

The Richlands Town Council held a "Public Hearing" in the Richlands Council Chambers on October 12, 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, Jeff Hurst, Mike Street, Doug Ratliff Richard Brown, Logan Plaster
Town Attorney :	Bob Altizer

Mayor Cury opened the meeting.

Mayor Cury – Solicit Public Comments – To receive input on the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding of \$5,430,362.00 which is over 1% of the total current budget.

Mayor Cury – Grace Stuart, Laura Mollo, Mike Bandy, Rocky Hill, Kevin Hamilton

Grace Stuart – Richlands – I realize I may be tilting at windmills, but here goes. For \$5.4 million dollars there are a lot of things you can do. Parks and Recreation should not be just parks, sports and kids or a brand-new soccer field. Recreation includes dancing, yoga, ping-pong, cards, crafts, board games, singing and much more, yet this type of recreation is not found in our park system. When we were looking for a home in the area, we were told that Tazewell County is becoming a retirement destination, but why would seniors want to relocate here if there is nothing to keep them active and engaged except maybe pickle ball. Do you realize that Parks and Recreation primarily caters to ages 5 to 24, 22% of the population but those from ages 55 to 74 is 27% but what is available for them? I am not talking about seniors who require or need services from AASC. If you can spend a million dollars on a new soccer field, I think you can spend a lot less creating an Active Senior Recreation Center which can be used year-round. It may help define the purpose of the center. It is to provide programs and activities that will help to keep seniors energetic and stimulated. It can provide contact with others through all sorts of clubs and activities which can be mentally, physically and intellectually stimulating which helps to keep seniors independent, self-sufficient and self-reliant. Another benefit is that of socialization. Today nearly 11,000 Senior Centers serve one (1) million older adults aged 50 plus every day. Baby boomers want to remain active both physically and in community life. Age 60 is the new 40; promoting active living can make neighborhoods more livable for all ages and reduce costs associated with social services and health care. An active Senior Recreation Center could bring in seniors from the surrounding areas, which could have a positive economic impact. There are many empty buildings on Front Street which could either be bought or rented for such a Center. Occupying one of these buildings could help to revitalize the heart of Richlands. For example, the Pawn Shop next to the Section House would be an ideal location and it even has available parking. The Center should be open five (5) days a week from 8:00am to 5:00pm. After 5:00pm and on weekends, the building can be used and or rented for other purposes which would help to defray costs. In conclusion, I believe there is a strong need to fill a gaping hole in Richlands. By the year 2030, the number of adults in the US over the age of 65 will double and make up 20% of the population; Richlands has already exceeded 22%. This emphasizes the need for an active Senior Recreation Center. Our Town government should not be SELF-SERVING but COMMUNITY-SERVING.

Mayor Cury - Receive Public Comments – Laura Mollo

Laura Mollo - 262 Linwood Drive – First I would like to address the fact this Public Hearing wasn't advertised with the proper notice according to VA Code 15.2-2507. This publication was made on October 6, making the notice only (6) six days prior to the hearing date. This code does require public hearing for this matter. It states: "any such amendment which exceeds one percent of the total expenditures shown in the currently adopted budget must be accomplished by publishing a notice of a meeting and a public hearing once in a newspaper having a general circulation in that locality at least seven (7) days prior to the meeting date. The notice shall state the governing body's intent to amend the budget and include a brief synopsis of the proposed budget amendment" As this money does exceed 1% of the budget, a public hearing is required as is the printing of a brief synopsis. We're talking about millions of dollars that is being rushed through without proper notice and opportunity for citizen input. Now, regarding the money itself. I think we're on the right track. Drainage issues and the Water Treatment Plant are priorities and I appreciate them being treated as such. The one thing I disagree with

