

Mount Jackson
Town Council Work Session
October 22, 2024

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Work Session

Mayor Pifer called the Work Session of the Mount Jackson Town Council to order at 6:01 PM in the Council Chambers at 5901 Main Street. Roll call was taken with Councilmembers Evelyn Burner, Judy Fultz, Bonnie Good, Todd Holtzman, and Rod Shepherd in attendance. Councilmember Al Asbury was absent. Also in attendance were Olivia Hilton, Town Manager; Greg A. Beam, Assistant Town Manager; Mario Rosso, Finance Director; Randy Lonas, Public Works Supervisor; and Barbara Riggelman, 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):

Master Park & Pedestrian Connectivity Plan

Ms. Hilton stated that Staff reviewed the original cost estimate and list from Kimley Horn and made recommendations for what to complete in 5-year increments. Overall, this would be a 15-year plan, with more pressing items being presented sooner. Some items that Kimley Horn had in the plan were removed as being unnecessary, like sidewalks where there is already one on the other side of the street. Ms. Hilton presented Council with a spreadsheet broken down into 5-year increments as the 15-year plan and stated that her goal was to prioritize, within the plan, what was most important to Council. The total project is around \$23 million, so breaking it down would help with cost. \$5.4 million would be spent in the first 5 years (Stage 1), \$2.3 million in the next 5 years (Stage 2), and \$13.8 million in the last 5 years (Stage 3).

Mr. Holtzman stated that he was hoping for a 5-year plan and not a 15-year plan, also that the Public Properties Committee had listed the pool as one of the top priorities, and it is shown in Stage 3 of this plan. Ms. Hilton stated that there are already funds allocated in the reserves, so out of the \$7.4 million in Town funds, \$1.6 million is unallocated. Mr. Rosso presented some spreadsheets to show what possible funding options would look like for the aquatics center, along with unallocated reserves and tax rates. Ms. Hilton shared a scenario where, if the Town was able to get \$2 million in grants and fundraising to cover the aquatics center costs, and a loan was taken out for the remaining \$10 million at 4% interest over 40 years, the total payments would equal \$20 million. Mr. Rosso stated that to make \$500,000 to cover the principal interest on a \$10 million loan, taxes would need to be increased 62%, which would be the highest rates in the county. Ms. Hilton stated that we currently have the lowest rates in the county. There are 150 new homes potentially coming in the next 5 years, but looking at what we have, the Town has a handful of restaurants and 1 motel, so it is not feasible to say that they will generate the funding needed. By having the aquatics center coming near the end of the 15-year plan, ideally you wouldn't have to increase taxes as funds would be saved up for that purpose. Spreading it out helps as this impacts the people who live here, and Staff is trying to have the lowest impact on the residents of Mount Jackson. Mr. Holtzman inquired, in the scenario shown, which interest rate would the Town most likely receive. Mr. Rosso stated that the USDA would most likely do 4%, but that is for an infrastructure project; they don't fund recreational projects. Current prime rate is 8%, so chances are likely that the rate would be higher.

Ms. Good inquired into the funds given to CREW. Ms. Hilton stated that funds approved by Council to be given to CREW were not specifically earmarked. Their renovation project is over \$2 million. CREW renovations were discussed. Ms. Good inquired if there had been any thought given to asking other towns to partner with the Town to cover the aquatics center costs. Ms. Hilton stated that realistically, the County would probably be the only ones to help; other towns have their own projects to fund. Mr. Holtzman stated his agreement with

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this assessment, and this would not be a CREW project. It would be Town-owned on Town property and run by the Town. There could be a partnership at some point, but CREW is not in a position to help financially.

Ms. Hilton stated that she would love to have everything be a 5-year plan, but funding it in 5 years is not feasible. Mr. Holtzman inquired into the \$3.3 million in capital projects reserves. Mr. Rosso gave a breakdown on the earmarks, which included sewer plant replacement as it is aging, Main Street water line replacement, and repainting the water tower. Main Street water line replacement was discussed. Mr. Shepherd discussed the financial breakdown of unallocated reserves. Sponsors to help with fundraising was also discussed. Ms. Hilton stated that fundraising for a project of this size would also require Council's assistance; there just aren't that many grants out there for this type of project.

