



City of Buena Vista City Council

Regular Council Meeting

March 21, 2024, 6:00 PM
Council Chambers – 2039 Sycamore Avenue

The City Council for the City of Buena Vista met for a Regular Council Meeting on Thursday, March 21, 2024, at 6:00 p.m.

Members Present: Mayor Tyson Cooper

Vice-Mayor Danny Staton
Michelle Poluikis
Melvin Henson

Steve Webb
Todd Jones
Ronald Cash

Members Absent: None

ADG #1: CALL TO ORDER, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE AND PRAYER

Mayor Cooper called the meeting to order, and Councilwoman Poluikis delivered the opening prayer.

ADG #2: APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Vice-Mayor Staton moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Councilman Webb, and carried by Council.

ADG #3: APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE MARCH 7, 2024, REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING

Motion to approve the minutes was made by Councilman Henson, seconded by Councilman Webb, and carried by Council.

ADG #4: RECOGNITION/COMMUNICATION FROM VISITORS

- John Shewey, 709 River Road, Chairman of the Greenwood Cemetery, provided a brief update on their progress on the cemetery. Mr. Shewey first noted that Greenwood Cemetery is located on 1st Street. He recalled coming to Council about a year ago for approval of Phase I of their project (which was approved), and he appreciates everything the City has done for them since then. He recognized Mr. Tyree for being a big help to him. He stated that he is able to go to his office to talk things over, and he has helped relieve some of the stress. Mr. Shewey then recognized all of the volunteers and donors, without whom nothing would get done. His motto is “if you don’t ask, you’ll never know.” Some of the volunteers include students from SVU and W & L as well as crews from the jail. Phase I has included cutting down around 40-50 dead trees, clearing out brush, and marking graves. They have currently located 190 graves and are still finding more. Phase I will continue with the erection of a fence around the entire property, which will begin on Monday, March 25th. The entranceway into the cemetery will include a bulletin board showcasing the history of the cemetery along with pictures of donors, volunteers, and all of the organizations and clubs that have helped along the way.

Mr. Shewey shared some of the history of the cemetery noting that in 1890, Buena Vista was down at the bottom and there wasn't much up around 1st Street other than fields. Since they had to find a place to bury the paupers, this is where they decided to do that, and by 1895, there were around 45 people buried there. Then in 1922, the City had to find somewhere to bury the colored people, so they decided to put them in Greenwood as well, but they had to divide it off. Mr. Shewey shared that the premise of the Friends of Greenwood is that everybody deserves to be recognized. He noted that so far, they have identified 47 names, and there will be a monument with those names. Mr. Shewey also mentioned that after Phase I is completed, they will be coming back to Council for approval of Phase II, which has yet to be determined.

Mr. Tyree thanked Mr. Shewey for all of his work on this project and commended him on the excellent work he has done with organizing volunteers and enlisting people without costing anybody much money. Mr. Tyree also mentioned that they are planning to have a grand opening and ribbon cutting in May. Mr. Shewey stated that they plan to have the news there and noted that this will be something great about Buena Vista that can be recognized.

Councilman Cash asked if the labor or materials for the fence had been donated or if they had to purchase those. Mr. Shewey said that they took a list of things they needed to Spencer's, and they agreed to donate everything, including delivery of the materials. The Co-op also donated all of the fence posts; they did have to purchase the wire and gates, however. Mr. Shewey then mentioned that they have had a lot of donors from out of the area who have seen their Facebook page. He noted one particular donor from Washington D.C., who came across their Facebook page, and wrote to them that he looks all across the country every week for something to donate money to "to have a good cry," and that he came across their project and their premise that "everyone deserves to be recognized" struck a chord with him, so that is who he wanted to donate his money to that week.

ADG #5: REPORTS

1. Mayor

Mayor Cooper reported that his highlight from the last two weeks was reading to the kids at Enderly last week. He noted that they asked him some great questions after he read a book to them.

