

**Town Council Minutes
Morehead City, North Carolina**

Wednesday, September 8, 2021

The Honorable Council of the Town of Morehead City held the monthly Workshop Meeting on Wednesday, September 8, 2021, in the Municipal Chambers located at 202 South 8th Street, Morehead City, North Carolina. This meeting was conducted as an in-person attendance meeting only. Zoom technology was not available due to the recent relocation of equipment to the new city hall building.

COUNCIL PRESENT: Councilmembers George Ballou, Bill Taylor, and Diane C. Warrender.

Mayor Jones and Councilmembers David Horton and Keri McCann were absent. Mayor Jones was excused due to an unforeseen matter and the councilmembers were excused due to prior commitments.

STAFF PRESENT: City Attorney Derek Taylor, City Manager Ryan Eggleston, Fire Chief Jamie Fulk, Finance Director Jewel Lasater, Police Chief Bernette Morris, Human Resources Director Susan Nixon, Parks and Recreation Director Jerry Riggs, Planning Director Sandi Watkins, Public Services Director Daniel Williams, and City Clerk Cathy Campbell.

OTHERS PRESENT: Elise Clouser of Carteret News Times,

The councilmembers present selected Councilmember Taylor to preside over the meeting. Councilmember Taylor called the workshop meeting of the Morehead City Town Council to order at 9:03 a.m. without a quorum present.

STAFF REPORTS

Fire/EMS:

Fire Chief Jamie Fulk stated that August was a very busy month for his department, and they are now preparing for the upcoming boat races and the Seafood Festival.

The department has established a ladder truck committee that will investigate the department's needs and criteria for the next ladder truck. This vehicle is scheduled to be replaced in FY 2023-2024 under the Capital Improvement Plan.

Currently, the department has one vacant position, and an offer of employment has been made to a candidate with the hope of having the position filled very soon.

Councilmember Taylor, noting that several other departments had transitioned from a van ambulance style chassis to a truck style chassis and asked if there was a deadline to do so. Chief

Fulk reported that all ambulances have been remounted and the department plans to transition to the truck chassis as vehicles are replaced. The city has also transitioned away from diesel fuel to reduce maintenance costs.

Police:

Police Chief Morris reported that the police department is also preparing for the boat races and Seafood Festival.

She shared that the department has seen an increase in social assault cases. Acknowledging that Lt. Guthrie, an expert juvenile advocate, has retired, Chief Morris was asked who would be taking her place in this role. Chief Morris stated that Officer Franklin Rice will assume the role. He is very capable and has been working with Lt. Guthrie in this area. Female officers are available that can be called upon when needed.

Chief Morris reported that they issued seven (7) parking tickets in July and three (3) parking tickets in August as well as six (6) warnings. In addition, three (3) golf cart citations were issued in August.

Chief Morris was happy to report that they have no COVID cases at this time.

In August, Animal Control responded to:

- 18 at large dogs, one (1) of which was returned to the owner and 6 leash warnings were issued
- 20 cats and 3 dogs were transported to the humane society
- 19 racoon, 2 fox, and 12 possum calls

There were a combined 98 animal calls in August and 116 in July. The County is down two (2) employees in this area and staff is anticipating the need to request another part-time animal control officer in the FY2022-2023 budget.

In closing, Chief Morris reported that the new police cars have not arrived, and the state cannot provide a target delivery date.

Public Services

Public Services Director Daniel Williams reported that the streets will close at noon today for the boat races and his staff is working to assist with this process. They are also preparing for the city hall grand opening next week and the Seafood Festival.

The Public Services Department has one-and-one-half vacant positions; a part-time administrative position and a full-time position that will replace a retired employee. They are looking at restructuring the full-time position to make it fit the department's current operations. Currently, he has one employee out with COVID.

