

January 8, 2024

A joint public hearing and the regular session of the Town Council of the Town of Grottoes was held on Monday, January 8, 2024, beginning at 7:00 p.m. at the Grottoes Town Hall, Grottoes, Virginia.

### **CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Plaster called the joint public hearing of the Grottoes Town Council and the Grottoes Planning Commission to order at 7:01 p.m. on January 8, 2024.

ATTENDANCE: Planning Commission Members present: Chairman Dylan Nicely, Brooke Haas, Jean Stoll, Maite Taylor, and Michael Kohl. Absent: Rene Ehlenfeldt and Darrel Baker.

Council Members present: Mayor Jo Plaster, Eddie Chittum, Joshua Bailey, Jim Justis, David Raynes, Michael Kohl, and Tim Leeth.

Mayor Plaster said the reason for the public hearing is to hear citizen comments on a request for a Conditional Use Permit at 402 Augusta Avenue for a Child Day Care in a B-1 zoning.

Speaking for the request – Ashleigh Muttai stated that she was here tonight to answer any questions on the council or planning commission may have on her request for the child day care.

Speaking against the request – none.

There was no discussion from Council or Planning Commission.

Mayor Plaster closed the public hearing at 7:03 p.m. and turned the meeting over to the Planning Commission.

Chairman Nicely asked the Commission if they had any comments or if they were prepared to make a recommendation.

On a motion from Commission member Stoll, seconded by Commission member Taylor, and carried by a 5-0 vote, voting as follows: HAAS – AYE; STOLL – AYE; NICELY- AYE; TAYLOR – AYE; KOHL – AYE, to recommend the approval of the Conditional Use Permit at 402 Augusta Avenue for a child day care in the B-1 zoning.

Chairman Nicely adjourned the meeting at 7:06 p.m.

### **CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Plaster called the regular session of January 8, 2024, of the Grottoes Town Council to order at 7:06 p.m. Mayor Plaster asked Clerk Morris for a roll call.

ATTENDANCE: Council Members present: Eddie Chittum, Joshua Bailey, Jim Justis, David Raynes, Michael Kohl, and Tim Leeth.

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

### **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: CHITTUM – AYE; BAILEY – AYE; JUSTIS – AYE; RAYNES – AYE; LEETH – AYE; KOHL – AYE; the Council approved the minutes of the December 11, 2023 meetings as presented.

### **PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS AND CLAIMS (public comment)**

Gleamer Sullivan addressed the council about previous emails she had sent to them and did not receive a response or did not receive any resolution of her concerns. She said as a citizen this leaves her frustrated and upset with the lack of responsiveness from the town governance. Ms. Sullivan said that number three under New Business on tonight's agenda is consideration - Code of Conduct and Ethics for the members of the Grottoes Town Council. She said if the council approves this, she is hoping that the town council and mayor will resolve to work toward being in line with the guidelines they agree upon. She feels if this is done more citizens will become involved with the town because they will feel welcomed, heard, and included.

Mary Robertson commented about the repaving of Edgewood Street. She said for the first time the road is smooth. Ms. Robertson said she is concerned with the ditch at the end of Edgewood and Augusta Avenue. She said it is a big ditch with not many reflectors there and asked if the town would consider adding more reflectors along the ditch. Ms. Robertson also asked if some dirt could be brought in to help with the drop off the shoulder from the road being repaved.

### **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: CHITTUM – AYE; BAILEY – AYE; JUSTIS – AYE; RAYNES – AYE; LEETH – AYE; KOHL – AYE; to approve the financial reports for the month of December.

**WATER AND SEWER** – no report

**ORDINANCE, HEALTH, AND PROPERTY** – Council member Kohl made a motion, seconded by Council member Justis. The vote carried 6-0, voting as follows: CHITTUM – AYE; BAILEY – AYE; JUSTIS – AYE; RAYNES – AYE; LEETH – AYE; KOHL – AYE; to approve the Conditional Use Permit at 402 Augusta Avenue for the child day care in the B-1 zoning.