2. City Manager

Mr. Tyree reported that the School Facilities Committee is tentatively planning on meeting on May 28 at 6:00 p.m. at the Ramsey Center. He and Dr. Francis are working to get all their ducks in a row and will provide updates and put out meeting notices as the time gets closer.

We have received bids for the wastewater treatment plant gas monitoring equipment and will be making a decision on that soon.

Mr. Tyree recalled a joint regional leadership meeting that occurred a couple of years ago between the City, Lexington, and Rockbridge County to discuss the purchase of the land for DSS so that all boards were receiving the same information at the same time and could make a decision at the same time. We are planning to do this again to provide an update on the DSS property. They're not sure when this will happen but imagine it will be before June 1st. Once they iron out the details, he will provide those to everyone.

3. City Attorney

None.

4. Council Committees/Representatives

a. Budget & Finance

Chairman Jones reported that they have begun going through the draft budget with an emphasis on the Police Department request and follow up on what the school's request will be. He mentioned that they will be meeting again next Monday, March 25th and they will start getting down into identifying anything we need to go over carefully and bring to Council.

Mayor Cooper asked if Councilman Jones feels that we will need a work session. Councilman Jones opined that once the figures are in, we should sit down and try to get on the same page or at least find out what, if any, issues there are. He also recalled how scary March used to be in the budget season, but where we are now is actually a fairly comfortable position. He opined that we need to go over the details and make sure we're proceeding wisely with what we have so we don't end up in the kind of budget crunches that we have in the past.

He suggested scheduling the work session following their next Budget & Finance meeting.

b. Outdoor Spaces

Chairman Henson reported that they were originally planning to get together to ride around town to look for potential projects this Saturday, the 23rd, but due to the forecast, it has been moved to April 13th.

He made note of the Easter Egg Hunt happening at the park on March 30th.

He also mentioned that there are three new commercial buildings going up in town as well as lots of housing which should help a little on the tax base.

c. School Facilities

Mayor Cooper reiterated that they are planning to have their first meeting on May 28th at 6:00 p.m. at the Ramsey Center.

5. Department Heads/Constitutional Officers/Court Clerks

a. Kristina Ramsey – Economic Development

Miss Ramsey began her report by noting that there is a lot going on right now. She is talking to three or four different individuals every week who are looking to start a new business, relocate their business from somewhere else, or relocating within the City because they need more space or are doing something a little differently. We are finding that rentable commercial spaces are minimal. There are a lot of obviously vacant buildings, but they are large and are for sale, which is a huge commitment for someone to take on. They are doing some due diligence and trying to locate developers who are willing to buy the buildings and fix them up to provide more rentable spaces for folks who want to open their businesses here.

She mentioned that she was able to pull away to attend the State Economic Developers Association conference in Charlottesville for their Spring session. This involved public policy updates and updates from state economic development partners. She stated that they are expressing changes, new strategies, and new steps that they are taking. One of those that is

particularly exciting is the establishment of a Rural Task Force that will be focused on the unique challenges that we have in rural areas. They typically focus on “mega sites” which we obviously don’t have, and we have less resources for talent for something like that, so they are shifting that focus to support smaller and more rural areas. They are also highlighting the importance of marketing efforts. They have recognized a need at the state level for more focus on marketing and are working with new firms to get a little more creative. As businesses that are looking to locate in Virginia, they find us online and if they don’t see us in their face, they won’t come here. They want everything to be nice and easy, so if the site is listed on the State’s website, they will pick from those and that’s where they will go. The State is encouraging localities to do the same if they want to get noticed.

They also underscored the critical need for housing and addressing housing shortages. This is something that we have been expressing for a while, as well as adequate childcare services, in order to attract new talent and support workforce needs. She stated that she has been working with our manufacturers a lot more regularly as they continue to grow and expand operations and housing is a huge part of those conversations. Their concern is that if they hire more, where are they going to live and how are they going to move those people here. She noted that fortunately we do have a lot of houses being built, but we are really shifting a focus there.

