

Town of Hurt, Virginia  
Council Meeting Minutes  
July 18, 2023

Hurt Town Council held its monthly work session Tuesday, July 18, 2023, at the Hurt Fire Department. The meeting opened at 6:00 PM by Mayor Gary Hodnett with a quorum present.

**Roll Call**

Members present: Mr. Gary Poindexter, Vice-Mayor Bob Majure, Mr. Jeremiah Knowles, Mr. Glenn Mitchell, and Mr. Pierre Richard

Members absent: Mrs. Kathy Keesee

**Closed Session**

A motion was made to enter closed session to discuss personnel, real estate, and prospective business as authorized by VA FOIA §2.2-3711 A (1, 3, 5).

Motion: Mr. Poindexter

Second: Mr. Majure

Passage: Unanimous

Council entered closed session at 6:03 PM and exited closed session at approximately 7:00 PM.

**Open Session**

A motion was made to return to open session and to certify that only personnel, real estate, and prospective business matters were discussed in closed session, as required by VA FOIA § 2.2-3712 (D).

Motion: Mr. Poindexter

Second: Mr. Majure

Passage: Unanimous

A brief recess was taken, followed by an Invocation given by Mr. Poindexter and the Pledge of Allegiance led by Mayor Hodnett.

**Welcome/Opening Remarks:** None

**Consent Agenda/Additions:** None

**Public Comments:** None

**General Business**

**New Business:** Solar Farm/Key Industrial Complex (SUP Permit and Option Request): A motion was made to advertise for and hold a public hearing for the Pivot Energy SUP application during council's upcoming August 15<sup>th</sup> work session.

Motion: Mr. Knowles

Second: Mr. Majure

Passage: Unanimous

Mayor Hodnett stated we will get that ready for advertisement.

**Old Business:**

**Office Remodel continues...**

Mayor Hodnett stated I don't know if you have been to Town Hall lately, but there is a lot going on. We are all working in the Council Chamber. They've got the police department and all the other offices torn up and they were working today on bulletproof materials and stuff like that, getting everything squared away. We're going to have to do an awful lot of extra work because of 50 years with nothing ever being done to the building, so we've got to bring it up to current code. That's going to take a considerable amount of extra time. We're trying to figure out how to put panic switches on the bulletproof doors.

We've basically put it out there to the material supplier and asked them what works best for them because there's so many options out there, it's just unbelievable.

### **Purchase of Staunton Plaza**

Mayor Hodnett stated as all of you know, we have concluded our purchase of the plaza, so it is the property of the Town of Hurt. We will be showing it starting immediately, with some people coming into the Winn Dixie building, which is 28,000-30,000 square feet. We need to do a little cleanup in there to get it semi-presentable. The county is willing to kick in a little bit of money on that and they're asking us if we would split it with them. If we could, I'd like to ask you guys to consider putting up \$2,500 for the cleanup on the inside of the Winn Dixie building. Mr. Poindexter stated I think this early in the fiscal year we certainly have some funding available in different line items, and we can discuss which one, but let me just say that I'm exceptionally proud of the accomplishment of finally being able to finalize an initiative that we've been working on for years. I want to publicly thank every person who has spent many hours making that possible. It has been anything but easy. That's a sizable step forward for our town. It has tremendous potential to change our landscape, both literally and metaphorically. I make a motion to authorize the expenditure of \$2,500 toward initial cleanup at the Stanton Plaza property to make it more presentable to prospective clients.