**STREET AND STREET LIGHTS** – no report

**PARKS, RECREATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES** – no report

**SPECIAL EVENTS** – no report

**PERSONNEL, FIRE AND POLICE PROTECTION** – Mayor Plaster said we have the list of the 2024 Officers for the Grottoes Volunteer Fire Department that was submitted for approval. On a motion by Council member Justis, seconded by Council member Leeth, and carried by a vote of 5-0-1, voting recorded as follows: CHITTUM – AYE; BAILEY – ABSTAIN; JUSTIS – AYE; RAYNES – AYE; LEETH – AYE; KOHL – AYE, to approve the 2024 officers for the Grottoes Volunteer Fire Department.

### **STAFF REPORTS**

TOWN MANAGER. Manager McAlister informed the council that we have entered into an agreement with the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission for updating the Town's Comprehensive Plan. She stated that they will hold a kickoff meeting at the planning commissions meeting on January 30, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. She said they will go over all the steps it takes to update the plan. Manager McAlister asked the council to mark their calendars and join the planning commission at this meeting.

ATTORNEY. Nothing to 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.

PARKS AND TOURISM DIRECTOR. Director Shank gave an update on Subterranean Sound Concert Series saying that all shows sold out within a couple days, and several sold out within a couple hours. He said there have been five groups that have offered to do an additional show and those tickets will go on sale January 13th. Director Shanks said he feels these tickets will sale just as fast.

**NEW BUSINESS** –

**ELECTION OF VICE MAYOR.**

Mayor Plaster said Council member Raynes currently serves as vice-mayor and asked if he was interested in continuing to serve. Council member Raynes stated that he would continue to serve as vice-mayor. Council member Kohl made a motion for Council member Raynes to continue as vice-mayor, seconded by Council member Leeth, and carried by a vote of 6-0, voting recorded as follows: CHITTUM – AYE; BAILEY – AYE; JUSTIS – AYE; RAYNES – AYE; LEETH – AYE; KOHL – AYE.

**SETTING OF DATE AND TIME OF MEETING.**

Council member Leeth made a motion to approve the schedule for the council meetings and the inclement weather policy. Seconded by Council member Kohl, the vote carried 6 to 0, voting recorded as follows: CHITTUM – AYE; BAILEY – AYE; JUSTIS – AYE; RAYNES – AYE; LEETH – AYE; KOHL – AYE.

**RESOLUTION  
#20240108-01**

**ORDINANCE AND RESOLUTION TO ESTABLISH THE DATES AND TIMES OF THE WORK SESSIONS AND REGULAR MEETINGS OF THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF GROTTUES, VIRGINIA, FOR THE CALENDAR YEAR 2024**

**WHEREAS** the Charter of the Town of Grottoes, Virginia (the “Town”) requires the Town Council (the “Council”) of the Town approve an ordinance to set forth the regular meeting times of the Council; and

**WHEREAS** Va. Code § 15.2-1416 requires the Council to pass a resolution establishing such regular meeting times at the organizational meeting of the Council following the election of the new members thereof.

**THEREFORE BE IT ORDAINED BY THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF GROTTUES, VIRGINIA, to-wit:**

1. A) Meeting Date and Times for 2024. In accordance with the Town Charter, beginning January 8, 2024, and the second Monday of each month thereafter, the meeting of the Council shall commence with a work session at 6:00 p.m., followed at 7:00 p.m. by the regular meeting, with the following exception: the meeting in October shall be held on Wednesday, October 16, 2024, beginning at 6:00 p.m.

B) Inclement Weather Policy for Council Meetings for 2024. If a meeting cannot be held due to inclement weather or for any reason as determined by the Mayor or the Vice-Mayor if the mayor is not available, the meeting will be held at the scheduled time on the following Monday, unless otherwise determined by the Council.

