

September 27, 2022 Council Meeting

The regular meeting of the Council of the City of Martinsville, Virginia was held on September 27, 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, Building Inspector Kris Bridges, Community Development Director Mark McCaskill, Public Information Officer Kendall Davis, and Police Captain Chad Rhoads.

Mayor Lawson called the meeting to order and advised Council would go into Closed Session beginning at 6:45 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 3-0 recorded vote: Mayor Lawson, aye; Council Member Turner, aye; and Vice Mayor Bowles, aye. Council Member Pearson and Council Member Martin were not present for the vote but joined Council during Closed Session.

Council convened in Closed Session to discuss the following matters: (A) Appointments to boards and commissions and personnel discussions, as authorized by Subsection 1, 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; Vice Mayor Bowles, aye; Mayor Lawson, aye; and Council Member Martin, aye.

Council Member Turner made a motion to appoint Crystal Dallas to the Southern Area Agency on Aging Board of Directors for a 3-year unexpired term ending September 28, 2024. Council Member Pearson seconded the motion with all Council Members voting in favor.

Mayor Lawson called the meeting to order. Council Member Martin lead the pledge to the American Flag and offered invocation. Lawson welcomed everyone to the meeting, stating printed agendas could be found in the back of the room and on the City website for those watching from home.

Approve minutes from the August 9, 2022 and August 23, 2022 Council Meetings – Vice Mayor Bowles made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Council Member Martin seconded the motion. Council Member Turner and Vice Mayor Bowles requested that their statements be added to the August 9 minutes. Clerk of Council Roberts will review the tape and add that verbiage before the minutes are posted. All Council Members voted in favor of the amended minutes.

Hear an overview of the September 26, 2022 West End neighborhood tour and meeting – City Manager Towarnicki summarized the West End Neighborhood tour and meeting held the night before. Towarnicki detailed locations visited and issues discussed and stated that any

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property not already posted, was reported to the correct departments today. Most areas were clean and most issues were already in the system. Approximately 30 residents from the West End area were present. Towarnicki shared that the meeting got a little “heated”, there was a lot of noise and residents speaking over each other. Concerns were expressed about the Pine Hall project, the Paradise Inn, property maintenance and properties for demolition, speeding in the neighborhood, kudzu, groundhogs, overgrown intersections, water runoff onto private property, areas without sidewalks or curb and gutter, and damaged roads that need repair. The neighborhood meeting lasted about 90 minutes ending at 8:35pm. Council Member Martin feels that part of the frustration in the community is that the City shares great ideas with the residents but are not keeping them updated on the progress or any reasons for delays. Vice Mayor Bowles likes that the residents can get updates in their utility bill and quarterly updates, along with the mobile sign to keep residents informed. Council Member Pearson says that Council needs to do a better job communicating through several venues to ensure all residents stay informed. Council Member Turner said there was an information session previously that was well attended. Bowles feels that it is Council’s responsibility to bridge the information gap with the City residents. Mayor Lawson expects more delays with the Pine Hall project due to bids, construction, etc. but the quarterly meeting to keep residents informed will be huge improvement. Bowles said a timeline easily assessible would be very helpful keeping residents informed. Lawson said Council is here to serve the residents and encouraged them to reach out to them with any concerns, they can’t address things if they are not aware of the concern.

Read a Proclamation acknowledging the 20th Anniversary of The Harvest Foundation – Mayor Lawson provided background on the Harvest Foundation. Vice Mayor Bowles read the proclamation which was presented to representatives of the Harvest Foundation Kate Keller, President and Latala Hodges, Director of Communications. Keller thanked Council for recognizing the Harvest Foundation’s 20th anniversary. Vice Mayor Bowles requested information about the Hope Project. Hodges explained that Project Hope was a response to community grass roots projects to help celebrate the anniversary. All applications have been submitted and they are excited to dive into those which will be reviewed by community leaders for funding approval. They hope it will be a regular project but they are waiting to see how the first round goes. They received 9 applications with \$100,00 to award and allotting around \$75,000. Council Member Martin said it would be a great gesture if Harvest would consider doing something with the Paradise Inn or with a food hub for that area.