is the million dollars toward the Rec Park improvements. We have other areas in Town that desperately need attention, like the flooding issues in Lake Park, Hidden Valley, Brown Street and Iron Street specifically. Even when the rest of the Town doesn't completely flood, those homes are being destroyed by pooling water. The Town cut a ditch for a citizen in Hidden Valley to prevent the pooling of water in a driveway. So that obviously is the Town's responsibility. We have to help those other citizens who are reaching out. Lake Park also needs their drains cleaned as some are now growing trees. This creates a huge back flow of water when we have heavy rains which is a danger to the citizens, especially the children. They're also in need of curbs on the higher streets of the neighborhood with the big hills. The Rec Park obviously needs upgrades and I'm not saying it doesn't. Why not compromise and give some to the Rec Park instead of the entire amount? If we are still dead set on the Rec Park, the upgrades should be those that benefit more citizens. A computer lab, art center, music center, rock climbing wall but not just an artificial turf soccer field which only benefits a few. This idea was proposed in 2017 by the Head of the Soccer Association where the cost was estimated at almost \$700,000. Now that person sits on the Council and has brought this up for discussion. I would ask that person to abstain from further conversations or votes regarding a soccer field as this poses a conflict of interest. It's time we stop looking at a small sector of Richlands and start seeing every citizen as important as the next. This money gives us the opportunity to do something great in Richlands, to start something that benefits every citizen equally and protects homes and neighborhoods or to do something that brings actual revenue into Town. Please consider this carefully before making a decision, and I am also asking you to hold another properly notified public hearing.

Mayor Cury – Mike Bandy

Mike Bandy – I live in Pounding Mill, but my business is at 113 Tazewell Avenue, Richlands. I believe in upgrading our soccer field to a turf field which will allow us to serve even more kids. Before Covid hit we served 250/260 kids per year and their families. This allows kids from broken homes, some for single parent homes and from regular homes. All get involved even if it is just the kids showing up to get on the field, parents coach and take part in practice. Parents help elevate our kids to a higher understanding of teamwork, leadership and character. To me that investment in the kids is going to allow us to again help some kids that come from different situations, we can say hey someone cares about me, thru a sport thru a team, thru an activity. The ball is just a tool, soccer reaches kids worldwide it is universally understood. But in our area for some kids sometimes that is the best family contact that they have, that means a lot to me, I believe the turf field not only serves soccer it can serve softball as well and any other sports that we bring in. The kids that we teach character, leadership and encourage to do well in their education they are going to be taxpayers one day, stay in Richlands and bring those skills and the things they did when they were kids, it is going to help them become the citizens that we need. Yes, I am in favor the Soccer Field and I would like to see the Town consider that please.

Mayor Cury – Rocky Hill

Rocky Hill – Co-founder and owner of Gods Rock Stars, I live in Pounding Mill, VA, I hate to say that because I have lived in Richlands my whole life; I am Richlands thru and thru. I am here to speak, and I need some interaction here tonight, if you could spend one (1) million dollars and be honest to save your child's life or your grand kids' life raise your hand, be honest. Now I am going to give you a history lesson and a story. I grew up in Red Ash it is a poor place, and it still is but I love it and I am honored to come from there. If it had not been for the Richlands Rec Park, me as a child, I promise you I would not be standing in front of you today. What you don't understand is when we use to charge 75 cents to get into the Rec Park I would go in my daddy's truck and I would try to find three (3) quarters, so I could go on Tuesday/Thursday nights at 5:30pm and on Saturday morning you could get there at 8:00am you could beat the tennis players before they got there and took over at 12:00pm. That was a big part of my life it was the only part of my life. We didn't have soccer back then; we had baseball but not a true basketball. We played at the Raven Elementary School. The Rec Park was a big part of my life, and it saved my life. I want to say that it saved my life. If it can save one life it is all worth it. I will tell you why it is worth it, I am not bragging on myself, Richlands has helped Hurley to no end. We have changed Hurley thru this flood; I have been a huge part of that. We could not have done that if we didn't have the Richlands Rec Park because Rocky would not have been here. I would have not made it. What