Town of Grottoes  
2024 Meeting Dates

	Work Session 6:00pm	Town Council 7:00 pm	Planning Commission 6:00pm
Jan	8	8	30
Feb	12	12	
Mar	11	11	26
Apr	8	8	
May	13	13	28
Jun	10	10	
Jul	8	8	30
Aug	12	12	
Sept	9	9	24
Oct	16*Wednesday	16	
Nov	11	11	26
Dec	9	9	

Unless otherwise posted all Council meetings are held at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Town Hall. Work session meetings will be held at 6:00 pm. Planning Commission will meet at 6:00 p.m. If you have any questions, please call the Town Office at 540-249-5896.

#### **2024 COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS.**

Mayor Plaster asked if anyone had any comments on the proposed committee assignments for 2024. She stated the only change she made was she moved David Raynes from Water and Sewer to the Personnel, Fire and Police Protection and moved Eddie Chittum from Personnel, Fire and Police Protection to the Water and Sewer Committee.

On a motion by Council member Leeth, seconded by Council member Justis, and carried by a vote of 6 to 0, voting recorded as follows: CHITTUM – AYE; BAILEY – AYE; JUSTIS – AYE; RAYNES – AYE; LEETH – AYE; KOHL – AYE, the Council approved the 2024 committee assignments.

## **2024 Committee Assignments**

### **FINANCE COMMITTEE**

**Chair:** David Raynes  
Jo Plaster  
Tim Leeth

### **PERSONNEL, FIRE AND POLICE PROTECTION COMMITTEE**

**Chair:** Jo Plaster  
David Raynes  
Michael Kohl

### **ORDINANCE, HEALTH AND PROPERTY COMMITTEE**

**Chair:** Michael Kohl - Planning Commission Liaison  
Joshua Bailey  
Eddie Chittum

### **SPECIAL EVENTS COMMITTEE**

**Chair:** Tim Leeth  
James Justis  
Jo Plaster

### **WATER & SEWER COMMITTEE**

Chair: Joshua Bailey  
Eddie Chittum  
Tim Leeth

### **PARKS, RECREATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES COMMITTEE**

Chair: Eddie Chittum  
Jim Justis  
Michael Kohl

## STREETS AND STREET LIGHTS COMMITTEE

Chair: Jim Justis  
Joshua Bailey  
David Raynes

### **CODE OF CONDUCT AND ETHICS.**

Council member Leeth made a motion, seconded by Council member Kohl. Council member Bailey stated that he has never agreed with signing this resolution and feels it is something that should come with the position. He said we adopt something that we are not following, and we should be, which was pointed out by Ms. Sullivan. Council member Chittum said he agrees and said the council is voted in by the citizens but feels this is belittling and holding them to a different standard. The vote carried by a vote of 6 to 0, voting recorded as follows: CHITTUM – AYE; BAILEY – AYE; JUSTIS – AYE; RAYNES – AYE; LEETH – AYE; KOHL – AYE; Council approved Resolution #20240108-02 reaffirming and readopting a Code of Conduct and Ethics for the Members of the Grottoes Town Council, as follows:

### **RESOLUTION 20240108-02**

#### **A RESOLUTION TO REAFFIRM AND ADOPT A CODE OF CONDUCT AND ETHICS FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE GROTTUES TOWN COUNCIL**

**WHEREAS**, the Town of Grottoes Council has previously determined that the adoption of a Code of Conduct and Ethics is important to emphasize the imperatives of integrity, fairness, and accountability in local government.

**NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the Grottoes Town Council this 9th day of January 2023, the following Code of Conduct and Ethics, including Conduct and Ethical Standards, are hereby reaffirmed, and adopted:

#### **GROTTUES TOWN COUNCIL CODE OF CONDUCT AND ETHICS PREAMBLE.**

The citizens of Grottoes are entitled to fair, ethical, accountable, and effective local government. Such a government requires that public officials:

- Comply with both the letter and the spirit of the laws, ordinances, and policies affecting government.
- Be independent, impartial, and fair in their judgment and actions.
- Use their public office for the public good, not for personal gain.
- Conduct public deliberations and processes openly.
- Act with respect and civility.

To this end, the Grottoes Town Council has adopted this Code of Conduct and Ethics to emphasize the imperatives of integrity, fairness, and accountability in local government.

