

Mount Jackson
Town Council Regular Meeting
September 12, 2023

-1-

Regular Meeting

Mayor Pifer called the regular meeting of the Mount Jackson Town Council to order at 7:00 PM in the Council Chambers at 5901 Main Street. Roll call was taken with Councilmembers Evelyn Burner, Brandi Freed, Judy Fultz, Bonnie Good, Todd Holtzman, and Rod Shepherd in attendance. Also in attendance were Olivia Hilton, Assistant Town Manager; Keith Cowart, Police Chief; and Barbara Riggelman, Town Clerk. Tyler Hinkle, Shenandoah County Planner; and Kathy Rivers, Joanne Poplar, Bill & Susan Walls, and Kim Yeck with the Daughters of the American Revolution were guests. Visitors included Seth Day, Lee Crosby, Brenda Foley, Joe & Becky Beckenstrater, Eric Pool, Judi Wakeman, Charlie & Melissa Dodge, Bobby Clark, and Katherine Manley.

Prayer: Rev. Lee Crosby, Mount Jackson United Methodist Church, offered the invocation.

Agenda Additions/Deletions/Changes: None

Hear from Visitors: Seth Day stated that he was representing the Day family that owns the farm in Meems Bottom on the Covered Bridge side. Mr. Day stated that they respect and acknowledge the time and effort and appreciation of the good motive pursuant of the boat access, but with that said, however, they are opposed to the proposed location. They are concerned with the amount of people that will be drawn to the site that will be used for more than just boating and maybe fishing. They have already seen this before the new bridge was built; on the east side of the bridge, a lot of cars were parked there and treated the area very disrespectfully. Trash was always left behind, there is no concern for the landowners' property, and they feel this will carry over to both sides of where this boat access is being proposed. Also, as a family, they have graciously allowed the public to park on their property to visit the covered bridge in a parking area there for close to 30 years. However, this has come at a price. They have had to put up with many trespassers and a great amount of trash as well, and the last few years this has increased dramatically. This can be verified with the Sheriff's Department and the Virginia Department of Game and Fish, as they have made many calls to them trying to get help handling the situation. The family appreciates their help with that, but they have seen firsthand the disrespect that has been shown to the land. Mr. Day stated that he believes that it is not a very good access since there is a really steep bank there. There are other places that would be safer. Also, with the proposed location, there is a proposed walkway on the south side of the bridge, which will create people walking across the bridge which could be a safety issue. Having a parking area at the covered bridge and then a place at the other end of the Day property could create an issue with people walking back and forth across their property. The Day family believes there are other locations that would be better and they are against this location.

Eric Pool stated he owns land to the north of the proposed site and he stated his agreement with Mr. Day's comments with the trash and people coming thru there. They already have the problems with the trash now. Mr. Pool stated that he used to have a boat ramp on his property that they let people use for years and had to discontinue that due to all of the trash and disrespect to the land. He can sit in his shop and hear music from the area at night, gun shots, and all kinds of ruckus. Mr. Pool stated that he is against the proposed site.

Joe Beckenstrater stated that he is representing Mount Airy Dairy and has been to Council before talking about the boat landing, and now there is a proposed bridge crossing, with fishing on one side and parking on Mr. Pool's side. When people walk down that steep bridge, it is a 12' incline from side to side. Are people going to carry their trash back across that bridge? No, they will leave it there and it will blow on their side and then they will be the ones picking it up. Mr. Beckenstrater stated that this hasn't been thought out very well. The other issue is that all of the landowners wouldn't have known that this issue would be addressed tonight without one person calling them and letting them know. He feels that if Council wants to propose something like this, they should come out to the landowners and invite them to the Council Meeting. It would make it a

Mount Jackson
Town Council Regular Meeting
September 12, 2023

-2-

lot better situation for everyone involved. Mr. Beckenstrater stated that the way this was done, he doesn't feel was respectful to the landowners; he stated his sympathy for the other landowners that will be dealing with the trash. Jonathan Day was at a previous meeting and had people going to the restroom all around the old Toll House. There have been people pulling down thru the dirt already this year since the new bridge was done and there is trash over there. When will this stop? Mr. Beckenstrater stated he tried to get ahold of VDOT today to get some No Parking signs installed to stop it.

Bobby Clark stated that he is an extension agent and in that capacity, he is neither for nor against installing a boat landing on one place or another; they are unbiased purveyors of information. He stated that he has worked with a bunch of different farmer groups on how to deal with things of this nature over time and would like to make himself available to the town. Sometimes there are ways to minimize some of the negative impact, with ideas and things that are very site specific that can be tried. Mr. Clark reiterated that he just wanted to make himself available.

Opening Remarks From Mayor: None

Ms. Hilton asked if she could address the public comments; Mayor Pifer conceded. Ms. Hilton addressed herself to the public as the new Assistant Town Manager, in hopes of transitioning to the Town Manager role following Mr. Showalter's retirement. She stated that she is new to the southern end of the county and wanted to let the public know that she had worked on some river access points on the northern end. This is very early stages, so absolutely landowner and stakeholders are going to be brought into that conversation. If this is something that is found to be an overwhelming benefit to the community, it will be with their needs in mind as well. If there are things that can be done, whether it be plantings, trees, brush, fences, whatever it is that maintains landowner properties, that is important to the process as she hopes to guide it along with Mr. Hinkle, who will speak later in the meeting. Additionally, if they are able to make this a Town-maintained place, Ms. Hilton stated that there will be a lot stronger of an impact on trash that is left behind and maintenance. Right now, this is unchartered territory – a use is already occurring, if we can stabilize it and guide it, potentially we can make it a better fit for the town using it and landowners around it. Ms. Hilton stated she would be present after the meeting tonight and would be available – she stated that she wanted everyone to feel ok about this process. It is very early stages so your voice matters.

