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Town Council Work Session  
July 23, 2024

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Work Session

Mayor Pifer called the Work Session of the Mount Jackson Town Council to order at 6:02 PM in the Council Chambers at 5901 Main Street. Roll call was taken with Councilmembers Evelyn Burner, Judy Fultz, Todd Holtzman, and Rod Shepherd in attendance. Councilmembers Al Asbury and Bonnie Good were absent. Also in attendance were Olivia Hilton, Town Manager; Greg A. Beam, Assistant Town Manager; and Barbara Riggleman, Town Clerk. Ryan Fitzmaurice, reporter for the Northern Virginia Daily, was a visitor.

Agenda Additions/Deletions/Changes: None

New Business (For Discussion Only – Not Eligible for Action):

**1. Master Park & Pedestrian Connectivity Plan**

Ms. Hilton gave an update on the Baker property, which cost an additional \$12,000 to incorporate into the plan, however this will include the final two conceptual plans by the August council meeting. At that time, Council can give feedback on the plans. Kimley Horn will be looking at the park as a whole, incorporating all of the items that the Town has asked for. Staff took pictures of all angles of the Baker property earlier today. Ms. Burner inquired into the timing of the plan, and how long it would take to start as well as finish. Ms. Hilton answered that the goal is to approve the final plan at the October council meeting. There will be 3 dates for the public to give input: At the National Night Out, August 6; TaterFest, September 28; and the September 10 council meeting. There will be a memo sent to adjoining landowners of the park to let them know the dates and invite them to talk to Staff. Staff is looking to break ground in the spring once items have been prioritized and we know which items to focus on first. Staff has sent current plans to VDOT to get feedback on a Rt. 263 entrance. Mr. Shepherd counseled Ms. Hilton to take her time and make sure it gets done correctly.

Mr. Holtzman inquired if VDOT has mentioned any roadblocks to an entrance, to which Ms. Hilton answered that they have not said anything yet. Ms. Hilton stated that the hope is for all park roads to become town-owned. The current entrance is VDOT-owned, which prevents the Town from installing some features like speed bumps, crosswalks, etc. Mr. Holtzman inquired if this delay would delay the entire project, including the aquatics facility. Ms. Hilton stated that her goal would be, once everything has been approved and an implementation team organized, ideally to have a yearly break-down, cost wise for what can be done in a reasonable amount of time, including the Public Properties Committee and Council. This winter will be a time of prioritizing the project. The goal would be to have an outline at the September 10 council meeting that details the aquatics facility as Staff should have a better idea of the cost from Kimley Horn by then.

Mr. Holtzman suggested going ahead with planning for the aquatics center as it is a big project. Ms. Hilton stated that she believed the priority should be the Lions Park first. Ms. Burner inquired if there was a way to get grants for the aquatics center. Ms. Hilton answered that there may be some; she has spoken with Gordonsville's town manager as they received a grant for land and water conservation that helped fund close to \$3 million for one of their outdoor pools and they did a capital campaign to raise funds for the remainder. She would like to show what the cost would be with no funding, what the revenue would look like each year to pay for it vs. if it were funded to give a realistic look at it. Ms. Hilton stated that Mario Rosso would be reaching out to the bank to see if they could give an idea of the Town's interest rate. Mr. Holtzman stated that some grant money could be found, and the Town could try to raise capital, but there are so many requests for so many different projects, even locally. You can't plan on donations to fund the project, but the Town has the ability to access a low interest loan over a long period of time, so he would hope Staff would start there first. It would be nice to have the cost estimates to start the research and determine if it would be feasible. While

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expensive to startup, an aquatics facility would bring people to Mount Jackson. Ms. Hilton stated that while we do have dreams and hopes, the initial cost estimate for everything just at Lions Park came in at around \$15 million. Mr. Holtzman stated that he could understand a \$12 million aquatics facility, but it didn't seem that the cost for the park should be \$15 million. Ms. Hilton stated that this includes bathrooms, splash pad, the asphalt, the parking areas, the entrance, an event venue, lighting and electrical, benches, all of the infrastructure, etc. Some things were definitely over-budgeted, but after Staff went through and took off some items that could be grant-funded, they got the cost down to a more realistic \$10 million. Getting a greenway trail from Daniel Gray Drive to Fleming Park is an estimated \$1.5 million. Ms. Hilton stated that she wanted to show the whole picture with the numbers, and have Council choose what is a priority as this will be a 5-year plan for implementing the park changes. Mr. Shepherd requested an idea of what the on-going expenses will be for the aquatics facility after it is built, to include staffing, utilities, etc. He suggested speaking with other aquatics facilities to get a feel for what operating costs would be. Ms. Hilton suggested that the first project for the park be a bathroom and what the Town could do in-house to save costs.

