

May 10, 2022 Council Meeting

The regular meeting of the Council of the City of Martinsville, Virginia was held on May 10, 2022 in Council Chambers, Municipal Building, at 7:00 PM with Mayor Kathy Lawson presiding. Other Council Members present included Danny Turner, Chad Martin, Jennifer Bowles and Tammy Pearson. Staff present included City Manager Leon Towarnicki, Assistant City Manager and City Attorney Eric Monday, Clerk of Council Karen Roberts, and Linda Conover, Finance Department, Finance Manager Mandy McGhee, Police Chief Eddie Cassady.

Mayor Lawson called the meeting to order and advised Council would go into Closed Session beginning at 6:00 PM. In accordance with section 2.1-344 (A) Code of Virginia (1950, and as amended) and upon a motion by Council Member Turner and seconded by Vice Mayor Bowles with the following 4-0 recorded vote: Mayor Lawson, aye; Council Member Pearson, aye; Council Member Turner, aye; and Vice Mayor Bowles, aye. Council Member Martin arrived during closed session. Council convened in Closed Session to discuss the following matters: (A) Discussion or consideration of the investment of public funds where competition or bargaining is involved, where, if made public initially, the financial interest of the governmental unit would be adversely affected, as authorized by Subsection 6. At the conclusion of Closed Session, each returning member of Council certified that (1) only public business matters exempt from open meeting requirements were discussed in said Closed Session; and (2) only those business matters identified in the motion convening the Closed Session were heard, discussed, or considered during the meeting. A motion was made by Bowles; seconded by Martin, with the following 5-0 recorded vote in favor to return to Open Session: Council Member Turner, aye; Council Member Pearson, aye; Council Member Martin, aye; Vice Mayor Bowles, aye; and Mayor Lawson, aye.

Mayor Lawson welcomed everyone to the meeting. Council Member Pearson lead the pledge to the flag and invocation.

Recognize a student from Martinsville Middle School's 7th grade class as Virginia Municipal League's Region 2 winner of the 2022 "If I Were Mayor" essay contest – Mayor Lawson said this is the third year in a row that Martinsville has had a regional winner. Sue Mellon, representative from VML detailed the essay contest and explained that this year students were encouraged to identify a problem in the community, talk to another person about that and then propose a solution. Mellon presented the award to Jordin Hernandez Machuca, Martinsville student and Region 2 winner. Mayor Lawson invited Machuca to take the Mayor's seat and read his essay. Mayor Lawson and Council presented Machuca with a certificate. Lawson said that Martinsville students interrogated her for 2 hours by Zoom and asked some tough questions but it was rewarding for her to interact with the students and she heard some very good questions. Council will review the other essays and will present a cash prize to their top three picks.

Consider presentation of a Proclamation regarding National Police Week 2022 and Peace Officers' Memorial Day – Mayor Lawson said the Peace Officers Memorial will be tomorrow at 11:00am at the Henry County meeting room. Lawson read the proclamation which was

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presented to Police Chief Eddie Cassady. Cassady thanked Council for the proclamation on behalf of the City officers and staff.

Read and Present a Proclamation recognizing the 50th anniversary of Piedmont Community Services – Council Member Pearson read the proclamation which was presented to Greg Preston and Board Chair Brenda Ephraim. Greg thanked Council on behalf of the Board of Directors and Piedmont Community staff. Greg recognized the staff for their diligence in serving the community for 50 years especially the past 2 years during COVID. Greg summarized the timeline of PCS since opening in 1967 and the area served. Piedmont Community will be expanding services including Crisis Intervention services and on May 20 there will be a grand opening of the new recovery center at 10:00am then at 12:00noon, there will be another celebration at Jack Dalton Park. Preston summarized several projects ongoing and several options offered to the community through Piedmont Community Services.

Consider adoption on second reading, Ordinance 2022-3 enacting or amending certain sections of the Code of the City of Martinsville regarding use of electric scooters – City Attorney Monday briefly summarized the proposed electric scooter program and the need for the ordinance. There are several ordinance changes to be considered which would allow the scooter program in the City. If the ordinance is adopted the only step remaining is the MOU with Bird corporation. Vice Mayor Bowles made a motion to adopt Ordinance 2022-3 on second reading; Council Member Martin seconded the motion with the following roll call vote: Vice Mayor Bowles, aye; Council Member Martin, aye; Council Member Pearson, aye; Council Member Turner, aye; and Mayor Lawson, aye.

Conduct a Public Hearing on the City's FY22-23 Budget and consider approval of Budget Ordinance 2022-U-2 on first reading – City Manager Towarnicki summarized the budget process and touched on some changes to the proposed FY22-23 budget. A proposed fourth work session is being considered for Wednesday May 18. Mayor Lawson opened the public hearing.

Margaret Caldwell, Blue Ridge Library representative expressed concern that the library is only being approved for level funding for the fifth year when the staff has not had a raise in years outside of the required cost of living raise. The library can not provide raises to the staff without the support of Council. The library serves residents from infancy to senior citizens. The library staff continued to work through the pandemic to serve the residents including providing wifi for students to complete homework. Library visits have increased by 25% in both February and March of 2022. Minimum wage library staff can go to local fast food restaurants and make more money starting pay. Caldwell asks Council to reconsider level funding and to allow for an increase so staff can receive a much-deserved raise. Betsy Haskins, library representative says the local libraries are so well run, they have a strong board, an excellent leader in Rick Ward, and an excellent 5-year plan. For Council to deny the 5% raise breaks her heart. Staff members work more than a 9:00-5:00 shift, often investing

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extra time during special events and they go above and beyond the call of duty. To not approve the raise insinuates that the staff are not valued. It would be a sad day if the library closed due to lack of staff. Patrick County has denied their request, Henry County has agreed to discuss the option so Haskin hopes that Martinsville Council will lead the charge in allowing the raise. Rick Ward confirmed that there is a contingency fund but it is not sustainable.

