

1 | **Appomattox Town Council**
Regular Council Meeting
July 8, 2019

The Appomattox Town Council held a Regular Council meeting on Monday, July 8, 2019 at 7:30 p.m. at the Appomattox Municipal Building, 210 Linden Street, Appomattox, Virginia with Mayor Harvey, presiding.

Members present: Jonathan D. Garrett, James Boyce, Mary Lou Spiggle, Timothy W. Garrett, Steven T. Conner and Claudia G. Puckette.

Others present: Chris Sams, Sam Carter, Frances Guill, Sarah Honosky (News & Advance), Michelle Payne (Times-Virginian), Bob Sayre, Don Wilk, Matthew Fifth, Linda Fifth, Wayne Simpson, Peggy Simpson, Beth Turner, Batina Dunnam, Marvin Mitchell, Nathan Simpson, Jeff Elder, Carlton Duck, Susan Adams, John Redding, Kim Ray, Town Treasurer; Gary Shanaberger, Town Manager; Roxanne W. Casto, Clerk.

Mayor Harvey called the meeting to order and welcomed the visitors.

Rev. Carlton Duck led the prayer and Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

Mayor's Comments:

Mayor Harvey reminded everyone of the "Movie Night" at the Courtland Festival Park on Friday, July 19, 2019.

Scheduled Public Appearances:

None

Consent Agenda:

On a motion by Mr. Timothy Garrett, seconded by Ms. Mary Lou Spiggle, Council voted to adopt the consent agenda for July 8, 2019 with the change of allowing the Citizen Comment Period before Unfinished Business. All members present voting aye. Motion carried 6-0.

Public Comment Period:

Mr. Jonathan Garrett wanted to preface a little about the welcome center and feels this may be why a lot of you are here tonight and I appreciate all of you coming out. The Town of Appomattox received an unsolicited request for funding to help promote tourism specifically in the downtown area. This request was to tap into an increased number of visitors that the National Park and museum sees that the downtown area does not always attract. The Town Council is simply weighing all options of this matter to promote tourism and the downtown area. The Town fully supports downtown revitalization and in no way intends to have the proposed welcome center take the place of the current downtown visitor's center. The priority of the Council is to do what is in this community's best interest and having a town that prospers. In doing that it is always important to use the facts to do so rather than to speculate. We too also have concerns that must also be addressed and careful thought and consideration to this matter before any approval action will be taken. I have spoken to many business owners in the downtown community and I understand and appreciate and respect each one of their concerns. I too have some concerns I would like to see resolved. I see the good and bad of both sides of this

but ultimately, I want only what is good for this entire town. With all this being said, I feel it most appropriate to have further discussion at a later time to talk with stakeholders about the impact this may have where pro's vs. con's may be discussed. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Harvey – I'd like to back that up too. I agree with that.

Beth Turner – 404 Cedar Cove Lane, Spout Spring, Virginia and current Main Street business owner and have been for about 27 years or more. My concern is over opening and funding another welcome center in a private business. It is my opinion that if you fund this project it will no doubt take away from the existing visitor's center. What a shame. Bob (Sayre) and I had a "agree to disagree" discussion. He admitted this plan was to boost his traffic flow of people and it would help his overall business. Well how about that. Take away from all of our locally owned businesses on Main Street to fund one private business. I as well with many others do not agree with using our local tax dollars to fund his own self-interest – where is the fairness in that?

Yes, I agree the economy has changed and people being so politically correct has changed many view on the history of our county. Consider why you would take away our hometown atmosphere from our visitors. When they stop on Main Street, they can grab a cup of coffee, hot meal, cash from a local bank, get a haircut, browse through local shops, get excited from the passing train and even stroll through the walking tour. As discussed with Mr. Sayre, he promised to send people downtown to the existing visitor's center. Well I explained to him the one stop to get info is all that people will make to get the info that they need. No one will come downtown to this visitor's center to get any info they acquired at the supposed welcome center. What is the fairness to our taxpaying citizens to fund one privately owned business? How will this plan of giving thousands of dollars away affect our revitalization grant? Thank you.

