

Regular Meeting, Wednesday, August 23, 2023, 7:00 p.m., Government Center, Verona, VA.

PRESENT: Jeffrey Slaven, Vice-Chair
Gerald Garber
Butch Wells
Carolyn Bragg
Pam Carter
Scott Seaton
Timothy K. Fitzgerald, County Administrator
Jennifer M. Whetzel, Deputy County Administrator
James Benkahla, County Attorney
Angie Michael, Executive Assistant

ABSENT: Michael Shull, Chairman

VIRGINIA: At an adjourned meeting of the Augusta County Board of Supervisors held on Wednesday, August 23, 2023, at 7:00 p.m., at the Government Center, Verona, Virginia, and in the 248th year of the Commonwealth....

* * * * *

Vice Chairman Slaven welcomed those present at the meeting.

* * * * *

Phillip Kauffman led the Pledge of Allegiance. Mr. Kauffman served as a Marine and owns and operates a gymnastics gym.

* * * * *

Dr. Seaton, Wayne District, delivered the invocation.

* * * * *

INFRASTRUCTURE ADDS/DELETES

The Board considered the infrastructure account status.

Jennifer Whetzel, Deputy County Administrator, stated that the adds and deletes to the infrastructure accounts that were previously committed were reviewed at the Staff Briefing. This is in accordance with the net assets policy and this is addressed twice a year. The list included items related to Parks & Recreation, as well as library. These are projects that the Board has allocated funding for that are now completed. The funds will go back to the respective accounts.

Mr. Garber moved, seconded by Ms. Carter, that the Board approve the infrastructure account status as presented.

Vote was as follows: Yeas: Slaven, Garber, Wells, Bragg, Carter and Seaton
Nays: None
Absent: Shull

Motion carried.

* * * * *

August 23, 2023, at 7:00 p.m.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

The Board considered awarding a contract Hill Studio.

Funding Source: Contingency 80000-8199 \$317,780.00

Doug Wolfe, Director of Community Development, introduced Julia Hensley as the new lead Planner for Community Development.

Mr. Wolfe stated that this agenda item to consider award of a contract to Hill Studio for the Comprehensive Plan and Economic Development Strategic Plan. The last rewrite of the Comprehensive Plan was completed in 2007 with significant updates in 2014/2015. Small Area Plans for the communities of Fishersville and Stuarts Draft were also completed in 2009 and 2020, respectively. Since 2015, the County continues to grow in population and now seeks to respond to this past and continued projected growth to develop a Comprehensive Plan that will best serve the long-term needs of all County residents. The last strategic plan for economic development for Augusta County was completed in 2009 and last updated in January of 2015. The Code of Virginia mandates periodic review of the locality's Comprehensive Plan. At the Board's strategic planning session in late 2022, the Board ranked an updated Comprehensive Plan and Economic Development Strategic Plan as high priorities and has since directed staff to initiate work towards this much needed work. The 2024-2044 Comprehensive Plan will revisit and articulate a community vision for the next 20 years and establish the specific goals, policies, and actions to achieve that vision. A critical component of the Comprehensive Plan will be the Economic Development Strategic Plan. The Economic Development Strategic Plan is the primary focus of the economic development section of the Comprehensive Plan. On March 1st, a request for proposals was issued seeking a consultant to lead the upcoming review and update of the Augusta County Comprehensive Plan and Economic Development Strategy. Four (4) proposals were received, and the top three firms were invited to interview. Interviews were held with the Fourth Economy, Hill Studio and Summit Design and Engineering Services. After a thorough request for proposal, interview, and negotiation process, staff recommends awarding the contract for this work to Hill Studio. As the attached scope of work outlines, Hill Studio will subcontract with Sanford Holshouser Economic Development Consulting (SHEDC) for economic development consulting and RiverLink Group for public engagement. Based in Roanoke, Virginia, Hill Studio has completed multiple comprehensive plans within Virginia and is currently working on three within the state. SHEDC is a comprehensive economic development consulting firm based out of North Carolina with a satellite office in Roanoke. SHEDC has conducted over sixty Strategic Economic Development Action Plans. The project managers for the Economic Development Strategic Plan have over eighty years combined experience in economic development. RiverLink Group focuses on stakeholder facilitation and business retention and growth among other efforts. Upon approval, staff will begin work immediately, with initial larger scale kickoff meetings beginning in September. A worksession has been discussed to share the Board's vision with the consultants. Mr. Hill has indicated that he will make himself available at the Board's convenience. The scope of work includes a robust public engagement plan which includes community meetings, focus groups, external ally interviews and community surveys. Goals for completion are early summer 2024 for Economic Development Strategic Plan and winter 2024 for the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Wolfe provided the Board with a set of expectations for the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee members and a rough outline of what is being asked of them to do. The next steps are to approve the contract and appoint the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee members.

