

January 9, 2024 Council Meeting

The regular meeting of the Council of the City of Martinsville, Virginia was held on January 9, 2024, in Council Chambers, Municipal Building, at 7:00 PM with Mayor LC Jones presiding. Other Council Members present included Kathy Lawson, Lawrence Mitchell, Aaron Rawls, and Tammy Pearson. Staff present included City Manager Aretha Ferrell-Benavides, Clerk of Council Karen Roberts, Finance Director Mandy McGhee, Utility Director Durwin Joyce, Community Development Director Keith Holland, Fire Chief Dan Howell, Human Resources Director Travis Hodge, and Deputy Police Chief?? Chad Rhoads.

Mayor Jones called the meeting to order and advised Council would go into Closed Session beginning at 6:30 PM. In accordance with the Code of Virginia, Title 2.2 Chapter 37, Freedom of Information Act and upon a motion by Council Member Lawson and seconded by Council Member Pearson with the following 5-0 recorded vote: Vice Mayor Rawls, aye; Council Member Pearson, aye; Mayor Jones, aye; Council Member Lawrence Mitchell, aye; and Council Member Lawson, aye. Council convened in Closed Session to discuss the following matters: (A) Discussion, consideration or interviews of prospective candidates for employment, assignment, appointment, promotion, performance, demotion, salaries, disciplining, or resignation of specific public officers, appointees, or employees of any public body, concerning appointment to the Arts and Cultural Committee, appointment to the Citizen Advisory Board, and reappointment to the Pittsylvania County Community Action Agency Board. Mayor Jones explained that Council recessed Closed Session and would return at the end of regular 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 Council Member Lawson; seconded by Pearson with the following 5-0 recorded vote in favor to return to Open Session: Vice Mayor Rawls, aye; Council Member Lawrence Mitchell, aye; Council Member Pearson, aye; Council Member Lawson, aye; and Mayor Jones, aye. Mayor Jones stated that no action was taken out of Closed Session. Mayor Jones explained that no action was taken out of Closed Session.

Mayor Jones called the meeting to order. Council Member Pearson led the pledge to the American flag and offered invocation. Jones 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.

Conduct a public hearing on proposed changes to the City Charter and consider approval – Attorney Paul Jacobson explained the process for approving the charter changes. Mayor Jones opened the public hearing. No one approached the podium, so the public hearing was closed. Vice Mayor Rawls made a motion to approve the City Charter changes as presented. Council Member Lawson seconded the motion with all Council Members voting in favor.

Hear a presentation on the Baby Bonds Program – Representative Peter Wells participated electronically and shared details on the program. Unfortunately, there were issues with the

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connection so Wells sent the information to Mayor Jones who will share with Council Members and encouraged them to contact Wells directly with questions.

Recognize City Employees who are eligible for Service Awards for the period October 1 – December 31, 2023 – City Manager Ferrell-Benavides read the list of service awards, sharing that the employees were also recognized earlier today. She appreciates their continued employment and dedication.

Business from the Floor – Noone approached the podium.

Comments by City Council – Mitchell hopes everyone is safe after the local flooding. Council Member Lawson congratulated Bobby, Owner of the American Patriot Liquidation Store Uptown and the winner for the Uptown window decorating contest. Lawson encourages residents to visit the store where they'll find great deals. Lawson thanked the electric department and the public works department workers for their dedicated work during a recent power outage and flooding. Lawson thanked the MiNET department for getting services reconnected quickly during a recent outage. The Martin Luther King breakfast is Saturday, this is a ticketed event, and the Martin Luther King community service is Sunday at First Baptist East Martinsville. Lawson said Council hears from citizens whose homes are not energy efficient and who do not have the funds to replace windows or make repairs to save on utility bills; Lawson requested that ARPA funds be considered to create a fund to invest in emergency efficient home repairs and assist residents. Lawson shared that the Sheriff's Department created a firewood program years ago; inmates cut down trees around the City and a resident donated acreage as well. Residents would need a referral from Social Services, Salvation Army, or Grace Network to receive free firewood. Vice Mayor Rawls referenced Lawson's comments about funding for energy efficient repairs, sharing that there is a federal program that will be offered soon and he is committed to look into that funding for Martinsville residents. Rawls hopes residents voted today, sharing that it's exciting that there is a Martinsville resident on the ballot. Mayor Jones thanked residents for attending the meeting, especially with the bad weather. Jones also thanked the electric department and commended them for their quick response to power outages and keeping the public informed. On Sunday January 14 at Mount Saini Church, there will be another Martin Luther King service free to the public. Jones thanked the employees who earned service awards.

Comments by the City Manager – City Manager Ferrell-Benavides thanked Council on behalf of staff for the extra holiday time. Ferrell-Benavides thanked Kornna Kitchen for offering the appreciation meal for City employees and thanked Council for continuing to support City staff. Ferrell-Benavides introduced Edena Reese who will be joining City staff on February 1 as the Chief Operating Officer and shared Reese's previous experience. The City is still looking for an Executive Director for the IDA and a Public Works manager. The Martinsville channel is active and PIO Kendall Davis is looking for content from Council and City Departments.

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There being no further business, Council Member Lawson made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:30pm.

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Karen Roberts, Clerk of Council

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LC Jones, Mayor