Presentations:

1. DWR's Support to Partners Grant Program – Tyler Hinkle, Shenandoah County Planner

Mr. Hinkle stated that some people present may remember when he, Rod Shepherd, and Dave Brotman had met with Council back in 2019 when the idea first came up, when VDOT talked about the bridge replacement project. Since then, they have had a few changes in the project. Originally the parking area was to be located on the south end of the North Fork. Due to the slope conditions that VDOT has to do for the sediment control plan, plus based on community input that they heard, concerns about site users accessing agricultural land on the south end of the river, it was noted to shift the investment to the north end of the river. This would help limit that potential nuisance in the future and also to appease the needs with VDOT with their sediment control plan for the bridge. This allows for a better product for the actual area that people will be able to park and access the river at that point. Mr. Hinkle stated that he wanted to also clarify the extension that is across the bridge was something that was worked in with the VDOT bridge improvement project. They had to build a bridge wide enough that they could build a sidewalk; this cost a little bit more for VDOT to build a bridge like that and that is in there whenever the town would like to use that. This project is solely focused on the northern end of the river. They would have to look further on for an access point on the south end. This is per

Mount Jackson
Town Council Regular Meeting
September 12, 2023

-3-

direction of DWR (Department of Wildlife Resources) and a grant committee group who oversees the funds from the DuPont funds. These are the reasons for why the shift happened and some delay with that. As VDOT worked with the project, there were multiple things that had come up that shifted based on what needed to occur. Mr. Hinkle stated that as Ms. Hilton had mentioned, as part of the grant process, if the Town is awarded the funds at the end, there is certainly time to do that community collaboration and own the design and see what things would actually look like, make sure all landowners benefit from it. As noted, one of the reasons why that site was identified by VDOT to have a river access point was that people were using it already, and they wanted to make sure to address the concerns and nuisances that were occurring there and formalize it with bear-safe trash cans that won't be able to be turned over.

As part of that original grant application, there was also an improvement proposed for the covered bridge location. Based on community input that they had heard at that time, and based on comments from DWR and VDOT, that public project was shifted to a project site that is on Red Banks Road in order to make sure they are appeasing and addressing the concerns heard from the public and encourage the river traffic to go northbound rather than use the covered bridge area to the new bridge replacement site. The reason why this site was selected – in discussion with DWR, VDOT, and Town Staff at the time – it is Town property, so they had seen the fact that it is publically available, you would be able to reuse an existing town asset, and it would provide for about an hour and 20 minute float from the new bridge site to the proposed Old Bridge Landing location. In addition, they found that in visiting the site, it was already being used by certain members of the public; this would be formalizing that public access, having better understanding of how the site is being used, making sure it winds up being an attractive public amenity rather than trash-ridden area of concern for public things. You would be bringing it into compliance with the Town standards.

Mr. Hinkle stated that right now where they stand, the award hasn't been given to the town yet; there are still some final documents that need to be finished up, in terms of preliminary engineering forms. Once those are completed, they have been instructed from the DuPont grant access group that the Town would proceed with funding and they will be able to move forward with the project. That is part of the reason for the hold up as well. Once that is done, some other documents will need to be signed. Once DuPont gives the green light, the Town will be able to proceed with the project. It may take up to a year to see the entire thing completed, from community engagement to final design and bidding out the contract with different construction groups. It is not something that will happen overnight. Mr. Hinkle stated that he wanted to give everyone an update on where things stood and help answer any questions.

Mr. Holtzman inquired if this was a County-driven initiative or a Town-driven initiative. Mr. Hinkle answered that they were reached out to by the Town for Staff assistance so they graciously decided to help the Town with some of the designs and helping to submit the grant application. This is entirely the Town's project; the Town controls the funding, the design. They just wanted to help support the Town in getting access to additional funds to improve the public space.

Mr. Holtzman inquired if the Town has taken any formal action up to this point, any vote to do this at any point. Mr. Hinkle answered that there was a vote he believed in September 2022 when the grant application was submitted last year. Again, the Town is in complete control of the project. They are just here for support.

Mr. Hinkle showed some visuals that they helped pull together with the grant application, including preliminary sketches of both proposed sites. Mr. Holtzman inquired into the date of the drawing shown. Mr. Hinkle answered that it was about 6 months old. They are drawings that came out of discussions back and forth with VDOT and DWR to what they would accept. These are just illustrative. Once the Town chooses an

Mount Jackson
Town Council Regular Meeting
September 12, 2023

-4-

engineer, they would draw actual designs and have formal drawings. These were just concepts drawn up with the grant committee as they worked thru what they would accept. Ms. Good inquired if VDOT accepts these concept drawings as they stand right now. Mr. Hinkle answered that they will need to be engineered.

Mr. Holtzman stated a better position would have been on the lower side in the road bed before it was taken out. Mr. Hinkle stated that the original design back in 2020 was that the existing road would be converted into a parking area to save on pavement and costs for the grant. VDOT had told them that if they could work in the cost of the nutrient management credits – if you have so much impervious surface in a floodplain, you have to buy certain credits in order to offset that – if this was worked into the grant, they could keep the pavement. Mr. Hinkle stated evidently this was not correct from the VDOT side, so VDOT stepped back on that, said they had to remove the pavement, but said the entire right-of-way that is on the north end of the river would be allowed to be used for access. This is substantially larger than the right-of-way on the south end.

Ms. Hilton stated that she believe there was another reason that the old bridge was removed and asked Mr. Hinkle to speak on that as there had been some miscommunication on whether the old bridge would stay or go. Mr. Hinkle stated that back when this was evaluated, Town Staff at the time, Rod Shepherd, Dave Brotman, and himself had met with folks at VDOT, DWR, and the DuPont committee at the site. There was a proposal looking at keeping the old bridge and converting it into a pedestrian bridge. VDOT said that they had designed the new bridge in a way that would increase the floodplain and they were not allowed to increase the floodplain, so they were required to remove the old bridge in order to comply with floodplain standards with the new bridge design. Another concern was that the old bridge had lead paint and they were concerned with the public touching the bridge with this lead paint. Mr. Hinkle stated that these were VDOT's words, not his.