Ms. Bragg moved, seconded by Dr. Seaton, that the Board approve awarding the contract to Hill Studio and authorize the County Administrator to execute the Comprehensive Plan and Economic Development Strategic Plan contract between the County of Augusta and Hill Studio pending review by the County Attorney.

August 23 2023, at 7:00 p.m.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN
(CONT'D)

Vote was as follows: Yeas: Slaven, Garber, Wells, Bragg, Carter and Seaton
 Nays: None
 Absent: Shull

Motion carried.

Dr. Seaton moved, seconded by Mr. Garber, that the Board appoint Emmett Toms to serve on the Comprehensive Plan and Economic Development Strategic Plan Steering Committee.

Vote was as follows: Yeas: Slaven, Garber, Wells, Bragg, Carter and Seaton
 Nays: None
 Absent: Shull

Motion carried.

* * * * *

MATTERS TO BE PRESENTED BY THE PUBLIC

Mr. Fitzgerald read an online comment received from Mary Beth Barbagallo. The key highlights are how the meetings are handled in regards to citizens listening online and the importance of using the microphones and recognizing who is speaking.

Marco Floyd continues to be concerned with Fire/Rescue and how the organization is operated.

Sophie Alberts is concerned with the actions of the Board and how they conduct business.

Chanda McGuffin, 1016 Bridge Avenue, Waynesboro, is concerned with the actions of the Board and the lack of transparency.

Steve Morris, 203 Hotchkiss Road, Churchville, is concerned with trust for the Board. Public safety continues to be a big concern for the County.

* * * * *

MATTERS TO BE PRESENTED BY THE BOARD

Mr. Garber stated that new buildings at the Shenandoah Valley Regional Airport will be dedicated soon.

Ms. Bragg stated that new businesses in the County were celebrated with their ribbon cuttings. August 30 at 7:00 p.m.at Schneider Park will be a public information meeting for the second solar project that has been applied for on Wayne Avenue.

August 23, 2023, at 7:00 p.m.

MATTERS TO BE PRESENTED BY THE BOARD (CONT'D)

Dr. Seaton moved to remove the restriction on applause during the meetings.

Vote was as follows: Yeas: Garber and Seaton
 Nays: Slaven, Wells, Bragg and Carter
 Absent: Shull

Motion failed.

Dr. Seaton moved, seconded by Mr. Garber, to remove the time limit on public comment.

Dr. Seaton made the following statement:

"The excuse I've heard from the Board is that residents have other ways of expressing their views to the Board, such as email and calling. I think we have all bought something and tried to return it because it didn't work or didn't fit. Thankfully, Amazon has made this much easier, but before Amazon made returns so easy, how many of us have tried to send an email and never receive a reply or how many of us have tried to call an 800 number only to be put on hold or forced to leave a message or hung up on. That's why I like brick and mortar businesses in our area where I can buy something and if I don't like it I can return it to a person in the store. I think many people share my feelings. They would rather talk directly to a person face to face than on an impersonal computer or phone. Our Government is slowly moving toward more transparency. Though often too slowly or sometimes going backward, it's encouraging that the state legislators and Governor recognize in Virginia Code that residents have the right to address their government during meetings at least four times a year. Our board has recognized the public commentary as needed during our meetings, but a couple of years ago this Board took a step back in freedom and restricted the public's ability to speak before the Board. Today, let's correct that and remove the time limit on public speaking. We have very capable people working for the County and they are available at the Government Center. People don't want just to email or call their government. As a Board, we should not be impersonal bureaucrats that only want emails and phone calls. Therefore, I will not vote for any time limit on the public's input toward their government or for that matter for restricting any Board member's speech on this Board by calling for the question or imposing actual time limits on the Board members. I think we just need to take a step forward. I think, mature governments don't have these time limits."

