

The Richlands Town Council held a “Public Hearing” on Tuesday, November 11, 2025, at 5:30pm in the Richlands Council Chambers with the following present:

Mayor: Rod. D. Cury
Town Manager: Ron Holt
Town Attorney: Michael Thomas
Finance Manager: Ronnie Campbell
Project Manager: Absent
Town Clerk: Amanda Beheler
Council Members: Seth White, Rick Wood, Jordan Bales, Jan White, and Laura Mollo.

Mayor Cury opened the meeting.

The Invocation and Pledge was led by Mayor Cury.

Mayor Cury advised the Public Hearing is for the purpose of providing the citizens of the Town an opportunity to be heard with respect to Spearhead Trails- Proposed ATV Trail Route.

Mayor Cury advised the meeting was open to take public comment.

Jamie Keeter, 271 Mountain Road- asked where the trail would begin and end.

Mr. Holt advised when they posted the original proposed route, it started at the top of Mountain Road, however the owner of that land has since elected not to sell that property at this time, so they are unsure where it would start now.

Mr. Keeter asked why the Town would run a motorcycle trail through an elderly neighborhood. Mrs. Mollo advised it was presented to Council as an idea to bring money into the Town and she wanted to hear what the citizens had to say about it, because she wouldn't want that going through her neighborhood.

Mr. Keeter stated it made no sense to him to bring in all the trash and disruption that would come to the neighborhood from the trail riders.

Mr. White advised the only reason the Council is looking at the trail system at all is because it is a potential source of revenue for the Town and stated that everyone knows without more revenue, they would have to increase taxes or other things, and no one on the Council wants to do that.

Mr. White advised that they look at every opportunity to get revenue into the Town.

Mr. White stated that in years past there had been people that sat in their seats and in administration seats that blocked businesses from coming in and they did not want to be those people, they want to look into everything that they can. Mr. White stated that one example of that was Macado's was going to put a restaurant in the Town and the administration at the time blocked it from happening.

Mr. White advised these Trail Systems bring in massive amounts of revenue and based upon stats from the state from five years ago, on average each person/rider spends \$190 per day in local businesses (stores, gas, restaurants, hotels, etc.).

Mr. White advised they are holding this Public Hearing to hear citizens' concerns, and the Trail will not be coming through Mountain Road at this time.

Mrs. Mollo stated the new proposed route would be down 9th Street.

Marcus Boyd, 306 Mountain Road- Mr. Boyd advised that 9th Street would still affect him, so he inquired what the contingent route would be before he makes his comments.

Mrs. Mollo advised she has been told by other members of the Council that if people on Mountain Road complained too much, they would follow the railroad track around.

Mr. White advised he is not aware of this alternate route and did not have that information.

Mr. Boyd stated that going through any residential neighborhood should not even be discussed. Rick Wood joined the meeting at this time.

Mr. Boyd advised that before any vote is taken they need to make sure that no Council member has any kind of ties or business dealings with anyone that is involved with Spearhead Trails, because it would be a conflict of interest.

Mr. Boyd stated for the record that he is opposed to the Trail System going through any residential neighborhood in the Town.

Otis Musick, 1912 9th Street- Mr. Musick advised his family moved to Mountain Road when he was fifteen years old and he and his wife built their home there in 1977 and have lived there ever since. Mr. Musick stated that 9th Street is basically a retirement community and everyone there is either disabled or retired.

Mr. Musick advised he pastors a church at the end of Coach Road and they had a problem there with a trail going across the church property so they put up a fence and riders would still come off the hill and make hill climbs on the property and spin gravels in their parking lot, until they hired a contractor to come in with a bulldozer and eliminate the problem.

Mr. Musick stated the road is very narrow and there are other options for the Town to look at to access the mountains.

Mr. Musick inquired where would the liability lay if a rider had an accident on any of their properties along the route?

Mr. Musick advised he is not against the economic development but is against the Trail System coming through a residential neighborhood.

Scott Honaker, 1801 5th Street- Mr. Honaker thanked the Council for the opportunity to speak and advised he is also opposed to the trail due to living at the stop sign on the route.

Mr. Honaker advised his wife is from Buchanan County, and they have a real problem with riders there. Mr. Honaker also advised there was a meeting in Tazewell County last week to keep them out of Burkes Garden last Thursday.

