

REGULAR MEETING OF STAUNTON CITY COUNCIL

Thursday, January 26, 2017

7:30 p.m.

Council Chambers

PRESENT: **Carolyn W. Dull, Mayor**
 Ophie A. Kier, Vice Mayor
 Erik D. Curren
 James J. Harrington
 R. Terry Holmes
 Andrea W. Oakes
 Walter J. Obenschain

ALSO PRESENT: **Stephen F. Owen, City Manager**
 Steven L. Rosenberg, Deputy City Manager
 Douglas L. Guynn, City Attorney
 Linda L. Little, Clerk of Council

Mayor Dull called the meeting to order. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited in unison.

MAYOR'S REPORT

The Mayor welcomed a guest delegation hosted by the University of Virginia Center for Politics in partnership with World Learning including 30 Mongolians who are participants in the *Leaders Advancing Democracy – Mongolia* exchange funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development. This program works to enhance the leadership and civic engagement skills of the participants through three particular themes: environment and urbanization, unemployment and poverty alleviation, and anti-corruption and transparency.

Mr. Erdenebolor Baast thanked the Mayor and stated that they were a group from Mongolia here to learn from the United States how people and institutions work together to solve problems. He noted that they were mostly interested in learning how transparency works and what they learned here they would like to apply in Mongolia so that the future of their country improves so generations to come will have a better democratic system. He further stated that this was an unforgettable experience to not only read about this but to actually witness a meeting of the City of Staunton. He presented the Mayor with a painting of the Mongolian countryside and invited anyone from the city to visit Mongolia.

The Mayor stated that she came upon a program from the West Virginia State University awards dinner and happened to notice that the alumnus of the year was our very own Lt. Col. Francisco Beale Newman, Jr. (Ret).

The Mayor presented the following 2016 State of the City Address:

I think we can all agree that 2016 was a year remarkably full of challenges. From a turbulent presidential campaign to numerous senseless tragedies, we experienced a year that shook many of us to our core.

I'm grateful to be starting fresh in this New Year with a desire for unity, peace and compassion for those here and abroad and a renewed sense of solidarity with the many efforts for justice and civil and human rights in our City and beyond.

Thankfully, here in the Queen City, we can find solace in the goodwill of a tight-knit community—a community whose hallmarks are a generous spirit, empathy, kindness and integrity. It's been my experience that more often than not, we're able to find common – and higher – ground.

Because of these characteristics and much more, I can tell you that the state of our City is strong.

Economic growth and the unemployment rate are holding steady, and the entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in Staunton.

- Unemployment is currently at 4.1%, which equals the current state average and is not a substantial change from the previous year. It remains one of the primary objectives of City Council to attract companies to Staunton that can provide good-paying jobs for our citizens.
- We issued more than 2,200 business licenses, and 33 new businesses opened their doors downtown.
- Many visitors and residents alike spent leisure time in Staunton last year, providing nearly \$3.7 million in revenue from meals and lodging taxes.
- Our financial standing is strong. While we could always use more funding to accomplish the multiple important projects, such as a police and fire facilities, or a high school, we are working with what we've got, and managing it well thanks to an exceptional Finance team.
- We adopted a \$106 million budget last April, and we've maintained a Aa2 bond rating from Moody's Investor Service and an AA- rating from Standard and Poor's. These ratings are defined as very strong creditworthiness.
- More than \$785,000 in the budget was provided to local agencies
- We continue to save for a rainy day by increasing the percentage of funds placed in reserves.
- And finally, we've been awarded a Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officers Association since 1985 for our sound financial standing and practices.

Staunton earned awards and acclaim on a number of coveted lists in 2016, thanks to our vibrant arts culture, ongoing historic preservation efforts and the tireless work of a community that continues to put Staunton on the map with its exceptional talents and enthusiasm.

- Country Living Magazine featured Staunton as one of "The 30 Small Towns You Should Visit This Summer." Cosmopolitan Magazine and MSN.com also picked up the article

and shared it with their readers.

- USA Today placed Staunton on their list of “Best Main Streets in the USA”
- We were named one of “America’s Favorite Towns” by Travel+Leisure
- Travelsquire.com called Staunton one of “The Top 28 Hot Destinations for 2016”
- And Tasting Table put us on its list of “9 of the Best Small Towns for Food in the U.S.”

