

The Richlands Town Council held a “Public Hearing” on May 24th, 2022, in the Richlands Council Chambers at 5:30 pm with the following present:

Mayor: Rod D. Cury

Town Manager: John O’Daniel

Town Clerk: Rebekah Hackworth

Council Members: Jeff Hurst, Doug Ratliff, Kristen Thompson-Whitt, Darrell Addison, Mike Street, and Seth White.

Town Attorney: Michael Thomas and Brad Pyott

Mayor Cury opened the meeting.

This meeting is for proposed Rate Schedule Ordinance O-2022-05-03.

Mayor Cury asked if anyone else would like to speak that may have missed the sign-up sheet. Since there are no additional comments or members that would like to speak, we will proceed to Laura Mollo.

Laura Mollo- 262 Linwood Drive

“Job loss and tax increase should always be a last resort yet we’re watching you dwindle down our town staff in secret while still including tax increases in this budget.

In a time of record high inflation coupled with a 28% poverty rate in town, you all should be losing sleep on how to cut this budget to give our employees a raise and not increase our taxes.

There are areas of the budget where you can make cuts without burdening the town employees or the citizens. You’ve sat here and heard these employees in most of the departments tell you how understaffed and underpaid they are. You’ve also heard citizens practically beg you not to raise taxes, rates, and fees at this time. We keep looking at you to study this budget and make these cuts, yet it still looks as if you’re going to take the easy way out.

Of course, you all won’t answer this, but I’m curious to know how many of you sitting here know the differences between the original budget proposal compared to what you’ve been given now. I know every single change made on that budget and they’ve not all been told to you publicly or highlighted in yellow. For a quick example, every department either stayed the same salary wise in the new proposal or they decreased significantly. Even departments with 3-4 people in them decreased tens of thousands of dollars in some cases. Yet the Town Manager’s salary only decreased by \$5 per year.

It isn’t too late to do the right thing and stop the job loss, stop the tax increases, stop the fee increases, and stop the wasteful spending. If you pass this budget tonight you’ve made it too late. The budget shouldn’t be passed tonight anyway because you’re going to approve a budget with a rate increase inside of it that you have not had two readings on. If you pass this budget with this increase in it without having both duly called readings, you are going against the Town Charter.

You were told numerous times to look at how well Botetourt is doing with their grid. How many of you actually looked? What AMP failed to mention is that Botetourt is regulated by the SCC. You may not allow the SCC to regulate you with these ridiculous electric rates, but we have something more powerful than the SCC to regulate you and that is the citizens, and they will regulate who are in those seats during the election this year. There will be no more choosing who you want there, no stacking the council. The citizens will decide, and we won’t forget the decision made here tonight.”

Mayor Cury- Thank you, Ms. Mollo. The next person who signed up for public comments is Barbara Cook.

Barbara Cook-

“This is going to be short and sweet, but I am going to plead that you please do not raise the utility rates. Most of the people of Richlands are not rich and they cannot afford the rates in addition to the increased inflation and the increase cost in everything else in their lives. You

can't get blood out of a turnip, and you can't get more money out of people that don't have any. You will end up running people out of town to some place they can afford better. Thank you."

Mayor Cury- Thank you, Barbara. That is all that has signed up for the comment period. Is there anyone else who would like to speak?

Since no one else would like to speak, I would entertain a motion to close this public comment period.

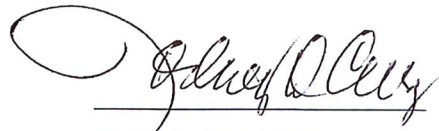
Jeff- I make a motion that we close this public hearing. Mike seconded the motion.

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. Roll Call- Jeff- Yes, Doug- Yes, Kristen- Yes, Darrell- Yes, Mike- Yes, Seth- Yes. Motion carries -6/0.

This public hearing meeting is Adjourned. Regular meeting will start at 6:00pm.



Rebekah Hackworth, Clerk



Rodney D. Cury, Mayor