PROCLAMATION

**RECOGNIZING THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE HARVEST FOUNDATION**

WHEREAS, The Harvest Foundation was established in August, 2002 from the proceeds of the sale of Memorial Hospital of Martinsville-Henry County to Province Healthcare, appointing its first executive director and establishing an office in Uptown Martinsville; and

WHEREAS, the proceeds from the hospital sale are invested with the earnings being allocated to a variety grants, awards, initiatives, and projects; and

WHEREAS, through funding provided by The Harvest Foundation, substantial investment has been made in our community's health, economic development, education, recreation & tourism, and initiatives improving the overall quality of life; and

WHEREAS, some of the more noteworthy Harvest-funded projects include the Smith River Sports Complex, funding assistance for the construction of New College Institute, assistance with development costs associated with Commonwealth Crossing Business Centre, and most recently the establishment of the SEED Program at Patrick & Henry Community College; and

WHEREAS, 2022 marks the 20th anniversary of The Harvest Foundation in the Martinsville-Henry County community

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Kathy Lawson, Mayor, and members of Martinsville City Council do hereby recognize The Harvest Foundation for its 20 years of service and the tremendous impact Harvest-funded projects have had in our community. We gratefully acknowledge the important work of The Harvest Foundation and look forward to many more years of success.

Kathy Lawson, Mayor

Hear public input regarding possible demolition of the Paradise Inn located at 802 W. Fayette Street – City Manager Towarnicki briefly summarized the Paradise Inn's history, the current condition, and the concerns related to renovation and costs. In addition to the cost of repairs, there are environmental issues that would need to be addressed before any repairs could be made. The owners of the property have no desire to do anything with the building and there are substantial liens on the property. The building lot is not the best location for any development. Council Member Pearson would like an update on what taxes are owed and legal issues associated with the property. City Attorney Monday says the current liens are from at least a year ago and when the City cleans up property, cuts grass, board up windows, etc. then additional fines are placed on the property immediately if the property owners are not willing to reimburse for that work. The percentage of the liens are set by the state, not the City. Monday explained the various types of liens that could be associated with the property. Monday said that there are \$300,000+ in federal tax liens because the owners did not pay their taxes. Vice Mayor Bowles asked if Council could dismiss any local liens on the property if a developer expressed interest in redeveloping the property. Monday explained that would be a council decision but Council cannot dismiss any federal liens. Pearson said that she could only find liens from Henry County and the City but no federal liens on file; she would like a more current review on what is owed. Monday explained there were also some private judgements on the property. Mayor Lawson opened the floor for anyone wishing to comment about the Paradise Inn.

Albert Davis, 107 Randolph Street and 912 Independence Street shared that in his younger

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days, Fayette Street was wide open for the black community and business owners. Today the only thing standing is the Paradise Inn, the City has taken everything else. Why is all the money being applied to South Side? Why can't any of the funding or grants be applied to the West End? Where is the residents tax money going? Mayor Lawson explained that the money is spent and then reimbursed for the grants once the work is complete, that reimbursement is reapplied to the general fund. Davis questioned why everything in Mulberry and Southside is nicer and cleaner than on West End. Mayor Lawson explained there were actually many more issues, houses and yards in disrepair on Southside. Lawson said no money has been put into any projects on Southside, if the area looks better it's because the residents are keeping their homes and property clean. Lawson confirmed that no decision has been made about tearing down the Paradise, that's why Council is asking residents for their opinions. Davis said everything the black community looks up to and all previously black owned businesses have been torn down, why is money an issue when it comes to local black history. Council Member Pearson asked if there is any way the City can legally go in and do anything with the property. Monday explained that Council can compel demolition because the property is condemned and unsafe but the City does not have the authority to take possession of the property without a tax delinquency or clean-up delinquency. If the property owners have paid all taxes and liens, any renovations or remodeling to the property by the City would be considered a gift to the property owners. Monday said a family member/representative for the Paradise Inn came to him two years ago and told him that the family planned to renovate the property but nothing has been done.