Mr. Hinkle shared a slide with the timeline of the project. Moving forward, the Town would be getting the preliminary engineering documents with what would be feasible and acceptable with all parties involved. Fall of 2023 would see resubmission of the application, making sure the DuPont group would be able to sign off on it. There is also a special use application with VDOT to be able to use the right-of-way; they have said it is a very straightforward thing, just procedural. Around Winter 2023 the grant should be awarded and an agreement signed with DWR. Spring of 2024 would be bidding out the full construction of the project. Ms. Hilton stated that with that grant, the Town would have 12 months to utilize it, but they are flexible to working with communities as long as they are making progress. Mr. Hinkle showed slide pictures of some canoe launches in other communities as examples of the access.

Ms. Good inquired if Mr. Hinkle saw a problem with getting the grant, if the Town gets everything together and the timeline isn't quite what was anticipated. Mr. Hinkle answered negatively, that they are very flexible. They have stated that they are really in support of seeing an increase in river access in the southern end of the county, specifically for the Mount Jackson area, so they are more than happy to work with the Town. Ms. Good inquired if there is a limit on the grant. Mr. Hinkle answered up to \$200,000 per project site. One thing that has come out of recent discussion with them has been that it will come once the engineer is brought on board to know the actual cost of the project. It looked like the Toll House Landing Site would eat most of the \$200,000 budget. DWR suggested that two grant applications be submitted so you could actually get \$400,000 to be spent total on both sites. This would be determined through the process.

Rod Shepherd asked, in looking at the two drawings, to separate them and look at the Old Bridge Landing, which is on property that the Town owns and is within the town limits, and gives the Town control over the property there and what needs to be done with it. It may well behoove the Town to separate that out as one project with the Toll House Landing as a separate project all together. The County might partnership more

Mount Jackson
Town Council Regular Meeting
September 12, 2023

-5-

with that landing. Mr. Holtzman inquired if the two projects were on the same side of the river; there is no parking lot anymore next to the Toll House. Mr. Hinkle answered that they are two separate places. Mr. Shepherd stated that the Old Bridge Landing is over by the Maintenance yard and sewer plant. Ms. Hilton clarified that the vertical street at the top of the Old Bridge Landing sketch is Massanutten Park and suggested that site be renamed as it sounds like the bridge that was just removed. Tyler stated that nothing is final.

Mr. Shepherd stated that he, Tyler, and other state officials have walked that site to get a feel for the property. There is room for a small parking area there and a nice angular boat ramp going down to the river. Ms. Burner stated that if it is made official, then it will be monitored more and there won't be a bunch of trash. Mr. Shepherd stated that there are other security things involved. On the Old Bridge Landing sketch, the white square is a Town building that has electricity with the ability to install cameras if needed.

Ms. Hilton asked Mayor Pifer if it would be appropriate for this item to go to the Public Properties Committee for further discussion. Mayor Pifer agreed with this suggestion. Mr. Holtzman stated that it sounds like Council has not taken an official action to date to approve or disapprove this project. Discussion ensued among several councilmembers. Ms. Hilton stated that she believed there was a vote in September 2022. Mr. Hinkle answered that there was a vote for the grant; the project itself can fluctuate, the Town can work within the bounds of what all involved would need. The County would be happy to help in any way that they can.

Mr. Holtzman stated that if this goes back to the Public Properties Committee, it would be nice to include the interested parties that were not aware of action so that they can attend and see the planned part of the discussion. Mr. Holtzman stated that he is excited about leveraging what we have in the small town of Mount Jackson to bring people in and he believes that is activities, hiking, and the outdoors, and it sounds like people are dropping in illegally anyway, so this would solve some of those problems. Cameras can be discussed, as well as trash control, but it would be nice for this group and for the public at large to have better understanding. He would love to know more about what happened at the covered bridge, who owns the property, can the Day's rescind that option, could some improvements be done there and add on some of the pieces here. Trash is obviously a problem. The covered bridge is a fantastic draw; he sees cars there all the time. It is great to have a reason for people to come, but it adversely affects the neighboring farm. There is no reason why the Town couldn't put bear-proof trash containers and some other things there. Mr. Holtzman inquired if that site is used for a boat drop as well. Mr. Hinkle answered that it is informally, but is not a DWR-approved site. The funds are flexible if the Town wants to put trash improvements, depending on landowner approval; there is flexibility with the DuPont grant to shift some funds. Ms. Good stated that from her understanding in past discussions, it was not just the trash; people were driving over farmland to park if parking wasn't available. They were driving around in fields that had been planted which is destructive, so there are multiple issues other than trash. People have been defecating and all kinds of things have been happening. Ms. Good asked Mr. Day if the Town owned the covered bridge. Mr. Day answered that as for the bridge itself, he did not know. Ms. Good stated that cameras could also be installed there. Mayor Pifer announced that this item would be sent to the Public Properties Committee, with the inclusion of the adjoining landowners, with a report to be given to Council at the next meeting. Ms. Hilton announced that October 4, 2023 at 12:30 PM is the next set Public Properties Meeting, public is welcome to attend; the set meeting for this committee is the first Wednesday of the month at 12:30. A zoom option could be given if needed. Mayor Pifer inquired if this date was in agreement with the Committee members. Ms. Hilton answered affirmatively.

Mr. Holtzman inquired if the Town has ever walked the sites with the property owners. Mr. Shepherd stated that the Old Bridge Landing is owned by the Town. Mr. Holtzman stated that this could be discussed in the Public Properties Committee meeting, but if this project goes forward, maybe have a site meeting because it is

Mount Jackson
Town Council Regular Meeting
September 12, 2023

-6-

one thing to see the drawing and another thing to stand at the site and look around. Maybe there is a win-win where the neighbors could be happy. Ms. Good asked what would be addressed at the first meeting that Ms. Hilton will have will be having, if we have the necessary forms that need to be filled out, and do they have to start to identify an engineer to work with. Mr. Hinkle answered that his understanding is that the Town has not been awarded the grant yet. The DWR and DuPont group would need to see the preliminary engineering documents and estimated costs for the project. You could choose to do public engagement before the grant is awarded and then work that into the costs, or do public engagement after you are officially awarded the funds. Ms. Good inquired if the engineering will be top of the line, the first item on the to do list. Mr. Hinkle agreed. Ms. Hilton stated that in her mind, the Town would be awarded the grant, the grant committee will accept a conceptual design, and then some of the funding could go to offset the engineered designs of it and included in the grant. At this point, she stated she was interpreting that the Town needed to have some community input at the Public Properties Meeting, gather where the potential areas of weakness are, and potentially tweak the current design or start over if needed to come up with something that works. From there, we will be able to apply for the grant. Ms. Hilton stated that this process does not need to be hurried; we can do it the right way and it will be something that the community will appreciate.

