movie projector be removed from the building, or was it being considered in CJMW's design for use as a visual reminder of the historic theatre.

Mr. Griffin stated that he was unsure of any issues with removing the projector, but would keep Mr. Mitchell's suggestion in mind to use as a historic item as a display in the theatre.

With no additional comments or questions from Town Council, Mayor Mattox thanked Mr. Griffin for the presentation and for his time spent in the downtown district of Altavista that day

- Bedford Avenue Park – parking discussion

Assistant Town Manager Matt Perkins stated, from previous direction of Town Council, Staff evaluated the current parking configuration at Bedford Avenue Park, as well as some challenges presented by citizens that lived in that immediate area.

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Mr. Perkins stated, after the evaluation, actions were taken to help ratify the issues discussed. He said, as a part of those actions, large rocks were laid to deter vehicles from parking in grassy areas and at times damaging shrubs on neighboring properties.

Mr. Perkins introduced Jane Greene, representing multiple citizen concerns for the said park.

Mrs. Greene, 1304 Bedford Avenue, spoke to Town Council in representation of Anne Mabry, 320 Myrtle Lane, Altavista, which lived adjacent to Bedford Avenue Park. She read aloud a letter from Ms. Mabry that indicated her concerns pertaining to the large rocks that were recently placed at the edge of the park off Woodland Avenue. Ms. Mabry stated that the rocks were placed too close to her driveway, making it difficult to back out. She said she believed the Town's garbage truck and snowplow would also be negatively affected by the rock placement, and suggested placing shrubbery, trees, or No Parking signs in the forbidden area.

Ms. Mabry also mentioned in her letter the Bedford Avenue Park's need for additional parking.

At the letter's conclusion, Ms. Mabry thanked Tom Fore, Public Services Director, and Reggie Bennett, Vice Mayor of Altavista, for listening to her convey what problems she believed the park had, and for ensuring her the items would be addressed alternate actions considered.

Mrs. Greene said she agreed with Ms. Mabry that additional parking was needed at this park, and it should be along Myrtle Lane or Woodland Avenue, because she believed parking on Bedford Avenue was dangerous.

Mayor Mattox informed Mrs. Greene that the rocks recently placed at Bedford Avenue Park were done so to deter people from parking in the grassy areas along the outskirts of the park.

Councilman Mitchell stated, with his residence being so close to the Bedford Avenue Park, he sees a lot of the activity in the park, and witnessed a recent incident where someone parked in the grass, and when leaving, backed over a shrub in a neighbor's yard adjacent to the park.

Mr. Mitchell said Bedford Avenue Park was considered a "neighborhood" park, and typically visited by citizens walking or biking in close proximity, so the concept was to only need ADA accessible parking. He referenced the two large community parks located in the Town of Altavista, English and Shreve Parks, and stated, if people needed to drive to a park, they should consider utilizing one of the larger community parks, which had multiple parking spaces.

Vice Mayor Bennett stated, while Bedford Avenue Park had the only outside pickleball court available in town, he rarely saw many people using the courts or the park.

Councilman George referenced the neighborhood park on 15th Street in Altavista, and stated the park had a large parking area available.

Councilman Mitchell reminded everyone the 15th Street Park did not have parking other than ADA accessible parking, and that the gravel area Mr. George was speaking of was not town-owned, but private property.

Mayor Mattox reminded everyone that Altavista's neighborhood parks were built for the citizens that lived in their immediate areas, as additional amenities to the community.

Councilman Emerson stated, if the large rocks were removed, there was the possibility of having the same issues of people parking in the grass and destruction of private property, as well as the previous issue of individuals parking there, not to patron the park, but to hang out and play loud music.

Councilman Lowman said that Bedford Avenue Park's renovation was done before he became a Council member, so he was unaware there was no other parking spaces beside the ADA ones. He stated that he believed all of Altavista's parks should be accessible to all town citizens, and that there should be more than ADA parking available at the neighborhood parks.

Director of Public Services Tom Fore asked for clarity on how Council wished to move forward

Councilman Higginbotham recommended that this item be placed on their September Work Session Agenda for further discussion. Town Council was in consensus to do so.