She is focusing a lot of efforts on improving and expanding our business and entrepreneur support network. A lot of the businesses that started within the last few years are reaching that two-to-three-year mark that is often the hump that a lot of small businesses don’t make it past. Most of our businesses are doing well, but some are facing challenges. She is trying to pull together additional resources to help the existing businesses push past that mark and continue to succeed and will hopefully have some training opportunities coming up for businesses.

Miss Ramsey made note of the following new business developments:

- Holy Cow! has purchased the Draft Creamery and plan to move that into the Innovation Accelerator.
- Elizabeth Loughead opened a massage business at 2175 Magnolia Avenue (the Cooper’s building)
- Kenney’s and More is having a ribbon cutting on April 3rd at 10 a.m.
- Humphrey’s Septic is constructing a building by the Hit Shop
- Dollar Tree is well under construction on 29th Street. She mentioned that when they first came to us, they were very confidential in not letting us know who they were until they went before the Planning Commission.

The Town Square construction is progressing well and fast. She expressed her gratitude to Leslie Excavating for doing the demolition of the existing concrete at the back of the site. We are working with Lou Hamilton to complete the actual construction, and he is moving very quickly! She noted that we have hit a few bumps along the way and now have to level the alleyway for runoff. They will have to grind it down about 3” and repave it. We’re not sure of the exact cost of that yet, but it will still fit within the budget for this first phase. Lou is pushing to move forward with the restroom building and is trying to pull together donations. He said he could get the cost down to about \$25,000, which is not in the budget right now, so hopefully

we can do that soon to push through another phase of the project. Brooke and Main Street Buena Vista are assisting with the peg fundraiser. This allows folks to purchase one of 150 pegs that will serve as “nails” for the structure. They can donate whatever they can afford to decorate one of the pegs. We will have these available at Straws, Asunder, and a few other locations downtown. Even though you can’t see them, knowing that you made your mark on this has a huge impact for the community. We have made really good progress on meals and snacks for the build weekend. She expressed her appreciation for Jason, Sarah, Chrissy, and others in the community for helping with this. We currently have a need for one full dinner, one full lunch, and a partial lunch and breakfast. She mentioned that she put a call out to the community last night for snack donations and has already gotten a ton of interest so it looks like we will be able to fill the snack needs. She will be putting out a volunteer sign-up sheet for people to volunteer to serve, float around, and talk to volunteers so they can get to know the community better. She noted that they love hearing about the impact they get to make. She will be sending that out to the Town Square Committee and Council before pushing out to the public to allow them to sign up if they would like to be there and volunteer on one of the days. We are still working on getting roof materials and planning for the install as well as the electric hookup that will come after. She said it could be a little while before we get the electric completed due to the RFP process, but we will hopefully have the electric to the pavilion soon after it is constructed. Mayor Cooper asked if we are getting lots of photos. She stated that Tom, Alan, and MSBV are staying on top of photos, and she has also reached out to Eric and the photography students at SVU to get them to be there during volunteer shifts to take photos of the build, during meals, etc. This will hopefully be a good portfolio builder for them. She also mentioned that we will have the media there at different points throughout the weekend and she is planning some press releases to go out tomorrow to move that forward.

The Façade Program is adding to all the construction taking place in downtown. Two have been completed and five others are in active construction. Those are Steve Baldridge’s office, Chad Allen’s print shop, David Groseclose at Stonewall Grace Insurance, Mari Shiraki at White Tree Inn, and Straws. These are all progressing quickly and are set to be complete by May.

There are plans for a joint regional EDA retreat in May. It will be for two days, four hours each. They are planning to bring in people from different partner agencies to provide training on topics like what economic development is and what the powers and authorities of EDAs are.

As of two weeks ago, we officially kicked off the website rebuild. We have decided to work with an agency that is contracted with the Virginia Information Technology Agency through a cooperative agreement. Their service has been great, and we are supposed to have a completed website by the end of August or early September, depending on any delays. As mentioned before, we will be transitioning to a .GOV domain which will be positive for us in recognition for when folks visit our site. We are working on photography for the site as well. She is doing initial photography with what is left in her current budget to get new images for the website and will be looking for models in the near future. She mentioned that she will be calling on Council and their families to come out and be in some photos for us. These will be used mainly for the website to start, but will also be used for social media content, marketing materials, etc.

