

The Richlands Town Council held a Public Hearing in the Richlands Council Chambers on June 09, 2020 at 5:30pm with the following present:

Mayor:	Paul Crawford
Town Manager:	Tim Taylor
Town Clerk:	Connie Allen
Council Members:	Richard Brown, Mary Ann Strong, Rick Wood, Doug Ratliff Rod Cury
Town Attorney :	K.W. McClanahan

Mayor Crawford opened the meeting.

Mayor Crawford - I call this Public Hearing to order. Please state your name and address when you come to the front to speak, you will have five (5) minutes to speak. Our attorney will be our timekeeper; he will let you know when you have 30 seconds left to speak. We want to make sure that anyone who wants to speak has an opportunity to speak. I will ask when you finish speaking that you go back out to the parking lot so we can make room for other people to come in. Any questions?

Mayor Crawford - Suzanne Barton

Suzanne – 500 Barrett Street, Richlands, VA – I would like to say something before I get to my question. I feel like each member of the Council has a responsibility to conduct and carry themselves in such a way that it doesn't bring negative light to our beautiful Town. I feel like it is completely irresponsible for Council members to misrepresent facts in public or private forum to call into question people's characters and to make heavily serious accusations. Every month the Council members have an opportunity to bring their concerns to the Council in a professional and productive way. I would like to say thank you to each Council member that handled their self in this manner. I thank you for acting professionally and please continue to hold yourself to this higher standard and continue to lead by example. I am very thankful that there are Council members on this Council that truly have the best interest of the Town at heart. I appreciate all that you do. I do have a question. In January, the Council voted unanimously to purchase a fire truck and to finance this truck. I know at the time Mr. Taylor discussed in the meeting there was a financial situation of the Town that all the Council members needed to be made aware of and discuss, it was even mentioned that the real estate tax rate may have to be increased to pay for this truck. It was decided to purchase the truck and I know it is needed I am not questioning that. My question is the tax increase is dependent for the payment of the truck. Question is if this tax increase is not approved what is the Town's plan on in making the payment for the fire truck? It is already purchased and financed and being built two (2) years out, the Town has to make sure that we can make these payments. I understand you really don't want to raise taxes. There is talk some of the Council members not approving the budget because of the increases. My question is - If the increases don't pass how we are going to pay for a truck we have already financed and agreed to purchase?

Doug - May I speak?

Mayor Crawford - One thing we are not going to do in this meeting is to have questions and answers session.

Susanne – I just wanted to say that.

Mayor Crawford – I appreciate you saying that, and I will take into consideration.

Mayor Crawford – Laura Mollo

Mayor Crawford – Josh, let's not ask people to leave until we fill up the seats, if someone comes in, we can ask someone to leave at that time.

Laura - 262 Linwood Drive, Richlands, VA – I do have a couple of concerns, pretty big. There was an opinion about Mr. Brown being in the budget. I have gone thru the minutes from 2010 where Council members have asked for certain members to abstain from certain things and I completely agree with that. In the charter it states that if a Council member has a personal or financial interest in a situation they can't vote on that issue. Mr. Ratliff has abstained from water rates because of his car washes; I saw one where people were asking Mr. Woods to abstain from the cigarette tax because he sweeps the parking lot in a place that sells cigarettes. How much more are we asking the Council to please be above approach on this? Mr. Brown's salary is literally in the budget as a School Resource Officer. With him voting on that does beg to question the authenticity of that. I would appreciate you guys looking into that and consider that. My next concerns are things regarding the budget. This is a list of calls that were transferred from 911 to our Richlands dispatch last year; we are talking over 3000 calls. It was really disturbing to me not just for financial reasons but for a public safety issue of the delay in service that is being caused by the transfer. We have incredible dispatchers themselves; I am not calling them into question, but I am calling your system to question. We have gotten calls on here that I have gotten reports from 911 as well as the Richlands Police Department we are averaging at least a two (2) to three (3) minute delay in service because of the transfer. Two (2) to three (3) minutes can cause death; it can cause people to have strokes without their medicine if not administered in a certain amount of time. A thirteen-year-old girl in Town was being choked by her dad; it took 11 minutes for that call to be transferred. It is by the grace of God that girl did not die in the middle of that transfer. I am asking Council to please allow Sheriff Hieatt to come here and talk to you guys and educate yourself; I have gotten information from Sheriff Hieatt as well as Jerry Gilbert. Everything that Jerry Gilbert has told me has turned out to be not accurate. I am not saying that he lied about it, but I am saying he does not have accurate information about this. You guys should educate yourself when making decisions about your Town on this. As far as everything else I have looked over the budget and it is distributing to me to see some of the short falls that are going thru with the budget. I do have a couple of questions. Why are these numbers so off in the budget? When you guys are asking to raise our taxes, to raise our fees, to raise our water rates and to limit service at the Rec Park we deserve answers to these questions. I have a couple of things that are really bothering me about the budget. One is why are we paying health insurance on Council members? I don't think that is a necessary expenditure coming out of our pockets as taxpayers. Last year your Non-Departmental spending you had a budget of \$4,750 you spent \$101,920.00. I want to know where that money went, and I want to know why it is not being held accountable in that budget. Community & Civic Facilities request you are actually spending \$6,000 and requesting \$33,000. You have transfers in for \$570,000 assume it is for utilities if I am wrong correct me, but why is the electric utility so much more than the water utility? It doesn't seem a very accurate number. Health insurance is going up from \$24,000 and you are requesting \$143,000. I would also like to know why the IT, Mr. Dorton IT position was not brought before Council. He is a part-time position and being paid with benefits.