2. Rebranding Process – Olivia Hilton, Assistant Town Manager

Ms. Hilton stated that this is just an overview to talk about branding, the buzz word of the year. Most of our neighboring communities have gone thru some type of rebranding process; this is just to figure out who we are – we know it, but how to express it and use it to recruit small businesses to our community is where we would like to start. Ms. Hilton introduced Katherine Manley, owner of Black Valley Creative, who has given a preliminary proposal to the Town to help guide us through this process. Ms. Hilton stated that she was not recommending or requesting as large an undertaking as the County or Woodstock have done, but it is just about identifying potentially shifting to a tourism-focused logo. We would of course keep our seal, especially for professional documents, but having something where you see “Mount Jackson” first is more catchy for those that are visiting. Our personality, mission and values – this would just allow the Town to regroup, especially because it feels like there is some positive movement towards redeveloping downtown. Ms. Hilton showed a slide with logos from neighboring towns that have gone through this process. Ms. Hilton pointed out that you can see that we are still using the more traditional seal, but most of them have shifted to using something more professional. We could get something that says “Mount Jackson” and incorporate the bridge or whatever we choose in that logo process.

Ms. Hilton stated that this is just a recommendation. Samples from towns and cities show their name big and bold. When we are using this to revamp social media, for our small business recruitment package, our website, it is much more clear who we are. Ms. Hilton stated this was just a higher level kind of concept, something to show we are ready and open for business. As she has transitioned into this role, and with more of a focus on quality of life, and “feets in the streets”, looking internally, there are a few things that we need to find out about ourselves before we are really able to recruit small businesses downtown. Ms. Hilton stated that she has reached out to an external website company; Staff has a brainstorming session of what we feel needs to be on our website, and this is great for community input, which would be helpful. Currently there is no easy staff directory, business directory, how to start a business, or those type of helpful documents on the website. This would be where we start, as well as internal IT, just refreshing and digitizing some things that we are still doing in paper form or doesn’t exist. From there, we would develop a marketing strategy, which is also where Ms. Manley comes in. She will help create who you are, your content, and this will up our online presence, do more media campaigns, regional tourism, and will dive more into it when it evolves. There will also be products reflecting the brand – some merchandise to build out the Visitor’s Center and things like that

Mount Jackson
Town Council Regular Meeting
September 12, 2023

-7-

so you can show your Mount Jackson pride. From there, we can create incentives for economic vitality downtown.

Ms. Hilton stated that her goal is for Spring and she is working now with some regional partners for a small business boot camp so that we can have an aggressive burst of revitalization of businesses downtown. Once we are able to get our tagline and spark, and kind of refresh and have a website that is really helpful for them to go to, then we can develop our recruitment package for small business. Ms. Hilton stated that she is tentatively calling this the "Mount Jackson Five!" for Spring 2024. Five businesses to start would go through a short boot camp for cash flow, marketing, target audience, and then potentially have some assistance from the EDA or from some local grants that she is looking at now to help them kick start those businesses downtown. The intent is that we can pull a handful of businesses at once instead of having one that comes and kind of holds down the fort for 8 months until someone else starts. As people can see, our downtown is beautiful, but a little vacant. This is in hopes of about a 6 month plan, so that by Spring we are able to feel open for business and feel as refreshed as we are trying to convey to folks that we are. The website process will take about 22 weeks once we get that going. Community input is welcome. Ms. Manley would also host some community engagement forums and opportunities for folks to be involved in the process of what Mount Jackson means to them.

Ms. Good stated that she didn't know exactly when, but probably about 3-4 years ago, there was a big branding project in the county and people came to each of the locations. She stated she could remember sitting in this room and answering all kinds of questions about Mount Jackson and the rest of the county. Ms. Good asked Ms. Hilton if she was aware of that, to which Ms. Hilton answered that she was. Ms. Good stated that she does not recall getting feedback from that. Ms. Hilton stated that she could definitely dig it up; it was the Shenandoah County Economic Development and Tourism Office. Ms. Good stated that they may have some ideas that the Town could jump on. Ms. Hilton shared the County's new logo that came from that; there was definitely more in the matrix feedback that they received from all communities. Ms. Hilton stated that she went thru this in Strasburg and it was a really long process, so she is hoping to avoid that.

Mr. Holtzman stated that all of the logos look the same now except for ours. Ms. Good stated that we are unique. Ms. Hilton stated that one big piece of this is that when you are focused on tourism, folks are traditionally not going to travel far just to visit Mount Jackson. We would love them to, but we really pull our funding as a county, so it is nice when they complement each other. Ms. Hilton stated that Mount Jackson can have its own personality - Strasburg has the water tower, Woodstock went after the seven bends; Strasburg threw in purple, maybe we throw in red - but having some complementing feel because we want them to visit the county together, but she does understand wanting to maintain some uniqueness.

Chief of Police Report: Chief Cowart reported for the month of August, there were 473 calls for service; year to date total being 6,947. Chief Cowart stated that he would go into this a little bit more, but everyone knows about the shooting that occurred on Orkney Drive; that is still inactive. Their side of it has been done, but the Medical Examiner is still completing their report. Once those reports come in, they will be able to close the case out. There was an arson reported that was an upset family member and it was related to the homicide; that was closed by arrest. There was a larceny, a license plate was stolen; that will be inactive until the plates are found and suspects have been identified. There was one drunk in public and a juvenile assault - a schoolyard fight between two 10 year olds. It was turned over to Juvenile Intake due to the baseball bat that was involved. There were 2 vandalisms; both were closed, leads exhausted. There were 3 fraud cases; all 3 are active, 2 are waiting on the financial institute to submit information back to us. Search warrants have been obtained and served on them. The third one is still in the process; suspect has been identified. Chief Cowart

Mount Jackson
Town Council Regular Meeting
September 12, 2023

-8-

stated that in the last month or so, the police department started going back through cold cases with an electronic search from August 2003 to August 2023. During that time, there have been 19,459 reports of crime over that span of 20 years. There are no electronic records prior to August 2003; they would have to go downstairs and go through boxes, but they are just working on this 20 year stretch right now. At the onset of this task, there were 261 active/inactive cases. As of August 31, 2023, there are still 203 active/inactive cases to be investigated. Current staff is going through all those cases to verify whether they need to be closed or reinvestigated. This is a time consuming project as it requires opening, reading, evaluating, going back through all the evidence, talking to people in some cases; some of the businesses have closed down – they are trying to make sure everything is covered and tie up loose ends.