## **2. Red Banks Riverwalk & Park**

Ms. Hilton shared a conceptual plan for the river access and park. A survey of the trade has been completed, which is a trade of the Town's inactive well for 11.5 acres along the river. With the MOU the Town has, a value did need to be attached to it, so it is valued at \$125,000. The Town will retain emergency access to the well but will own the acreage. Mr. Holtzman inquired how much Rouge River Farms would have been spending per year on water. Ms. Hilton answered that it is more that they will not be pulling from the river. For them, the well is more of a security issue during a drought, not a revenue loss for the Town, as they were pulling about 1 million gallons per day from the river. Ms. Hilton stated that the Town was struggling to balance the nitrates at the well and it hasn't been used in years, but if the farm is using it for irrigation, they don't care about the nitrates. Ms. Hilton stated that the concept plans have been submitted for a grant, which would be a \$200,000 river access grant. Mr. Shepherd stated that he was glad the Town would be given easements to access Wells 2A, 7, and 4 and the mountain tank.

Ms. Hilton showed an aerial view of the proposed park. She stated that ultimately the goal is to have a 2-mile loop with one mile going down Daniel Gray, there is a grant that would help pay for a pedestrian bridge to cross the Shenandoah River, and then a walkway back up. Mr. Shepherd pointed out what looked like the remains of an old road by the river. Ms. Hilton stated that the Town will own this and it may become the natural driveway to the property. Staff recruited Valley Engineering to come up with a proposal for the best place for a crosswalk. Discussion ensued on the proposed sidewalk and crosswalk, and proposed improvements at Red Banks. VDOT will be replacing the bridge at Red Banks in August, so the County is working with VDOT on some changes.

## **3. Community Business Launch – Mount Jackson Five**

Ms. Hilton shared a proposed program schedule for the Mount Jackson 5. She and Mr. Beam have been interviewing 8 potential candidates and have made a few offers to whom the 5 may be. The expectation with the grant is that they will go through the six-week program this fall and open a brick-and-mortar store either within the Historic District or downtown by the end of 2025. Ms. Hilton and Mr. Beam gave an overview of the program. The hope is that this will be the catalyst to revamping downtown and the economic development. Part of what Staff has been doing is reconnecting with property owners downtown that may have stagnant properties and pairing them with these businesses. Mr. Beam stated that there is one eatery, some retail, a hobby shop, some potential foods, but these people are fluid and adaptable to meeting the needs of the Town.

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They realize that they may open and need to flex a bit in order to stay open and in business and seem receptive to this. There are other businesses that may not be appropriate for this grant, but are drawn to the town because of it; they will be seeing that the town is willing to help them. Mr. Holtzman inquired if they are just pushing the downtown area, as there are other spaces in town, like the Food Lion shopping center. Ms. Hilton stated that they have discussed this, and while it is supposed to be mostly downtown, it could be opened to other areas, like the old Denny's. Ms. Hilton discussed the program highlights.

Mr. Holtzman inquired why Ms. Hilton wasn't mentioning names. Ms. Hilton answered that they don't know that they have been accepted yet. Mr. Holtzman asked what type of businesses have applied. Ms. Hilton answered that the list includes a bike shop, a hobby shop which would include a gaming space, a co-op/DIY craft shop and shared office space, a yoga studio, an upscale resale boutique similar to Cherry on Top or The Buttercup, a woodworking shop, a general store, a potential gym, and a restaurant. This program was promoted on social media, press releases, radio/WHSV interviews. Most of the winning businesses will receive \$10,000 to be used for whatever is needed, which will come from the Department of Housing & Community Development. Mr. Holtzman inquired if the Town could add to the funds. Ms. Hilton stated that there is flexibility with the grant, and to receive the \$50,000, the Town had to match \$12,500 so the Town is contributing, not all of which is administrative costs. Discussion ensued on the program and other localities' programs which are similar, and success rates.

Councilman Shepherd requested permission to be excused from the work session at 6:45 PM due to a prior engagement; permission was granted.

#### 4. **Brand Concepts**

Ms. Hilton stated that Staff just received the second-round draft from the designer today, so it was not able to be shared with Council earlier. A few sample drafts were shown. Mr. Beam gave an overview of the design and the different ways that it could be used/appear. Some tweaks are still needed, so this is still a draft. Discussion ensued on the design and overall, feedback was affirmative.