No one else approached the podium so Mayor Lawson closed the hearing.

Consider approval of the consent agenda – Vice Mayor Bowles approved the consent agenda as presented. Council Member Martin seconded the motion with all Council Members voting in favor.

BUDGET ADDITIONS FOR 9/27/2022				
ORG	OBJECT	DESCRIPTION	DEBIT	CREDIT
FY22 - General Fund				
01101916	434105	Categorical/Shared - Commonwealth Attorney Office	3,319	
01221082	506105	Commonwealth's Attorney - State Confiscated Assets		3,319
		DCJS Confiscated Assets		
FY23 - General Fund				
01103938	462101	Categorical - Other -State	502	
01311085	506078	Police - State Confiscated Assets		399
01221082	506105	Commonwealth's Attorney - State Confiscated Assets		103
		Total General Fund	3,821	3,821

Business from the Floor – Keith Owens, 1708 Meadowview Lane thanked Council for their time and he appreciates all they do for the community. If no one has a stable place to lay their head then they have no hope for recovery. Today, they had a rally for awareness to bridge the gap to let the public servants know the need for homeless support, the impact on the community and the cost if those people are arrested or require emergency services. Owens feels that there are better days ahead for Martinsville and Henry County, they just need to help those people

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who are at their most vulnerable. The local shelter won't open until November and it's getting cooler already. Funding from the City and County are vital to help these people until they can help themselves. Mayor Lawson shared that Council is working with United Way to help prevent evictions, she encouraged Owens to reach out to them also for partnership.

Pastor Michael Harrison spoke to reiterate what Owens shared, the City and County have a huge need for a homeless shelter, this is a way to get people off the streets and help them until they can help themselves. He hopes that ARPA funds, opioid funds, and Harvest funds can be applied towards this shelter. Vice Mayor Bowles asked for a description of what "wrap around" services are. Harris explained residents are assigned a counselor to ensure they make it through the programs, to assist them in saving money, in jobs and in housing. Council Member Turner asked what the budget for a 32 bed "wrap around" shelter would cost. Pastor Harrison explained that would cost approximately \$250,000 per year. The ideal property for the shelter must be in a location with bus access and within walking distance to the City. Harrison said the calls coming in to assist the homeless have gone up 300% in 2022.

Leroy "Toolie" Hairston, 109 Terry Street said he left the West End neighborhood meeting very hurt. He doesn't own property but he is concerned what residents can do to help a situation. Some will talk a good game, but Hairston says he is a player. Hairston stated "hearts need to be reevaluated". People need to work together, not against each other. We are all human, we all have flaws. Hairston feels that Council Members and City employees think that they are better than him and other residents. Many people will not come to a meeting because they don't feel like their voices would be heard. The City must make better progress. Hairston is sad to see how the City has "gone to pot", we are here to learn from each other and grow with each other.

Ricky Foster of 1162 Crestridge Road says until you've been involved with the homeless or the shelters then you don't understand the severity of people who don't have food, shelter, jobs, etc. He's been involved in the shelter and has taken over the food ministry at his church. Instead of getting 2 trucks a week, going forward they may be lucky to get 1 truck. Foster appreciates Council Member Martin's assistance and he encourages Council Members to get involved and consider more funding for the shelter. Vice Mayor Bowles says she has worked with similar organizations and assured Foster that what he's saying is not falling on deaf ears.

Michael Sanguedolce of 708 Starling Ave says his heart goes out to the local homeless and those organizing the shelter. He agrees there is a need in the area. He moved to Martinsville four years ago and loves it here. Sanguedolce thanked Towarnicki for helping with the traffic issues. He read an article in the Martinsville Bulletin recently about pickle ball, it's the fastest growing sport in the country with over 5million people playing. The largest group 52% are 55 years old and older. What can Martinsville do to bring more people to the area in addition to fishing or walking trails, he suggested pickle ball. Sanguedolce explained how pickle ball is played and says it's geared towards the older community over 55 years old. Council Member Martin said the salary for those playing professionally are \$200,000 and more so it could be

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very beneficial to get this sport in the schools and the kids trained to play. Martin says that the Virginia Department of Health has some amazing programs for older residents.