Mayor Crawford - Your time is up, Thank you.

Mayor Crawford – Melissa Green – (No Show)

Mayor Crawford - Ernest Edgell

Ernest – 206 Terry Drive, Richlands, VA – I don't know if it is true or not, but I have heard talk of food tax going up. You pay \$0.41 more for a hamburger in Richlands than you do at Claypool Hill. So why is that? It says tax on your bill.

Mayor Crawford - You are making statements; we will look into it.

Ernest - Here is the receipts for the exact same food. My concern, I have heard that you want to do away with the library. That is an asset to the Town. I think you will be doing harm very much if you decide not to fund that.

Mayor Crawford - I agree.

Ernest - Thank you

Mayor Crawford – Melissa Green (no show)

Mayor Crawford - Person back in the corner, do you want to address Council?

Citizen - I would like to ask a question?

Mayor Crawford - You can ask the questions, but I won't answer it. If you have a concern you can state the concern.

Mayor Crawford - Larry Johnson

Larry – I appreciate you letting me come and speak. Seems like I have been here too many times since I have been up there. Right now, I am glad I'm not up there. The trashing of the town officials is disgusting. I think it is ridiculous and uncalled for. I had a lady this morning send me a text message that she had never seen a community so eager in destroying itself. I tend to agree with her. I am almost ashamed to tell people where I am from now; it is the most ridiculous thing I have ever seen. Dispatch, we have had a million different reasons to get rid of dispatch. We have had 3000 calls in a year thru dispatch that is one of the reasons we need to keep dispatch. The dispatch office is a safe haven. I can't tell you how many times, just in the time I worked at that Police Department for about four (4) years, the number of times people went in there and found help. Dispatch would get an officer to come and help them. That is something that we cannot lose, we can't keep losing things. Everything that has been brought up in this budget has been take away, take away. I am sick of losing. I would like to see us win for a change. I am not ever in favor of paying more taxes, but I understand why we have to. My problem is when there is a tax increase, or when someone wants to take away something they need to come and provide a solution to make sure it doesn't happen again because it is going to happen again next year. A tax increase is like kicking a can down the road if you don't have a solid solution. Concerning Dispatch- I have something I want everyone to hear. This is a radio check between Tazewell County 911 and Richlands. The officer was sitting in front of the Police Department and this was recorded thru our console, Police Department console, the console picks up a lot better than the cars do. (played the recording)

Mayor Crawford - Larry times up.

Larry - Thank you.

Mayor Crawford – Do we have anyone else outside that wants to address Council?

Officers - No

Mayor Crawford - Laura, do you want to finish some of the notes that you have. I will give you and Larry a little bit more time to discuss your concerns.

Laura – I also want to say about the radio check, I also went and asked if I could see Richlands Police Department dispatch. I was told "no" that it was not my place and my business to see the dispatch center that my taxes pay for. I have a pool in my back yard and if I had to pull my kids out of it, I would want to know who is coming to save my child. I went to 911 and 911 Center and I was very blessed to get to see their center, they gave me a tour, they said they would love to have you guys up individually or as a group. When I was there, there was a radio check that came in from Richlands, it was maybe two (2) or three (3) weeks ago they heard them perfectly. He even said it is not fair to judge based on that, the radios would need to be upgraded anyway. I looked at the cost for that is approximate \$5000 per car. We are spending more than that on 911 trying to find refurbished parts from eBay for our systems here. Our system is so old that God forbid the motherboard went out of that system our officers would be radio silent. There would be no back up. Tazewell County 911 has three (3) back-ups and they would