Councilmember Ballou asked for a summary of the stormwater issues being experienced from the staff's perspective with the cause of each, stating that most of the city's problems are due to rising tide when there is nowhere for the water to runoff to, and is quickly resolved as the tide goes out. City Manager Ryan Eggleston explained that there is not one major problem but that it is a combination of all the issues included in the study. Mr. Williams further explained that his department would like to move to a proactive position rather than a reactive position, and the proposed plan is what will allow them to do this. Mr. Eggleston stated that he was a little hesitant to create a separate list outside of the study performed by leaders in the industry. He encouraged councilmembers to drive into areas not frequently visited during a heavy rain event to see the ponding first-hand. He explained that although the water recedes in 12 to 24 hours, the street understructure is being damaged during the flooding that will require additional maintenance. Councilmember Taylor stated that a wholistic program consisting of infrastructure, retention ponds and vegetation is needed to improve the situation. Councilmember Ballou then asked for a special workshop meeting to be scheduled for October that will allow the council time to discuss the proposed stormwater plan in depth before Mr. Eggleston presents the requested communication plan. Councilmembers Taylor and Warrender agreed. Councilmember Taylor stated that the differing opinion among councilmembers indicates a lack of understanding of the problem. Mr. Eggleston was asked to add the scheduling of the special meeting to the September Council agenda for consideration.

Planning and Inspections:

Planning Director Sandi Watkins reported that some of the Planning Board and Board of Adjustment members completed legislative and quasi-judicial training through the UNC School of Government. Additional training has been scheduled for this month as well.

Planning staff is reviewing the Bask Village plan which is to be located on the Russell's Glass/Osteen property. This includes 32 townhouse units. Staff is also reviewing a 17-lot subdivision proposed on North Florida Extension at Harold Drive and Hamilton Drive. Council previously approved the sketch plan for the subdivision. The next step in this process is the Planning Board review.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) RFQ deadline was September 1, 2021 and nine (9) responses were received. Staff will be reviewing these very soon.

Staff has finalized a first draft of the comprehensive plan RFP and various staff members will also be reviewing these.

Ms. Watkins advised that she recently attended FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) training where she learned that they are changing how flood insurance premium rates will be calculated. These changes will become effective October 1, 2021, and will allow for the CRS discounts to be applied to all properties not just those in flood hazard zones. Elevation certificates will still be required for building sites but will not be the deciding factor for flood insurance premiums. Properties outside of the AE & BE zones may also be required to carry flood insurance

if a federally backed mortgage is tied to the property. Ms. Watkins read through a list of factors that may be used to determine a requirement for flood insurance and the premium rate. Although these changes are intended to make the premiums fairer and more equitable, they will make it more difficult to estimate premium amounts.

The Planning and Inspections Department issued a total of 168 permits in August including 10 single-family dwelling permits and 12 single-family attached permits. In addition, approximately 140 non-compliant signs were pulled.

Parks & Recreation:

Parks and Recreation Director Jerry Riggs reported that August was a good month, wrapping up Marlins baseball and the summer camps. Staff is now moving into the fall activities and sports. Staff is also working on small repair and refresh park projects.

Mr. Riggs reported that his department has only one (1) COVID case.

Shephard and Evans Streets will close today at noon for the Offshore Powerboat Association's World Championships and the Crystal Coast Grand Prix boat races. Trial runs and safety checks will begin tomorrow with races to be held on Friday and Sunday every hour starting at 12:00 p.m. and ending at 5:00 p.m.

The Cape Lookout Shootout King Mackerel Tournament will be held on Saturday. Both parties are working together to prevent conflicts. Mr. Riggs stated that he and the dock master will be on sight to address any last-minute issues that may arise. Councilmember Ballou thanked him for his efforts in assuring that both events are managed without conflict.

Mr. Riggs reported that the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board will resume their monthly meetings in September and advised that subcommittees worked on small projects during the summer. The two vacant positions are being advertised through social media.

The dog park has been well received and is heavily used. The fence is being extended to provide some extra space.

In response to the damage done to Rotary Park, fencing is being altered to help deter such activity in the future. Mr. Eggleston was asked to explore the cost of adding cameras to the park. This expense is to be paid from the Contingency Fund. Staff was asked to present a proposal at the October meeting.

Finance:

Finance Director Jewel Lasater reported that her department continues to prepare for the audit, to train new staff, and to work towards the launch of the utility billing module. The "Go Live" date has been delayed until February due to the illness of a critical team member and other departmental demands.

They are continuing to research American Rescue Plan (ARP) while waiting on the final rule. Ms. Lasater shared that the North Carolina League of Municipalities (NCLM) has a resource page on their website dedicated to the ARP funds that provides a wealth of information.