Comments by City Council – Council Member Pearson stated in regards to parking Uptown, that it is still a concern. The same cars are parked there all day long, most belonging to the business owners. The City should enforce parking so guests to uptown businesses have more parking. Council Member Turner asked if an ordinance can be passed to prohibit business owners from parking in front of their business. City Attorney Monday confirmed that Uptown is already posted for 2-hour parking, it's just a matter of how far Council wants to take enforcement. Pearson asked if towing could be implemented, she feels that it is inhibiting visitors to uptown businesses. A letter has been sent from the Chamber but Council feels that the City should enforce this issue more. If a friendly reminder doesn't work then maybe a ticket on a windshield will. Mayor Lawson said the police department is already spread thin so they would need to consider another way to enforce parking restrictions. Vice Mayor Bowles asked for a study to see how many parking tickets could support an additional employee to monitor those vehicles. Pearson stated that due to the weather on Saturday, the OctoberFest will be rescheduled to October 29 from 11:00am-4:00pm and she encourages everyone to attend. The Christmas Parade has been scheduled for November 19 beginning at 5:00pm. In regards to homelessness and a shelter, she asked the City Council to take the lead by working with Pastor Harrison and others to hold a summit, pull some groups together including Henry County, Harvest, Grace Network and come up with actionable plans. Lawson explained that they are in constant communication and there is a business plan and an effort to locate a building. Pearson said she was dismayed that the city school board has lawyered up in relation to reversion and that the school board has obtained legal representation towards reversion. It continues to be unbelievable to her that the school board is having to fight their own City. She is saddened that the majority of Council continues to vote for reversion. She feels the schools and the students should be top priority and not the cost invested in reversion. Council Member Martin stated that he never once wanted to keep the schools out of the reversion process. Council Member Martin stated that you don't understand what a homeless person goes through until you walk in their shoes. Martin has slept in his car and was embarrassed to tell his parents but it was the most eye opening and worst experience of his life. He never wants to get so high and mighty that he can't understand what others are dealing with. He asked that the Henry County board, both Martinsville and Henry County school systems, Council Members and other organizations such as DSS to participate in a "poverty day or weekend" where an individual is dropped off at the library with \$5 and a phone and told to "figure it out" Being homeless is a dehumanizing experience and it takes a lot of courage to ask for help. Martin recommends that organizations need people with experience being homeless on their board. Martin said while this may not be true, it is a strong perception that anytime there is something West End or Fayette Street wants it's always about lack of money. When other areas want things, it appears the City can make it

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happen. It's a thought process whether it's true or not and he hears it regularly. Council Member Turner shared that Friday 6:00pm the Martinsville High School Bulldogs play GW; they are 4-0 which encourages him that Martinsville can beat GW this year. Turner encourages residents to attend the game and pull for the Bulldogs. Vice Mayor Bowles invited a resident who missed the Business from the Floor session to the podium to speak.

Linda Mosley, 1409 Cardinal Lane said that she was happy that the City Public Works visited her today, looked at her issue, acknowledged the concern and will work with her to get that water runoff problem resolved.

