

April 10, 2023

A work session of the Town Council of the Town of Grottoes was held on Monday, April 10, 2023, at 5:30 p.m. at the Grottoes Town Hall, Grottoes, Virginia.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Plaster called the work session of April 10, 2023, of the Grottoes Town Council to order at 5:30 p.m.

ATTENDANCE: Council Members present: Mayor Jo Plaster, Tim Leeth, David Raynes, Michael Kohl, and Mark Sterling. Council members Joshua Bailey and Jim Justis arrived late.

Other Town Officials present were: Town Attorney Michael Helm, Town Manager Stefanie McAlister, Clerk Tara Morris, Treasurer Rhonda Danner, Public Works Director AJ Hummel, Parks Director Austin Shank and Police Chief Jason Sullivan.

Mayor Plaster stated the first item on the agenda was the budget review. Manager McAlister presented a detailed presentation of the proposed budget. She stated this year's budget represents a 26% decrease from last year, which is primarily due to not receiving any federal funds. Manager McAlister stated that there is an increase in expenses in the budget for electricity, materials, supplies, and gas/ diesel. She stated that with this budget there has been restructuring in staffing, position descriptions and compensations. She said this budget proposal also includes a 60/40 split for dual and family health insurance verses the previous 80/20 split. Manager McAlister said there are no increases proposed for real estate or personal property taxes or in the water and sewer fees. However, Manager McAlister said that our refuse fund which is a user fund and must pay for itself, has to incur a \$3.50 increase per month. She stated that Waste Management has increased our contract rate due to the increase in fuel prices and wages. Manager McAlister said the Park fund represents a restructuring of staff to work a variety of tasks in the park and not just as a tour guide. She stated that the Parks Director is looking to create Park Aide and Park Ranger I positions to assist with more responsibilities but will also mean higher compensation than the current minimum wage rates. Manager McAlister said in January 2024 the Park Department is looking to hire one Park Ranger II position, which would be full-time, and would include maintenance and upkeep of the parks. Council member Bailey asked about using the merit and cola process for the raises. Manager McAlister said this year she is trying to get staff at a comparable wage so we don't lose our staff, is refining position descriptions, and plans to use the merit and cola process for raises next budget. Council member Bailey said when the council prioritized goals for the strategic plan that staffing wasn't a priority for council. He said he knows the staff voted on that goal, but the council did not. Council member Bailey asked if the council could get a plan of positions that will be needed over the next few years so we can have a plan in place to implement them. Council member Leeth said he feels the next workshop should be about what Josh was saying about staffing and what we are going to do to bring revenue into the town.

Mayor Plaster said the next item on the agenda is the B-2 zoning request. Clerk Morris said that Kenny May, property owner, 703 Dogwood Avenue is requesting to build up to a 40'x60' pavilion to provide a covered outdoor area for customers to dine, enjoy entertainment and help absorb the noise from the live entertainment. She stated that the pavilion would be constructed so in the future it could be enclosed for use during the winter months. Clerk Morris said the Planning Commission reviewed and discussed the request and unanimously recommended approval of the request to council. She stated that this is an action item on the regular meeting agenda under new business.

Mayor Plaster said the next item on the agenda is funds for HVAC repairs. Manager McAlister said Riddleberger has notified us that our HVAC unit over the town office needs to be replaced. She said the unit has been working at half its capacity for several years and does not have much freon so the air conditioning will not work adequately, and the heat will only work on emergency heat. Our service provider recommends that we replace the unit and gave us a price of \$44,000.00 to replace the 15-ton unit. Manager McAlister stated a problem we have run into is there is a 20–30-week lead time on getting one of these units here. She said we have reached out to get other quotes and are still waiting on two, but we did receive a quote from Landes for \$36,000.00 for a 15-ton unit which they have in stock and can get here in a couple of weeks. Council member Bailey made a motion, seconded by Council member Leeth, to replace the HVAC unit at a cost not to exceed \$40,000.00. Council member Bailey amended his motion to add quickest availability, Council member Leeth accepted the amendment. The vote carried by a vote of 6-0, voting recorded as follows: JUSTIS – AYE; BAILEY – AYE; STERLING – AYE; RAYNES – AYE; KOHL – AYE, LEETH – AYE.

