



Council & Citizens

3-1-2022

It is my privilege to report to you the State of the Town of Hurt, VA. This is my second opportunity to share with you the opportunities, challenges, accomplishments and aspirations for our Town from the perspective of being your Mayor.

But first, we must begin with the acknowledgement and recognition of our history and heritage. Our Town's story began over two centuries ago circa 1740 when Captain Benjamin Clement arrived in the area and began amassing land holdings in the area that would one day be called "Hurt" Va. He built his home circa 1770, by hand, on land in the Staunton River valley that was provided to him by a Royal Land Grant in 1741. He named his home "Clement Hill".

Captain Clement and his company of local militia Rangers provided to the local settlers protection from attacks from roving bandits.

Captain Clement understood the value of the fertile land on the banks of the beautiful Staunton River as he farmed the cash crop of Colonial America – bright leaf tobacco.

In 1775, a partnership was formed with Charles Lynch to create the first Gunpowder Mill in this area. Nearly a century later, another leading Pittsylvania citizen, Henry Hurt, became associated with the property when soon-to-become-State Senator John L. Hurt bought Clement Hill. From Hurt, Clement Hill passed to his nephew, also named John L. Hurt ("Jr." to the public), a philanthropist bent on bringing prosperity to the residents of northern Pittsylvania through industrial development. From Hurt's efforts came the growth of our town. Our town prospered through the Klopman textile years providing good jobs for many of our residents. Unfortunately, textile industries decided to relocate overseas and our beloved Klopman closed forever. This loss caused our Town to drastically decline as jobs, our children and other businesses that supported Klopman left and the Staunton Plaza, once proudly proclaimed as Hurt's Main Street, rapidly declined as stores closed and vacant storefronts remain to this day.

I know many of you have dreams and visions for our Town as well as I have. Without our dreams and visions we are like a ship at sea with no fuel. We drift along with the current taking us who knows where. I would like to share a few of my dreams and visions with you. I dream of the day when Clement Hill has been restored to its original luster atop the hill overlooking the entrance to our Town and a revitalized Staunton Plaza, as a lighthouse

marks the way to safe harbor on a rainy, stormy night. Clement Hill is our beacon. I envision a beautiful new icon were Staunton Plaza now sets that is the center of commerce for a busy community. I dream of the Solar Farm providing low-cost energy to the residents and businesses of our Town. New industries located in the SVMP Park that provide livelihoods to our residents allowing them to work closer to home and providing more family time together. I dream of a Farmers Market where people can shop and gather as well as a park in Town where children and pets can go to and play and run loose. I dream of a slab behind Town Hall uplifted to an amphitheater for Friday night events where families can bring their children for interactive entertainment. I dream of more sidewalks and beautiful streetlights adorning our main street with a Town Flag adorning them. These are some of mine, let me hear yours. Starting today join me and let's work together to make OUR dreams OUR reality. I am waiting for your call.

As the Phoenix rose from the ashes, so is our town. We are currently witnesses to history as we all are seeing the renaissance of our Town as our re-branding takes place. From our new Town sign (*designed by a FCA student*) located at the entry into Hurt as you cross the new bridge from Altavista, to our new Town Logo (*designed by a HES student*) that is now our Official Logo and Header on our stationary. Everywhere I go with this new logo the compliments come in as friends and peers are taking about our "New" Town Sign and Logo. They always ask, "What's happening in Hurt, it's different"? Friends, you are witnessing the process of completely re-branding our Town. We have embarked on a new path that if carried through fruition will see our town grow to something that several years ago was unimaginable. This is being noticed by our surrounding neighbors. You know the old saying, "Dress for Success". Hurt is on the move and the professionalism of our Staff is a huge part of this. ***I ask that you embrace this new path and become a part of history as we take this journey together get involved. There has been no time better than NOW to live in the Town of Hurt. Don't just watch become a player in our Town's Future.***

We are all working together to continue the positive trajectory that our town is travelling on. Our Town may be small, but our dreams and hopes should always be ambitious and oriented to our future. Isaac Newton stated that objects at rest tend to stay at rest. Objects in motion tend to stay in motion. Hurt is definitely in motion and we intend to keep our Town rolling!