people don't understand not all kids get to play High School sports? My son does not play High School sports, but he loves playing at the Rec Park. Another thing I cringe when I hear people say let's do away with the Rec Park or move it or let's do this or that. I can remember going down there on nights when we had ping pong table in the back and the ping pong paddle didn't have foam on it, we didn't care we could have cared less. Dave Ascue gives us what he had, and we went back there and played. I heard someone in a meeting the other night talk about cracked chairs that just gives you scars for you think about and to remember about the Rec Park. We don't worry about cracked chairs we want to change lives. That is how you change it you give a kid a ball I am not just saying soccer ball or basketball any kind of ball. I can give you names like Ramsey Cury, Ryan Altizer, Brandon Buskill I could go on and on and Myra Stevenson that grew up on that tennis court; I am not the only person that that Rec Park changed their lives. I love going in there and seeing Tommy Sargent, Tommy is back now teaching in Richlands if I am not mistaken. She ran the Rec Park and took our money for 25 years, old man Bill, hateful as all get out, but I miss Bill. I don't know if you know Skip with the googles, he used to walk around and get in our way in basketball, we loved Skip. I could go on and on, Craig Hunsucker. I am going to give you some more history, Luke Peery, I was on the bank with my dad playing ball when I see Luke Peery hit a baseball and went to the swimming pool. That is amazing. Luke Peery was one of the greatest coaches in Southwest Virginia, Tommy Keene coaches at Tazewell right now watched him play a thousand games at the Rec Park. I could go on and on with great names. To get this multi sports complex is huge it could save a life. If it saves one and it is a chain reaction it will change hundreds. Think about it, it is very important to this community. We don't need to move it or rebuild it just make it better, it that is on turf field softball field or whatever let's do this, and make it happen. The kids depend upon us.

Mayor Cury - I want to apologize for being late that is what is running the meeting behind I will take full responsibility for that.

Mayor Cury – Kevin Hamilton

Kevin Hamilton – 414 Buchanan Street – I watched the last Town Council meeting on the budget of the 5.4 million dollars to spend at the Council's will, I guess. After hearing the meeting, I went over the Rec Park the next day and looked around and saw some issues that needs taken care of. One of the main concerns they are wanting to put in a soccer field, I am not opposed I think it is awesome idea. Every great idea is not always the best idea. You can put a million-dollar field over there but then you are still going to have a parking issue. There is nowhere to park; you crammed all these parents and kids in one area. It is inconvenient and unsafe to be honest with you. At Critterville, I looked over there and there are several things. I looked at every dugout and took pictures, every dugout is cracked. The mortar and brick are cracked. The press box is cracked; one is cracked all the way from the top to the bottom. I feel like those are issues and we should use of the money to fix the things that are wrong. Whatever we have left start building off that. That is my main concern, because safety. The playground has looked horrible for years, I am kind of afraid to take my kids over there I don't know if something is going to break or get tetanus. It is bad over there I don't know if you have looked over there or not. I think some of the funds should go for recreation but for the right thing. I think we need to look at our neighboring Towns like Lebanon and Tazewell. Tazewell is doing great I think they have a new walking trail opening real soon. Lebanon has a Splash Pad at no charge. My kids went there this summer and had a great time. I love it. I would love to see something like that come here. Bring families and communities together. Businesses around here stay open for a little while, a little cupcake shop opens yes their prices may be a little bit steep but if people would just think, go spend your money at those places and help those local businesses. It is honestly the community's fault that these businesses don't succeed. If you are not going to go spend money there, they are not going to be able to stay in business. I would like to see some of those funds to go for things like that.

Mayor Cury - We have heard all the public comments, all spoke with heart and all exceed five (5) minutes; thank you Brian for alerting me but I tried not to call anyone because it is something I did not do. With all due respect to our citizens is there anyone who did not sign up how would like to have five (5) minutes?

Mayor Cury - Mr. Earls please come to the podium.