### **1. Act in the Public Interest**

Recognizing that stewardship of the public interest must be their primary concern, Council Members shall work for the common good of the people of Grottoes and not for any private or personal interest. They will treat all persons, claims, and transactions in a fair and equitable manner.

### **2. Conduct of Members**

Council Members shall at all times restrain from abusive conduct, personal charges, or verbal attacks upon the character or motives of other members of the Town Council, boards, commissions, committees, staff, or the public.

### **3. Respect for Process**

Council Member duties shall be performed in accordance with the processes and rules established by the Town Council. A Council Member shall respect a decision once it has been made by the majority of Council.

### **4. Communication**

It is the responsibility of Council Members to share substantive information that is relevant to a matter under consideration that they have received from sources outside of the decision-making process with all other Council Members.

Council Members shall interact with one another honestly, forthrightly, and respectfully. Discussions shall focus on issues, policies, and other substantive matters relating to the function of Town government.

### **5. Confidential Information**



Council Members shall respect and preserve the confidentiality of information provided to them concerning the matters of the Town. They shall neither disclose confidential information without proper legal authorization nor use such information to advance their personal, financial, or private interests.

## **6. Advocacy**

To the best of their ability, Council Members shall represent the official policies and positions of the Town Council. When presenting their personal opinions or positions, members shall explicitly state that they do not represent the Council or the Town.

## **7. Positive Work Environment**

Council Members shall support and maintain a positive and constructive environment for residents, businesses, Town employees, and others involved in Town activities.

## **8. Compliance**

The Grottoes Town Council Code of Conduct and Ethics expresses standards of ethical conduct expected of Members of the Grottoes Town Council.

Members of the Council have the primary responsibility to ensure that ethical standards are understood and met, and that the public can continue to have full confidence in the integrity of the Town Council.

# **TOWN OF GROTTUES, VIRGINIA**

## **Conduct and Ethical Standards Guidelines and Suggestions to Maintain Good Working Relationships**

### **1. Relationships with other Council Members**

A Council Member wants to be a success in getting certain policies approved and carried out. The most important factor in determining whether this will happen is the attitude of other Council Members. They are a crucial audience.

Questions you need to ask yourself:

- Do you act in a way that suggests you are concerned primarily with your own benefit (or a select group)? Or does your behavior convince your colleagues that you are acting in the best interest of the entire town?
- Do you help your colleagues obtain the information they need to participate effectively? Or do you try to look good at their expense?

- Do you try to get everyone trying to agree on an issue? Or are you satisfied once you know the majority is achieved?
- In short: Do you compete or cooperate?

A Council Member will be respected by colleagues if the Member behaves in a way that is seen as fair as well as effective. Knowing and understanding your colleagues is central to establishing, building, and maintaining effective relationships.

Keys to working well together:

- Be willing to listen to others.
- Respect others' skills and attitudes.
- Keep an open mind.
- Disclose yourself to others openly and freely. Express your opinion and let colleagues learn why you think the way you do on issues.
- Make a conscientious effort to be well prepared for each meeting.
- Offer criticism of colleagues only in private meetings with appropriate individuals or in closed meeting.
- **ADHERE TO THE ESTABLISHED CODE OF CONDUCT AND ETHICS**

## **2. Remember the Rule of Four!**

When it comes to adopting policy or getting any item approved in our community, you need to remember the Rule of Four. A simple question you need to ask is, "How many citizens does it take to get any policy or action item approved?" The answer is four. The point is the three additional citizens you convince have to currently share a position with you on the Council or one of them be the Mayor. Obviously, your own mind is made up on an issue, if you persuade three other Council Members or two and the Mayor (in case of ties) in your favor, then the motion will pass. So, although the citizens are very important in what we do, when it comes to approving policy and items at hand, you need to convince your colleagues. It is easier to accomplish this by working with them instead of alienating them.