Batina Dunnam – 2026 Wildway Road, Appomattox, Virginia and owner of Granny Bee's Restaurant – First off, we knew nothing about it. I think it was handled the wrong way. I am getting a few more bits and pieces and a little more understanding but how can the Town give this kind of money when we are in the process of working on a grant. You really think this is going to help? I don't think so. Two things I've learned in restaurant business – 1) people complain about prices and taxes – so I think homework needs to be done – 2) my personal opinion – I don't think we need a visitor's center and a welcome center. I think most people are in a hurry today. Lifestyles have everyone on their phones and they are googling information. I'm just really afraid if you were to have a welcome center it would close the visitors center because people wouldn't be using that one. They would have no need to go to that one. I'm sure the Town Council will make the right decision behind all of this to keep Appomattox historically great like it has always been. Thank you.

Sam Carter – 307 Morton Lane, Appomattox, Virginia – Mayor, Town Council and Town Staff – thank you for the opportunity to speak. I became aware of this situation about 2 weeks ago. I, for one, have always been an advocate, just like you are. I don't think there is nobody in this room that will say they wish bad things to come forth on the Town itself, downtown. Everybody knows that as Mr. Garrett pointed out, but to me if you move it and by the way a Welcome Center/Visitor's Center, to me is the same thing. It's no different. If you move the existing

visitor's center to the museum, to me it is synonymous with the bypass. When you put the bypass in small communities, what happens, it folds, it goes dead. We have a prime example 10 miles down the road. Even when we put in our bypass 20 some years ago it hurt the downtown businesses because if you are not directed downtown people are going to the museum and the courthouse and that's where they are going to stay. They aren't coming downtown. I don't see how anybody really cannot see that.

I mean we've always tried to make downtown our #1 project to grow, to bring income in, so to me I'm sure that you all know a whole lot more about it than I do. You all got the paperwork and the information. I would like to see the visitor's center stay intact. Thank you.

Marvin Mitchell – 398 Morton Lane – I am going to look at it from a different perspective – just as a Town resident and I also own a business on Main Street in downtown. I looked on Google, we have 1780 people in Town, in the County 15,400; so what they [ACWM] want is 11% of the county to finance this welcome center, which I totally disagree with. That is not the right scenario from where I am coming from. Thank you.

Bob Sayre – Thank you all very much for the opportunity to speak to you tonight on this topic. Again, this has been up to discussion for the last couple of years and it was an idea presented to Linda Lipscomb when she was Director of the Museum. I've been here since the museum opened in 2012. I work both here and in Richmond for both visitor engagement and retail (front of house) at all three (3) sites. I have a different perspective being associated with two (2) different national park sites – here and in Richmond as well as, the White House of the Confederacy in Richmond which has a national park next to it at Historic Tredegar. The national park here in Appomattox sees about 62,000 visitors a year. As someone mentioned earlier there have been some issues with political correctness. I would just say we have a very complicated history that gets discussed here and nationally. That has led to some downturn in historic sites and historic homes, more specifically recently Thomas Jefferson's Monticello is one of those places. They are part of the community. We are a part of the community and have been. The national park numbers are going down and it affects us, and it affects the Town. The Town's Visitor's Center numbers have dropped in half over the last 10 years. We do spend a lot of time on a daily basis directing people to downtown and we are a part of the community, we all live here. I would like to say that first. It is not just me but a raising tide, the intent is to have all boats rise at the same time not just me but the whole community. We care very deeply about this community.

I had the opportunity to go to Manassas yesterday and to the Welcome Center on Rt. 66 which is funded by the state and I went to the downtown historic visitor's center in the Town of Manassas in a train depot and I went to the national park that is about 5 miles away on the other side of Rt. 66 and I talked to them about this idea because they have a visitor's center and a welcome center and a national park. They thought it was a wonderful idea and they have done very well having all 3 work in concert. We can get more information from them, Virginia Tourism Corporation and look at other places in the state that have a welcome center, visitor's center and national park. The museum is very supportive of this community and the cost is very specific and it is not to bail the museum out as some folks have said. We still pay 95% of all of our expenses. It is a

\$1.50 per person to potentially attract another 7,000 – 8,000 visitors of the 50,000 that do not go from the Appomattox Courthouse National Park to the Appomattox Visitor's Center. We are underserved in this community and we have a wonderful downtown. Thank you.