be able to dispatch. Whereas our officers would have nothing. I am not asking you guys to make a decision on 911 on what I say or based on what Larry Johnson said but I am asking Council to please educate yourself and go up and see the 911 Center. I don't know if the guys at the Police Department will let you see their Dispatch Center, but they would not let me see it. I do ask you guys to get the information and go and see the 911 Center and see what is going on and make a decision based on that. I appreciate the extra time. In last year's budget there was a police grant in that budget in for \$34,000 but shows zero received. There is over \$2,000 miscellaneous expenses for council expenses. Finance Office salaries is actually \$53,574, requested \$285,864 this year. Is that going to be salary increase or what is going on there? The health insurance is going up, the retirement plan actually paying \$17,000 requesting \$70,000 as far as finance office printing supplies you paid \$1,794 actually and asking for increase of \$10,000 and the office supplies the same thing \$598 and you are requesting \$7,000. Office furniture, you have not bought office furniture in years, but you are requesting an extra \$3000. I keep seeing special studies in the budget but don't say what that is, so I am interested in why we are spending \$30,000 for special studies, who is doing the studies and what are they studying. We are spending \$92,000 on workers comp insurance but you are budgeting \$0 in the budget, to me that does not make any sense because the cost is going to come up, \$5,000 in miscellaneous insurance, IT department, I want to know why the IT position was not brought before Council, why it was just created as a part-time position with full-time benefits and how many town employees are part time who are actually getting benefits like that. Why is the School Resource Officer grant included in the income , already spent \$20,000 in federal assets last year again you are budgeting \$0? It says we have no Narcotics Task Force, no expenses for that but we are paying insurance for Narcotics Task Force, where is that insurance going? Again, the Police Department salary you are paying \$622,000 and you are requesting \$950,000 , health insurance again, retirement , office supplies you are spending \$536 and you are requesting \$5,000 and again with the office supplies. I have been going thru the ledger and I had to buy a 5-gallon bucket of hand sanitizer I was able to buy from local distillery for \$50. Jerry Gilbert spent over \$400 on the same 5-gallon bucket. That to me is not responsible spending. Postage you are averaging \$48 and asking for \$1,000, \$15,000 again on special projects what are the special projects, what did they accomplish, who did them, where did that money go. The Rec Park, the budget for the Rec Park is all out of control. You are saying on the budget that the Rec Park concession are not bringing any money, are they paying sales tax? Is the rec park exempt from paying sales tax on their concessions? I know you don't want to answer all those questions, but I hope you guys consider citizens and we are trusting you guys to be responsible for this stuff so I would appreciate looking into it a lot more and holding each other accountable all of you. To hold each other accountable of what is going on , hold each other accountable to be above approach in the situation of Mr. Brown on his own salary . Hold each other accountable as you guys have done and let go with whatever the divide is and come together and start working as a team for us because a lot of us are getting upset of seeing our services getting cut and our taxes being talked about getting raised and we want to know why. It is not fair to keep doing that to us we want the accountability and transparency and that will start with you guys as a Council.

Mayor Crawford - I really appreciate the time and energy that you put into this so the questions that you have brought up I made notes and will follow up. Thank you

Mayor Crawford - Larry did you want to finish up?

Larry Johnson – I hope you all don't start bringing up every part time employee in front of Council if you do you are going to be very busy with lifeguards, etc. for summer. You all heard the recording I have actually sit in the cars where we tried this before and it does not work it is hard enough to get out of places like head of Hill Creek when you had dispatch in Town must less trying the reach Tazewell. The radio system was upgraded before I left in 2006 it was upgraded once when moved from here to the Police Department now. Technology moves so fast it is nothing that can't be fixed all I have to ask in hearing that recording can anyone up here put their husband, son, daughter, wife in one of those cars and send them to Hill Creek that is their life line. That is the question that I have for everybody.

Mayor Crawford - Anyone else outside that wants to speak?

Officer - No sir.

Mayor Crawford - Ernest do you need more time, is everyone happy or at least said your peace.

Mayor Crawford - I will now close the public comment period.

Mayor Crawford - Since we have time we will go ahead and go into executive closed session, if we get out of that meeting, we can just take a break for regular council meeting at 7:30pm.

Mayor Crawford - At this time I need a motion for the Mayor and Members of Council to convene in executive closed session for the purpose of discussion as permitted by Subsection VA Code 2.2-3711 (A)(7) Pending Litigation, VA Code 2.2-3711 (A)(8) Legal Counsel, VA Code 2.2-3711(A)(1) Personnel and VA Code 2.2-3711(A)(29) Contract Negotiations.

Doug - I make the motion to convene, Mary Ann seconded the motion.

Mayor Crawford - 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 – 5/0.

Mayor Crawford – I now entertain a motion that the Members of Council reconvene in open session and accept the Certificate of Executive Session certifying that the matters discussed while in executive session were those both lawfully exempted from the open meeting requirements and identified in the motion by which the closed session was convened.

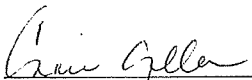
Rod- I make the motion for Council to return from “Closed Session”, Rick seconded the motion.

Mayor Crawford - Connie please call roll

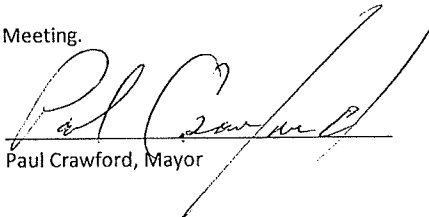
Connie - Rick-Yes, Doug-Yes, Richard-Yes, Rod – Yes, Mary Ann – Yes

Mayor Crawford - 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 – 5/0.

Meeting is adjourned until 7:30 Regular Council Meeting.



Connie Allen, Town Clerk



Paul Crawford, Mayor