Angela Frasier, 1107 Smith Lake Road circulated a petition regarding the condition of Smith Lake Road. The road is dangerous and the only way out for many residents in that area. She estimates 20 or more houses in the area of Village Street which would generate a higher traffic flow than what the City believes there is. Frasier said that the road was built in the 1990s and has never been repaved, if it is not repaired correctly she fears there could be a terrible wreck or fatality. She challenges Council members to drive the road from top to bottom if they don't believe it should be included in the budget. Bowles explained that if that road were paved, it would cost \$232,000 which would take 100% of the paving budget. A lot of paving contractors already have full schedules so the City will put it on the rebid list later in the summer. Bowles said she and other Council members have all received complaints about the road. Pearson explained that infrastructure is part of the consideration of ARPA funds and would like to see Smith Lake Road paving project be reconsidered. Martin said he commends Frasier for how she has handled this situation.

Mayor Lawson closed the public hearing. Council Member Martin made a motion to give \$6571 towards the 5% pay raise requested by the library. Council Member Turner seconded the motion. Turner asked Martin to amend his motion to offer the full \$13,000 if Patrick and Henry County agree to the raise as well. Martin agreed to the amendment, Vice Mayor Bowles seconded the amendment. Council Member Pearson questioned the proposed Council pay raise and that she would be willing to forego the 10% Council pay raise and apply it to the library raise. Lawson explained that funds would need to be allocated first. All Council Members were in favor. Lawson would like to see a minimum 5% adjustment on the assessed value on personal property tax assessments. Turner made a motion to approve the 5% assessed value on personal property tax assessments; Council Member Martin seconded the motion. Lawson explained that by decreasing the assessed value of resident vehicles and instead of basing tax on 100% value of the vehicle, the City would base the assessment on a 95% value to decrease the resident amount owed. This option will give some tax relief to residents. Pearson prefers that they approve more than 5% on personal property tax, maybe 20%? Commissioner of Revenue Ruth Easley said it appears the number listed on page 10 of the handout only included cars, motorcycles and boats. Lawson asked if Council could continue this discussion to the next budget work session. Martin made a motion to award half of the \$11262 requested by the Public Defender's office; Bowles seconded the motion. Lawson wonders if \$6,000 will make the impact they need considering the other localities, nor the state are not stepping up. Lawson would like to hold off further discussions until the

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Wednesday work session. Pearson questioned adding staff to Street marking and signs and eliminating other positions. Towarnicki explained anything done through street maintenance will be funded in part by the state. Pearson is concerned about reducing any positions in the Police Department. Bowles said the Police Department will continue to provide the same services, these are positions that were already vacant so they are not eliminating jobs. Pearson questioned where the cost of reversion legal fees is reflected in the budget report. Pearson does not want to see a 10% pay raise for Council. Turner said he spends his Council salary back into the community so he's not concerned about the raise either. Towarnicki said as far back as 2009, Council salary has remained the same, there was even a time when the salaries went down 5% for 1 year. Bowles explained that Council salary is not substantial but Council donates a lot of their time and reinvests their salary back into the community. Turner would like to set aside \$4million in ARPA funds going forward for budget relief. Pearson questioned the Finance Department, since there is a Finance Director and an Assistant Finance Director, is there a need for the part-time position. Towarnicki explained that Linda Conover would be needed until the Director and Assistant Director are fully trained. Conover explained that part of her salary comes from ARPA funds

Bowles made a motion to approve Budget Ordinance 2022-U-2 on first reading with requested changes to the library budget; Martin seconded the motion with the following roll call vote: Council Member Pearson, aye; Vice Mayor Bowles, aye; Council Member Martin, aye; Mayor Lawson, aye; and Council Member Turner, aye.

Business from the Floor – None

Comments by City Council – Council Member Martin asked if there is a way to get the hospital to talk to Council to provide an understanding of what's going on and why departments are closing. Towarnicki says that meeting is in the works. Council Member Turner said several people were in attendance to view the BB&T building with more than 20 people touring the building. The Request for Proposal process is being adjusted and will allow additional time than before. Vice Mayor Bowles thanked staff, administration and department heads for their hard work on the budget and answering all of Council's questions. She thanked everyone for the congratulatory remarks on her earning her MBA. Martin complimented Turner for his work bringing in developers to the BB&T building, stating that Turner is a champion for Martinsville. Lawson attended the Crimestoppers 40th Anniversary luncheon which was well attended and some founding members were in attendance. Tomorrow night is the third Uptown group meeting at 6:00pm at TAD Center. Lawson congratulated Vice Mayor Bowles on receiving her MBA.

Comments by the City Manager – City Manager Towarnicki said that there was a ribbon cutting at the Five Points project; the first five houses are complete and two have been sold. The price point on those homes are \$130-\$135,000 range and the houses were more affordable prior to COVID and price increases. The target all along was to create affordable workforce housing. Each home and situation vary with financing and down payments. Towarnicki explained that

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Martinsville High School will hold the Big M awards on Thursday, May 12 at 7:00pm. Martinsville High School graduation will be May 21 at 10:00am. The Peace Officers Memorial will be tomorrow May 11 at 11:00am at the Henry County meeting room. Friday at 11:00am is the Start-Up Martinsville awards with a large group of 19 businesses. The next budget work session will be May 18 at 6:00pm.

There being no further business, Vice Mayor Bowles made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:45pm.

Karen Roberts, Clerk of Council

Kathy Lawson, Mayor