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9. Unfinished Business

▪ Town Code Amendment – Altavista Fire Company (AFC)

Town Manager Gary Shanaberger informed Town Council that this item was discussed previously in 2018, and Council was in consensus to allow the AFC to conduct fundraising efforts in Altavista. He shared with Council the amendment drafted by Town Attorney John Eller, which needed to be approved in order to convey the Town's approval.

Councilman Tracy Emerson made a motion, seconded by Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett, to approve the ordinance amendment presented by Staff, allowing the AFC the ability to fund raise in the Town of Altavista. The motion carried and Town Council voted 7-0 in favor of approving the amendment as presented.

▪ Ordinance – Granting a Franchise to Brightspeed of Virginia

Assistant Town Manager Matt Perkins reminded Council of their previous discussion in favor of granting Brightspeed a franchise right in the Town of Altavista. Mr. Perkins shared with Council the draft ordinance that would convey this right.

When asked by Councilman Mitchell to clarify what the franchise agreement awarded Brightspeed, Mr. Perkins stated that having this agreement would allow Brightspeed to utilize town-owned right-of-ways in order to install and maintain their fiber infrastructure.

With a motion made by Councilman Wayne Mitchell, seconded by Councilman Tracy Emerson, Town Council voted 7-0 to approve the ordinance as presented by Staff.

▪ Water Treatment Plant (WTP): 1st-Floor Painting

Director of Public Services Tom Fore reminded Council that this project was a previously approved CIP item for the WTP, and shared Staff's recommendation for this project, KT Painting, which was the lowest of the two bids received, at \$27,000.

Mr. Fore stated there was \$25,000 allocated in the budget for this project; and he could utilize unexpended funds from the Repair & Maintenance Fund to cover the \$2,000 cost difference.

Councilman Higginbotham asked Mr. Fore if he had investigated KT Painting's credentials.

Mr. Fore stated that KT Painting submitted the required proof-of-insurance, and he was confident they could complete the work as specified and agreed upon in the contract.

Councilman Mitchell asked what type of paint would be used for this project.

Mr. Fore stated that epoxy paint would be used, which should last approximately 30 years.

Councilman Higginbotham made a motion seconded by Councilman Wayne Mitchell, to accept Staff's recommendation to award KT Painting the painting contract for this project. The motion carried and Town Council voted 7-0 in favor of approval.

10. 2023 Departmental Reports, Project Updates, and Communications

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

Departmental Reports and Town Council's Meeting Calendars were delivered to Council with their September 12th Meeting Agenda Pre-Packet.

Mayor Mattox asked the Town Manager and Department Directors if they had any project updates, comments pertaining to monthly reports, or any other matter to discuss with Council.

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Assistant Town Manager Matt Perkins shared updates on two grants recently awarded to the Town.

- Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)
A \$57,000 Grant that the Town, through the Spark Innovation Center, would use to support “small business and entrepreneurship” growth and start up.
- Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM)
A \$302,000 *Planning* Grant for Streamline Stabilization; the Town could use towards its English Park Riverbank Restoration Project.

Mr. Perkins stated, after the engineering study and planning/design process, the Town would be eligible to apply for additional grant funds for remediation purposes.

11. Matters from Council

- Councilman Wayne Mitchell asked that an item be placed on the next meeting agenda to discuss a plan to “clean” the front area of the Vista Theatre. He reminded Council there were funds allocated for the Vista Project that could be utilized to cover the cost of this issue.
- Councilman Tracy Emerson asked if the Town had found a new Director for the Spark Innovation Center.

Assistant Town Manager Matt Perkins informed Council that Autumn Evans, a previous tenant of the center, had been hired as the Spark Center’s new Business and Community Engagement Coordinator, and that she would be present at Town Council’s Work Session for introductions.

12. Closed Session

There was no closed session conducted on this date.

13. Adjournment

With no further business to discuss, Mayor Mattox adjourned the meeting at 7:22pm.

Michael Mattox, Mayor

Gary Shanaberger, Town Clerk/Town Manager