

Altavista Town Council Work Session, Tuesday, March 28, 2023

The March 2023 Work Session for Altavista’s Town Council was held in Council Chambers of the J.R. Burgess Municipal Building, 510 7th Street, on Tuesday, March 28th, 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 – entered at 5:20
Dr. Scott Lowman
Mayor Michael Mattox
Mr. Wayne Mitchell

Also Present:

Mr. Gary Shanaberger, Town Manager
Mr. Matthew Perkins, Asst. Town Manager
Mrs. Tobie Shelton, Director of Finance and Administration
Mr. Tommy Merricks, APD Chief of Police
Ms. Sharon D. Williams, Community Development Director
Mr. Tom Fore, Director of Public Services
Mr. Paul Hill, Asst. Public Services Director
Mr. Jeff Arthur, Public Works Manager
Mr. John Eller, Town Attorney
Mrs. Crystal Hailey, Assistant Town Clerk

1. Agenda Adoption

Per Mayor Mattox, item #6.1, Community Skate Park Presentation, was moved up on the agenda to Citizen’s Time, so that the individual(s) would not have to stay for the entire length of the meeting.

Mayor Mattox asked Town Council if they had any questions, comments, or concerns in regard to the March 2023 Work Session Agenda, of which there were none.

Councilman Tracy Emerson made a motion, seconded by Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett, to approve the agenda as amended. The motion carried.

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

2. Recognitions and Presentations

- 2022 Excellence Award in Waterworks Operations and Performance
STAFF: Tom Fore, Director of Public Services

Mr. Fore informed Town Council that, for the sixth consecutive year, the Altavista Water Treatment Plant (WTP) received a “Gold Standard” Performance Award, from the Virginia Department of Health.

Mr. Fore referenced the Consumer Confidence Report (CCR) that the WTP was required to report annually to show the town’s water quality. He stated the WTP continuously tests for contaminants and the 2022 CCR showed Altavista was in compliance with all state and federal regulations.

Mr. Fore shared his appreciation for Altavista’s WTP Operators and the work they do on a daily basis. He recognized Polly Brown, Shane Petrie, Nathan Farmer, Jim Powell, and Samuel Mattox.

Mr. Fore also informed Council that, in an effort to decrease spending costs, which had previously been up to \$4,000 to advertise the CCR, Staff utilized the town’s own marketing resources and shared the report on the Town of Altavista website and social media page. He referenced the direct link to the report: www.altavistava.gov/CCR22.pdf

3. Citizen’s Time

Mayor Mattox asked if there were any citizens present that would like to come before Town Council regarding a non-agenda item; of which there were none.

4. Unfinished Items (referred from a previous meeting)

There were no items for discussion in this section of the agenda

Altavista Town Council Work Session, Tuesday, March 28, 2023

5. New Items for Discussion

5.1 Policy for Town Businesses Required to Have Metered Fire Protection Systems

Public Service Director Tom Fore stated that it was the Town's current policy to monitor fire lines, with no charge to businesses for fire protection availability, however, while recently investigating a leak on a fire suppression system, it was found that there was usage on fire lines that should not have usage, and Staff determined that some businesses may have tapped into the fire lines within their facilities. He said, unless the fire suppression system was being tested, or there was usage because of a fire, Staff recommended that those businesses be charged for their water usage.

Mr. Fore stated that Staff was seeking Town Council's approval of the proposed Water-usage Policy for town businesses that require fire protection systems. He asked, if Council favored the policy, that the item be placed on the April 11th Consent Agenda, so the policy could go into effect on May 1st, 2023.

Town Council accepted Staff's recommendation and authorized placing this item on the Consent Agenda of Council's April 11th meeting for official approval; and the policy be effective as of May 1st, 2023.

5.2 Discussion Regarding Semi-annual Tax Collection

Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett facilitated this discussion and shared information for Council's consideration

Mr. Bennett referenced Campbell County's recent decision to start bi-annual tax billing, which allowed citizens to pay their tax bills in two installments, June and December, or to pay the entire amount in June and not have a December tax bill.

Mr. Bennett stated bi-annual billing did not affect a citizen's tax amount if paid on time, however, it would provide a locality with a one-time lump sum of revenue from the first tax installment (June) in the first year of the program, that would not otherwise be available. He shared his favor with doing so.

Councilman George asked Staff for their input on this matter.