First, I would like to thank every citizen of our town who connected with us regarding their needs, their questions, and their concerns. YOU are the reason why we serve, and we value your ever-increasing involvement in the governance and growth of our hometown. Next, I would like to thank the Council for working with me as I bring a business approach to the operations and management of our Town. This is obviously a new approach for most of

Council and they are fully supportive as they see the positive results. Our Council members are participants in my business approach as individual members are assigned projects that they oversee and handle from start to finish, making monthly reports to council on their progress. This collectively makes us stronger as Council members actually get hands on experience in being responsible for a projects completion. This approach helps us get so much more done in a much shorter period of time and the experience that the Council member gets is awesome. I want to thank the following Council members for their contributions on the following projects: Kathy Keeseë who worked on the final layout of our logo (she summed up our Town in the three words that appear on our logo, "**Integrity, Community, and Innovation**") excellent work, she also worked with our staff on finalizing the colors on the new town sign and many of the decorations that adorned Town Hall during our Christmas Celebration. Donney Johnson handled the revision of our employee handbooks for staff as well as our Police Department working with Ellen Brumfield and Chief Lovelace. Donney also makes himself available for all of our VDH meetings in regard to our water system and the work that is being done. Shirley Barksdale-Hill for working on our minority hiring policies and suggestions on how to make our town more diverse, this study is still in process. Shirley is also working with Town Attorney John Eller on updating many of our completely out of date Town Ordinances. Collin Adams for working on a project to secure our pump station from damage should a driver lose control of their vehicle as they come down E. Hurt Road, and overseeing the House numbering as outlined by the county. All of these projects are important and thanks to each for their help. Gary Poindexter will be working with Treasurer Ellen Brumfield on the upcoming 2022-2023 budget as well.

There is only one goal here, and that is to leave our Town better than we found it, and nothing is too large or small to tackle. We are here to solve problems and not to "kick them down the road" ***The problems we face today are ours to own and to fix.*** We rely upon you as our council to communicate with our citizens to assist with keeping us informed of things that need attention. We set our goals and projects and work towards their success with a laser focus. We do not settle; we only seek to improve.

A lot of things have changed as we make Town Hall more effective and efficient. All of us are still affected by COVID -19 as we all have seen friends, relatives, and neighbors' struggle with this pandemic. This is still a work in progress as we try to make Town Hall safe and still offer the services that you and your family and business deserve.

The Town of Hurt is considered to be one of the safest Towns in Virginia based on data from the Commonwealth of Virginia!!! The Hurt Police Department is continually evolving as Council works to increase staff. Deputy Town Manager/Director of Public Safety Mike Jones and Chief Jason Lovelace have introduced the "Community Policing" approach to our

town, and it seems to be working well. The addition of Officer Thomas Sawyer has proven to be the "excellent fit" we all strived to achieve. Officer Sawyer has already made a very "Big" impression on our town. We are also looking at why our town does not attract as many quality minority applicants as we would like. We are currently waiting for this study to be available. We are striving to have our police department reflect the community it serves. We are so excited to be able to protect our children as the Optatrafic speed enforcement unit installation is now complete and operational in front of HES as well. We are one of the 1st towns to install this state-of-the-art traffic speed enforcement tool in Virginia so speeders beware!

And of course, we are so proud of Hurt Elementary School being named one of the top 10 Schools in Virginia!! This is just another reason why Hurt is going to go from GOOD to GREAT!

Chief Lovelace is proving to be the "right" person as our Chief of Police. We offer congratulations to him and admire his ability to mold our Police Department into exactly what we had envisioned. Chief Lovelace is currently modernizing many of the desperately needed policies, regulations, and procedures to carry us into the next decade. I am so proud of him becoming his own person, such as recommending the fundraiser for "Police Santa" where our Police Department distributed over \$2,800.00 in Christmas gifts to local children who may have never had a chance to meet a police officer in such a friendly manner; this is only one of his many ideas.

Mike Jones is currently working with us as the Public Safety Director as we implement several new policies in this area. In addition to supporting the police and public safety efforts, Mike has a wealth of knowledge in government operations, and we are constantly tapping into his 46 years of executive experience. Mike assists the Town in almost every aspect of operations as we move forward. I just recently ask Mike to assist me in working with the state in reference to the State's Hazardous Mitigation Plan centering on the Town of Hurt. Mike's input is second to none and he is actually spearheading this project by providing much of the information that references our Town.

