

The Richlands Town Council held a "Public Hearing" in the Richlands Council Chambers on December 14, 2021, at 5:30 pm, with the following present:

Mayor: Rodney D. Cury
Town Manager: John O'Daniel
Town Clerk: Connie Allen
Council Members: Mary Ann Strong, Mike Street, Doug Ratliff,
Darrell Addison (late arrival)
Council Member Absent: Richard Brown, Jeff Hurst
Town Attorney: Brad Pyott

Mayor Cury opened the meeting.

Mayor Cury – Public Comment - Receive input on the proposed allocation of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding of \$5,430,362.00 which is over 1% of the total current budget. The only items currently being considered for immediate expenditure from this funding are improvements to the Richlands Public Library (\$154,000), Greenway Stage Phase II (\$25,000), SSES Grant additional funding (\$20,000), and Body Worn Cameras for the Richlands Police Department (\$9,000). The cost for each item is an estimate and the actual cost may vary.

Mayor Cury - Ginger Branton

Ginger Branton – P.O. Box 436 Richlands, VA

- Suggested to allocate some funding to the next mile of the Clinch Valley Walking Trail. We have started to develop so many assets in our community, could be a tourist attraction to our area but could be the next greatest thing to the Creeper Trail. Would be a huge draw for the Town and boost the economy and the downtown revitalization.

Mayor Cury – Amity Layne

Amity Layne – 6954 Mountain Road, Cedar Bluff, VA

- I came to represent the Richlands Library, been part of it most of my life.
- I see more than just an old building with books in it, but that is how people see it, the Town has an opportunity not just to refresh but bring more interest in it, maybe a community hub and center of tourism.
- I see different people in the library every day that I am there. In the past two (2) months there have been people that have been on vacation that have come in just to visit.
- Library is crumbling looks really bad, an old house with books in it.
- Consideration of the \$153,000 goes toward the remodeling, remaking and new façade of the Library.
- The Library Foundation will be expanding & remodeling and many upgrades. Hope to improve not just for the children but for the community and the seniors. We want to offer more than an old house with books.

Mayor Cury – Ellen and Don Elmes

Ellen Elmes – 7902 Pea Patch Road, Jewell Ridge, VA

- Muralist since 1980
- 1984 - First outside Mural in Richlands on Railroad Avenue, several others since then.
- Not here to speak on Murals but more broadly the number of Public Artworks in Richlands.
- Brick Sculptures created by Johnny Hagerman, the Coal Miners Memorial. We have more Public Artworks in Richlands than in Roanoke, VA.
- People locally, people who have moved back home or tourist, the Murals, Brick Sculptures, and Coal Miners Memorial it is a drawing card for people to gather, to remember their history and pride.
- I am here to suggest some money saved for ongoing preservation of Public Artworks.
- Murals have to be resealed every so often because of the ultraviolet rays, the Brick Sculptures cleaned and Coal Miners Memorial repaired and cleaned.

Don Elmes – 7902 Pea Patch Road, Jewell Ridge, VA

- Lived at Jewell Ridge, VA for over 40 years, been connected to Richlands the entire time in some way.

- Ellen has done several Murals in the Town of Richlands.
- Extremely important to preserve the Murals and Public Artworks with proper maintenance, especially the Coal Miners Memorial. It is a real testament to the people in Richlands and the miners in Richlands. Some funds need to be set aside to maintain that facility.
- Library – I was a friend of Kip Thompson who facilitated all that, my son volunteered at the library when he was 10/11 years old.
- Library is an addition to this end of the county. The library is in need of repair. Some of the funds used to make those repairs and expand the library in the future.