Chief Cowart stated that it was just brought to his attention before the meeting that today is National Law Enforcement Women's Day. Officer Sarah Campbell and Investigator Christina Whorton are his two females and they are probably the hardest charges he has. They work very hard. In other personnel news, Officer Young has announced his retirement after serving the citizens in the Town of Mount Jackson for 12 years. The Police Department wishes him the best of luck as he enjoys retirement; it is well deserved. He opted not to come tonight, he just wants to relax for a while. On September 14, 2023, the Shenandoah County Chamber of Commerce is hosting a Valor Awards ceremony for local first responders. Sergeant Mark Johnson is being recognized for his part in the standoff that occurred in Perry Trailer Park in December 2022. Representatives from Town Staff and all members of the police department will be present to support him in this honor.

The incident on Orkney Drive was a shock to the community, but was handled professionally and efficiently by Officer James Penwell and Investigator Christina Whorton, along with help from Shenandoah County Sheriff's Office Crime Investigation Team. Both wounded victims are expected to recover from their wounds. The cooperation with the SCSO's Crime Scene Team was a major asset to the effectiveness of processing the scene and evidence. On that incident, Investigator Whorton was inducted into the Crime Scene Team for the County. The skills she displayed there led to an invite to her.

The Flock Safety cameras – the final property agreements are coming in, once all papers are in hand, it will take about 3 weeks to get the cameras up and running. This will be a major asset. Mr. Holtzman inquired if the cameras are concealed somehow so they will be attractive along Main Street. Chief Cowart responded that there are solar panels on top of them, so they won't be concealed as much, but he can provide pictures of them. Chief Cowart described the cameras in Harrisonburg. The results of that system being in place, Harrisonburg is solving many, many things and recovering property, finding victims, and finding suspects.

Town Manager Report: Ms. Hilton stated that Staff will be meeting with LPDA, our new Master Park Plan consulting group on Thursday morning. Everyone is more than welcome to come, it is a stakeholder event. It will be here at the Town Hall at 9:30 AM. If you do have other feedback, there is a park survey out right now on the Town of Mount Jackson Facebook page. Staff has received over 50 responses so far; it has been pretty positive and quick on the replies. This will be open for a little while as the park is crafted. Ms. Hilton congratulated Officer Campbell and Ms. Riggelman on celebrating one year with the Town; some really solid choices were made a year ago. Ms. Hilton then showed the August Zoning Approvals and Updates.

Committee Reports:

1. Finance Committee - Chairperson Rod Shepherd stated that the fiscal year ended on June 30, 2023. All of those numbers have been put together and the auditors will be here soon. Hopefully, the annual audit report will be here before the end of this year.

Mount Jackson
Town Council Regular Meeting
September 12, 2023

-9-

2. Ordinance Committee - Chairperson Evelyn Burner had no report.
3. Personnel Committee - Chairperson Todd Holtzman had no report.
4. Public Safety Committee - Chairperson Judy Fultz had no report.
5. Public Services Committee - Chairperson Bonnie Good had no report.
6. Public Properties Committee - Chairperson Brandi Freed stated she had items on the Agenda.

Consent Agenda: Approval – Minutes of August 8, 2023 Regular Meeting

Councilmember Good MOVED, seconded by Councilmember Fultz to APPROVE the Consent Agenda item above.

ROLL CALL VOTE:

<u>AYE</u>	<u>NAY</u>	<u>ABSTAIN</u>	<u>ABSENT</u>
Councilmember Burner			
Councilmember Freed			
Councilmember Fultz			
Councilmember Good			
Councilmember Holtzman			
Councilmember Shepherd			

6 AYES, motion carried

Old Business:

1. Nomination of Olivia Hilton to the Shenandoah County Tourism Council (Appointment is by the Board of Supervisors) – 3-year Term – Tabled from July 3, 2023 Town Council Annual Organizational Meeting

Councilmember Shepherd MOVED, seconded by Councilmember Good to APPROVE the Nomination of Olivia Hilton to the Shenandoah County Tourism Council.

ROLL CALL VOTE:

<u>AYE</u>	<u>NAY</u>	<u>ABSTAIN</u>	<u>ABSENT</u>
Councilmember Burner			
Councilmember Freed			
Councilmember Fultz			
Councilmember Good			
Councilmember Holtzman			
Councilmember Shepherd			

6 AYES, motion carried

2. Montvue Stone Wall Update

Ms. Hilton stated that as a recap, the goal was improve a wall feature on Rt. 11 at the entrance of Montvue Avenue. Town Council wanted to beautify the space and the thought was to cover it with a stone façade, incorporating Triplett Tech students into the design and masonry work. Since that conversation, there have been a few other options – a flat cap or natural corners, if we wanted to incorporate some type of intentional message/usage/art – so Staff thought to have Council do a vote. Ballots were provided to Council prior to the meeting with concept pictures provided. The proposed mural, if selected, would utilize the Mountain View

Mount Jackson
Town Council Regular Meeting
September 12, 2023

-10-

High School art students. Design shown was just an example and could be any type of design. Both groups of students are open to the project depending on Council's decision.