Mr. Honaker stated he is not against the revenue source, only the route coming through residential neighborhoods. Mr. Honaker advised it would also decrease their property value.

Pete (last name and address inaudible)—thanked the Town of Richlands for the Veterans Program.

Morgan Earp, 6th Street- advised his concern is that the route comes through a residential area where people walk and kids ride their bikes, and that is a problem.

Mr. Earp inquired what the time limits would be on the Trails, about liability for property damage and if there were any alternative routes.

Mr. White advised that a representative from Spearhead Trails was in attendance and could hopefully answer some of these questions.

Mrs. Mollo advised the hours are from daylight to dark and there was a pretty big incident in Pocohontas a few nights ago where there had been some running after dark.

Dixie Keeter, 271 Mountain Road- Mrs. Keeter advised that she opposed the Trail System being put in residential neighborhoods.

Mrs. Keeter stated she would like the Council to think about the children who walk on the road to the bus stop and also the animals.

Mrs. Keeter advised the road is narrow and breaking off.

Susan Hunsucker, 159 Mountain Road- inquired about how the letters that citizens turned in regarding this would be handled or considered.

Mayor Cury advised the responses that the Town received were printed and included in the Council Packets for them to read.

Mrs. Hunsucker also inquired about the petition that was signed by citizens in the neighborhood.

Mrs. Mollo asked if it had been turned into Town Hall and Mrs. Hunsucker stated she was not sure who had it.

Mr. Holt advised they have not received a Petition.

Mayor Cury inquired if there were any other citizens who would like to speak, there was none.

Mr. White stated that at this time the Council had not made any decisions or chosen any routes, and it was Councils desire to hold this Public Hearing to hear citizens' concerns.

Mr. White spoke briefly on the positive impacts the Trail System has had on Damascus, VA.

Mr. White advised the Town is looking at other recreation opportunities as well, including a rail line, and trying to keep an open mind about them all.

Mrs. Mollo advised that she has not spoken to one person that was ok with them bringing the Trail System through a neighborhood.

Mrs. Mollo stated the Town is currently going through a transition with the Town Manager position and advised that if it's the desire to bring the Trail System to Town, they need to work with the new Town Manager to find an alternative route that does not go through a neighborhood.

Mr. Holt stated that when the Town was approached by Spearhead Trails to potentially open the Towns roadways to ATV traffic, they were made aware of a piece of property that was for sale in close proximity to the trails, so there was some discussion regarding that potential route.

Mr. Holt advised that the Town was not trying to force this on anyone and that is why they wanted to hold the Public Hearing to hear the communities' thoughts and concerns.

Mr. Holt stated that the owner of the property advised them a few weeks ago that it was no longer for sale, so at this time they haven't had a chance to discuss any alternative routes.

Mayor Cury asked the Council for a consensus regarding whether they would like to speak to Mr. Pike from Spearhead Trails during this Public Hearing or during the Regular Meeting.

Mrs. White advised the citizens who are already in attendance might like to hear what Mr. Pike has to say, Council agreed.

Mr. Pike thanked the citizens for attending the Public Hearing and gave a brief history of Spearhead Trails and the positive impact it has had on other surrounding communities.

Mr. Pike advised Spearhead Trails has recently joined the Hatfield McCoy Trail System in West Virginia as well.

Mr. Pike addressed the safety concerns of citizens and advised them that Spearhead Trails is tightly controlled by Trail Rangers and Rules that must be followed, or tickets are issued. Some of those rules include, no alcohol allowed, must wear helmets, etc. Mr. Pike also advised the trails only operate from sunrise to sunset.

Mayor Cury inquired about what Mr. Pikes' official title and position with Spearhead Trails is. Mr. Pike advised he lives in Fort Blackmore in Scott County Virginia, and he is the Government Relations Director for the Southwest Regional Recreation Authority.

Mayor Cury also inquired if they ticket trail rule violators and if so, how do they do that. Mr. Pike advised that Trail Rangers issue the tickets and if they are not paid their attorney can take them to the local courts to collect ticket fees.