Miss Ramsey mentioned a few events coming up in the City:

- Senator Warner is visiting the Virginia Innovation Accelerator on Tuesday, March 26th from 3:30-4:30 to discuss goals in economic development and entrepreneurship. He will also hear questions and comments during this time.
- The Chamber is hosting a Monday Mingle on Monday, March 25th from 4:30-5:30 at Splash of Color Studio downtown. This is a great opportunity to get together and network.

The Chessie Trail has been nominated again for USA Today's best recreational trail in the Country. Last year we came in third place, and we are currently in fourth place for this year. You can visit the site and vote every day. The Friends of the Chessie Trail have also set up a reminder that you can sign up for and they will send you an email every day so you can remember to vote.

b. Wayne Handley – Police Department

Chief Handley highlighted some of the projects that the Police Department has going on right now. The first thing he spoke about is the expansion of their K9 program. He introduced Officer Matt Slagle and his K9 partner, Hans, who is a German Shorthaired Pointer. Hans is part of the narcotic detection program. They have a second officer, Corporal John Hill who has acquired (at no cost to the City) a Belgian Malinois named Maverick. Maverick is also certified through the National Police Work Dog Association for detection of narcotics. Having both of these K9 officers allows for us to have K9 ability on both daytime and nighttime shifts. He noted that while the distribution of narcotics isn't a problem that we have here, possession of narcotics is still a problem and the social determinants that go along with that. Hans and Maverick are able to alert us to the presence of narcotics and to engage in an active interdiction process, which we have been very successful with over the last few months. Hans has become very familiar in town as they try to get him out as much as possible. They have also been able to work with the school system. Dr. Jones at the high school has asked them to come up there and be a presence at the school just to be there as part of augmenting the security process to help the School Resource Officers.

The department's auxiliary program is something that is quite unique in the Commonwealth. State code section 15.2-1731 allows for jurisdictions to have auxiliary officers. They are trained nearly as much as they would be if they were in a full DCJS academy program. They have to go through testing, defensive tactics, firearms training, laws of arrest, probable cause, etc., just as any sworn officer would. The difference between them is that these officers are volunteering their time. They are out working their jobs in the community during the day and coming to work with the PD as a force multiplier in the evenings and weekends. He mentioned that if people see a "two-officer unit" as they are called, that is almost always an auxiliary officer situation. Chief Handley introduced auxiliary officers Michael Walters, David Wheeler, and Daniel Slagle noting that he feels that they and the work that they are putting in to help keep the community safe is worth of recognition. He also stated that this program isn't something you see in a lot of other jurisdictions, but it is one that the [police] department as a whole has worked on. They have worked hand in hand with the Department of Criminal Justice Services to make sure they are covering all of the bases in regards to their certification as auxiliary officers.

They are working with Scott Covington and Scott Beatty to revitalize the Chaplain program within the department. This program is designed to provide a faith-based service where not only can officers bounce certain things off of them but also provides someone for officers to

talk to after critical incidents or for exposure to chronic stress. Noting his background in mental health counseling, Chief Handley stated that he recognizes the benefit of having someone that the officers can go to for those things. The Chaplain can be part of a ride along program where we can get them out in the community with the department at events. This allows for the opportunity to not only work in the capacity of their respective churches but is also showing the partnership with the police department. They have policies in place and are looking at revamping what that program looks like. Right now it is a blank slate, so they can make it what they want it to be. He mentioned that they will also be asking questions of the community to see what it is they thing they would like to see in a program like this.