As requested by Council, a list of the four (4) delinquent emergency small business loan accounts was emailed to the council. Since that time, one account was paid in full and in response to the letter another was brought current. Another loan recipient attempted to contact her, but they have not spoken yet. One business remains delinquent without responding to the letter. Attorney Taylor advised that the latter referenced business has been dissolved and Council must decide if they want to pursue resolution through the personal debt recovery process.

Referencing a communication received from a customer who had concerns with the timing of utility bill notices, Ms. Lasater stated that the payment schedule has been in place for a long time. If changed, multiple related processes would also have to be changed. She advised that a large percentage of customers are paying consistently on time. Multiple payment options are available including online bill pay and automated drafts. It was decided that a separate bill insert would be added to the next mailing that outlines payment options as well as directions to sign-up for paperless billing.

Human Resources:

Human Resources Director Susan Nixon provided a status report on current vacancies:

- PT – Planning & Inspections Administrative Assistant - advertising
- FT – Police Officer (2) - advertising
- PT – Police Officer - advertising
- FT – Police Administrative Assistant – offer made
- FT - Utility Maintenance Technician – advertising
- PT – Water Administration Assistant - advertising
- PT - Public Utilities Administrative Assistant - advertising
- FT – HR Assistant –job description prepared and will be advertised internally

Ms. Nixon advised that she has received no response for the part-time positions.

The RFP (request for proposal) process for police chief position is ongoing with a deadline of September 18, 2021. The consultants will be more aggressive in advertising the position in hopes of increasing the response. Currently, law enforcement positions are hard to fill nationwide.

In addition, Ms. Nixon is working to implement the approved comp study recommendations and managing COVID cases. In response to a question, Chief Fulk advised that 24 people are hospitalized locally with COVID and the majority of these are unvaccinated. Hospitalizations are high, but he was unaware of the hospital turning any cases away. It appears that most cases are mild to moderate without the need for hospitalization.

Administration/Communications:

City Manager Ryan Eggleston reported that he spoke with two financial institutions and is awaiting information from a third later this week regarding the high interest loans. He explained that most are financed under USDA (US Dept. of Agriculture) 40-year notes so it is expected that refinancing will increase the annual payments. He was asked to share this information via email for the benefit of those not present today.

The utility assistance program is on hold awaiting final guidance on the ARP funds.

Mr. Eggleston stated that he is still working towards reinstating the monthly departmental reports; however, the relocation of staff to the new city hall prevented him from meeting with the department directors to discuss it.

All audio-visual equipment has been transferred to the new building. VC3 has been very easy to work with and facilitated a smooth transition. The city's overall technology position is much stronger and experiences less interruptions with the implementation of Office 365 and cloud-based email platform.

Reporting for Communications Director Alize Proisy, Mr. Eggleston stated that the next edition of the Mullet Wrapper has been released and should be in mailboxes within the next couple of days. Ms. Proisy is working with Satellite Army, Daniel Williams, and Sandi Watkins to finalize the technology work in the new council chambers, and she is working with the administration staff to coordinate the ribbon cutting ceremony.

In response to a question, Mr. Riggs reported that the repairs to the Carolina Sounder monument are complete except for the painting. The painting is taking some time due to the cost of the paint and the need to work around forecasted rain events.

Mr. Eggleston presented renditions of the Recreation Center playground that is scheduled to be installed this fall at the cost of \$50,000, and asked Council about their preference for adding a poured rubber base like the one used at Shevans Park. This would cost approximately \$25,000. It was explained that the poured rubber base is more economical overtime. Councilmember Taylor was in favor of adding poured rubber to all parks as improvements are made. Council expressed support of the recommendation and asked that it be presented at the September Regular meeting for consideration.

PRESENTATIONS/RECOGNITIONS

Councilmember Taylor stated that Resolution 2021-R-38 will be presented to Lieutenant Kelly Guthrie at the September 14, 2021 Regular meeting in recognition of her retirement from the Morehead City Police Department on September 1, 2021. Lieutenant Guthrie retires with more than twenty-seven years of faithful service to the Town.

NEW BUSINESS ITEMS

Discuss Resolution 2021-R-37 Endorsing the Raleigh Saltwater King Mackerel Tournament

Parks and Recreation Director Jerry Riggs presented Resolution 2021-R-37, endorsing the Raleigh Saltwater Sportfishing Club King Mackerel Tournament and authorizing action necessary for the event to be held November 5-8, 2021 in Morehead City. This is a reoccurring annual event and no unusual requests have been made.

