

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE RURAL RETREAT TOWN
COUNCIL HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS ON
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2015, 7:00 P.M.**

Council Members Present: Mayor Timothy Litz; Vice-Mayor Dale Yontz; Jerrell Hall; Peggy Hash; James P. “Sean” Viars; Geary Jonas; James Lloyd

Council Members Absent: None

Administration Present: Jason Childers, Town Manager; Lori Guynn, Clerk/Treasurer; Scott Mitchell, Police Chief

Administration Absent: None

Others Present: Bob Lewis; Harry Hamil

DETERMINATION OF A QUORUM

Mayor Litz called the meeting to order and determined a quorum was present.

INVOCATION

The invocation was given by Geary Jonas.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mayor Litz.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made by Vice-Mayor Yontz, seconded by Councilmember Jonas to approve the minutes of the October 13, 2015 regular meeting. There being no discussion, the motion passed by a vote of four (4) for: Hall, Jonas, Viars, Yontz; zero (0) against; two (2) abstained: Hash, Lloyd.

CITIZEN’S TIME

Harry Hamil with Morning Chorus Farms L3C addressed the council. He introduced himself and explained he and his wife have been working to revolve healthy food in and around the Ashville, North Carolina area for the past 20 years. He stated he ran the farmers market and eventually took it over and sold it. Mr. Hamil provided in-depth background information about himself and Morning Chorus Farms L3C. He explained he and his wife had been looking for property within an hour of Fancy Gap Mountain and had previously ruled out Rural Retreat due to the land prices. However they did decide on Wythe and Bland counties because of the business variety, growing conditions, stable populations and economy and the Wythe-Bland Foundation strongly supports education.

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – OCTOBER 27, 2015 – PAGE 2

Mr. Hamil explained Morning Chorus Farms has developed a unique technique for sustaining family farms in the 21st century. In this technique the land is owned by all of the farmers in a separate entity, Morning Chorus Farms, L3C with all farmers farming individually but collaborating, Mr. Hamil explained. He stated this vision fits perfectly in this area because of the long tradition of agriculture and the success of agriculture and we are part of the Mount Rogers Planning District. Mr. Hamil explained they bought the Corinth Lutheran Church because it deserved to be saved because it is a community center for the area and to have a place to live following renovations to the sanctuary that will include a second story with living space. Two additional properties in Rural Retreat are being considered for the entity's use, 238 South Greever Street and 326 North Main Street.

Mr. Hamil stated he visited the town hall to inquire about the Zoning Ordinance and learned it doesn't permit the installation of greenhouses or growing beds for agricultural purposes. He explained he is in attendance to inform the Council of their vision and to ask the town to consider amending the Zoning Ordinance so that the property could be used the way they envision. Mr. Hamil referred to the property at 326 North Main Street and explained a greenhouse may be located along the driveway with growing beds on the flat part of the land near the drainage ditch. The property is currently zoned Commercial General, he stated, but to try to develop the property as a commercial use is almost impossible because of the 20 ft. sewer easement, the flood vein and it is well below the roadway. He explained current zoning requirements for the district include a sidewalk in which he noted he wouldn't put one in because they don't own land next to the street. Mr. Hamil stated the house would be occupied as a residence for the person who is running the greenhouse and would be used as a place for educational opportunities and possibly a junior achievement program. He further stated they already have potential markets for starts because they would be complimentary to Harpo's Hardware who would be able to offer more items such as what is found at Lowe's. He has also spoken to the manager at Food County who expressed interest in selling starts and produce that is grown. Mr. Hamil stated they understand the only way they will be successful is if our area joins together to be successful. He added they want to be part of the heart of the community and they are interested in offering young people, who don't have access to land, the opportunity. Mr. Hamil thanked the Council and stated he would be glad to answer any questions.

Councilmember Hash asked Mr. Hamil if he is considering only placing one greenhouse on the property. Mr. Hamil stated he is saying one because a greenhouse the size of the council chambers can accommodate an astonishing number of starts. He explained the primary use will be to grow starts for when they get the farm in its full use such as growing peppers but it would also possibly be used to grow out of season vegetables such as lettuce. Councilmember Hash inquired about the barn on the property. Mr. Hamil explained based on appearance it was previously used for cattle because it has a chute with a loading dock and has a hay loft. Councilmember Hash asked Mr. Hamil if he was interested in selling to the public. Mr. Hamil replied yes because it is a perfect place for a produce stand and if property is developed outside of town there would be a place to bring the produce to offer a six day per week opportunity for the public to buy. Eventually, he stated, it could progress to being a year round operation.