Finance Director Tobie Shelton stated that bi-annual tax billing was "doable", however, if Council chose to do so, Staff would ask for ample time to investigate the process, what upgrades would be needed to the town's existing billing system and/or software program, and costs involved with the change, if any.

Councilman Mitchell shared his favor with bi-annual tax billing, stating he liked that it would offer citizens more options for how they pay their taxes.

Mayor Mattox shared his concerns with implementing bi-annual tax billing, stating that it would cause Town Staff to have double work to process taxes twice each year. He said that he would like more information regarding the costs to implement bi-annual tax billing before asking Town Council to make a decision on the matter.

Town Council was in consensus to postpone making a decision on this matter at this time; but to discuss the item further, with more information, at a future Council meeting or work session.

5.3 Discussion on the FY2024 Draft Budget and FY2024-2028 Draft CIP

Presented by: Town Manager Gary Shanaberger and Finance Director Tobie Shelton

Mrs. Shelton presented Town Council with the FY2024 Draft Budget, which showed a combined surplus of approximately \$1.5 million for the General Fund and Enterprise Fund. She informed Council that the draft budget, at that point, did not include CIP items, Employee COLA, or annual Agency requests, but did include the 10% water and 5% sewer increases as previously approved.

Mrs. Shelton stated that Staff was seeking Council's direction for how the Town would pay for its Draft CIP and other items not yet included in the budget. She said, while they did not have to make decisions that evening, Council would need to have the budget finalized by the April Work Session, in order to advertise the draft budget for public hearings in May.

At this time, the Town Manager shared a few options for Council's consideration when determining how to balance the FY2024 Budget.

Mr. Shanaberger referenced the proposed Economic Development budget, previously funded annually with \$100,000. He said this fund was used for business initiatives and the Downtown District Grant Program, and had not been fully depleted over the past few years, therefore staff recommended the budget be decreased to \$40,000.

Altavista Town Council Work Session, Tuesday, March 28, 2023

Councilman Mitchell shared his favor with the recommendation, but suggested Staff discuss the matter and reasoning for the decrease with AEDA Chairman, Bill Gillespie.

There was a consensus of Town Council in favor of decreasing the FY2024 EDA Budget to \$40,000, and for Staff to discuss the decision with Mr. Gillespie.

Mr. Shanaberger continued by referencing page 1. of the FY2024 Draft Budget, with its estimated surplus of \$432,970, and options for COLA, ranging from 3% to 7% for Council's consideration. He informed Council, in order to help balance the budget, Staff decreased CIP projects from \$1.5 million to \$300,780.

Mr. Shanaberger informed Council, while there was \$110,000 in the draft budget allocated to the Police Department (APD), that amount may be covered by a grant that Chief Merricks had applied for, but at that time, the award was unknown, so the budget still showed the amount.

Mr. Shanaberger then referenced Public Works' proposed CIP items, stating the Town's bi-annual paving project was reduced from \$820,000 to \$800,000, deleting paving an alleyway. He also informed Council that the Streambank Restoration Project was minimized to the amount of \$25,000 instead of \$50,000.

Mr. Shanaberger stated, while the Bedford Avenue Decorative Streetlight Project was reduced from \$393,300 to \$50,000 in the FY2024 Draft Budget, Staff intended to investigate if VDOT had a grant that could assist with the project. He also informed Council that replacing the Leaf Vac would be divided into two year increments of \$22,500 each, instead of spending the full amount in FY2024.

Mr. Shanaberger referenced the Parks & Recreation FY2024 Draft CIP, \$180,150, and stated the items had been removed, and would be reconsidered in a future fiscal year. He also informed Council that the \$10,000 originally allocated in the draft document for the Spark Innovation Center Expansion Project (renovating the second floor with additional office spaces) had been removed.

Councilman Mitchell suggested reallocating \$10,000 of the Economic Development budget to this project

Assistant Town Manager Matt Perkins stated that the initial \$10,000 investment was to start the "planning" process of the second floor renovation.

Town Council was in consensus to reallocate \$10,000 of the ED budget to the Spark Innovation Center Expansion Project, pending Staff discussions with the AEDA.

After CIP discussions, Mr. Shanaberger moved forward to "FY2024 Agency Requests", which had been presented to Town Council by the agencies at the January 10th Council meeting. He stated the \$20,000 allocated for Uncle Billy's Day was a placeholder from previous years, and since it was not definite whether the event would continue, the amount could be removed from the budget if Council so desired.