A few other mentionable lists we made include:

- “The 6 Cutest Main Streets in America” by Purewow.com
- “20 Great Small Towns Near Washington, DC” by About.com
- And “12 Perfectly Picturesque Towns in Virginia” by OnlyinYourState.com

We had some significant and extraordinary happenings last year, so I thought I’d share a list of six highlights of 2016. Here goes:

1. We kicked off two new developments off of Route 250, near the I-81 and I-64 corridors:
 - a. The City finalized an agreement with Staunton Crossing Partners, L.L.C. on 25 acres at the old Western State Hospital property, now known as Staunton Crossing, and we completed an entrance road for the development. Staunton Crossing Partners joined the City for a groundbreaking and ribbon cutting ceremony, announcing plans to bring two hotels, restaurants and other mixed uses. We believe this new growth will jumpstart future development on this nearly 300-acre property where we hope to bring good jobs and housing.
 - b. Across the street, site work for Phase 1 of the development of Frontier Center began, with commitments from three restaurants and a retailer. We expect significant progress there this year, including a groundbreaking sometime this spring.
2. The Governor came to Staunton last spring to announce Graphic Packaging International’s \$20 million expansion of its manufacturing operation in the City and the creation of 43 new jobs. Additionally, the City received a \$250,000 state grant to assist with the expansion and will provide an incentive grant to the company. Graphic Packaging’s anticipated growth has the potential to generate nearly \$1 million in tax revenue for the City over a 10-year period.
3. Next door, a new 200,000 square foot FedEx distribution center opened in Green Hills Industrial Park, replacing an existing center in Fishersville. The expanded facility brought new jobs to Staunton as well as the existing jobs from its Fishersville plant.
4. The City dedicated the bridge on Richmond Road near Staunton Crossing and Frontier Center to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. last January on MLK Day. The memorial

was a unanimous decision for Council, and for me, it represents Staunton's desire to connect the triumphs of the Civil Rights Movement to our continued determination to ensure equality for all residents today and for years to come.

5. The City reaped the results of a successful, citizen-led campaign to keep the historic Augusta County Courthouse in Staunton. We are grateful for the many concerned Stauntonians and neighboring residents who cared deeply enough about the historical and economic vitality of our region to help preserve an important piece of our area's history.
6. And last but certainly not least, an uptick in civic engagement brought us many more applicants for City boards and commissions, like the West End Alliance. The group became more active in 2016, hosting City Council and School Board forums, clean up days and networking opportunities to recruit businesses to the City's west end. It's always invigorating to see citizens take an interest in their government and exercise their ability to influence the direction of our City.

A few other projects and investments worth celebrating include:

- The approval of the Staunton Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee's work plan to make the City more bike and pedestrian friendly and the committee's award of a \$65,000 grant to help implement the plan.
- Receiving a Safe Routes to School Grant for \$285,000 to build sidewalks, crosswalks and lighting at Bessie Weller Elementary School to improve safety and access to the school for students.
- The City's first Dog Park, also known as the Bark Park, which debuted at Gypsy Hill Park last fall to wagging tails and canine grins and has become a popular meeting place for dogs and those who love them.
- The City completed a \$589,000 renovation of Lake Tams, thanks in part to a \$200,000 grant from the Virginia DEQ. The renovation improved the water quality of the lake and included the addition of a walking path, a vegetative bank, stone wall and other aesthetic improvements.
- Council approved an application for a Department of Homeland Security Assistance to Firefighters Grant in the amount of \$180,000 to help our emergency personnel upgrade its personal protective equipment. The grant also includes a 10% match.
- And Council approved a Local Government Challenge Grant Application in the amount of \$5,000 to assist three local arts organizations: ShenanArts, the Stonewall Brigade Band, and the Staunton Augusta Art Center. The City hopes to match the grant with a \$5,000 contribution.

More than 30% of the City's budget is allocated to Staunton City Schools, which we are proud to support.

- For the 4th consecutive year, employees of Staunton City Schools received a raise in an ongoing effort to increase compensation to competitive levels and to recruit and keep

skilled teachers, administrators and staff

- Our school division saw an overall increase in SOL score pass rates and was especially celebratory of Bessie Weller's scores, where students raised their SOL achievement level in *every* content area
- Staunton City Schools also saw a remarkable 2016 on-time graduation rate of 91% and a dropout rate of just 5%, which is below state average
- And we ramped up our work with the Staunton School Board to determine a cost figure that will bring much needed physical improvements to R.E. Lee High School. We'll continue to make progress on that front this year.

It takes positive working relationships with the School Board and the superintendent to achieve success on large and important projects like the high school, and we are grateful to have good relations with school division leaders. We look forward to our continued work together.

The wonderful peaks of the year were also accompanied by some valleys. We lost several bright lights in our community who left an unforgettable impression on us.

- **Rita Wilson**, the City's first black council member who served the City in that capacity from 1991 to 2008 with zeal and compassion. She was a force of nature with her indomitable and vivacious spirit and a true public servant.
- **Desmond Wray**, who served as Staunton's city attorney for 20 years, from 1984 to 2004, with integrity, diligence, distinction and gentlemanly grace.
- **Brady Kier**, the three-year-old grandson of our very own vice mayor, who valiantly fought cancer and stole thousands of hearts here in Staunton and around the globe with his contagious smile and enduring spirit.
- **Michael Organ**, one of our City's most vocal cheerleaders and a true ambassador for Staunton's historic preservation and revitalization.
- **Jody Grogan**, a faithful School Board member who cared deeply about the future of the City's students.
- And **Becky Williams**, a former 911 dispatcher for the City and the beloved wife of our police chief.