Mrs. Mollo asked Mr. Pike about an incident that happened recently in the Town of Pocohontas where there were some trail riders that came into Town around 10:30pm and were throwing rocks on vehicles and homes, and a woman videoed it and posted it on Facebook. Mrs. Mollo also stated the Pocohontas Police Department responded to the incident, so she inquired if once the trail riders come off the trails and into Town, would it then be the Richlands Police Department that would respond. Mr. Pike advised that they work collaboratively with local law enforcement. Mrs. Mollo asked if Trail Rangers would have authority in Town. Mr. Holt advised he had spoken to Mr. Pike regarding this, and that it would depend on their level of certification.

Marcus Boyd- Inaudible.

Mr. White asked Chief Holt how many patrol officers are on duty for each shift. Chief Holt advised that it is mostly two per shift, sometimes three. Mr. White inquired how many officers the Town of Pocohontas has, and Chief Holt advised he believes they only have one sworn officer in the department and that is the Chief of Police. Mr. White stated that was a major difference between Richlands and Pocohontas.

Mr. Pike advised he grew up in Wythe County, VA and after spending 34 years in law enforcement and public safety, he retired and moved back to Southwest Virginia. Mr. Pike stated that when he moved back to Southwest Virginia, he wanted to help the communities, so after he began at the Southwest Regional Recreation Authority, they sat down with Southwest Virginia Community College and Mountain Empire College and talked with them about how they could work together to try and keep people in the area after college. Mr. Pike advised they want to enhance lives; it's not only about the trails.

Molly Land, SRA Marketing Director- Big Stone Gap Virginia- Mrs. Land advised that there was a recent study done by the Bureau of Economic Analysis, who studies all outdoor recreation and tourism, and it showed that ATV's/UTV's -which is what's rode on Spearhead Trails- is the 2nd fastest growing outdoor recreation across the country. Mrs. Land also advised that other data from the recent study showed the following information:

- When a rider from out of town comes into Town and stays overnight, they spend an average of \$567 a day.
- When a rider from 2-4 hours away comes into Town, they spend an average of \$131 a day.
- When a rider from within the County or adjacent County comes into Town, they spend an average of \$92 a day.

Mrs. Mollo asked Mrs. Land if she knew the additional amount that the localities spend in additional police coverage, cleanup, etc. Mrs. Land advised that was a great point, and advised that they like to not only look at how they are bringing money in, but also the jobs that it could create such as extra police officers, rangers, maintenance, etc. Mrs. Land stated she would get the specific dollar amount for Mrs. Mollo.

Mayor Cury advised he did not hear anyone that was angry, just concerned. Mrs. Mollo agreed.

Mayor Cury stated regardless of the cost of police, trail rangers, etc., like anything else it is not perfect, there will be rulebreakers, the world isn't perfect.

Citizen- Inaudible.

Mrs. Land spoke briefly about the positive changes it has brought to her hometown of Big Stone Gap, VA.

Mrs. Land advised the study was based on a national average of communities much like Big Stone Gap and Richlands, not large cities like Indianapolis.

Mrs. Land stated that she would try to see how those numbers break down regionally and not nationally.

Mrs. Land stated she was glad that so many people showed up to the meeting, it showed the beauty of living in our free country

Mrs. Land advised she could write a grant for \$100k to do an updated Economic Analysis, but the numbers would more than likely be very similar to the ones she had given earlier and that she would much rather write a grant to see how we can create jobs in our communities.

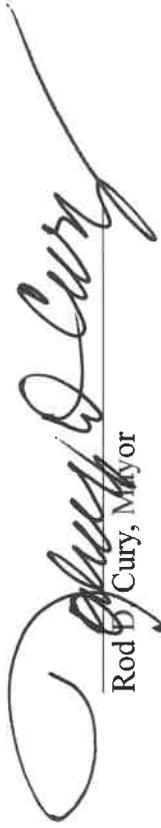
Mr. Bales stated they would want to break those numbers down by year of impact, and that he imagined by year 3 they would drive economic growth with Airbnb's, hotels, etc, Mr. Bales stated he would like to see those statistics, keep an open mind, and explore the Town's options.

Morgan Earp- Inaudible.

Multiple citizens advised they were not against the trails, would like for the Town to look at other route options besides their neighborhoods.

Mayor Cury closed the Public Hearing.


Amanda Beheler, Town Clerk


Rod B. Cury, Mayor