Councilman Mitchell referenced the Chamber of Commerce's request of \$55,000, and wondered why the dollar amount was much higher than requested in past years, which previously included UBD funding. He reminded Council there was also a \$10,000 line item in the Chamber's request that had never been itemized/described for Council's consideration. Mr. Mitchell stated, due to those reasons, he recommended decreasing the amount of Town funding for the Chamber in FY2024 to \$45,000.

Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett reminded Town Council that the budget would be in "red" (a deficit) if all CIP items and Agency requests were funded, and asked Council to consider ways to reduce the deficit.

The Town Manager referenced the "Tax Revenue Information" provided to Council with the draft document. He went through the different scenarios for their consideration that offered options that would increase revenue and help balance the budget.

Mr. Mitchell stated, by decreasing the Chamber's funding to \$45,000, and removing the \$20,000 Uncle Billy's Day funding, the Town would save \$30,000.

Mayor Mattox stated that he did not see evidence where Altavista On Track (AOT) had given the Town a good return on its annual funding/investment for the past few years, and suggested the Town of Altavista consider decommissioning the organization, which would be an annual savings of \$55,176.

Mayor Mattox reminded everyone that the Chamber of Commerce and Altavista On Track both originated as volunteer organizations, that at some point were supposed to become self-sufficient. He stated that he was not in favor of funding their Director's salaries at such a large cost to the Town.

Altavista Town Council Work Session, Tuesday, March 28, 2023

Councilman Lowman stated that AOT assisted the Town in the initial grant process for the new Spark Innovation Center; and said that he believed that AOT was an important asset when the Town applied for grants for the Downtown District and DRO (Downtown Revitalization Overlay).

Councilman Higginbotham asked if the TOA Employee COLAs (cost of living adjustments) were a set number in the draft budget, or if different percentages were being considered.

Mr. Shanaberger stated that the draft document offered scenarios for 5-7% COLAs. He referenced the pay increase last year for all Town employees, to get the Town caught up with the surrounding job market. He said the goal was to keep up with inflation; which assisted the Town in retaining valuable employees.

Councilman Emerson stated, “there was no reason to get the Town caught up in the job market, if it did not make decisions to stay caught up with rising costs”. He said that State Employees, such as Teachers, Law Enforcement, and VRS employees, would be receiving a 7% pay increase in FY2024; and he believed that Town of Altavista employees should receive the same.

Mr. Emerson also referenced the option to increase Town taxes, and reminded everyone that the taxes were lowered several years ago, with the understanding that if the Town’s budget ever had a shortfall, that Council would consider increasing taxes to balance the budget.

Vice Mayor Bennett stated that the Town of Altavista currently had one of the lowest tax rates in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and a reasonable increase would still keep the Town within the lowest rates. He said the Town also offered its citizens multiple amenities at no extra charge, such as trash pickup, snow and leaf removal, and brush and bulk pickup; and that some localities charged for the same service(s). Mr. Bennett stated that he believed the citizens of Altavista would be willing to pay a little extra to keep their Town services.

Mayor Mattox stated the recent inflation costs and other unexpected issues had caused an uncertainty in the FY2024 Draft Budget, at no fault of the Town. He said it was Council’s responsibility to determine the appropriate actions, most feasible to the Town, to help Staff balance the budget.

Councilman Higginbotham stated that it was also the responsibility of Council to look out for the citizens of Altavista. and he shared that he was not in favor of raising Town Taxes.

Town Manager Gary Shanaberger asked Town Council for direction on how they wished to move forward

Vice Mayor Bennett asked the deadline for making final decisions and revisions to the draft budget.

Finance Director Tobie Shelton said that advertising the draft budget was tentatively scheduled for April 19th and April 26th, for public hearings in May, which left only one additional Council meeting (April 11th) before the draft budget would be advertised. She reminded Council that the draft budget could be decreased after being advertised, but not increased, which was confirmed by Town Attorney John Eller.

Mr. Shanaberger reminded Council that there were additional meeting dates on the budget calendar if they needed more time to discuss the draft budget.

Vice Mayor Bennett referenced the tax revenue information provided by Staff, and suggested that Town Council consider the different scenarios for potential increases in Town revenue.

Councilman Higginbotham shared that he was not in favor of raising Machine & Tool Tax. He said the Town should support its local industry, in an effort to keep them located in the Town of Altavista.

