**Town Manager’s Report**

**February 12, 2024**

**Administration:**

Rodefer Moss is still working on the FY22 audit. The last email I received from them on February 6, 2024 indicated that the audit is being reviewed by their Quality Review team and that they are in the final steps of completion. Once the FY22 audit has been completed, they will begin work on the FY23 audit.

We are in the early stages of creating the FY2024-2025 Town Budget. I have placed an item on the agenda to set a Budget Calendar to ensure that we are all on the same page, placing meetings on calendars, and following deadlines.

**Projects/Grants**:

The use of contingency funds for the Fourth “Street” Waterline Project has been approved to work on the waterline on the western portion of Broad Street (by the Assembly of God Church). We are working with The Lane Group and Little B to schedule when this replacement will take place.

Due to the timing and rising costs of the Public Safety Building Project, I am going to apply for Congressional Funding to cover some of the cost. We will discuss the updated PAR during the Town Council Meeting and steps moving forward.

I am always on the lookout for new grant opportunities to support the Town. As a reminder, if you see any, please feel free to send them to me.

Upon approval of the Capital Improvement Plan, my next project (alongside the budget) will be conducting Asset Resource Management Plans and Maintenance Plans for the Town. This will include working with Public Works to identify and rate various water, wastewater, fleet, and building items. We can then take this data and come up with plans to ensure that we are properly maintaining Town assets.

**Council Meeting Follow-Up:**

Chris Mullins from The Lane Group will be at the meeting to discuss the survey results for the Farmer’s Market Alley and to address Automobiles Driving Across Sidewalks.

The Planning Commission will meet at 5:30 on February 12, 2024 to make a recommendation on the Capital Improvement Program/Plan. A final vote will be taken by Council during the meeting.

I have received a quote for security camera upgrades at the pool. We will discuss this during the meeting.

I have received one quote from Chris England to repave and restripe the tennis courts/pickleball courts. I am waiting for Baseline Sports (Bob Gibson’s Castlewood Group) to view the project and submit a bid.

I have three sets of quotes for the New Town Signs at Oxbow Lake from Appalachian Graphics, Select Graphics, and Speedpro to be discussed during the meeting.

Due to the weather, waterline breaks, and schedules, we had to reschedule the Recreation Committee Meeting. We are planning to hold the meeting on February 13, 2024 to discuss the outdoor fitness circle grant and possible skatepark/bikepark projects.

**Richmond Legislative Trip**:

We had a very successful trip to Richmond this year to discuss projects, funding opportunities, and to meet with local legislators. Here is a brief summary of the groups that we met with during our trip:

*Virginia Department of Health – Kelly Ward* – There are three main sources of funding being offered by the Department of Drinking Water. These include Lead Service Line work on the private side of the meter connection, PFAS or nonregulated contaminates in water systems, and system upgrades. We also discussed the previously submitted request for the Raw Water Intake and ways to strengthen the application. Ms. Ward advised to strengthen the regionalism components, the Town’s desire to be more proactive, the public heath concerns and to install more precautionary measures such as generators at all pump stations and the Water Plant.

*Department of Housing and Community Development/Appalachian Regional Commission­* – Dr. Deserae Austin – We had two big projects to discuss: Riverside Drive CBDG Funding and primarily the Public Safety Building. For the Riverside Drive project, she recommended other approaches to the project such as LMI components, connectivity, economic development impacts, and possibly giving certain buildings and spaces to developers with restrictions. We learned that ARC funds can fund façade improvement projects.

Our main conversation focused on the Public Safety Building and determining if DHCD and/or ARC would be a good fit for the project. The short answer is no due to the type of building being constructed. We had a lengthy discussion and I tried every possible argument for funding. She recommended reaching out to USDA Rural and Community Development for assistance and/or gap funding. We are planning to have a community space within the building which would be a better fit for DHCD and ARC.

*Department of Environmental Quality* – Karen Doran – Funding opportunities from DEQ currently include: Loan Funds, State Storm Water Grants, State Waste Water Grants, and the remaining ARPA Grant Fund. These funds have different requirements and loan/grant opportunities depending on the locality size, project need, and system status. Applications for the FY25 cycle open June 1, 2024 and close July 31, 2024. I will be working with The Lane Group to identify projects and will report back to Town Council for discussion.