Mayor Pifer stated that Council voted last month to do a full stone wall and had engaged the Triplett Students to do the install, so an action has been made. Ms. Burner stated that Council could still do stone part of the way on the wall and involve more students at the high school; she likes the stone on the bottom, but a compromise could be made to do both. Mr. Holtzman stated that if you start over, effort would need to be put in to how paint would work on with wall. Some of the cement parching is coming off so prep work would be required. Also the mural should have some sort of tie-in to the town, be it artsy or something historical. Mr. Holtzman referenced an electrical panel in Woodstock with a picture of Eleanor Roosevelt and questioned how she ties in to the Town of Woodstock. Mr. Holtzman stated that professional input may be needed in order to do both projects. You can't have a stone façade part of the way up a wall and then just stop and continue with paint unless there is a provision for flashing. Flashing would go across the stone and somehow penetrate the wall. On a wooden house, flashing metal goes up and curves and then siding boards come down and go across the flashing. All of the water would run down with the flashing diverting it away from the stone. If you just stick stone on the wall and cement it, water is going to run down behind that, degrade the mortar, and the stone will come off. If you get contractor input, you will not go halfway up the wall without some other provision to do that. Mr. Holtzman stated that he is all about downtown beautification, but he was hopeful that Council would honor the previous vote. Last month, Council had given Triplett Tech the go ahead to move forward, Council just needed to allocate funds, the bid, and agree what the donation was going to be; now Council just needs to pick the stone and proceed with the project, and choose another location for a mural. Ms. Good stated that she agreed with Mr. Holtzman. She stated she felt a small mural on the Montvue wall would be inconsistent with the other walls in the area and there should be consistency in the drive through town. Ms. Good stated that she liked the idea of a mural and she loves having the idea of having students do it, but the budget has been approved for stone.

Ms. Freed stated that hopefully if Council chooses stone and not to include a mural, they can find a project as they are working on the parks and other areas. She stated that she loved the mural of the covered bridge and she was sure there would be opportunities for them moving forward. With Mr. Holtzman bringing up the concerns with potential water damage, this should be considered in the decision. Ms. Freed stated that she would hate for Council to invest in the wall and then have to redo it later or cause more maintenance issues. Ms. Hilton stated that she did not want to stunt the conversation but felt there was agreement; she recommended Council choose between the two stone options – Winter Point and Crescent Peak. Mr. Holtzman clarified that there are many options to consider – mortar can be recessed, flush, or a raised bead between the stones. He stated that he was in favor of the recessed mortar to show more of the stone. He also felt that a flat cap looks more modern whereas the natural corners look more historical. They do make a stone where the top stone is L-shaped and flat stones can go behind that. It is all mortared in and gives the appearance from the top and side that it is a real stone wall. There are examples of this installation in town and if applied, this wall would tie in with many of the other stone walls through the rest of town, including down to Triplett School. Ms. Hilton stated that she did want to make a mention that the Director of Public Works is in favor of the flat cap, due to issues of drainage and maintenance, but it is Council's decision.

Councilmember Shepherd MOVED, seconded by Councilmember Holtzman to APPROVE a full Winter Point wall, top-to-bottom, with the natural corners and recessed mortar.

Mr. Shepherd stated that he loves art, he loves wall paintings and felt this was a brilliant idea, but being flat and parallel to the road, he felt no one would see it unless they were a pedestrian. Where wall paintings have

Mount Jackson
Town Council Regular Meeting
September 12, 2023
-11-

impact are on a flat surface as traffic approaches that flat surface. The covered bridge is a perfect example of how a wall painting should be. Mr. Holtzman stated that there are a few other canvases around town. There is a spot on the side of the bowling alley; the prior owner painted it white, Town Staff said he couldn't put a sign there, so it just stayed white. The large building on the south of town right before the funeral home has two really nice flat walls. Mr. Holtzman stated that he felt if they reached out to the property owner, they would probably cooperate with some public funds to do some type of nice mural on the sides.

ROLL CALL VOTE:

<u>AYE</u>	<u>NAY</u>	<u>ABSTAIN</u>	<u>ABSENT</u>
Councilmember Burner			
Councilmember Freed			
Councilmember Fultz			
Councilmember Good			
Councilmember Holtzman			
Councilmember Shepherd			
6 AYES, motion carried			

2. Avondale Tree Planting

Mr. Shepherd stated that the Town built a sidewalk down past Avondale and when that was done, most of the trees that screened the neighborhood from the lights from Bowman Andros were removed. The sidewalks are nice, but the lights are aggravating residents in Avondale and Mr. Shepherd would like Council to explore some type of tree planting along the sidewalk. He spoke with an official at the Department of Forestry last week or so and there are funds available to plant native shrubs and trees as barriers. This is a complicated spot, some of it being private property and some VDOT right-of-way, but Mr. Shepherd would like Council to do something there. He believes with grant funding from the state DOF, it could be done. September-October are ideal times to plant woody shrubs and trees. Ms. Hilton gave background that previously, Council had voted to defer the topic to the Public Properties Committee, which then chose not to move forward with tree planting, so at this point, Council can now vote to accept that recommendation from the Public Properties Committee or chose an alternative direction, such as planting trees. Ms. Hilton also noted that one main property owner would be in need of an easement, so there would only be one person to contact besides VDOT. This would be a short space, so not a lot of trees to plant, but she is familiar with some grants for this topic.

Ms. Freed asked for clarification on the subject property. Mr. Shepherd stated that he wasn't sure where the dividing line is between the back of the property and the sidewalk. Ms. Freed stated that in order to make a decision, it should be known who owns the property. As it was mentioned in the Public Properties Committee meeting, the Town is not in the tree-planting business; they won't personally plant trees in your yard and she doesn't want this to be the thought process going forward; the Town would be planting trees and it is not really clear who owns the property. Ms. Good responded that it is clear who owns the property. Ms. Hilton stated that if Council were to vote, that would be a Staff problem to handle; Staff would get an easement in place for the continued use of the land if Council wanted to plant trees, and mitigate the issues if given the direction to do so.

