

TOWN COUNCIL WORK SESSION

February 16, 2010

In Attendance: Mayor Taylor, Vice Mayor Whittle, Council Members Baker, Le Vine, Mauck, Redmon, Ritenour, Terndrup and Vena. Staff: Town Manager Fauber, Director of Finance Mullins, Town Planner Rex and Town Clerk Keller.

The minutes of the January 19, 2010 Town Council Work Session were approved as presented.

Public Comments:

Discussion Items

- Council Forum agenda

The Strasburg Volunteer Rescue Squad will be hosting the Forum. The first half hour of the event will be "round table" discussions with Staff. The Rescue Squad will then give a five to ten minute presentation telling of their activities, etc. The last part of the Forum will be a time for citizens to ask questions of the Council or Staff. There would be no presentation by Council or Staff at this Forum.

During discussion, it was asked if a Forum was necessary at this time. **Council Member Le Vine** said he thinks the more we can inform the citizens, the better it is. It was felt it was worth spending money to advertise in the paper and the Rescue Squad should be mentioned in the ad and the outline of the Forum given. The Forum would be advertised on the sign in front of Town Hall, on the website, sent to the Chamber of Commerce membership, and posters placed at the front counter of Town Hall. **Council Member Terndrup** said failure to communicate was the number one reason for having the forums and so we need to do this well. It was asked of **Amber Marra**, reporter with the Northern Virginia Daily, if an article could be written regarding this and she was going to check with her editor.

- Strasburg Volunteer Rescue Squad

In the absence of Chief John Nixon, a written report was submitted.

- Presentation of proposals for the 2010-11 Budget

Town Manager Fauber reviewed the two proposals shown in a PowerPoint presentation (slides attached here-to). He said there was no new long term capital debt included in either scenario. During discussion, **Council Member Le Vine** felt the Town cannot put the entire burden on the citizens and not raise the availability fees. It is unfair to the general citizen to raise water and sewer rates and not availability fees. It was asked if Council was willing to raise availability fees at this time. The various ideas given at the meeting between developers, Planner Rex, and Council Members Le Vine and Baker were reviewed and some of these were not considered because availability fees need to be fair and equitable to all. The main scenario discussed was the lowering of the fees for a period of time and allowing builders to prepay, but it was stressed that if rates are lowered, they would need to be lowered for all and not just done by developer.

Council Member Baker felt there should be only a small window of time in which a developer could pre-pay, but **Planner Rex** said this would be scrutinized more if it is done outside the budget cycle. The impact of changing the availability fees can change the entire picture of the budget and some of Council wondered if there was enough time to put this scenario into place before the new budget year; Staff felt there was enough time. **Mayor Taylor** asked Council Members Baker and Le Vine if they would be willing to consider lowering the availability fees and **Council Member Le Vine** said he is if this would give more cash upfront. It was thought that cash flow was the answer. Questions posed were:

- Is it ethical to do this as the large developers can afford to pay ahead, but smaller builders can't?
- Is it worth the time to move forward with this?
- Could an ordinance be written in time for budget approval?

Responses from Council Members:

Vice Mayor Whittle: Is not sure it will pay off with the economy in the condition it is.

Council Member Baker: Feels Homewood will take advantage of this.

Council Member Ritenour: Does not feel this can be done by budget approval and we need to make certain this would work. He would like to keep the tap fees the same for the next year and spread the burden out to as many as possible.

Council Member Mauck: Feels more information is needed before moving forward.

Council Member Terndrup: An ordinance could be passed within 30 days, if need be. He suggested setting the fees at a total of \$15,000 for 12 months and putting a cap on the number of taps that could be prepaid. The money gained from doing this would go toward lowering individual user fees.

It was decided that Staff should study this more to find the “break-even” point of how many availability fees would need to be prepaid to make the option feasible. Concurrently, an ordinance should be written so it is ready if it is decided to go with the prepayment option.

In further discussion of the budget, it was asked what the growth rate of the budget was over the current year and **Director of Finance Mullins** said it is 3.17% more than the current year. Questions were asked about the position of the Assistant Town Manager. It was said this position would not require a new employee, but would be a promotion for a current employee. The position of code enforcer would be new. **Council Member Ritenour** said the position of code enforcer is needed as the Town has ordinances, but they cannot enforce them. It was asked if the police department could possibly help with code enforcement.

Council Member Ritenour asked if a new employee is needed at the Waste Water Plant now; he is looking at this from simple economics. **Vice Mayor Whittle** also questioned the need for a new employee. **Town Manager Fauber** said this could possibly be put off for at least six months, but **Council Member Baker** feels the position is needed as soon as the Town can get it as the Chesapeake Bay act is not going to get any better.

When talking of pay increases for employees:

Council Member Ritenour: Looking at 0% increase.

Council Member Baker: Need to be competitive

Vice Mayor Whittle: Would like to see some sort of increase for the employees

Council Member Terndrup: Recommendation originally was a 3% merit increase in January. As this is a merit increase, the entire amount might not be used.

Council Member Le Vine: Feels a 3% increase is unacceptable. He might consider a 1%, but felt employees should be thankful to have a job.

Other general budget comments:

Council Member Mauck: Thinks the Town has a “glut” of police cars and would like an explanation on the need for proposed vehicles in the budgets. She would also like to hire a part-time person to oversee the park during summer weekends. She would also like to add a line to the budget where 1% of the transient occupancy tax collected would go directly to the Tourism Committee.

Council Member Redmon: Asked if there is a way to take down the barrier between the general fund and the infrastructure needs. Can money be taken from the general fund to pay for water and sewer plants? It was explained the loan contract says the loan must be paid for with user fees.

In conclusion, the goal is to have a solution to the availability fees by the March Work Session. The consensus is to drop the user fee rate of increase. Also, a decision will be made in March if there will be an increase to employees. Donations will be discussed at the Finance Committee meeting on March 1.

The meeting adjourned at 9:43 .m.