Craig Earls – 311 Linwood Drive- I currently serve on the Recreation Commission although I am not speaking on behalf of the Recreation Commission I am speaking as a citizen. I first want to thank you for the opportunity for having the public hearing this is very important for our Town. This is a turning point you don't get this kind of money very often and I think everyone had lots of great ideas. I have been around this kind of project for a while and the planning that has gone into it this multi-use facility is very important to the community. Not only for the use of the field itself but there are other improvements to that property, particular around safety that I feel like should be included in that. Parking is one of the issues and also lighting at the Rec Park, especially in the evenings. Those are very important infrastructure that should be included along with a Splash Pad. We have had some investments in other items over there and maybe some grant opportunities, someone gets a grant or matching grant and things like that could cut some cost. The infrastructure is as important as well. The Pizza Hut work and the work on Iron Street that we have been trying to get fixed for a while I don't think it is fair to some of the citizens to not fix some of those items. I think it is balancing what we have here, and all continue to be priorities and we have put you here to make these very important decisions and the best interest of the Town. I take my kids to tournaments all over the place and spend a lot of funds in other counties. This is an economic driver for us being able to have a field like this for soccer, football, softball, and God's Rock Stars and whatever is over there it is important to the community, but it is a balancing act. I think grants can come in to help offset some of the cost and I will help with whatever I can to help get the grants and any type of help that I might be able to do. Again, I think safety issue and infrastructure like Iron Street, Pizza Hut and all these things are very important. Thank you for able to speak about this project I hope you proceed with it; it is very important to our citizens and thank you for the time.

Mayor Cury – Rocky are you wanting to speak again. You are limited to three (3) minutes.

Rocky – I spoke from my heart the first time now I want to speak from my business side. God's Rock Stars is a special needs program. We have people from Hurley, Lebanon, St. Paul, Castlewood and Richlands; I could go on and on. This is a growing organization for our special needs kids. It is an amazing opportunity; I spoke to people about the multipurpose complex we are willing to partner up with the Town. I am trying to find a place to build a field; I already have materials and money. I will promise you on a handshake deal right here God's Rock Stars will partner with anybody that will make this happen so we could build the road down as we can access to the handicap, and we can update the parking lots. Me and my God's Rock Stars we can get a few more grants than the Town can get, and other people can get. We have a handicap update. I will partner with you guys whoever is on this, and we will do this, OK. I just wanted to tell you that. Thank You.

Mayor Cury – Anyone else who would like to speak?

Amity Layne – I live in Belfast, but I have spent my whole life for the most part in Richlands on Tank Hill and I am a graduate from Richlands High School. I do a lot of volunteer work in Richlands. A lot of my volunteer work is with the Friends of Tazewell County Library. My heart is with the Richlands Library. The Richlands Library is falling apart we have had some money and grant money to give a face lift the structure damages that need to be repaired. It has not yet been done. I am hoping with this new money that has come in maybe we can finally see it started. Thank you.

Mayor Cury - Anyone else?

Morgan Erp – 1618 6th Street – First I am going to say yes, we need to give money to the Richlands Library I think that is top of the list. The second idea a Laser Tag Arena I think that would be appealing to the Town. Just saying everyone can participate something different and someone as big as myself could participate in an arena like that, that is something to consider.


Mayor Cury - Anyone else who would like to speak? If no one else is going to speak I will have a motion to close the Public Hearing.

Richard - I will make the motion, Mary Ann seconded the motion.


Mayor Cury- We have a motion and a second, any further discussion? All those in favor of the motion say yes. All those that oppose say no, Motion carries – 6/0. Unanimous vote

Mayor Cury - I apologize to member of the Council, Attorney and the Public we went over a little bit but it was well worth it.

Mayor Cury - Adjourned Public Hearing - Regular Council Meeting in five (5) minutes



Connie Allen, Town Clerk



Rodney D. Cury, Mayor