

The Pearisburg Town Council met in Regular Session on August 11, 2020 at 6:30 pm at the Pearisburg Municipal Building in the Council Chambers and via electronic meeting using Zoom technology hosted by Town Treasurer Harrell. Present for the meeting in the Council Chambers Mayor Dickerson; Vice Mayor Eaton; Council Members Williams, Harrell, Journell, Ballard and Clark; Town Manager Meredith; Town Clerk Harless; and Police Chief Martin; Treasurer Harrell; and Director of Public Works Wilson. Present for the meeting via Zoom Town Attorney Hartley; Erin Jones, Suddenlink; Sterling Silver, citizen and Virginian Leader, Amelia Whittaker.

Ballard made a motion to approve the minutes of the Regular July 14, 2020 Council Meeting as written. Clark seconded the motion. Voting yes: Mayor Dickerson; Council Members Williams, Harrell, Clark, Eaton, Ballard and Journell. The motion carried by a vote of 7 to 0.

Sterling Silver, resident of Pearisburg, addressed Council concerning Suddenlink and his problems with internet service. He spends large amounts of time on hold. Suddenlink staff have neglected to show up for appointments to correct his issue. He stated that after many calls he finally had a technician install a new cable. They damaged the heat pump during installation. He stated his frustrations stemmed from there being no avenue to escalate your questions, the wait time for service is 2 to 3 weeks. He works from home and pays for service that is unsatisfactory. He has placed a complaint to the FCC on performance. He stated he recently turned to social media for help.

Erin Jones addressed Council and stated that the escalation team normally responds quickly. She stated that any complaints from the FCC receive an expedited response. She stated that the comments she received from the Town Manager this week have been escalated.

Silver suggested Suddenlink have a better system in place than a call center. Jones answered that she would get his issue handled as soon as possible. Hartley stated that he heard there are no employees in a facility to visit in person only the call center. He commented that customer service issues have been ongoing for some time. He questioned Jones as to whether there was a way to get beyond the call center. He stated it didn't make sense to call the FCC or the Town. He told Jones he would like to hear her plans for making that a reality.

Jones stated that issues can be handled online or by use of a chat system. She understands it can be cumbersome at times. They currently have extra staff working and the ability to shift calls to another call center with a lower call volume.

Sterling stated that Suddenlink representatives won't forward you to anyone else to help resolve your issue. The chat forwards you to hold that can last up to 45 minutes or more. Jones stated that she understands they have federal requirements they must meet. The calls go through an internal automated system. Hartley asked Jones what the normal response time was before a service technician goes to the person's home. Jones answered that new installs were within 1 to 2 days and service calls 3 to 5 days. She stated that outages take longer.

Hartley asked about the logs for federal reporting call times and service visits. Jones stated that the response time might be a company policy. She indicated Suddenlink followed the FCC and Attorney General's Office guidelines. She had noticed in October 2019 the billing platform was down and there was a spike in our area. She knew of three major outages and reviewed the call volume and complaints. Silver stated he had experienced a 10-day minimum on response time. Jones stated that they were not working under normal circumstances their employees are all working from home and they are trying to keep up with their system. They understand there is some lag time and it can be frustrating.

Ballard addressed Jones and stated that she kept citing Covid-19. He wanted to know if Suddenlink had any intention of reducing the customers' bills. He stated that it appeared the customers were only receiving partial service. Jones stated that they were working towards resolving services issues. Ballard asked when there was a lag in service, did they credit the customer's bill. Jones stated that the customer must call to request a credit due to lack of service. Hartley mentioned the outage that occurred from the line on I-77 being cut for 10 plus days. He asked if Suddenlink unilaterally gave credit to the customers. Jones stated that the entire County was not out, only one small area took more than 24 hours to fully restore. Ballard asked at what threshold would Suddenlink initiate the credit. Jones answered that part of the customer agreement outlines the customer must request credit for outages more than 24 hours. She stated that on larger areas they can proactively do it. She will check on that specific outage and follow-up with Meredith. She will also provide a copy of the agreement the

customer has for the request for credit. Mayor Dickerson thanked Jones for participating in the Council Meeting.

Clark reported on the Public Safety Committee. Council discussed the speed limit sign for 148 Wildwood Drive and tabled it for more information. The Committee discussed two police vehicles becoming less reliable and the need to look at replacing them. Meredith is assessing the possibility of leasing vehicles. He will obtain more data and bring it to Council in September.