Mr. Garber stated that this rule is due to some people abusing the fact that public comment is allowed. He takes a different view on this matter. If you speak for twenty minutes, after about ten minutes no one cares what you said, but people remember how long you talked. It is a self-defeating thing. The time limit given to speak is too short. The change discussed at worksession is a good change. Mr. Garber will likely vote against this motion because there is another option coming up.

Vote was as follows: Yeas: Seaton
 Nays: Slaven, Garber, Wells, Bragg and Carter
 Absent: Shull

Motion failed.

August 23 2023, at 7:00 p.m.

MATTERS TO BE PRESENTED BY THE BOARD (CONT'D)

Ms. Carter attended the Central Shenandoah Planning District meeting and one of the items discussed was some significant changes that the Commonwealth Transportation Board is considering making to the Smart Scale Project scoring process. As a result, that would affect project eligibility and competitiveness for this region. There have been several organizations that have submitted a letter reviewing with the Transportation Board why they feel like these suggestions are detrimental. She requests that Augusta County submit a letter.

Mr. Fitzgerald will draft a letter that reflects the County's views and concerns on the changes being proposed.

Ms. Carter moved, seconded by Ms. Bragg, that the Board approve sending a letter to the Commonwealth Transportation Board regarding the proposed Smart Scale changes.

Vote was as follows: Yeas: Slaven, Garber, Wells, Bragg, Carter and Seaton
 Nays: None
 Absent: Shull

Motion carried.

Mr. Wells moved, seconded by Ms. Carter, that the Board appoint Carolyn Bragg to serve on the Metropolitan Planning Organization Board. Effective immediately and to expire December 31, 2023.

Vote was as follows: Yeas: Slaven, Garber, Wells, Bragg, and Carter
 Nays: Seaton
 Absent: Shull

Motion carried.

Mr. Wells commended Animal Control Officers on how they handled a situation with a dog in his community. He attended a program of grant awards for the Valley Alliance of Education held at Blue Ridge Community College. The program included the three localities; Staunton, Waynesboro and Augusta County. Three teachers of the year from each locality were recognized; Elizabeth Benbow from Augusta County, Amber Gibson from Waynesboro and Brandi Johnson from Staunton. In addition, there were approximately forty-five more teachers in twenty-one different schools in the three localities that were awarded creative grants for things they have done in their classrooms. Each grant ranges from \$1,000.00 to \$3,000.00.

Mr. Slaven stated that Blue Ridge Community College is in the process of bringing the Agriculture programs back as part of their curriculum.

* * * * *

August 23, 2023, at 7:00 p.m.

MATTERS TO BE PRESENTED BY STAFF

Mr. Fitzgerald discussed the following:

1. There was an Animal Shelter meeting held yesterday. The shelter is close to being full. There are positions open for employment at the shelter. The updated euthanasia policy was approved. The ordinance is still in discussion with both cities.
2. During Monday's Staff Briefing, the Board discussed changes to the public comment period during Board meetings. The idea of eliminating the group designation was discussed.

Mr. Wells moved, seconded by Ms. Carter, that the Board change the three-minute time limit for public comment to four minutes and eliminate the representing a group option.

Dr. Seaton does not agree with having a time limit and will be abstaining from the vote.

Vote was as follows: Yeas: Slaven, Garber, Wells, Bragg, and Carter
 Nays: None
 Absent: Shull
 Abstain: Seaton

Motion carried.

3. Mr. Wolfe gave an update on the Jennings Branch Project. Nineteen of nineteen title exams are complete and five easements are signed.

* * * * *

ADJOURNMENT

Dr. Seaton moved, seconded by Mr. Wells, that the Board adjourn the meeting.

Vote was as follows: Yeas: Slaven, Garber, Wells, Bragg, and Carter
 Nays: Seaton
 Absent: Shull

Motion carried.


Chairman


County Administrator