Ms. Good asked when acquiring the property for the aquatics center would be addressed. Ms. Hilton stated that it would need to be prioritized with the other projects. While personal property taxes are low, the Town is getting less money each year as vehicles are depreciating and people aren't buying new vehicles. The Town can't continue to dip into reserves. Mr. Lonas stated that when the Town has had to raise taxes, it has been for a necessary expense, like redoing water lines and building the sewer plant. The citizens have complained about higher taxes but have understood that it was a necessity. If taxes are raised this much for an indoor swimming pool, he felt it would be a very different outcome. Ms. Good inquired if there was an increase in water rates due to construction over the past years. Mr. Rosso stated that the Town has been doing cost of living raises on the water rates to not lose money. There haven't been any raises to cover an additional amount. Previous water rate increases were discussed. Ms. Good inquired about raising the rates gradually over a period of time, like 1%. Mr. Rosso stated that the water rates were just increased this year, and increasing again would make the Town have the highest rates in the county. Ms. Hilton reiterated that this is the reason for a 15-year plan, not a 5-year plan. We have to start saving now. Ms. Hilton discussed sponsorship for some items and grant funding for some others. Items within Stage 1 were discussed. Highest priorities were given to an entrance off Rt. 263 and bathrooms at the park.

Mr. Holtzman stated that if the indoor pool is relocated to the end of the 15-year plan due to funding, CREW may not want to hold that piece of property for that length of time, so this project should probably be removed from the plans. Ms. Hilton stated that they could use the property in the interim. Ms. Good stated that the Town should buy the property to make a statement and gather a consortium of groups to help with the cost of the project. Mr. Holtzman stated that he felt there would be no help from neighboring towns or individuals for a project of this scale in a town of our population. Benefactors just aren't willing. Ms. Hilton inquired into changing the plan to more of a therapeutic, fitness, health and wellness center instead of a 6-lane Olympic-sized pool which could serve a broader range of individuals at a quarter of the size. Ms. Good stated that a big part of the need for an indoor pool was to have it for the students. Ms. Hilton stated her feelings that the Town was trying to fill a need that the County should be filling. The County has other priorities, like building another elementary school, so they likely won't help with funding. Mr. Holtzman stated that having a smaller building would be more cost effective, and the building could be expanded at a later date. Whether the Town bought the property or it stayed with CREW, it would still serve the community rather than staying vacant property. Mayor Pifer inquired what a smaller scale facility would look like, cost-wise. Ms. Hilton stated that she felt it could be done for \$4 million versus \$12 million for the larger facility. Council requested Staff look into this option and report back.

Stage 2 of the 15-year plan was discussed. If the aquatics facility could be scaled down, it was agreed that a 10-year plan would be more ideal and could be feasible. A health and wellness style facility would serve a greater number of individuals and could even be done as a partnership. Renovations to the current pool at the

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park were discussed. The proposed entrance to the park from Rt. 263 was also discussed. It was agreed that the VDOT application process was an immediate need and should be started as soon as possible. It was agreed that \$800,000 for a splash pad was excessive and not necessary.

Mr. Holtzman discussed the renovations for CREW and encouraged Staff and Council interested in seeing their progress to let him know and he would be happy to take them through. Their ribbon cutting will be April 1, 2025, when all the renovations will be complete.

Mr. Holtzman referred to \$540,000 listed under Greenway/Redbanks on Stage 2 of the plan for a 10 ft. multi-use trail. Ms. Hilton stated that this was for the Meems covered bridge, being the first stage of a greenway from the covered bridge to the river park.

Ms. Hilton stated that she would condense the 15-year plan to a 10-year plan to reflect the changes. Mr. Holtzman asked if members present could agree to Stage 1 being a 3-year plan. Mr. Shepherd requested Stage 1 be added to the agenda for the November council meeting for preliminary strategizing. Staff will work towards this part being a 3-year plan.

Ms. Hilton announced that Mr. Lonas will be retiring effective January 2, 2025. Members present offered their congratulations. Mr. Lonas expressed his appreciation for the support given to him during his tenure.

Mr. Holtzman stated that the November council agenda would include the first page of the plan (Stage 1), though Staff will be working towards a 3-year plan rather than a 5-year plan, and inquired if page 2 of the plan (Stage 2, 2030-2035) would be reabsorbed into page 1 or remain as Stage 2. Ms. Hilton stated that she would reshape the plan into a 10-year plan, but would request some numbers from the Finance Committee for the potential shrink. Her goal would be to bring implementation as a whole chunk. This would not delay starting on the entrance to the park. Mr. Rosso reiterated that the highest priorities on page 1 were the entrance and bathrooms. Bathrooms were what was mentioned in the initial survey as most requested by town residents. Mr. Holtzman inquired what the next steps would be and if there could be another work session. Ms. Hilton stated that there would be another work session in January for strategic planning, and Staff would start moving ahead on things that can be done now. Mr. Holtzman requested feedback from Ms. Hilton's discussion with Kimley Horn on if a \$4 million indoor pool would be feasible.

Council recognized and commended Staff on all of their work and efforts.

Motion made by Councilmember Good, seconded by Councilmember Burner, to adjourn the work session at 7:33 PM.

Barbara Riggelman, Clerk

Donald "Donnie" I. Pifer, Mayor