Ballard reported on the Property and Recreation Committee. The Committee discussed the blue spruce tree near the gazebo at the Community Center. Ballard stated that Wilson was recommending the blue spruce be cut down. Wilson indicated that the tree does not add much ecstasically and there are maintenance issues with the location near the gazebo. Ballard stated a different type of tree could be planted that's smaller in proportion.

Williams made a motion to have the blue spruce tree near the Gazebo cut down. Eaton seconded the motion. Voting yes: Mayor Dickerson; Council Members Williams, Harrell, Clark, Eaton, Ballard and Journell. The motion carried by a vote of 7 to 0.

Eaton reported on the Finance Committee. She stated that Jamie Snider, IT Tech, was evaluating internet service providers for Town facilities. Meredith stated that Snider contacted the current internet service provider to discuss requirements for the Town. Meredith stated that the current service provider's staff were very helpful and eager to provide needed information.

Clark moved to have Suddenlink installed at a cost of \$130 a month. Hartley stated that the current franchise agreement will remain in force until we renew it. He stated that in the existing franchise agreement there are some free connections available for the Town and we could negotiate. He indicated the franchise renewal could come to pass in the next 60 days. Meredith asked if the video would be separate from the internet. Hartley stated that cable TV will probably go away in 5 to 10 years. Ballard asked if the Suddenlink internet speed issues would fall under the current agreement. Hartley stated the Town couldn't regulate the speed of equipment. The Town can regulate whether they are meeting the services. The Town can't regulate the programming cost or content of the service for internet. He indicated that

Suddenlink does need a franchise in order to utilize our right of ways. He suggested asking for a free connection at the Police Department and other Town facilities. Ballard asked if that was only for CATV or did it include internet. Hartley stated he would need to review the agreement to answer. He stated it did provide right of way for internet but not sure about a free drop for internet. Ballard stated his question was broader. He wanted to know if any issue for internet was covered in the franchise agreement or is only specific for cable. Hartley stated Suddenlink had to follow the provisions if they add any type of internet and use the same standards for new connections. Hartley felt the matter needed to be discussed further in executive session.

The Committee recommends that the Council waive all the penalty and interest that is shown as owed to the Town on the "Delinquent Tax List." Voting yes: Mayor Dickerson; Council Members Williams, Harrell, Clark, Eaton, Ballard and Journell. The recommendation carried by a vote of 7 to 0.

#### **Delinquent Tax List - to waive penalty and interest**

<b><u>BILL TO NAME</u></b>	<b><u>CURRENT OWNER</u></b>	<b><u>YEAR</u></b>	<b><u>BASE</u></b>	<b><u>PEN/INT</u></b>	<b><u>TOTAL</u></b>
David Hazelwood	Sandra Clark	2015	\$ 16.75	\$ 5.26	\$ 22.01
Dan Huffman	Mary Stevers	2012	\$ 311.92	\$ 254.44	\$ 566.36
Louise Martin	Earl Lee Martin Jr.	2016	\$ 408.37	\$ 145.82	\$ 554.19
Laura Sproupe	Heather Tickle	2015	\$ 217.42	\$ 96.77	\$ 314.19
Gregory Thomas * Customer has already paid base amount	Morehead Contracting	2013	\$ 321.78	\$ 199.85	\$ 521.63
Halstar Inc.		2014	\$ 155.00	\$ 82.63	\$ 237.63
Halstar Inc.		2014	\$ 737.18	\$ 392.98	\$ 1,130.16
Halstar		2014	\$ 77.50	\$ 41.32	\$ 118.82
Benjamin Doyle * Customer has already paid base amount	Richard Sadler	2010	\$ 120.79	\$ 106.91	\$ 227.70
Ratcliff Bobby * Customer has already paid base amount	Thomas Jason Tickle	2016	\$ 172.86	\$ 61.73	\$ 234.59
Bobby Ratcliff * Customer has already paid base amount	Thomas Jason Tickle	2016	\$ 6.70	\$ 2.10	\$ 8.80
Maral Development *Property was purchased by County tax sale on 11/13/2006	Robert or Diane Clay	2006	\$ 99.76	\$ 123.42	\$ 223.18
Robert or Diane Clay *Customer made a payment on 04/17/2020 -		2019	\$ -	\$ 6.74	\$ 6.74

The Committee recommends that the Council write-off the 2006 real estate taxes owed to the Town for the Maral Development property owned by Robert or Diane Clay. Voting yes: Mayor Dickerson; Council Members Williams, Harrell, Clark, Eaton, Ballard and Journell. The recommendation carried by a vote of 7 to 0.