They have established the Buena Vista Police Foundation. They have acquired their IRS 501(c)3 designation as a charitable organization, the board of directors is nearly set, and the bylaws are currently being reviewed for accuracy and completeness. They are looking to have the first board meeting by the end of summer and start fundraising in the fall. He noted that Lexington and Charlottesville also have police foundations, but not to compare ours to theirs as it is a lot different. The purpose of the foundation is for access to things that standardized funding may not apply to and to prove a charitable outlet for people to donate money that we can use right here in Buena Vista. He also stated that while the focus is Buena Vista, they want the reach to be region wide. The foundation could serve in different ways. They wouldn't have a problem reaching out for kids who may need a coat or school supplies. If there's something an officer or the department may need, where [the foundation] can provide some funding that is not part of what we talk about during budget season but can be obtained through donations to the BVPF. This also provides accountability, transparency, and oversight as every request would go through the process of being approved by the board of directors. He feels that having this foundation is something that the City can look at and go to if there is a need and they are really excited about the things that it is going to be able to do.

The Community Resource Officer program is something that the City currently doesn't have, but they are looking to do and are looking to leverage grant funding for this. There would be an officer assigned to quality-of-life issues. He stated that when you look at police departments and talk about calls for service, there is a difference between criminal calls for service and quality of life issues. Those can be parking issues or accumulation of solid waste; things that we do see and hear in our daily activities, but this would allow for officers that can specialize and pay attention to those things and try and work with citizens to abate concerns or nuisances. This program would also help augment the SRO program as well as being present in the community at some level different and more involved than a patrol officer. The reason for that, he said, is that patrol officers are responsible to their radio and have to listen for those calls for service. If an officer is dispatched to a call for service, there may be an opportunity where they can really connect with the community but then get called away to another call for service. If that's the case, we can follow up with the CRO that can then go in and see how we can connect them to resources. He also noted that people call the police for everything, even when it's not a police matter. In those cases, CROs can go in and find out how they can connect them to the appropriate resources so that they are getting their services met appropriately by the right foundation. This program is very popular in every jurisdiction that he has been a part of, and they are looking forward to how this program develops.

Chief Handley stated that one of the things he wanted to do when he came here was to see how we could better use the officers that we have and expand the services we need. He visits

Hardees every Wednesday morning to talk with citizens and ask them what's going on and what's important to them and what he hears overwhelmingly is that people want to see more officers driving through their neighborhoods. This isn't because there is a lot of crime, but because people feel safer when they see a police car driving through their neighborhoods. If that opportunity exists, we want to make sure that we are providing that. Therefore, the police department is looking to expand their patrol services. The idea with that is to do targeted recruitment for certified officers. He noted that there is a big difference between an uncertified and a certified officer. In order to recruit, hire, and train an uncertified officer, it is one year before they can operate on their own. Also, between training, salary, benefits, equipment, etc., it costs at a minimum about \$90,000. Certified officers, on the other hand, can come in right away, go through a basic training to update them on our policies and procedures, which are consistent with a lot of other regions, and they can get to work right away. The reason we are doing targeted recruiting is because we are looking for people who want to be in Buena Vista and stay in Buena Vista. He quipped that he may be new here, but he is not new to this business and when you find the right people that are willing to stay in a community and invest themselves in the community, it makes the police department better, it makes service delivery better, and it makes the community feel safer and ultimately provides a better support of the vision that City Council will create when we talk about a strategic vision for our city.

Next, he reported on the PD's grant funding. They are aggressively applying for grants to pay for a lot of things he is talking about. Assistant Chief Clements has been working on applications for the past six weeks, and they currently have eight or nine applications out. They are looking for grants where the match is zero, minimal, or in-kind. With these in-kind grants, it could be something we are already spending money on such as fuel for cars or the lease program that we are looking at. They are looking for opportunities where the City doesn't have to come out of pocket for money that they're not already spending so that we can get double duty for the money we're looking at. Through the VSTOP (violence against women) grant award, they have created a new position in the department, that they hired a very experienced officer, Jennifer Smith, for. Officer Smith's experience is in domestic violence and special crimes investigations. He noted that she came from a very busy jurisdiction and is very happy to be here. He mentioned that as with Officer Smith, they are promoting the quality of life in their recruiting efforts. The quality of life in Buena Vista and the surrounding area is so much better than the more urban areas that they are recruiting from; these officers come with a lot of experience, but their work/life balance isn't there. They are also leveraging Byrne-Jag and COPS grants not only for personnel, but for technology as well. They are looking at where they can leverage technology where we may not be able to put officers. By responsibly putting technology in certain areas, we may be able to use those items not just for the PD, but for other departments in the City as well. He did note that putting cameras on streets can tend to cause a pushback. It's not because we're watching every single car going down the street as they don't have the time or personnel for that and there is no real-time crime center, but these cameras can be used when we know that there are some issues that are happening so that we can provide additional information to make informed decisions related to law enforcement functions.