Mayor Plaster said the next item on the agenda is phase II for the cave internet. Director Shank stated that we have completed the first phase of running the internet to the cave. He stated that we were planning to complete the second phase in the future but the need to upgrade the emergency phones, which have been a continuous problem, has become an immediate need versus a future need. Director Shank said that this quote includes running conduit in the walking paths to get the internet into all areas of the cave and emergency phones spread out throughout the cave. He stated that this will also include conduit for running new electric lines into the cave. Director Shank said he would like to start this project sooner versus later and asked to use the ARPA funds to cover the cost. Council member Justis made a motion to spend up to \$80,000.00 to complete the second phase of the cave internet and emergency phone service project. Council member Sterling seconded the motion. Council member Justis amended the motion to clarify the funds would come from the ARPA funds. Council member Sterling accepted the amendment. The vote carried by a vote of 6-0, voting recorded as follows: JUSTIS – AYE; BAILEY – AYE; STERLING – AYE; RAYNES – AYE; KOHL – AYE, LEETH – AYE.

Mayor Plaster asked if there was anything under other business. Council member Bailey asked if we could limit discussion at our meetings to town residents. He said he feels there could be a lot of people here to speak about the pool tonight and feels that we should hear from our town

residents since their tax money goes toward operating costs. Mayor Plaster said she does not know of a policy to exclude non-residents from speaking during the public comment section. She said she was going to ask for all town residents to identify themselves, all Rockingham County residents to identify themselves, and all Augusta County residents to identify themselves. She said she feels that we can definitely listen to the Grottoes residents first. Council member Kohl said he feels we should listen to all the citizens because they obviously support our pool, businesses, and community. Council member Bailey made a motion to ask staff to work with counsel to draft a policy for comments to recommend to the council at the next workshop. Council member Sterling seconded the motion. The vote carried by a vote of 6-0, voting recorded as follows: JUSTIS – AYE; BAILEY – AYE; STERLING – AYE; RAYNES – AYE; KOHL – AYE, LEETH – AYE.

With no further business Mayor Plaster adjourned the work session at 6:30 p.m.

April 10, 2023

A regular session of the Town Council of the Town of Grottoes was held on Monday, April 10, 2023, at 7:00 p.m. at the Grottoes Volunteer Fire Department, Grottoes, Virginia.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Plaster called the regular session of April 10, 2023, of the Grottoes Town Council to order at 7:00 p.m. Mayor Plaster asked for a roll call.

ATTENDANCE: Council Members present: Joshua Bailey, Mark Sterling, Jim Justis, Jo Plaster, David Raynes, Tim Leeth, and Michael Kohl.

Other Town Officials present: Town Manager Stefanie McAlister, Clerk Tara Morris, Attorney Michael Helm, Parks Director Austin Shank, Treasurer Rhonda Danner, Public Works Director AJ Hummel, and Police Chief Jason Sullivan.

SPECIAL PRESENTATION

Mayor Plaster said we have a special presentation tonight. She asked Caleb Bailey and Roger “PeeWee” Randall to come forward. Caleb said that Roger has been coordinating the Friday Night Bluegrass in the Park for many years and has now passed the reins over to him. Caleb said he appreciates Roger’s efforts in organizing such a successful event for many years and feels that it is only right to give the honor where it is due. He renamed the Friday Night Bluegrass in the Park to the Roger “PeeWee” Randall Concert Series Bluegrass in the Park. Caleb presented a banner that will be hung during the shows. Roger Randall thanked Caleb and said this would not have been possible for all these years without the support of the Town. Mayor Plaster presented Caleb with a donation from the Town of Grottoes for the Concert Series. Caleb thanked Mayor Plaster and Town Council for their continued support.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

On motion by Council member Raynes, seconded by Council member Justis, and carried by a vote of 6-0, voting recorded as follows: JUSTIS – AYE; BAILEY – AYE; STERLING – AYE; RAYNES – AYE; KOHL – AYE, LEETH – AYE; the Council approved the minutes of the March 13, 2023 meeting as presented.

PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS AND CLAIMS (public comment)

Maite Taylor addressed the council concerned with the council’s action to demolish the pool. She said she has a petition with 1857 signatures on it and has a sponsor to donate \$10,500.00 to help repair the pool. Ms. Taylor said she has reviewed all the documentation from the leak and the information from the geophysical report and structural engineers’ report and does not feel

that the pool's structure is unsafe. Ms. Taylor feels the council needs to reconsider their action on demolishing the pool.

Sara Kinzer addressed the council and stated that she moved here from a small town in Ohio that closed their community pool and the outcome from that was not good. She said it led to children and teens getting into trouble with the law and using drugs. Ms. Kinzer said that the next closest pool is 15-30 minutes away and the kids can't walk or ride their bikes to those pools. She said a pool is a lifeline for these children and asked the council to please fix our pool.