Eaton reported on the Public Works Committee. She reported that paving of utility cuts is continuing. The parking stalls and center lines have been painted on the new paving on Mountain Lake Avenue and Curve Road. Also, several trees have been trimmed or removed from the street right of ways in Town.

Eaton reported on the Beautification Advisory Committee. The weather hindered their scheduled meeting. She stated that the Committee did get flowers planted and mulch down at the Welcome sign at Route 100. They discussed trees and aging sign at Community Center.

Clark reported on the Library Advisory Board.

Meredith discussed Edmunds Online Payment System with Council. He stated there was additional information provided in the packet. Treasurer Harrell stated that all options are available at this time but option D. She is waiting to hear back from Edmunds on D. She stated the County was using Pay pal as the gateway and absorbs the fees. The County pays Pay pal \$50.20 per month and 10 cents over. They spend around \$800 a year. They run e-checks through the National Bank.

Treasurer Harrell mentioned there were perks for her office going with Edmunds. If they had Edmunds, the payments would go into a batch and then automatically update in Edmunds. She stated that currently they are entering a 15-page list of payments. Councilwoman Harrell stated that having online payments available was nice but there are other options like in person, mail and drop box. She thinks Council needs to consider the finances of the Town. Ballard stated he was in favor of the Town absorbing fees for online. Treasurer Harrell stated that currently there is no charge for taking payments over the phone. She would like to give customers some notice before any changes are made to the system. She recommends Council approve option A or C but stressed she would be good with any Council decided upon. Ballard suggested sending notices now to customers to let them know that starting January 1, 2021 fees would be imposed.

Ballard made a motion that Council approve of using Edmunds for online utility payments beginning January 1, 2021 and charge fees to the customer as follows: 2.95% for card transactions and \$1.05 for e-check transactions. Harrell seconded the motion. Voting yes: Mayor Dickerson; Council Members Williams, Harrell, Clark, Eaton, Ballard and Journell. The recommendation carried by a vote of 7 to 0.

Meredith briefed Council on an Ordinance for the Fire Department. He recommends Council allow the Fire Department to bill insurance companies a minimum of \$300 and maximum of \$1000. The revenue could be significant to the Town and important providing revenue for the Town. The soft billing goes to the insurance company and not the property owner. Hartley stated the fee only applies when there is a wreck resulting in a ticket and charges. There is some blame on the driver for the wreck. He stated that insurance companies will pay this bill once it is submitted to insurance company. A multi-vehicle collision will go to the driver at fault. Eaton asked if the insurance company determines the amount of the bill. Hartley stated it would be a flat rate of \$300 and if the invoice is itemized the cost would not exceed \$1000. The fireman would need to calculate time involved for the call, equipment and supplies used to itemize.

Clark asked if the ordinance covered fires. He stated that most towns are soft billing for motor vehicle wrecks. Clark mentioned that on the homeowners it was discussed that we could bill the owner's insurance. Journell agreed the Fire Department should soft bill for fires as well. Hartley stated he could add the wording to the current proposed ordinance or do a separate one. Meredith stated that if the ordinance was passed tonight staff wasn't ready to implement this immediately. Harless stated she was working with Fire Chief Stevers on updating their call forms to gather the needed data. Hartley stated he would prepare the needed ordinances and a form letter to send to insurance companies. He stated that the fire call report would need to be included in the billing process as well.

Meredith briefed Council on the Infectious Disease Prevention Plan Policy for Covid-19 and VOSH Standard. He stated that by adopting the standard it keeps the town in compliance. He recommends on page 6 pertaining to employee return to work be left as the employees'

choice. He stated that staff is taking temperatures each day and answering survey of questions. The cost of thermometers will be submitted for Cares Act reimbursement.

Williams made a motion to adopt the COVID-19 and Infectious Disease Prevention Plan and VOSH Standard. Eaton seconded the motion. Voting yes: Mayor Dickerson; Council Members Williams, Harrell, Clark, Eaton, Ballard and Journell. The motion carried by a vote of 7 to 0.