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – OCTOBER 27, 2015 – PAGE 3

Councilmember Hall asked Mr. Hamil if he was aware that if a use doesn't meet the zoning requirements then it must go to the Planning Commission. Mr. Hamil replied yes he was aware that it must go to the Planning Commission then back to the Town Council after a public hearing. Councilmember Viars asked what the issue was with this parcel that it doesn't fit into our zoning. Mr. Hamil explained all things aren't known because he doesn't have all of the pieces. He pointed out agricultural is completely restricted and the Agricultural – Conservation district requires five acres at a minimum. He explained there isn't a piece of property except the land behind the South Greever Street property that is a cornfield toward Milk Plant Road that has enough acreage. Mr. Hamil further explained that if the North Main Street property is acquired the issue is the requirement for a sidewalk which would be prohibitive. There isn't anything in the ordinance that mentions the allowance of greenhouses with the possible exception of lawn or garden which is permitted in Commercial – Neighborhood but is not permitted in Commercial – General, he stated. Mr. Hamil stated they are considering the possibility of offering more of a lawn and garden retail operation instead.

Mayor Litz addressed Mr. Hamil and stated he gave a very good presentation but the Council doesn't have enough answers. He referred Mr. Hamil to Town Manager Childers and asked that he present his concerns to him then he can begin the process of review. Mayor Litz stated based on his presentation it helps the Council to know what he would like to do. Mr. Hamil stated the current ordinance doesn't permit anyone to have any form of animal other than a cat, dog or rabbit. He explained in other areas that have major cities, chickens are being allowed. He stated this might be an opportunity to consider changing the Zoning Ordinance. Mayor Litz commented that years ago he remembers his grandfather having chickens in town but it could be considered as well. He then requested that this item be placed on the agenda under unfinished business until a solution is achieved. He thanked Mr. Hamil for his presentation.

CORRESPONDENCE

Councilmember Hash reminded the Council that the town should still pursue the museum that was discussed. She asked that after the first of year it be considered more. Mayor Litz commented now that the town has a building it could help. Councilmember Hash stated she has been obtaining more information on the requirements.

Clerk/Treasurer Guynn reported the Rural Retreat Volunteer Emergency Services had inquired about the Council participating in their trunk or treat event on Halloween night. She asked if the Council was interested in participating and if so she would purchase candy to be handed out. Discussion ensued on other locations in town where trunk or treats were being held. Vice-Mayor Yontz stated it was his understanding that the rescue squad was considering combining with the Rural Retreat Baptist Church because of events happening at the same time.

Councilmember Hash informed the Council that Jay Hawkins is leaving the rescue squad and is currently working out his two week notice. Town Manager Childers asked who would be replacing Mr. Hawkins. Councilmember Hash explained applications are being accepted

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – OCTOBER 27, 2015 – PAGE 4

therefore she didn't know at this time but would keep the Council informed. She stated Mr. Hawkins will be missed. Mayor Litz added the rescue squad will be losing experience.

POLICE REPORT

Chief Mitchell reported he is continuing to place the radar speed sign around town. The maintenance crew punched holes in additional sign posts so that Chief Mitchell can place the sign in other areas. Chief Mitchell stated he along with the Sheriff's Office will be patrolling on Halloween night. The new police vehicle will be delivered within the next couple of weeks and the equipment will be installed.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

DR PEPPER LOT PROJECT – Councilmember Lloyd reported no response had been received. He explained Mr. Harris had said a response would be received in late September or early October. He added he will contact Mr. Harris to follow-up with the status of the project.

STATUS OF SINGLETON PROPERTY – Mayor Litz asked if there had been any changes since the previous meeting. Councilmember Lloyd stated Mr. Singleton had called him because he is worried about the property. Mr. Singleton had told him as soon as he was better he would take care of the property.