The SRO program is expanding. He and Sheriff Hamilton had several conversations regarding the SROs and together they concluded that it's better to have those under one roof instead of two different organizations, so they will all now be under the BVPD. They have applied for the

grants that fund all four SRO positions in the City and fully expect that the grants will be awarded (those awards don't come out for another couple of weeks). The SRO positions will transfer officially on July 1. Additionally, they are looking to expand what they are doing with SROs. They are working on a junior police academy, summer camps, and additional coaching positions where officers can volunteer. Sergeant John Snider, the senior SRO, has come up with some good ideas and they are looking forward to seeing other programs that he develops as they are allowing and empowering him to come up with some new programs where we can utilize SROs even more than we are now.

Chief Handley closed by saying that the most important thing from his perspective and the thing that he is the most responsible for as Chief is the culture of the organization. This is a great department, there are very good officers here and they are hungry to do a great job. His expectation is that we will be creating a culture in the organization where officers will come here, learn, and grow personally and professionally. He stated that we will train the best police officers the region has, and people will want to come here to be cops. He said that morale is a big concern for him and the most important thing to him is that his officers are happy. Happy officers are good officers, and good officers make better decisions.

6. Invited Community Organizations

None.

ADG #6: CONSIDER APPOINTMENTS TO BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, AND COMMITTEES

Economic Development Authority

Mr. John Dryden has resigned from the EDA. This appointment will begin immediately and will expire on March 31, 2025. This is the first time it has appeared on the agenda.

Mrs. Jody Fix and Mr. Peder Weierholt applied for the opening.

Councilman Jones noted that Mrs. Fix has shown a great desire to be involved and nominated her for the opening.

Councilman Webb made note of her appointment to the Board of Zoning Appeals. Ms. Burch stated that she had made Mrs. Fix aware that she would have to resign from that if appointed to the EDA.

With that being said, Councilman Jones changed his motion to nominate Mr. Weierholt. Mr. Tyree stated that Mrs. Fix's preference is the EDA. Councilman Jones then stated that due to Mr. Weierholt's background in titling, he may be a better fit for the BZA, so Councilman Jones withdrew his motion to appoint Mr. Weierholt and renewed his motion to nominate Mrs. Fix for the appointment. Councilman Cash seconded the nomination.

Mayor Cooper asked if there were any other nominations; there were not.

Council carried the motion to appoint Mrs. Jody Fix to the Economic Development Authority.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

NB #1: DISCUSSION & APPROVAL OF BVCPS REQUEST FOR 2022-2023 CARRYOVER FUNDS

Mr. Tyree noted that Dr. Francis was unable to attend the meeting tonight due to previously scheduled plans.

He stated that this is a straightforward request and something that is done annually. He also noted that if we do not approve this, the funds will revert back to the State and will go to another school division. The total amount of the request is \$781,887; \$618,263.81 of which would be used for construction projects for the whole division and \$163,623.19 would be placed in the division's facilities reserve account.

Councilman Webb moved to carry this forward to the next meeting in order for Dr. Francis to be able to attend as he would like to know how we are using this money to invest in the schools. Councilman Jones seconded the motion, and it was carried by Council.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Sarah M. Burch, Clerk of Council

Tyson T. Cooper, Mayor