Mayor Pifer stated his concern that Council may be setting a precedent and inquired if then Council would need to do this for all the citizens in the town who have issues with lights shining into their houses. Ms. Hilton answered that she didn't believe it would be, and she could check with the attorney as well, but since the Town removed the trees, this would be more of a replanting than a planting situation and that is where the issue is. Ms. Hilton stated that in her view, it is less about giving property owners blocking from the lights and

Mount Jackson
Town Council Regular Meeting
September 12, 2023
-12-

more of replanting trees that we took down. It is almost two separate conversations. Ms. Good stated that she felt they were missing the bigger picture. Years ago, trees were planted down Main Street to give the town pretty spring-blooming trees. She stated that the benefit to her is that it makes the sidewalk situation something that the Town can highlight. Many people use these sidewalks, and they are great for exercise, but the sun beats down on them; especially in 90° weather, it sure is nice to have shade to walk thru. Ms. Good stated that while we are investing in enlarging and bettering our park, she would like our Main Street to look beautiful and part of that would be having the greenery through all of our town. Ms. Freed stated that she liked that thought process and it could be beneficial to look into the grants.

Mr. Holtzman stated that it sounds like this needs to be referred back to the Public Properties Committee. The Committee met and he remembers that the thought process at the time was we didn't plant trees to begin with, there were right-of-ways and easements that needed to be obtained, and they were concerned about the precedent of needing to plant for other property owners. Ms. Good inquired why it couldn't be though, if you want the whole side of the street with the sidewalk to be a lovely place, why not. You are doing it for a purpose for the sidewalks on Main Street. Mr. Holtzman stated that this should be referred back to the Public Properties Committee with anyone welcome to attend. Information is not available to make an informed decision tonight anyway. This would give time for more information to be made available, and a recommendation from the Public Properties Committee to be brought to Council for a vote.

Ms. Good stated that she has had conversations with representatives of that landowner for other topics and right now, it is Highway Business and he is considering making it into part of a subdivision. Ms. Good stated she could give the phone numbers of people to call.

Councilmember Shepherd MOVED, seconded by Councilmember Good to REFER the Avondale Tree Planting to the Public Properties Committee to Discuss and Bring Back a Solution to the October Council Meeting.

Mayor Pifer inquired if this could be included in the October 4, 2023 Public Properties Committee agenda. Ms. Hilton answered affirmatively.

ROLL CALL VOTE:

<u>AYE</u>	<u>NAY</u>	<u>ABSTAIN</u>	<u>ABSENT</u>
Councilmember Burner			
Councilmember Freed			
Councilmember Fultz			
Councilmember Good			
Councilmember Holtzman			
Councilmember Shepherd			
6 AYES, motion carried			

Mr. Holtzman stated that there will be a lot of information covered in the Public Properties Committee meeting and if interested, full attendance would be good in order to make a decision for the proper direction. Ms. Hilton stated that this meeting would be on October 4, 2023 at 12:30 PM and if Council feels they need a work session to work through some of these issues, that can be scheduled as well. Zoom will be an option.

New Business:

1. R-06-2023: Resolution for Constitution Week

Mayor Pifer stated that the Daughters of the American Revolution have approached Staff with a request to proclaim the week of September 17-23 as "Constitution Week." Monday, September 17, 2023 will mark the

Mount Jackson
Town Council Regular Meeting
September 12, 2023
-13-

236th anniversary of the drafting of the Constitution of the United States of America by the Constitutional Convention. Mayor Pifer then read the resolution.

Councilmember Burner MOVED, seconded by Councilmember Fultz to APPROVE Resolution R-06-2023 Declaring September 17-23 as Constitution Week in the Town of Mount Jackson.

ROLL CALL VOTE:

<u>AYE</u>	<u>NAY</u>	<u>ABSTAIN</u>	<u>ABSENT</u>
Councilmember Burner			
Councilmember Freed			
Councilmember Fultz			
Councilmember Good			
Councilmember Holtzman			
Councilmember Shepherd			
6 AYES, motion carried			

Ms. Hilton stated that there were some representatives in the public audience. Joanne Poplar stated that there were several members of the Narrow Passage Chapter present and introduced Kim Yeck, historian for the chapter; Kathy Rivers, who heads up the Bible project; Susan Walls, who is the state historian, past regent, and their honorary regent; her husband, Bill Walls, who is known as a HODAR (husband of a DAR member); and herself as the 1st Vice Regent.

2. 160 Race Street Property

Ms. Hilton stated that Staff was asked to do background on if this was a blighted structure and what the space could be utilized for since there are current owed county and town taxes. It is a dilapidated building with delinquent taxes, no known owner, and is a strategic location on Bryce Boulevard. Staff research connected with Shenandoah County to see where they were in their process with their attorney, and our attorney as well. For potential actions, basically there are three, an A, B, & C option that Staff came up with, along with a Staff recommendation. It is a dilapidated building and Council should choose whether to demo it or not, and put a lien on property (technically a lien is already recorded). From there, it would have to go to the County steps and the Town would have to purchase the property. Option A – if the demo is done before the tax sale of the property, the Town would pay for that demolition and only get reimbursed if there are excess funds after the sale of the property happens, which is probably not likely. The Town would want to bid on the property to at least get the land after demoing the building. Option B – if the demo isn't done until the sale, the Town could wait to get the property and then demo the building. While that does control the cost, we would run the risk of someone else getting the property and then continuing to have an eye sore in that location. Option C – the Town could wait for the tax sale, buy the property, demo the house, put up whatever desired signage with an easement on the corner, and then sell the remaining portion of the land, potentially to the adjacent property owner. Staff recommendation, between Ms. Hilton, Town Manager Showalter, and our attorney, Jay Neal, is if the goals are to clean up the building and put up an entrance sign or some type of signage, the best course would probably be to clean it up prior to the tax sale to be sure the building is demolished, record the lien, and then the Town could move to sell the property for unpaid taxes. If the Town is the highest bidder, we can put up a sign and sell the rest of the space. Staff is recommending if the goal is clean up and sign, to go ahead and do demo pre-tax sale. Ms. Hilton stated that moving from here, if that is what Council would like Staff to move forward with, then Staff would do some cost estimates on what that would be. There were a couple options from a contractor and internally; if we are not able to recoup any of the demo costs, we want to make sure we are being cost-efficient.