Mayor Cury – Laura Mollo

Laura Mollo – 262 Linwood Drive, Richlands, VA

- Disappointed to see lack of attendance for such an important matter. They will still get to cast a vote and not hearing what we feel strongly about.
- Our Council will go down in history as being the most disappointing Council this Town has ever seen.
- You will be known to have ignored opportunities I first thought you were missing the opportunities, but you are aware but ignoring them anyway. Not sure if it is willful, ignorance or selfish agenda. The Town is crumbling before our eyes. It is on the backs of the Council.
- ARPA money is this the only way to fund these projects or are there other ways to get funding. If there is we need to utilize prior to using ARPA money.
- Library is in dire need of improvements, I am glad it is now taken seriously but should have been year ago. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. You should consider in every area of the Town.
- Repairs more expensive. Where is the money given by the Board of Supervisors? It is not listed as funds available for the project.
- Curious about the SSES Grant, write down what SSES stands for and the requirements. I know you won't do it; it is not to embarrass anyone but to think about the facts. You are voting on huge issues. If you are not fully entailed, it is not a grant but a principal forgiveness loan and its match is being provided by Cumberland Plateau and the study is happening as we speak. Why do we need additional money toward this? It isn't required or needed and shouldn't come from the ARPA money.
- I believe the Body Worn Cameras are necessary for the officers and citizens alike. I know you remember when I was pulled over before a Town meeting, first thing they I did was request body cam footage of the incident. I was told they were not in use because the storage is too expensive. Why do we need new ones if we have them now and not being use because of storage cost? Will we not run into the same issue with the new ones? How do you plan on paying for the cost of storage going forward?
- Looking at the priorities the money is being spent not invested. Once in a life time opportunity for the money.
- What we say as citizens goes in one ear and out the other with some of you. If you are going to change your heart change your priorities and lay your own personal passion projects aside. Do what is right for the citizens.
- Bring consultant's in, there are resources available thru VML to advise. Don't just spend the money invest it in the people and the future of our Town. Fix what we have, fix the playground, roads, start the imagination library. Invest in our kids and the things that matter.
- Believe in the citizens enough to invest I do and I am asking you do the same.

Mayor Cury – Shea Cook

Shea Cook – 215 Washington Square, Richlands, VA –

- Wanted to bring to Council attention - You may have 5.4 million dollars but it has strings attached to it. I am looking at a list of projects that have been identified for discussion today, I presume.
- Interim rules put out by the Department of Treasury is very specific and the usages for these funds.
- Suggested before any decision is made on any specific project you have your Town Attorney do a review and provide a legal opinion whether or not the usage of these funds is consistent with the interim rule from the Department of Treasury. They didn't mention when you get this money but there's going to be a day when the Town is going to have to provide a report to the Department of Treasury on how these funds were used, kind of like an audit process. If not used properly Town will be in a position of having to pay money back for usages that was not permissible under the regulations. I don't want to see the Town fall into this situation.

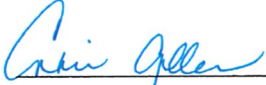
- Not sure how the list of projects ended up before us, I assume input from individual Council members and Department heads as it should. I would have hoped this list would have been presented to the Planning Commission and the IDA. Those are the deliberative bodies that Council should rely on in many instances, on how to utilize funds for a long term benefit.
- ARPA once in a lifetime windfall, and how we use these in the wisest way possible for this Town and the people for the long term, that's a significant challenge.
- One thing I don't see on the list is money set aside for a feasibility study for flooding. I have had the opportunity to mention on several occasions to Council and Planning Commission, effects over 500 families in the Town of Richlands and the surrounding area. Last year we had two significant flooding incidents where FEMA was involved. Working with the Flood Commission I know there are millions of dollars available. Speaking to the grant liaison office with Emergency Management Agency at the State level. We had a conference with her and she indicated one project after another all across the Commonwealth from east to the north for projects not specifically for flooding but for projects that would enhance the safety infrastructure of these Towns. The money is there, it is about how you ask for it, and you have a feasibility study prepared to support a grant application. Grant money is available thru the State, ARPA or FEMA. Every year we drive by one kind of flood or another just like it is supposed to be like that. I think it is a real disservice to the Town generally but specifically to those individuals that live in communities like Brooklyn and Dalton Addition, whom some of the poorest people and least able to protect their interest. That is what Council is supposed to be for.
- With the once in a lifetime windfall I would suggest that money be set aside for a feasibility study and begin an aggressive application for grant funding. I know the Board of Supervisors will pay for the advertising to solicit for bids. Once you now the solicitation process would involve some funding as far as advertising. It is the first step but not necessarily take anything away from the Town. Once we get an idea what the cost is going to be for the study we will know how much money it will cost for a feasibility study performed. It is going to be a long process but every year for three (3) decades or longer we have had flooding issues in Richlands. We have not really done anything about it.
- With this opportunity we need to take serious action on coming up with something about the flooding, it is not going away and getting worse every time.

Mayor Cury - That concludes the list of people for Public Comment. I will close the Public Comment hearing. I will ask for a motion to close the Public Hearing.


Mike - I make a motion to close the Public Hearing, Mary Ann seconded the motion.

Mayor Cury - Voice Vote - All "I", motion carries unanimously. (Richard Brown, Jeff Hurst absent)

Mayor Cury - Adjourned Public Hearing - Regular Council Meeting at 6:00pm.



 Connie Allen, Town Clerk



 Rodney D. Cury, Mayor