Don Wilk – 1848 Church Street in downtown Appomattox – a little unique because I live and work in Appomattox right in the downtown. I want to see lots of people come to the visitor's center downtown and all the fellow merchants certainly without a doubt to thrive. There seems to be a lot of things to consider though, everybody here has mentioned everyone wants to prosper and do well. That's a consideration, will it take away from one entity for another. That remains to be seen. My wife and I are still trying to contribute to the economy and the community here. We are slow going but feel welcome and part of the downtown. I like the Visitor's Center. I've heard good things about it from people coming by our building even though we aren't open for regular hours. I would hate to see that go away. So, just some of our thoughts. We like the private enterprise doing it too. There are merchants that are like their own welcome center. Go to the hotel and they've got all the brochures out for all the other businesses in Town and they send people elsewhere. Certainly, everyone working together is what we want. However, that is best done – that is the question – to be answered and determined. Thank you.

John Redding – 311 Acorn Drive, Appomattox – Over the years, I've had a lot of citizens communicate with me that a visitor's center on the highway would be much more appropriate than one downtown. I've always supported that downtown needs the Visitor's Center and I agree with that continuum. To me this is a simple request for resources to help the museum market Appomattox. If the Council finds out that the amount spent on those resources will not be compensated by additional revenue then they shouldn't go forward but if you do think this amount, relatively small amount, to help investment and will pay off in additional meals tax, sales tax, and lodging tax, then you should go for it.

Mayor Harvey closed the citizen comment period.

Mayor Harvey suggested doing a little more "homework". He asked those in attendance if they would be willing to come back to a public meeting where the Town could do a little research where these things (welcome centers) are working well and if it provides a flow of people from one place to another.

Ms. Spiggle requested the floor – She stated she visited the museum on Friday. I wasn't going to speak about this publicly, but I visited your museum (to Bob Sayre) and spoke with you. Unfortunately, every interactive exhibit was broken.

Mr. Sayre – no ma'am it was not.

Ms. Spiggle – please don't argue – are we going to argue?

Mr. Sayre – you are misrepresenting what you came in and saw. There were three (3) monitors that needed to be rebooted. I explained it to you then and I knew I would have to answer to you (Ms. Spiggle). There are 12 monitors in the gallery, we got the program today from Virginia

Tech to reboot one skit and there are 2 audios that needs to be rewired completely. I asked Gary Shanaberger today if he knew anyone who could do it. There are 12 monitors in the gallery, three (3) needed to be turned back on. Nathan has replaced five (5) of them in the last three (3) months. Not all these things were out.

After volleying comments between Mr. Sayre and Ms. Spiggle, she requested all the things broken or not working properly be repaired before the Town considers funding the Welcome Center request.

Mr. Conner requested the floor – He stated it is not up to us to run their organization, all we are doing is to see if this helps get business to Appomattox. That’s the reason we looked at this and tried to have discussions to help everybody’s business. There are more empty buildings on Main Street than there were 5 years ago. There are more empty buildings in this town than there were 10 years ago and all we are trying to do is keep the businesses we got going so we don’t get anymore empty buildings and look for ways to promote business to keep the ones we have and get new ones.

But of course, if you add a new one (business), I might sell it and guess that’s a conflict – nobody is supposed to gain from anything that happens. If one gains – everybody gains. I think one (Welcome Center) would work better on the highway but they said we should keep both so we will keep both and we are spending right now around \$20.00 per citizen to keep the one on Main Street going. We spent \$16,000 to get ready for the sesquicentennial and it didn’t bring more downtown. This will work and if it doesn’t, we will get the money back - \$15,000 a year we might get it back in water and sewer from flushing the toilets at the museum.

Mrs. Puckette requested the floor – I tried to speak at the last meeting but was shut down and I would like to just say because all the people are here tonight that there is a real estate principle involved here that I know from my real estate experience. Commercial real estate is very different from residential real estate. Residential real estate is purchased on feeling and emotion. You want were it feels like home. Where momma can cook and daddy can sit in his easy chair but commercial estate is driven by numbers and one of the things if any of you had come to me and said I need a piece of commercial property to put my business on the first thing I’m going to do is find out how visible you need to be. What I mean is will your business do better with a high traffic count or does it really matter to you. If you’re an attorney’s office, it probably doesn’t really matter. But if you’re a retail business or a restaurant it means a lot to you. So, I’ve got 3 lots for example – I’ve got one on Main Street, Confederate Blvd., and 460 near the museum. Next thing I’m going to do is call the highway department and ask what the traffic count on these 3 roads is. What I’m probably going to hear is these are not precise numbers, but they are close because I’ve checked this before when we talked about this at earlier dates. Main Street probably has 100-125 cars in a 24-hour period and from my business I know that for every 100 cars that go by I might get 10 people to come into my establishment. My real estate numbers tell me for every 30 people I talked to, I might make one appointment. That’s just the statistics for the business. So, if I find a lot on Confederate Blvd. let’s say the traffic count is 1000, my opportunity to get people to come in just went up. But then again if you go out to 460, I don’t think its quite 10,000 but for the sake for argument, in a 24-hour period. The chances I