Mr. Holtzman inquired about the sidewalk from the hardware store to the ABC Store and asked when that project would begin. Ms. Hilton answered that it would be this summer before fall. Plans may include adding to the Union Church next spring. The property on Race Street is set to be demolished the week of August 19-23. Once demo is complete, Staff will have a better timeline of the next steps. Ms. Hilton stated that the Wayfinding project may take up to a year and a half. Ideally, a design would be finalized this fall, and it would be nice to start installation next fall.

Ms. Hilton asked Mr. Holtzman if he could give an update on the property behind the Gulf Station. Mr. Holtzman stated that the property was formerly the Central Hotel, but has been neglected for years. The foundation is bad and they were close to tearing it down, but once the siding boards were removed and the logs were exposed, they were in very good shape. They are now entertaining moving it across town and setting it on Main Street. Mr. Holtzman stated that his tentative plan is to take it to the other end of the town; as you start down the hill on the left, there was a house that Curtis Bladen also owned but burned down. The hope is to do a drawing and see if it can be put there. There is an exposed log house in New Market by the Reformation Church that is the inspiration for this property. A plaque could be installed on the front stating that it was once the Central Hotel, which is one of the oldest buildings in town. Ms. Hilton inquired if this would be a home, not a museum type of structure. Mr. Holtzman answered that it would be a home, but have the classic look. He was afraid at first that it would be cost-prohibitive, but Barnwood Builders, a television

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show that focuses on these projects, came and looked at the structure and they have deemed it not to be cost-prohibitive. Mr. Holtzman shared a photo of the property in New Market that he referenced.

Mr. Holtzman asked Ms. Hilton for an update on the Confederate/Colored Cemetery. Ms. Hilton stated that the name is the Mount Jackson Historic Colored Cemetery. Mr. Emmert is open to an easement for a sidewalk and using the parking area for now to access the property. Ms. Hilton nodded to Mr. Fitzmaurice, who stated that there will be an article on the cemetery in Monday's newspaper. Ms. Hilton gave a brief overview of the article with Mr. Fitzmaurice assisting. Mr. Holtzman stated that the Sons of Confederate Veterans, who look after the Soldiers Cemetery, have expressed interest in cooperating with the overall care of both cemeteries. Ms. Hilton stated that she did not share this information as she felt there may be mixed emotions. Staff is trying to determine whom the trustees are and talking to DeLois Warr, who has maintained it for many years. Mr. Holtzman stated that the Sons are very receptive to having a conversation; they are already taking care of the Soldiers Cemetery. The Town could come in with infrastructure and parking, with something other than chain-link fencing in the back. Right now, it is an overgrown mess. Ms. Hilton stated that Staff had covered what they were willing to do on their end, as far as beautification, fencing, access, telling the story, and that it may be too soon to share that information as it is still unknown at this time. Ms. Burner inquired if there have been any strides taken to identify a lot of the people buried in the Colored Cemetery. Ms. Hilton stated that all the ones that are able to be identified are on the plaque. Staff is trying to work with the Civil War Trails Society to move/redo a sign and tell the story of the cemetery.

Mr. Holtzman inquired into the Wayfinding signs, which is part of the branding process. Ms. Hilton stated that once branding is done this fall, there is \$50,000 budgeted for the design and then the sign company will work with VDOT. Ms. Burner inquired into the old mill. Ms. Hilton answered that the EDA will meet on July 24. There are 4 applications on the list; SEARCH, Randy's Hardware, and the old mill have applied for façade improvements. SEARCH and Randy's are asking for half of the cost for their signs and Yvonne Proctor is asking for support for things like painting and repair. A.D. Engineering is looking to expand their production line, so they have applied to the EDA as well.

The LOVE sign is live, Staff has received 2 submissions, and there are some artists working on it so Staff hopes to receive some more. Triplett Tech is still on board to build the sign this fall and do the installation. Ms. Burner inquired into the old Blue Bell building, which was going to be used to manufacture solar panels. She asked if anything is happening there. Ms. Hilton stated that she has not heard anything from them. Mr. Holtzman stated that he had not heard positive things and inquired if the owners have an application for use. Ms. Hilton answered that they do not, they are just renting the building. Ms. Rigglesman answered that the owners are Dale and Beulah Dueck from Port Republic, VA.

Ms. Hilton gave an update on Bartolo's, which may be opening as a new restaurant. TaterFest was discussed, which will be held at the Lions Park due to space. This event will be on September 28 and will continue to be held on the last Saturday in September. Staff is asking for donations of old sports trophies for prizes.

Motion made by Councilmember Fultz, seconded by Councilmember Burner, to adjourn the work session at 7:19 PM.