Councilmember Ballou questioned the closure of Shepard Street from 8th Steet to 7th Street that would close off the entrance to Southern Salt Restaurant. Mr. Riggs confirmed that the street would only be closed from the tip of the Jib to 8th Street and would not interfere with the restaurant. The map will be corrected.

Discuss Resolution 2021-R-41 Endorsing the North Carolina Seafood Festival

Parks and Recreation Director Jerry Riggs then presented Resolution 2021-R-41, endorsing the North Carolina Seafood Festival and authorizing action necessary for the event to be held October 1-3, 2021 on the Morehead City waterfront. He stated that he does not foresee any major problems. Councilmember Ballou, also a Seafood Festival board member, stated that the festival footprint remains the same. He explained that 10th and 11th Streets will be utilized for one-way traffic to improve traffic flow.

Downtown Traffic/Parking Update

Fire Chief Jamie Fulk provided an update, as requested by Council, regarding parking in the downtown area that is restricting traffic flow on Shepard and Evans Streets, impeding visibility of oncoming traffic on Arendell Street, and restricting Fire/EMS apparatus accessibility. Chief Fulk provided a handout with pictures of some of the access and visual impairment issues they face on a regular basis. He stated that fire apparatus has been involved in two collisions while trying to access the waterfront. He explained that the parking at Radio Island beach access is controlled by Carteret County, and he is communicating with them about how to share authority of parking management.

Mr. Eggleston suggested that a traffic consultant be hired to assist in developing long-term solutions that are consistent with North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT) plans. Public Services Director Daniel Williams advised that NCDOT must approve roadside parking and encroachment agreements are required to erect signage. It was suggested that "no-parking" areas on city streets be identified by signs and painted markings.

The proposed recommendations will be presented for consideration at the September 14, 2021 Regular meeting.

Discuss Future Plans for 202 South 8th Street and 706 Arendell Street

City Manager Ryan Eggleston lead a discussion concerning the future plans for 202 South 8th Street and 706 Arendell Street. Councilmember Taylor stated that a meeting will be held with the Fire Museum Committee later this week as they are looking at long-term plans. The Library Committee recently visited both buildings to determine which will best fit their needs and the overwhelming majority preferred 202 S. 8th Street (Municipal Building) location. If Council agrees with designating the Municipal Building for the library, staff would like Council to consider advertising the sale of 706 Arendell Street through the auction process, and a proposal for such will be put forth for consideration at the October meeting. Councilmember Warrender shared that it would be expensive, if not impossible, to adapt 706 Arendell Street for a library. She stated that the Webb Library provides 5,600 square feet of space. The City Hall provides 5,300 square feet of space on three (3) different levels without the possibility of an elevator. The Municipal Building only provides 4,100 square feet of space on two (2) different levels, but a working elevator is already in place and the building offers the possibility of expansion. Library staff also favored the Municipal Building. It was agreed that the selection of the Municipal Building for the library should be presented to Council for consideration.

Quarterly Financial Report

Finance Director Jewel Lasater appeared before the Town Council to provide the quarterly financial report, reviewing summary statements of 06/30/2021 as of August 31, 2021. She reported that in many areas the city has collected more revenue than budgeted and that \$1.7 million has been transferred into the Fund Balance. There remains one (1) month of sales tax that has not been recorded as well as the water and sewer renewal that have not calculated. Overall, the city is on track and in a good position.

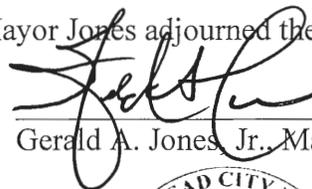
Ms. Lasater confirmed that payment for the property located at 2413 Bridges Street (previously the National Guard Armory) has been received.

Review Budget Ordinance Amendment

Finance Director Jewel Lasater explained that she had planned to delay the one minor budget item to be made; however, in light of today's discussion she will present budget amendments at the September 14, 2021 meeting to record a small reclassification, the purchase of the rubber floor for the Recreation Center playground, and the security cameras for Rotary Park.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no other business to discuss, Mayor Jones adjourned the meeting 11:46 p.m.


Gerald A. Jones, Jr., Mayor

Attest: 
Cathy Campbell, City Clerk