Mother Teresa said, "I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples." These folks undoubtedly created their share of ripples, and we're all the better for them.

We are fortunate to have an incredible staff who continuously represent Staunton well, work diligently to keep the City flourishing and work well with Council to accomplish our shared goals.

- Our sincere thanks to City staff, including police and fire and rescue, for the excellent and sometimes difficult work they perform daily. Our City wouldn't be exceptional without them.

And our congratulations and gratitude to City staff who earned regional and state recognition for their work last year:

- Linda Little, Clerk of City Council, was awarded the Clerk of the Year award for Region III of the Virginia Municipal Clerks Association.
- The City's park maintenance crew was recognized with a Fields of Excellence Award for Lee High football field upkeep in Gypsy Hill Park.
- And our Fire & Rescue Department received several Governor's Fire Services Awards for excellence in Virginia's fire services.

City Council has kept busy at the local and state level:

- During the 2016 City Council election last May, Ophie Kier, Erik Curren, Andrea Oakes and Jim Harrington were re-elected.
- We designated a week in May as National Police Week, which we plan to continue this year to honor our men and women who put their lives on the line daily to keep us safe.
- We opposed the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and sought ways to prevent it from disturbing the pristine waters we hold dear, including our drinking water supply.
- And Dr. Harrington represented the City in the annual Waynesboro soap box derby. Did you win, Dr. Harrington?

And finally, I'd like to mention a few other meaningful activities and City business that deserve recognition:

- Continuing on the successful merger of our City and School finance departments in 2012, we merged City and School Human Resources departments, fostering more efficiency and collaboration.
- We also reorganized our engineering and planning departments into a consolidated community development department.
- And we welcomed several new faces over the last few months: Charley Haney became City Assessor following the retirement of Jim Gallagher; Nicki Mills is our new City Engineer following the retirement of James Davis; Rodney Rhodes became our new City Planner following the retirement of Sharon Angle and Molly Goldsmith became the City Registrar following Amanda DiMeo's move to our Economic Development department.

- Staunton celebrated its first Bike and Walk to Work Day last May, during which many walked and biked to work to feel more connected to the community, to promote physical fitness, and to help the environment.
- The City's only institution of higher learning made a transition from Mary Baldwin College to Mary Baldwin University. We congratulate them on their next chapter.

Staunton's future remains bright, and we have much to look forward to in the coming months. We are most fortunate to call the Queen City home and to live in a charitable and welcoming community full of creatives, visionaries, go-getters, do-gooders and civic pride. Thank you for making our City shine. May Staunton be blessed in this New Year.

ADDITIONAL ITEMS BY MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

There were no additional items by members of Council.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Oakes moved to approve the work session and regular meeting minutes of January 12, 2017. Mr. Holmes noted that he would be abstaining because he was absent for that meeting.

The motion was seconded by Dr. Harrington and carried unanimously as follows:

Dr. Harrington	aye	Ms. Oakes	aye
Dr. Curren	aye	Vice Mayor Kier	aye
Mr. Obenschain	aye	Mayor Dull	aye
Mr. Holmes	abstain		

REGULAR MEETING

A. Recognition of Sharon Angle for Years of Service to the City of Staunton

Retired Director of Planning Sharon Angle was recognized on the occasion of her recent retirement from City service.

Mr. Owen listed the following achievements that Ms. Angle accomplished during her career with the City:

- Involved in the grant funding for the "Big Dig" downtown streetscape project
- Co-project manager for the renovations of the old Leggett's building (City Hall)
- Project manager for the renovations of the Circuit Court (Cochran Judicial Center)
- Lead the adoption of Historic District regulations and coordinated the draft of the Historic Preservation Ordinance
- Lead the adoption of the Corridor Overlay District regulations.
- Charter member of the Rural Planning Caucus of Virginia, executive committee member and treasurer
- Planning District Commission, began working there in 1968, executive director from 1984 – 1987

- Co-project manager for the renovations and rebuild of the Stonewall Jackson Hotel
- Work hard on the Blackfriars Theatre to make that a reality
- Worked on the Central Avenue streetscape project and federal grant
- VDOT Safe Routes to School grants applications – coordinator and project manager on Bessie Weller, McSwain and Shelburne
- Governance committee member for reversion to town status committee
- Lead the Green Hills Industrial site grants for Best Buy
- Coordinated grant applications for the creation of the Green Hills Industrial Park
- Worked on six different comprehensive plans for the City
- Served as the City's emergency services coordinator
- Work on community development block grants for residential and economic development projects in Green Hills, Gospel Hill District, Stonewall Jackson Hotel, the Sunnyside neighborhood, Newtown neighborhood and the block by block program.
- The local government challenge grant coordinator for supporting our arts
- Worked on urban development areas and grants to improve bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Worked on the Montgomery Hall Park designation for historic landmarks

Mr. Owen presented Ms. Angle with a certificate of appreciation from the City.