Councilman Mitchell referenced \$902,930 transferred in from Reserves in the FY2023 Adopted Budget, and asked Mrs. Shelton the purpose of that transfer. He also asked why FY2023 Projections were empty.

Mrs. Shelton stated that approximately \$600,000 was allocated to the new Spark Innovation Center, and the remaining amount was to fund other CIP projects; and the FY2023 Projections had not been calculated

Councilman Emerson referenced the \$418,000 still allocated in the Enterprise Fund for the Town’s PCB Remediation Project, and asked, with the recent purchase of the De-mister, was the entire amount still needed to fund the PCB Project, or could a portion of the funds be utilized for current CIP needs.

Public Services Director Tom Fore asked that at least \$100,000 remain in the Enterprise Fund, allocated for the PCB Remediation Project, for items that would be needed to complete the project. He said, if needed, he felt comfortable with reallocating the remaining \$318,000 to help balance the FY2024 Budget.

Altavista Town Council Work Session, Tuesday, March 28, 2023

Councilman Lowman stated, if \$318,000 was reallocated from the Enterprise Fund to the General Fund, and Councilman Mitchell's recommendation was accepted (to reduce the Chamber of Commerce's funding from \$55,000 to \$45,000, and remove the \$20,000 UBD funding), there would be a cost savings of \$348,000 that could be reallocated to help balance the FY2024 Budget, with a 7% COLA.

Mr. Fore suggested Council also consider implementing a garbage pickup fee, to help cover the costs associated with this service: employee salaries, rising gas prices, and landfill charges.

Councilman Higginbotham said he thought garbage, brush, and bulk pickup were services included in the Town of Altavista's taxes.

Regarding the potential of the Town charging a garbage pickup fee, Town Council agreed to discuss the matter at a later date.

Vice Mayor Bennett stated that utilizing unexpended funds from the PCB Remediation Project to help balance the FY2024 Budget, would only assist with that fiscal year's deficit. He said Town Council needed to consider ways that would prepare the Town for potential deficits or issues in the future.

Councilman Mitchell stated, along with reallocating the PCB funds, he was also in favor of increasing the Town's Real Estate taxes, to help the Town build a stable future.

Mr. Fore stated that counties typically include a garbage pickup fee on their utility bills.

Councilman Higginbotham asked if the Town of Altavista was still collecting the Town of Hurt's residential garbage; and if so, where was that garbage being disposed.

Mr. Fore stated the Town of Hurt's garbage was being taken to Pittsylvania County's landfill. He informed Council that the citizens of Pittsylvania County currently pay an annual landfill fee.

Councilman George referenced the Lynch Mill Creek Restoration Project and asked what it would cost to restore both sides of the creek, top to bottom, the entire length of the creek to the (Staunton) River.

Mr. Fore stated a scope-of-work of that magnitude would cost an estimated \$2 million. He said the Town would continue working on this project in increments for the next few years.

Mr. Fore informed Town Council of an extensive amount of erosion on the left side bank of the boat ramp in English Park, and stated that the issue would need to be addressed sooner rather than later, because Pittsylvania Avenue crossed over that bank.

Councilman Lowman asked if the State (VDOT) would help with the cost of repairing that area.

Mr. Fore stated that the Town was responsible for maintaining all of its streets, except for Main Street and Bedford Avenue. He said that part of the funds (\$800,000) requested in the budget for "street maintenance", may have to be reallocated to address the bank erosion issue beneath Pittsylvania Avenue.

Assistant Public Services Director Paul Hill informed Council that Staff had reached out to VDOT regarding this matter, but was denied assistance because it was not a state-maintained road.

Community Development Director Sharon D. Williams stated that Staff was working together on the idea of utilizing the \$1.4 million grant, currently pending, the Town applied for to conduct the Shoreline Restoration Project at English Park.

Mr. Fore stated that the grant could potentially be utilized to include remediation of the bank erosion issue adjacent to the boat ramp. He stated that he would keep Council posted on the matter.

The Town Manager asked Town Council for clarification on their proposed changes to the draft budget.

Town Council discussed "Agency Requests" a little more, and decided to reduce the Chamber of Commerce's FY2024 funding to \$45,000; and the other agency funding amounts remaining the same.

Councilman Higginbotham questioned Avoca's CIP list and the \$30,000 amount to repair a fence.