Rachel Jackson addressed the council and stated that she was here tonight to express her concern about the council's action to demolish the pool. She said that she has lived in Grottoes all her life and spent most of her child and teenage years at the pool. She said that's where you went to connect with your friends over the summer. Ms. Jackson said the pool is not concrete and water. It's community! She said she knows there was concern about the number of family passes that were sold but feels that residents were reserved about investing the money when the pool was closed several days during the week for private use. She said we have been hearing about a community center for years and if we are having problems getting a few lifeguards and a cashier how could we staff a community center. Ms. Jackson thanked the council for reconsidering their decision to demolish the pool.

Nadina Pupic addressed the council stating that she has lived in Grottoes for 8 years now and grew up in the Town of Timberville. She said as a child growing up in Timberville she spent her summers at the Timberville pool. She said she would like her kids to have the same experience. Ms. Pupic said we keep hearing about a community center, but she doesn't feel that is a big interest to residents because there is a community center less than 7 miles away in Weyers Cave. She expressed her sadness to the council and asked them to repair the pool and not to demolish it.

Pat Holloway addressed the council stating that she served as a council member for Grottoes many years ago and knows the tough decisions that they must make. However, she does not feel that this is the right decision for the town based on the reports from the engineers. She said her daughter manages a pool and it is very successful. Ms. Holloway said that advertising should be done to promote the pool, events could be held, late evening swim hours on certain days could all help the success of the pool. She said having the pool closed several days for private events is ridiculous and such events should not be happening during business hours. Ms. Holloway asked the council not to give up on the pool because the community needs it.

REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEE:

FINANCE – Council member Raynes made a motion, seconded by Council member Leeth, and carried by a vote of 6-0, voting recorded as follows: JUSTIS – AYE; BAILEY – AYE; STERLING – AYE; RAYNES - AYE; KOHL – AYE; LEETH – AYE, to approve the financial reports for the month of March.

WATER AND SEWER – Council member Bailey stated that we have water lines that need to be upgraded and it will cost \$4.5 million and a lagoon that needs to be dredged that will cost \$1.5 million. He said the council is trying to be good stewards of your money.

ORDINANCE, HEALTH, AND PROPERTY – no report

STREET AND STREET LIGHTS – no report

PARKS, RECREATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES –

SPECIAL EVENTS – Council member Leeth announced the Grand Caverns 5K is scheduled for April 28th, Chief Charlie’s Kid’s Fish Day will be held on May 6th, and the community yard sale will also be on May 6th.

PERSONNEL, FIRE AND POLICE PROTECTION –

STAFF REPORTS

TOWN MANAGER. A written report was provided. There were no additional comments from staff and no questions or comments from Council members.

ATTORNEY. No report

TREASURER. A written report was provided. There were no additional comments from staff and no questions or comments from Council members.

ASSISTANT TO TOWN MANAGER. A written report was provided. There were no additional comments from staff and no questions or comments from Council members.

POLICE CHIEF. A written report was provided. There were no additional comments from staff and no questions or comments from Council members.

PUBLIC WORKS. A written report was provided. There were no additional comments from staff and no questions or comments from Council members.

RECREATION AND TOURISM DIRECTOR. A written report was provided. There were no additional comments from staff and no questions or comments from Council members.

NEW BUSINESS

On a motion by Council member Kohl, seconded by Council member Sterling, and carried by a vote of 6-0, voting recorded as follows: JUSTIS – AYE; BAILEY – AYE; STERLING – AYE; RAYNES – AYE; KOHL – AYE, LEETH – AYE; to approve the B-2 zoning request to build a pavilion at 703 Dogwood Avenue.

Mayor Plaster asked the council to cease demolishing the pool until we have all the figures in place.

Council member Justis made a motion, seconded by Council member Sterling, to cease demolishing the pool until further information for clarification can be obtained. Council member Sterling said he thought that was the original motion. Council member Bailey stated that he doesn't feel the pool is safe to be opened. Council member Kohl said he doesn't think we are looking at an unsafe pool but feels the decision is if we are going to spend the money to repair it. Mayor Plaster called for a vote, the vote carried 5-1, voting recorded as follows: JUSTIS – AYE; BAILEY – NAY; STERLING – AYE; RAYNES – AYE; KOHL – AYE, LEETH – AYE.

Council member Kohl made a motion for a special meeting for public comment. Council member Kohl withdrew his motion.

Council member Kohl asked for consideration to rescind the council's previous motion be placed on next month's agenda.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Plaster adjourned the meeting at 7:47 p.m.