Motion: Mr. Poindexter

Second: Mr. Knowles

Passage: Unanimous

Mr. Majure asked if we were allowed to discuss the appraisal. Mayor Hodnett stated I don't see why not. Attorney Eller stated it is public record. Mr. Majure stated some people may be interested that the property was purchased for \$165,000. It appraised at over \$760,000. Attorney Eller stated that is the tax assessment. Mr. Majure stated usually those are a little bit lower than the actual price. Mr. Poindexter stated it is an important distinction that tax assessment appraisal generally is less than what a third party independent appraisal would be. Mr. Majure stated that from the current leases that exist, we could pay off the purchase price in just a few years based on the amount of rent income that it's currently producing and it's not even currently filled up. Thank you all for everyone that's been a part of this project. It's going to do some great things for the town. Mayor Hodnett stated one thing I would like to add is don't never be afraid of prayer because I can tell you I said a whole lot of them over this building. If you don't believe it works, then you should try it sometime. Another thing, I've been getting a lot of feedback from the community on the building, and some people don't understand and they're very concerned as to why we would buy it. Just what you said is reason enough. We've been offered three times the amount that we paid for the building. We know there's people out there who want it. We're working on a couple of grants to move forward with getting the building cleaned, put some lipstick on this pig, and really get it looking good. I've talked to some people about a sign out on the road, doing a digital sign so that it will advertise for every business in the plaza. The reason I'm going here on some of these things is, I think it's important with Sami here to get it out there in the paper, and the public record as to what we're looking at for the future/down the road for the plaza. We want to fix the sign, we want to fix the building, and we've talked about the A frame, that's all part of the building down on the lower end, using some of the cedar shingles, like the storefronts that some people have and look pretty good. We can take this thing wherever we want to take if we get these grants. They're going to help us with the remediation that we've got to do, and the asbestos and mold, so we're working on that. We're working on some possible solar grants that could come up and maybe beneficial to us. We want to assure everybody that we didn't just blunder into this thing, and trip and fall. This is what we came up with, this was well planned, and it's been well thought out. It will be an extremely good asset to the town through the years as far as contributing dollars to the general account. That will offset some of the taxes that people are paying. It's part of our overall economic plan. I know it's hard for some people to think that we can come up with an economic plan, but we have things and this was well

thought out. It bothers me a lot when I hear somebody say these guys don't know what they're doing and it makes no sense for them to buy that. I can't even figure out where those comments come from because anybody that will take the blinders off and look towards the future understands what we're trying to do here. It's for the people of this town, to benefit them in the money that they pay out in taxes. We're trying to relieve that burden on people as much as we can and you can't do it without economic development. You can sit around the kitchen table all you want to talk about how we need to cut this position out at Town Hall, or we need to cut that out, they make too much money, and all of these things, but none of that will get you even close to where you need to be. All you're doing is putting a band aid on the wound and you need to understand why. Mr. Majure stated you should also make light of that, how we were able to purchase it through ARPA funds. Mayor Hodnett replied that the ARPA funds made the purchase available because there was an influx of cash into the town. Without that influx of cash from ARPA and how it is used we couldn't have done it.

Mr. Poindexter stated along that line it's important to remember that as the Mayor mentioned it, the influx of ARPA funds made this initiative possible for us to do without having to either borrow money, or to increase taxes and fees to pay for it. This is not something that is put on the back of the citizens at the local level. I guess if you want to get mad at somebody about it, and I don't know why you would, but if you do, maybe Congress in the White House because they passed the ARPA bill and the President signed it. It's federal tax money that we all pay and this is a great case of it coming back to a small locality here in SOVA that needed it. Ultimately, there's nothing but good that is going to come out of that. Another thing that I'd like to add that I thought about more recently... As far as the concerns that have been raised about a municipality getting involved in this type of venture, it came to me what happened in my own hometown of Rocky Mount, which I realize is like Altavista, larger than Hurt, but the principle is similar. There was an old building in the downtown section that during all of my high school and college days, it was a hardware store and a farm equipment dealer. When those people retired and moved on, it sat idle for a while. The town took the initiative to acquire and renovate it and it is now what is regionally known as the Harvester Performance Center. Some of you may have been to an event over there. If not, check out its website – you can find any kind of music, comedy, or other entertainment that you want to go to. What that's done is it's brought people into the town. It brings ideas into the town. It brings life and activity and vitality into a town that had been hit hard by loss of legacy industries, not too unlike Hurt and Altavista in this area. There was Lane Furniture over there too, and it closed, so we can relate. Guess what people do when they go to an event – they go out to eat, they get gas, they go shopping, and they stay in local hotels. It's nothing but gain, it's life in the community. It's sales tax revenue, meals tax, lodging tax, and the list just goes on. The question would be why you would not do something like this when you have a rare opportunity; I'll leave it at that. Mayor Hodnett stated since I moved back here from Carolina that's probably the number one thing that I've heard from anybody you want to talk to in town is why don't you do something with the plaza, I'm tired of riding by it and looking at it. Well, now something's going to be done. Your question is being answered. It will be a tremendous asset to this town, now and going forward. I suggest to everybody... if you've got any comments, you got any interest, any ideas as to what you'd like to see – and this was in the newsletter that went out yesterday – we encourage you to call us and talk to us about it, get in the car and come down. This money that we're talking about using to clean up the Winn Dixie building is because next week, I'm showing it. That's how fast we're moving. We're literally showing this building very soon after it became ours. I've had a lot of people calling and asking about what we have for rent, interested in doing this, interested in doing that. We need to get with the program to get this built and looking better because the better it looks, the more people will come. We'll be able to generate more revenue for us because we can ask more dollars per square foot, when we've got people wanting to come to Hurt and wanting to be in the plaza. We have to reinvest in the building and I think that we're going to be able to get a lot