Vice Mayor Bowles shared that OctoberFest has been rescheduled for race weekend so she hopes it will be a better event. The Bulldogs game will be at 6:00pm. Bowles said her Grace Presbyterian Church celebrated Decan Alberta Wilson's 100th birthday and asked if the City could send a proclamation to the church to recognize her. The MLC Cancer Foundation will be hosting their annual Pink Event October 22 and she invites the community to attend. She wants individuals to know what is available with free mammograms, support and resources. Bowles congratulated DeShanta Hairston who was appointed to the Executive Director position with FAHI. Bowles pointed out that early voting started last Saturday and is available from 8:00-5:00 at the City Municipal Building in the Registrar's office but noted that the office would be closed for lunch. Bowles requested that the Saturday office hours for early voting be publicly advertised. Bowles stated that there was a lot of passion, pain and frustration at the meeting last night. Bowles made a motion to request city administration to research and review installing historical markers for Paradise Inn and other historical spaces within the black community and West End area, these landmarks are important to the black community and she feels the City should be proactive in healing the racial divide. Council Member Martin seconded the motion to research installing historical markers. Bowles stated that doing things like this will be the first step to moving forward as a community. Council Member Pearson said this was something that Council had discussed on the neighborhood tour last night and agrees with Bowles. Martin said Paradise was a go-to place, where James Brown, Dianna Ross, Tina Turner and other greats performed and asked what would happen to the Paradise if the City were to recognize it as a historical property. City Attorney Monday explained that a marker can commemorate what was there but the owner can still demolish the building if they wanted to. Listing a property on the historic register doesn't limit the owner's actions. Monday feels that the request for markers would be well received. Turner moved to question with all Council Members voting in favor. Bowles stated, as someone who went to Martinsville High School along with other Council Members, for Pearson to imply that they want to abolish the schools is inaccurate. For Bowles to push for reversion is because she is considering what's in the best interest of the citizens. If the City didn't have ARPA funds, the City taxes would increase 15% for residents that already can't afford it. Bowles doesn't believe that the high school will close because it's in the epicenter of the City and because Henry County residents do not want students of a certain demographic

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mingling with their students. Bowles stated that reversion is a moot point, let the citizens vote, it's not for her to push her opinions on anyone. The school board was invited to the reversion session and were involved in the decisions that have been made. Bowles questioned who put up the Queen Elizabeth display near the Martinsville 7 marker; Mayor Lawson shared that this was done by Rev. Millner. Bowles said the position next to the historical marker caused some complaints. Mayor Lawson shared that there was a joint meeting held on October 6, 2020 which included the schools, Henry County and the City; it was an opportunity for all to present their needs and to list all educational beliefs to help students succeed, staffing concerns, etc. They left that meeting with the understanding that there would be future discussions, however the school superintendent chose not to participate in additional follow-up meetings. When the City was allocating funds from ARPA, they identified the need to increase the demolition budget and water drainage issues in various parts of the City, they did not have a unanimous vote but these are serious issues that affect all neighborhoods. There is a misconception that the City wants to tear down the Paradise Inn; Lawson confirmed that the City does not want to tear it down. They have been asking for opinions from the residents to help decide what steps to take in the best interest of the neighborhood. Their purpose to have it on tonight's agenda was to receive comments and opinions from those residents that live in that area. If the City doesn't receive information then they can only go by the voices of the few that have spoken. Mayor Lawson reminded residents of Hazardous Waste Day on October 15. Lawson and her husband attended the 150 Anniversary service at Mount Zion Church, sharing that it was a beautiful service. Lawson reminded residents that there are magnets available for citizens which lists emergency contact and general information. Lawson commented on a September 18 article in the Martinsville Bulletin noting a Council candidate was quoted as saying "our city manager will be retiring very soon". Lawson and Towarnicki both confirmed that there were no plans for Towarnicki to retire anytime soon; Towarnicki said he would give council plenty of notice when he decides to retire. Lawson also expressed her frustration about a statement about Council Members that "they aren't very active in the community". Lawson said that Pastor Harrison, still in attendance, could attest to her service and participation in the community. Lawson stated that she found that quote to be shallow and untrue and if someone is going to criticize then they should get their facts straight. Words were exchanged with Council Candidate Rawls from the audience and Council Member Martin, Vice Mayor Bowles and Mayor Lawson where they disputed Rawls claims that they are not involved with the community. Rawls accused Council Members of participating in the community only when the media was present. Martin pointed out his participation with the homeless and the prison ministries. Lawson said she works hard for this community and she felt that was unfair and very untrue. Rawls accused Mayor Lawson of lying to him about ARPA funds. Martin accused Rawls of making a scene for the media since Charles Roark was in attendance. A resident in attendance thanked Mayor Lawson for regularly putting out the flags Uptown without the media present. Mayor Lawson adjourned the meeting

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at 9:20pm after an outburst by Council Candidate Aaron Rawls and an exchange of words
between Rawls and several Council Members.

Karen Roberts, Clerk of Council

Kathy Lawson, Mayor