Meredith updated Council on the RD UV/Sewer Project and closeout documents for Division 1 of project. He stated the Town has their VDOT letter of completion. In the previous packet there was a change order, it has been removed. He reported that Hurt & Proffitt had jetted the line on Main Street and removed grease. It was originally diagnosed as a collapsed line the first time. He stated Hurt & Proffitt was able to camera all but 40 feet of the line. The line looks better and feels the Town should be able to reline the sewer line. He has talked with another locality that has a vacuum truck to help vacuum the line. He hasn't seen the full camera work yet because it was just completed around 6:00 p.m. today. This portion of work fall under the original contract. Our staff has been great in staying on it and monitoring the manholes.

Clark made a motion to approve and authorize the Town Manager to sign and process the following documents:

- a. VDOT - Letter of Completion
- b. Reduction of Retainage
- c. Certificate of Substantial Completion - Division I
- d. Notice of Acceptability of Work - Hurt & Proffitt, Inc.
- e. Notice of Acceptability of Work - Town Manager
- f. Division I Partial Punch List
- g. Requisition No. 7
- h. Pay Application No. 5 - Division I

Eaton seconded the motion. Voting yes: Mayor Dickerson; Council Members Williams, Harrell, Clark, Eaton, Ballard and Journell. The motion carried by a vote of 7 to 0.

Hartley discussed the development of property near Walmart that the IDA owns. He stated that the IDA had provided some information about the property. He indicated the information should not have been disclosed due to a confidentiality agreement. He stated there

was nothing significant in the information. There was nothing going on currently. The IDA is actively engaging in selling/developing the property. Clark asked if there was a time Hartley might be able to provide an update or is it basically wait and see what happens. She understands there is an interested party. Hartley stated that once the IDA gave their authorization, he would discuss the property. He stated that possibly in 6 months they might be able to discuss comfortably.

On a motion by Williams, seconded by Clark, passed by the following recorded vote, Mayor Dickerson, yes; Council Members Williams, yes; Eaton, yes; Ballard, yes; Journell, yes; Clark, yes; and Harrell, yes; Council went into Executive Session as permitted by Virginia Code § 2.2-3711(A) (1), for discussion, consideration or interviews of candidates for employment; assignment, appointment, promotion, performance, demotion, salaries, disciplining, or resignation of specific public officers, appointees, or employees of the Town of Pearisburg regarding information from Town Manager regarding employee personnel discipline; Virginia Code § 2.2-3711(A) (7), for consultation with legal counsel, and briefings by staff members or consultants pertaining to actual or probable litigation, where such consultation or briefing in an open meeting would adversely affect the negotiating or litigating posture of the Town; and consultation with legal counsel employed or retained by the Town regarding specific legal matters requiring the provision of legal advice by such counsel: regarding PSA right of way and PSA contract; and Virginia Code §2.2-3711(A) (29), for discussion of the award of public contract involving the expenditure of public funds, including interviews of bidders or offerors, and discussion of the terms of scope of such contract, where discussion in an open session would adversely affect the bargaining position or negotiating strategy of the Town on a potential contract: regarding discussion of proposed franchise agreement with Suddenlink.

On a motion by Williams, seconded by Eaton, passed by the following recorded vote, Mayor Dickerson, yes; Council Members Williams, yes; Eaton, yes; Ballard, yes; Journell, yes; Clark yes; and Harrell, yes; Council returned to regular session.

On a motion by Williams seconded by Ballard, and passed by the following recorded vote, Mayor Dickerson, yes; Council Members Williams, yes; Eaton, yes; Ballard, yes; Journell, yes; Clark yes; and Harrell, yes; Council certified that the subject discussed in this Executive



Session was the subject identified in the motion to go into Executive Session and only that subject, and that Council discussed no other subject while in Executive Session.

Eaton made a motion that Council approve and authorize the Town Manager to pay \$2300 toward paving a 400' ft section of the easement to the Riverbend Water Tank. Ballard seconded the motion. Voting yes: Mayor Dickerson; Council Members Williams, Harrell, Clark, Eaton, Ballard and Journell. The motion carried by a vote of 7 to 0.

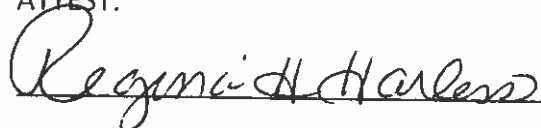
There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.

APPROVED:



Mayor Robert L. Dickerson

ATTEST:



Regina H. Harless, Town Clerk