I'm sure most of you have noticed the increased professionalism of our staff. As a Town, we are very fortunate to have the professional quality of staff that Treasurer Ellen Brumfield and Clerk/Internet Administrator Kelsie Sligh bring to our operation at Town Hall. We are so proud of our employees who excel in being NICE as they serve our citizens!

Being a responsible steward of your tax money is a key aspect of my job. I am very proud to inform you that our Clerk, Kelsie Sligh has been instrumental in reducing our Delinquent Debt by 80% in the past 12 months. It has been years since our Delinquent Debt has been this low, if ever. This is unheard of, and special thanks go out to her. When I asked Staff to

concentrate on this project, I had full faith in their ability to accomplish this and I am so proud of them. Kelsie also just recently established our new resident contact system that many of you have been signing up to receive notices from the town via your home or cell phones. This has been needed for years and now it's here. Kelsie has also worked very hard to catch up the boxes of abatements that were let behind from years of neglect. Now abatements are handled as soon as they come in.

Ellen Brumfield has proven to be the right person for the Treasurer's position. She concentrates her time on fiscal matters and makes sure our financial accounts balance every day. Ellen has also brought our Payroll up to standards which has proven to be a Herculean task. She has also gotten our taxes filed correctly and on time, no more penalties. She and Kelsie have worked with our Auditors to make sure payables have the correct checks and balances in place. Ellen will be a key partner in the development of our Budget for the new fiscal year. Ellen is also instrumental implementing the state's DMV STOP program that will suspend the registration of vehicles for persons who fail to pay their personal property taxes to the Town. It has been so unfair to those of you who pay on time; every time while others went for years without paying. Additionally, she and Mike Jones will be constantly seeking Federal, State and Local Gov't Grants that the Town can utilize. She is a trusted and valuable asset to our Town.

What can be said about our new "Public Works Coordinator"? Simply one word - "Impressive". Joe has fit in like he has worked with this group for years. He comes to us with a strong understanding of procedures and personal experiences that he gained over years of service in New Jersey. He has only been with us for a few months and already handling this department like an "old veteran". We brought in Water and Sewer Professional Tom Fore who has recently been appointed to the **"Water and Wastewater and On-site Sewage Systems Professional Board with the Virginia Department of Professional Occupational Regulations"**. Tom is mentoring Joe on the many intricate laws and regulations involving Water and Sewer operations, working closely with the Virginia Health Department. Joe and Tom are working together on conducting a comprehensive inspection of our aging water infrastructure, and correctly mapping this into our data base via google earth. For the first time, our Town will have a specifically detailed location readily available of all meters, cut-offs valves and hydrants on Google Earth, pretty impressive. **This is extremely important in emergency situations and the Town has never had this capability before.** All indications are Joe will be the first licensed and certified water professional the Town has ever had as he plans to sit for his test as soon as he is eligible.

I am happy to report Joe has completed overseeing the installation of the remaining 260 cellular read meters. He was pushing extremely hard during less than normal weather conditions to accomplish this task. Our current billing was completed with 100% cellular

read meters. Joe has also personally installed some of the new cellular read water meters when a replacement was needed. **Joe is also actively working with residents helping them locate leaks as the new system informs us of suspected leaks within our Town.** I knew he was a keeper when the weekend before he was scheduled to start. The Town had a feeder line compromised by VDOT near HES and this is near Joe's home. Without hesitation, he came out to observe what was being done and actually stayed on site with me through the entire process.

The professionalism and efficiency that Kelsie, Ellen, and Joe bring to the business of our town is second to none. They always are one step ahead of me when it comes to suggestions and ways to make our town better. From our new accounting software system to more social events, everything they touch seems to be a success and they are always looking for new ways to get our residents involved. They have all been involved in many of the new procedures, policies, and check lists that have been implemented to make Town Hall more effective and responsive to our community.

You may have noticed Compton & Nichols Industrial Contractors working in the area between the Altavista Water Treatment Plant and the Town of Hurt Pump Station. At this time, they have completed phase 1 of our water quality project and we are moving forward planning the implementation of Phase 2 work that will involve aerators in our water tank. Water services are very important to our residents and our businesses as well as Fire Protection.