I learned that the Town applied for SSES Step 2 funding in 2022 for wastewater system improvements and studies. This involved 40% principal forgiveness and I will be working with The Lane Group to learn more about this offer. The offer is good for up to five years.

Lastly, we discussed the Dante Wastewater Project that includes sending wastewater from Dante to the Town’s Wastewater Treatment Plant. There are some existing concerns due to leachate and highly septic wastewater entering the plant. We will be setting up a meeting with Russell County PSA in the coming weeks to discuss these concerns and feasibility.

*Virginia Department of Transportation* – Joanne Maxwell – The Lane Group had difficulties scheduling a meeting with direct VDOT staff. As a result, we met with Ms. Maxwell who is the Director of Governance and Legislative Affairs Division. While she was not able to directly answer our questions, she did create a “punch list” and will report back once she has answers. Here are the concerns that we brought to her attention: HSIP Sidewalk Project – Need of procuring engineering services in line with federal guidelines and using a different engineering firm than who originally submitted the project; TAP Wise Street Project – Update on timeline of when awards will be awarded and feedback received from the Town’s application; Wise Street Fence – When is it going to be fixed and why is there a delay? Can they use netting on the hillside instead?; Land Use Permit for Gateway Signs – Why have we not been issued a permit to place the signs and how can we accelerate this process?; Debris Trimming alongside US 58A – Second request has been put in to clean debris and elimination of confusion between VDOT residencies on county boundaries; Destination Center – Line of sight issue along Frosty Road and where the center will be located, increase VDOT cost for the pedestrian bridge and justification of the increase. *Once I receive these answers, I will forward them to Town Council. Please note, Ms. Maxwell is the legislative liaison for VDOT and the General Assembly is currently in session until the middle of March.* *This may cause a delay in the agency’s response*.

*Virginia Tourism Commission ­*– We discussed numerous tourism grant opportunities for the Town. If you would like to see the list, please let me know and I will provide them to you. Letterpress has expressed interest in applying for the grants and the Town will serve as the fiscal agent. This was primarily an introduction meeting due to the recent marketing staff change. I am in the process of following up with VTC and St Paul Main Street on pending grants. VTC was excited to hear that the Town has hired an outside marketing firm and expressed that they are happy to help alongside at any time.

*Senator Pillion, Delegate Kilgore, and the Office of Delegate O’Quinn* – There were three main legislative priorities on our radar when meeting with the local delegation: Clinch River State Park, getting natural gas into Town for economic development, and Heart of Appalachia/Spearhead Trails. Please note, while the public safety building was on our mind, we thought it was too early to get into details, but they are aware of the project. Clinch River State Park – Support for state funding for the park in the upcoming state budget. Natural Gas – Expanding access to natural gas for economic development purposes and residential use. We have been in contact with the gas company and they are running estimate calculations. Heart of Appalachia/Spearhead Trails – Aligning the two organizations together to achieve a common goal.

**Marketing**

I am now the Town’s DMO contact due to recent personnel changes. If you were not aware, we have turned routine marketing posts over to Letterpress Communications. They will be holding a kick-off meeting with shareholders and town staff on Friday, February 9, 2024 at 9 A.M. in the Lyric. I will continue to provide updates in this new section of my report.

**Miscellaneous:**

Phase 1 of construction on the Deen Building will begin in next month. The Town serves as the pass through for St Paul Tomorrow for the IRF grant. The project is expected to be completed in late 2025.

I’m sure that you are aware, we had a major waterline break on Grey Hill in the early morning of January 19, 2024. Town crews laid a temporary above ground waterline to restore water service. As a result of the break, a boil water notice was quickly put into place and notices were hand delivered to residents. This notice has been lifted. We had several other waterline breaks, but they were not as severe as this one. **On a personal note, I would like to thank all town employees for their tireless work in the conditions. This incident continues to demonstrate that we have the best employees in all of all Virginia. Additionally, I would like to thank various members of the community that provided warm meals and refreshments to employees during this challenging time.**

If I missed anything or you have additional questions, you know where to find me!