## **3. Management of Conflict**

Council Members who don't think and act as part of a team, who are difficult to get along with, most often become ineffective. They are left out of the decision-making process, which is a loss to the entire Council. Disagreements among Council Members are inevitable, and a normal part of any decision-making process. It is important that disagreements do not interfere with cooperative processes. The most serious paralysis a Council can have is the inability of Members to work with one another. This inability becomes visible to the community and reduces the Council's political authority within the community. The interests of individual Members become personal and apparently more important than the interests of

other citizens. To manage conflict constructively may require that ground rules be established, so that an atmosphere can be created where differences can be raised, and respectful dialogue can occur.

#### **4. Relationships with Town Staff**

Staff bashing is tempting for a Council Member who wants to look good to those who are complaining. But the local government pays a heavy price for such behavior. The morale of town employees is likely to decline if the Council expects the laws to be enforced, but then publicly jumps on those responsible for enforcement. Therefore, Council Members should be careful about how they deal with specific complaints about staff expressed at a public meeting.

Things to remember about staff relationships:

- Treat all employees with courtesy and respect.
- Avoid publicly criticizing any employee in any way that reflects on the competence and integrity of the employee.
- Don't try to resolve controversies during a public meeting.
- Make clear to a citizen that the complaint will be addressed and ask the Town Manager to appoint a staff member to contact the citizen.
- Don't let the staff be blamed for major policies, since those are the responsibility of the Council.
- Remember that the success of every policy depends on its implementation by an effective staff.
- If there is a problem with a staff person, resolve it in private rather than at a public meeting (or the press). Raise concerns about employees with the Town Manager, and concerns about the Town Manager with the Mayor.

#### **Town Manager- Council Relationships**

- Council Members must understand that their role is to develop policy, not get involved in administration. Such activity can erode the manager's authority with staff members and often lead to morale and productivity problems within the staff.
- Council Members should maintain consistent positions in both their public declarations and their private discussions with the Town Manager. Our actions can increase or minimize the quality of work by our Town Manager and Staff.
- All dealings with town staff should be handled via the Town Manager, unless he or she prescribes otherwise.

#### **5. Relationships with the Media (Print, Radio, TV, Websites)**

- When talking with the media, avoid attacking others, even if they attacked you. Don't let an aggressive reporter or citizen lure you into battle. Fighting with a citizen, staff member, or fellow Council person can make you look small minded and divert attention from what you were elected to do. Resist the urge to be vindictive.
- While Facebook, blogs, wikis and other forms of online discourse are individual interactions, please remember that to our citizens, you are always a representative of the Town of Grottoes. We have an official Town website and Face book page for our town and that content is controlled by Town Staff
- Please refrain from conducting any town related business on personal websites. If you receive questions via personal websites, please direct people to our official Town website or Facebook page to find information and/or post comments.

## **6. Relations with the Public (Citizens)**

- Avoid a private lifestyle that casts public doubt upon the integrity and competence of the town government
- Pay all taxes due to the county, state, or national government.
- Work to create a positive environment in public meetings where citizens will feel comfortable in their roles as observers or participants.
- Be tolerant. Allow citizens, employees, or colleagues sufficient opportunity to present their views.
- Be respectful and attentive. Avoid comments, body language or distracting activity that conveys a message of disrespect for the presentations from citizens, personnel or colleagues.
- When making comments, make sure you clarify when you are speaking individually and not for the Council as a whole.
- There will be times when we are asked to speak at public meetings, with the media, post comments on websites, etc. If you are sharing your personal thoughts and/or opinions, you need to make this clear to your audience by stating your comments do not represent the Council as a whole.
- Reflect on your comments before you speak to make sure they cannot be misinterpreted. Comments based on fact and forethought will hopefully eliminate any possible misunderstandings.
- Serious issues should be discussed as a whole (Council and Staff) before public comments are made.
- Remember that even though you are an individual, in the eyes of the public and media, you represent the Council and our community. Choose your words wisely and make decisions

appropriately.

Mayor Plaster asked council to check their calendars to see when they would be available near the end of February to schedule a retreat. Mayor Plaster said she has asked Attorney Helm to review Robert's Rules and discuss and answer any questions that may come up.

**OLD BUSINESS** – none

**ADJOURNMENT**

Mayor Plaster declared the meeting adjourned at 7:26 p.m.

Attest

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Mayor

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Clerk