would get more people into my business was greatly enhanced. No one wants to hurt anybody here in this community. We've got to figure out a way to get the traffic that is out here on 460 into Town. This is a very cheap way of doing it and one we can pull out of if it doesn't work. All we can do is put up \$23,000 and if all else fails we've got a kiosk. If someone has a better idea I'm all ears. I want to do what's right and best for this community. I grew up here. I've lived here almost all my life. I went away for a while. But I love this town. It hurts me to see that when I came back to Town it isn't much different than when I left in the early 80's.

I agree with Steve – we've got more empty buildings than I've ever seen. If this isn't the answer – that's fine but let's find the answer that will work and I think you are going off of a lot of misinformation. I don't think anyone in this room said last week that we wanted to close down the current visitor's center. I did not hear that and I don't know of anybody here who would say we want to close it. I think you've been feed some misinformation. So let's work together and find a solution that will work because if we don't increase our tax base your taxes are going to have to go up. Do I want that? No. I don't want mine to go up anymore than you do yours.

Mr. Boyce – I think there is a lot of misinformation out there and the only way to keep misinformation from spreading is to be here. Come to the meetings, hear what is said. Don't worry about what someone else says. Be here. Hear with your own ears and make up your own mind. If there is misinformation being given out we need to stop it and the only way to stop it is if you, the citizens, come to this Council and say this Council member said this – then we can iron it out. I don't go for fear mongering because I think that's just another way to try to control the masses. The government does it all the time. I've not heard the first thing said about any kind of food tax being raised to support this. That was one of the objections I heard. The food tax is going to go up – that has not been mentioned in this council. I've not heard close the center down – that's not been said. We are not trying to close the center, we are trying to grow the center. The only way to grow the center is to get more people in this town. It's going to be up to us to grow this and we have to find a way to grow it together. With that being said I'd like to make a motion to table this matter until another time.

ACTION ITEM:

On a motion by Mr. Boyce, seconded by Mr. Timothy Garrett, Council voted to table this matter [consideration of adopting a resolution amending the FY 2020 Operating Budget for the Appomattox Welcome Center initiative requested by the American Civil War Museum] until another time. All in favor – yes. Motion carried 6-0.

Mayor Harvey – I am going to go back to my original request to hold a public meeting and I'd like for all of you to come to that. We are going to try to get some better facts and information and try to straighten out some of the misinformation out there. Mr. Shanaberger has suggested bringing someone from the Virginia Tourism Corporation to Appomattox who would be willing to come to a meeting.

Thank you for being here and speaking about your passion regarding this.

Unfinished Business:

None

New Business:

See ACTION ITEM above

Standing Committee Reports:

None

Town Manager's Report:

Mr. Shanaberger reported on the following:

- Experience Appomattox will be hosting "Experience the Holidays" on Saturday, December 7, 2019 from 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. as a free community event. The Experience Appomattox committee requested a waiver of the \$25.00 fee to use Abbitt Park. Council concurred with the request for the waiver.
- There will be a bid opening on Wednesday, July 10, 2019 for the Meadowlark drainage/streetlight project. If funding allows there may be funds available for additional housing projects.
- There will be a kickoff meeting on August 6, 2019 of the Town Planning Commission to begin work on the Town's Comprehensive Plan.
- Updating of the zoning maps by WW Associates continues.

Council Concerns:

Mr. Jonathan Garrett would like to see the Town fund a firework display for the 4th of July in the future.

Council provided consensus not to let Appomattox fall by the wayside for the 4th of July firework display.

Mr. Jonathan Garrett also thanked the Public Works department for correcting the issues with the slides and park equipment at the Kiddie Park.

Mr. Jim Boyce reported a streetlight is out on Burke Street.

Adjournment:

On a motion by Mr. Jonathan Garrett, seconded by Mr. Timothy Garrett, Council voted to adjourn at 8:12 pm. All members present voting aye. Motion carried 6-0.

Roxanne W. Casto
Clerk of Council

Paul D. Harvey, Mayor