This past year I was very happy to sign a contract with a Solar Development Company located in Cape Canaveral Florida, Clean Footprint. Their CEO has visited Town Hall several times this summer negotiating the contract and walking the Key Industrial Complex where the Solar Farm will be located. They are moving forward with the project and engineers are soon to be on site. I appreciate the support that Pittsylvania County Supervisor Tim Dudley showed as we moved forward with this project.

Economic Development has been a focus of our town for the past several years and we are starting to see the benefits of this hard work. We were happy in June of this year to make the public announcement that Staunton River Plastics, a Fortune 500 company, is locating in our Town. Construction is currently under way and soon the hiring process will begin. They will very soon be bringing 250 well-paying jobs to our community along with other support personnel to service the industry. This is the first of many new industries we hope as others will come as the Town of Hurt and Staunton River Regional Investment Facility Authority continue to work together to bring industry to the Town of Hurt. You will very soon see the benefits as our "new" Regional approach starts to take shape on the Northern end of our County. I am proud to say the Town of Hurt, Supervisor Tim Dudley and

Pittsylvania County have a fantastic working relationship in regard to Economic Development for the Northern end of our county. This is a very exciting time to live in Hurt. At this point, the only question is how large our STAR will be on the map.

Last but certainly not least, I would be remiss if I did not include the financial status of our Town. ***The Audit report that was just delivered to the Town of Hurt is certainly the best our Town has ever received.*** Our financial history has not always been this way. Our Council, I as Mayor and our staff understand that financial transparency is OWED to those who pay their town taxes. We proudly hold no hidden secrets as any citizen may inspect our budget and its process if they so desire. The annual audit report is your document that reflects the financial facts as well as the financial management of our town. This is the proof that the structure, guidelines and fiscal safeguards we have implemented are working. It is also a testament to our staff and their dedication to deliver the most professional, efficient and effective service to our residents that can be delivered. The financial health of our town is strong thanks to the changes that have been implemented. This cannot be taken for granted it is something that has to be nurtured and maintained. We must stay on course without deviation. **Hurt has remained debt free!** With this said, there, is soon to be a point coming on the horizon when the town will have to assume some debt to finance the mandated Consent Order issued by the Virginia Department of Health. We are actually in the steps of closing the loan on Phase I of this project. We are also renegotiating the process with the Commonwealth of Virginia that will provide considerable financial savings to the Town of Hurt when the process is complete, and the loan is fully closed.

Most of Virginia's cities and towns are utilizing critical infrastructure that has long passed it useful life and needs to be replaced. This is an expensive issue that will only get worse as time passes and the Town of Hurt is no different. All of us are aware of our aging water system that is quickly approaching 40 years of operation. We are seeing signs of the system's age in more frequent break downs, especially during the winter months. However, we still cannot forgo the position we are in with our water system and it's all the more important for us to financially prepare for the inevitable. There WILL be a major breakdown one day despite our best efforts to maintain a system that has outlived its useful life! We are working to fix years of neglect, and we will fix it! This Consent Order came about due to our aging infrastructure that was NOT properly attended to and we are working to ensure it gets updated. Clean, plentiful water is a must-have for every town. In the past two years, we have taken steps to better prepare the town for this day by budgeting additional dollars for this very expenditure. Also, our taxes and fees remain lower in comparison to many towns of our size, and we work very hard to keep your taxes low.

As of January 21, 2022 our cash position and reserves totaled \$1,142,800, a 41% increase over the prior year. We accomplished this, not by cutting the necessary items in the budget but by pinching every dollar we spend, saving on contracts, negotiating every process, and increasing our infrastructure reserves. No doubt our uses of ARPA Funds have helped as well.

I closed last year with this comment, and it is just as important Now as Then. "We must remember to watch closely and listen diligently to everyone, because there are people who still need and deserve our help. There are some among us who have struggled and received little to no support." It is incumbent upon all of us to make sure NO one is left behind as our town moves forward. Our community is incomplete without the total sum of its parts strong. We must work together to preserve what we all love — our beautiful home: "Hurt."

Remember, a rising tides raises all our boats! *I am SO honored to serve you all!*

Gary Hodnett
Mayor, Town of Hurt