Mount Jackson
Town Council Regular Meeting
September 12, 2023

-14-

Mayor Pifer inquired about the size, acreage wise, of the property, if it is less than a half acre. Ms. Hilton stated that she could look, but probably about a quarter to half acre. Mr. Holtzman answered that it is a quarter acre tops. Mr. Holtzman stated that he brought this item to the Public Properties Committee. As you come down Rt. 263, Race Street veers off as you come towards town. This is the triangular corner property. There are no known heirs to the house at this point, so the property sits there. Because it has no value, actually it has negative value because the neighbor doesn't want it, anyone who buys it will have to clean up the house and make it safe, and as a result of that, the County has never moved to foreclosure. The taxes aren't paid; the taxes are so low that both the County and the Town waive the taxes after a period of time. The house will just sit there indefinitely until falling down. Mr. Holtzman stated that pictures are worth a thousand words – it's falling down, there is no restoring this home, the foundation is not safe. Town Staff explored the Fire Department burning it down; for environmental and other reasons, they won't touch the building. Mr. Holtzman stated that his initial interest was that it is definitely a blighted property; it is an eye sore, and dealing with a fair amount of traffic coming from Bryce, it is a shame for this to be the gateway. He was hopeful that Town could tear it down, and with the Staff recommendation that we do that, whether internal or external, then the Town has that value of the clean up, apply the lien to the property, and there is a sale on the courthouse steps, at which point the Town would be the bidder. Anything the Town would pay for the property, we could recover as a portion of the clean up. If the Town would choose to put up a "Welcome to Mount Jackson" sign, we could do so and maintain that small piece of property, mow it from time to time, or offer to sell it. The only logical buyer is the neighbor who probably wouldn't want it. All in, you would be looking at \$25-30,000 for everything, including legal fees, etc. Ms. Hilton stated that the Town's attorney did comment on what that process would look like and there are a couple of legalities of publication, timelines to track down any potential heir, though none has been listed as living for over a decade. From there, the Town would move forward with construction costs to demo the property and go from there. The Circuit Court will need to be incorporated and Mr. Neal is confident to guide that process if there is a consensus.

Councilmember Holtzman MOVED, seconded by Councilmember Shepherd to MOVE FORWARD with the Demolition, Subject to Receiving a Second Bid on the Work, Perform the Clean Up, and Direct the Town Attorney to Navigate the Process to Recover the Funds.

ROLL CALL VOTE:

<u>AYE</u>	<u>NAY</u>	<u>ABSTAIN</u>	<u>ABSENT</u>
Councilmember Burner			
Councilmember Freed			
Councilmember Fultz			
Councilmember Good			
Councilmember Holtzman			
Councilmember Shepherd			
6 AYES, motion carried			

3. Bake Sale for Rescue & Fire

Mr. Shepherd reported that he requested this agenda item. There is a tradition of a lady doing a bake sale for the Rescue Squad every weekend. Mr. Shepherd stated that he and the Mayor race down every weekend to get cinnamon rolls. Construction is going on at the location and she has had to relocate. Apparently there will be some type of temporary building set up for her to sell her pastries out of and Mr. Shepherd wanted to make sure Council is ok with her doing a slight relocation and that there is Staff agreement that this will happen with dispatch and not a bunch of delays. Mayor Pifer inquired that this would just be a temporary building. Mr. Shepherd answered affirmatively. Ms. Hilton stated that she has not received an application so far. Mr.

Mount Jackson
Town Council Regular Meeting
September 12, 2023

-15-

Shepherd stated that Staff may not receive one as it is just a simple, temporary thing, but he just wanted to make sure everyone was on board to continue to let her have her bake sale. Ms. Good inquired if she would still be on the same property. Mr. Shepherd answered that she would be, just more towards the hotel. Ms. Hilton inquired if this would be a canopy tent. Mr. Shepherd answered that he wasn't sure. Mayor Pifer stated that there was a canopy up this past weekend in front of the office building and it is still there. Mr. Shepherd stated that he has been hearing that it will be some type of structure, perhaps a shed that can be picked up and moved; it is a temporary basis. Ms. Hilton stated that if they would put up some type of structure, they would need to do a zoning permit, but that would be a quick administrative approval. Mr. Holtzman stated that it is only \$10. Ms. Hilton stated that she believed it was \$30.

Closing Remarks by Council Members, Mayor: Ms. Burner requested the Hometown Partnership give an update. Ms. Wakeman stated that Five of a Kind performed in August to a full house. The event was moved to the Brighter Days pavilion at Brighter Days Church, which was well received. The Market was on Labor Day weekend and they did not have the vendors and traffic that they were hoping for. The Woodstock Farmer's Market also did not have a good response. The last Downtown Music will be on September 30 with South River Express, a bluegrass band, at the Brighter Days pavilion. There will be a taco food vendor and the Brighter Days Church will offer soft serve ice cream. The Markets will continue on the first Saturdays thru December; a venue is still being considered for November and December. On Thursday, September 14, they will be getting a tour of the Old Triplett School as a possible event center. Ms. Wakeman stated that it is coming up on a year that she and Brenda Foley have been chairing the Partnership and it has been quite a ride. In November, they are in the process of making plans for the Veterans Day event, which will be on Veterans Day, Saturday, November 11 at 5:00 PM at Mount Calvary Lutheran Church. They are waiting on word from SEARCH about catering a paid meal which will benefit the SEARCH home. They are still working on choosing a veteran to honor from the Ashby District. Ms. Wakeman stated that they are moving the Christmas Tree Lighting to the Saturday after Thanksgiving; they will be the first to do it in the county. At this point, they are hopefully planning a parade, working with Chief Cowart on that, to run from Valley Fertilizer to the old DBI. They will start petitioning businesses in town for this. Ms. Wakeman stated that for those who are local and don't know what the Hometown Partnership is, they are a non-profit organization that was established in 2018 by John Boor and Tyler Hinkle. They are trying to make a difference in Mount Jackson; funds are through vendor fees and private and business donations. After events, they make donations to other local non-profit organizations, especially in Mount Jackson, like the Fire Department, Brighter Days Church for the use of their facilities, the schools, and the VFW in Edinburg for their assistance with Memorial and Veterans Day.

Motion made by Councilmember Fultz, seconded by Councilmember Good, to adjourn the meeting at 8:40 PM.

Barbara Riggelman, Clerk

Donald "Donnie" I. Pifer, Mayor