Assistant Town Manager Matt Perkins stated that the amount was estimated as a placeholder in the draft budget. He informed Council that Avoca had been working with the Town's Assistant Public Services Director, Paul Hill, to lower the cost of this project, and expected it to be completed for \$22,000-\$28,000.

Altavista Town Council Work Session, Tuesday, March 28, 2023

Regarding the potential of increasing Town Taxes, Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett recommended that Town Council postpone making that decision until their next meeting (April 11th), when they had the additional information they requested from Staff that pertained to the matter. Council concurred.

Councilman Lowman asked if there had been a consensus of Council to add a garbage pickup fee to quarterly utility bills.

Councilman Higginbotham shared that he was not in favor of implementing a garbage pickup fee, and stated that he liked being able to market Altavista as having many free amenities for its citizens.

Mr. Fore said that he had suggested the fee as another option for consideration in balancing the budget.

Town Manager Gary Shanaberger stated that he would investigate what surrounding localities charged, if anything, for sanitation services, and bring the information back to Council at their next meeting.

Councilman Higginbotham suggested also removing the \$50,000 Decorative Streetlight Project for Bedford Avenue.

Councilman Mitchell reminded Council that the amount was a starting point, to be continued each year until the project was complete.

Mr. Higginbotham stated, with the Town looking at options to balance a budget that currently showed a deficit, he believed the project should be postponed.

With no further questions or comments, the Town Council was in consensus to make the following revisions to the FY2024 Draft Budget:

- Decrease the Chamber's funding from \$55,00 to \$45,000
- Eliminate the UBD funding of \$20,000
- Calculate the budget with a 7% COLA

The Town Council also asked Staff for the following information:

- Peer analysis regarding Machine & Tool Tax
- Multiple scenarios for implementing a garbage collection fee

6. Updates and Informational Items

1) Community Skate Park Presentation

This item was moved to the "Citizens Time" section of the agenda. No one attended to deliver the presentation.

2) USDA Grant Award

Public Services Director Tom Fore presented this item, and informed Council that the town was awarded a \$35,000 grant from USDA to use towards a PER and ER for WWTP Aeration Upgrades.

- Hurt & Proffitt will be assisting the Town with an RFP for this project.

7. Matters from Town Council

- Vice Mayor Bennett asked Mr. Fore when contractors, Mendon Pipeline, would be removing the boom trucks from the Lynch Creek Restoration Project's site.

Mr. Fore informed Council that he had spoken with Mendon that day, which stated they were waiting on warmer weather to complete minor items and to pick up their equipment. Mr. Fore said the remaining work should be complete by the end of April.

- Mr. Bennett also asked whose responsible it was to mow the additional grass that was seeded in that area.

Public Works Manager Jeff Arthur stated that the town would be mowing the area.

- Councilman George referenced the town-owned property located on the corner of 7th Street and Campbell Avenue. He stated that he considered the site as "blight" and recommended the Town cleanup/renovate the area.

Assistant Town Manager Matt Perkins took this opportunity to inform Town Council that the town was recently awarded a \$189,241 Housing Grant from the Central Virginia Planning District Commission. He said the grant would be used in Altavista's Acquire-Renovate-Sell Program, to build three new homes.

Altavista Town Council Work Session, Tuesday, March 28, 2023

8. Town Council Closed Session

The Altavista Town Council convened in closed session in accordance with the provisions set out in the Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended,

Section 2.2-3711 (A)(3) Discussion or consideration of the acquisition of real property for a public purpose, or of the disposition of publicly held real property, where discussion in an open meeting would adversely affect the bargaining position or negotiating strategy of the public body.

Section 2.2-3711 (A)(8) Consultation with legal counsel employed or retained by a public body regarding specific legal matters requiring the provision of legal advice by such counsel. Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to permit the closure of a meeting because an attorney representing the public body is in attendance or is consulted on a matter

A Motion was made by Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett, seconded by Councilman Tracy Emerson.
The motion carried.

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

Town Council went into Closed Session at 6:48 PM.
Notice was given that Council was back in regular session at 7:08 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

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

Notice was given to Staff by Town Manager Gary Shanaberger, that Town Council did not make any official actions as a result of this closed session.

9. Adjournment

Mayor Mattox asked if there were any additional comments or concerns from Town Council, of which there were none.

The March 28th, 2023, Town Council Work Session was adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

Michael Mattox, Mayor of Altavista

Gary Shanaberger, Town Manager/Town Clerk