RENTING A PORTION OF THE RANDY'S BUILDING – Mayor Litz asked for an update. Councilmember Lloyd explained he had spoken to Jamie Martin and told him the town wouldn't sign a three year lease which he was fine with. Councilmember Hash stated the town shouldn't commit when we don't know what is going to happen with the building. Mayor Litz stated there still are a lot of decisions to be made. Town Manager Childers asked Councilmember Lloyd if Mr. Martin was concerned about whether or not a lease was signed. Councilmember Lloyd replied Mr. Martin didn't care either way. Town Manager Childers asked the Council to consider removing this item from the agenda. Mayor Litz reiterated there are still decisions to be made and asked Clerk/Treasurer Guynn to remove this item from the agenda.

NEW BUSINESS

None

COMMITTEE REPORTS

HERITAGE DAYS – No report.

FINANCE & APPROPRIATIONS – No report.

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – OCTOBER 27, 2015 – PAGE 5

PERSONNEL, ORDINANCES & LEGAL MATTERS – Chairperson Hash stated they are happy to have Town Manager Childers, he is doing a wonderful job and the emails he is sending to the Council are informative.

PUBLIC UTILITIES – Chairman Hall reported the committee hasn't met. He inquired about the effluent discharge issues. Town Manager Childers stated he would address this during his report.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

Town Manager Childers reported on the following items:

RANDY'S INC. BUILDING – Dennis Amos with Anderson & Associates, Inc., was contacted about the building being assessed by a structural engineer. Mr. Amos advised a structural engineer had not assessed the building and it had been removed from the project for budget reasons. The approximate cost would be \$5,000 - \$7,500 to have done.

Councilmember Viars asked if this was dependent upon the money received for the work related to the project. Mayor Litz replied yes but this needs to be looked at before doing work on the building. He asked Town Manager Childers to research other engineering firms to perform this assessment. Town Manager Childers stated he would hate to renovate a building that a structural engineer hasn't looked at and later upon completion an accident occur. He explained the grant money is to refurbish the building.

WASTEWATER PLANT PROJECTS – The Mount Rogers Planning District Commission has awarded the town money to replace the screen compactor at the wastewater plant which will help with the other pumps that we have had issues with. The effluent discharge pipe will also be replaced. AEP has been contacted and about the power lines and we were advised the power could be turned off on the side of the property next to our plant for one day since this will be a one day job. AEP is looking at the project plans and will provide a response.

RANDY'S BUILDING – According to Tony Wright; approximately 75% of the items inside the building have been removed since the Council toured the building. Town Manager Childers requested permission to replace the locks on the building effective November 1. The consensus of the Council was to change the door locks.

PAVING AT THE RURAL RETREAT FIREHOUSE – At the previous meeting, the Council discussed the need to pave the parking lot because it is in bad condition. Town Manager Childers reported he had received two quotes and one more is to come in. He explained both quotes received recommend tearing out the entire parking lot and repaving. One of the contractors verbally suggested repairing the sections that needed replacement then cap the entire parking lot. Town Manager Childers stated he would like to see it done correctly the first time due to the heavy equipment on the property. He explained the quote for \$23,000 discussed at the previous meeting may end up being higher in order for the work to be done correctly.

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – OCTOBER 27, 2015 – PAGE 6

Councilmember Viars inquired about the work involved in the quote for \$23,000. Town Manager Childers explained it was only to patch and cap the front parking lot. He further explained Tony Wright has talked to some of the paving companies and they advised we should have until early December before the asphalt plants close down. Town Manager Childers stated he has an appointment with the guy with Medley's Sugar Grove Asphalt to discuss their quote. He added the firehouse is an important part of town and he wants to make sure it is done correctly and won't have to be redone in the next few years. Discussion ensued about tearing up the parking lot and repaving it.

Clerk/Treasurer Guynn asked Bob Lewis if he recalled when the parking lot was paved last. He stated it had been paved once and sealed a couple of times. He further stated it needs to be paved by a company that uses the proper grade of asphalt not a driveway paver. Councilmember Jonas stated with the heavy equipment it needs to be dug up and have gravel put underneath then repaved. Town Manager Childers added that Dave Evans had said the parking lot was paved in 1992.

TREASURER'S REPORT

The invoices for October 27, 2015 were read and approved.

TALK OF THE TOWN

Councilmember Hash is to attend the *Talk of the Town* radio program at the WYVE/WXBX radio station on Wednesday morning.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no additional business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned upon a motion by Councilmember Lloyd. The motion was duly seconded and approved.

Mayor

Clerk