Vice Mayor Kier thanked Ms. Angle for her many years of service to the City.

Ms. Oakes also thanked Ms. Angle for all her efforts.

B. Update on Staunton Greenways Plan

Mr. Rodney Rhodes, Senior Planner, stated that a draft plan was prepared, and on December 8, 2016, City Council, the Planning Commission and the Recreation Advisory Commission conducted a joint public hearing to receive comments on the plan. At the conclusion of the hearing, the commissions adjourned and reconvened jointly to consider the public comments. Each commission took action to formally recommend endorsement of the plan.

Staff expected to schedule Council's final consideration of the plan for a regular meeting in January, however, since the action by the commissions, at a regular meeting of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC), members of the committee expressed continued concerns with the plan. Their concerns focused on potential conflicts between existing trail users and users of the proposed paved trail. Planning and Zoning and Parks and Recreation staff plan to meet with members of the BPAC to discuss their concerns and walk the proposed trail, all in an effort to present to Council a plan supported by all three of the Planning Commission, the Recreation Advisory Commission and the BPAC. Accordingly, staff proposes to include Council's consideration of the plan on a subsequent regular meeting agenda.

C. Consideration of Final Plat for Staunton Crossing Center, Section One

Mr. Tim Hartless, Planner, presented a PowerPoint presentation to Council showing the area for the final plat of Staunton Crossing, Section One. He stated that Staunton Crossing Center is part of the larger Staunton Crossing development. The Staunton Industrial Development Authority (now the Staunton Economic Development Authority) purchased the almost 300 acre site from the Commonwealth of Virginia in 2010. In 2015, the City of Staunton began the construction of

the entrance road, "Crossing Way." Also in 2015, the Economic Development Authority (EDA) entered into a real estate contract with Staunton Crossing Partners, LLC (SCP, LLC) to sell the front 25 acres. SCP, LLC subsequently acquired the property from the EDA, in accordance with the contract, to be developed as Staunton Crossing Center.

Planning Commission approved the preliminary plat of Staunton Crossing Center at its meeting on March 17, 2016. The final plat of Section One includes the creation of four lots at the northeast corner of the intersection of Richmond Avenue and Crossing Way. All of the lots will be accessed from Crossing Way; lots 1 and 4 will have frontage on Crossing Way. The plat also shows necessary utility easements on both sides of Crossing Way. Staff has reviewed the final plat and has no adverse comments.

At its meeting on January 19, 2017, Planning Commission reviewed the final plat and voted unanimously, on a 3-0 vote, to recommend its approval.

Dr. Harrington moved that City Council approve the final plat of Staunton Crossing Center, Section One, as recommended by the City Manager.

The motion was seconded by Mr. Holmes and carried as follows:

Dr. Curren	aye	Vice Mayor Kier	aye
Mr. Obenschain	aye	Mayor Dull	aye
Mr. Holmes	aye	Dr. Harrington	aye
Ms. Oakes	aye		

Matters from the City Manager

Mr. Owen echoed the welcome already extended to the guests. He noted that they were presented with some booklets regarding the establishment of the first council-manager form of government, which began in Staunton.

Matters from the Public

Mr. Baldwin Jennings, 332 Sharon Lane, stated that he was concerned about the \$40 million proposed to update Lee High School.

Ms. Katlyn Savage, 1742 Englewood Drive, a student at Robert E. Lee High School, read a letter she wrote City Council concerning building a new high school.

Mr. Francisco B. Newman, Jr., 1318 Ashby Street, thanked Council for the recognition that was given him earlier in the meeting.

Mr. Clinton Davis, 219 Sunnyside Street, stated that he agreed with the student from Robert E. Lee High School regarding a new high school.

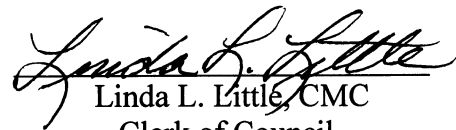
Ms. Christine Poulson, 315 Sherwood Avenue, again spoke about her concerns in renovating the old Lee High School.

Dr. Curren asked Mr. Owen about asbestos in the current high school. Mr. Owen indicated that he would get back to Dr. Curren on that.

Ms. Clayton Brooks and her son, William, 891 Preston Drive, again stated that they continue to support a new high school.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before Council, the meeting adjourned at 8:33 p.m.


Linda L. Little, CMC
Clerk of Council