of the money that we need from outside resources to do this. It's not going to be on the backs of the taxpayers. Mr. Knowles stated once we take the time and we get the building cleaned up and looking nice, how people view Hurt will change. Right now people drive through Hurt to get to Altavista. In two years, people will come to Hurt who are not going to Altavista. Mayor Hodnett replied this is our main street. When people drive through and they see this, that's what they will remember Hurt as. We're going to change that entire perception of how this town is viewed by this one purchase. Mr. Poindexter stated to go along with all of that, how many years have we talked about what a blight the condition of that property was for our community. I don't know of anyone who has not agreed with that, that I've talked to in the 10 to 12 or more years that I've been involved with Council. That's putting it mildly; I have used the term "albatross on the back of the community" a few times and I don't think that's too far off. I'm happy to see this as a relief – at least some kind of prospect is on the horizon to elicit a change. I would just ask that people be patient and understand something that I said a few years ago when we were trying to get Staunton River Plastics – economic development is a process, not an event, and it can seem like geologic time. I know that sounds like a science teacher, and I am one, but really it can seem like that some days. What we're working on doing here is not something that we're going to suddenly see some miraculous transformation next week, or even next month. This is going to require patience and perseverance over a timescale of months to years. If we stay with that and follow through on it, I think you will see a paradigm shift; I really do. Mr. Richard stated in the long run, if things work out and it makes us a little bit of money, then maybe the shopping center would be a good place to have a senior center for the town. Again, Mayor Hodnett said this is all years away. It's going to take a lot of time, but that is something to look at in the long-term future. Mr. Poindexter stated all of this is a long-term proposition and if we don't think long term, then we don't have a future, we might as well close down. Mayor Hodnett replied if you don't think economic development, you've got none. Mr. Poindexter stated there's no surer way to get away from having to raise taxes, fees, and things like that, than to bring money in from other sources. Well, business/commerce or industry, that's the main way that you do them. It's not coming if you don't do what it takes to attract it. If they get the impression that you're resistant to change, and want to live in the past, they're not coming. They're not interested in that. Mayor Hodnett stated some of the minutes that we've had here lately aren't sterling recommendations for our community, and people read that stuff. If you don't think it matters, you ask business people. I'll tell you something else that matters more than that is the willingness of this community to buy into their belief and buy into their dream, that if we're not willing to invest money in our town, and do stuff like this, why should a business invest in our town. If we don't believe in ourselves, nobody else will do it and that's the bottom line. I can tell you, we've got six people sitting at this table who believe it and we're behind it.

Revisiting Town Hall renovation, Mr. Poindexter asked I know that there's an undue delay of some of the material but what specifically is being worked on in the building in the meantime while we're awaiting the rest of those materials? Mayor Hodnett replied that the clerk's office and the police department are completely gutted. They're in the council chamber, along with Joe's office that's gutted they will start putting up sheetrock and bulletproof material. They were cutting some of the stripping for that today. HVAC is finished upstairs. Mr. Poindexter asked what about the electrical and plumbing? Mayor Hodnett replied no, plumbing hasn't started or electrical. The sheet rock has to go up first. We will be moving to the office trailer that's in the parking lot as soon as they get ready to start sanding that sheet rock and we'll have to move out the computer system because the DMV stop has to be in a separate entity. We've got to get that in there plus we're worried about sheet rock dust damaging the computer system. We're going to finish upstairs before we move downstairs for the PD. There's two containers down there and it took two containers to hold everything that was in our building.

### **Returned Check Policy**

Mayor Hodnett stated this is the paper that was on the wall when you came into Town Hall. I know most of you have probably seen that before. It has been there for a couple of years and we also have, John if you like this, Virginia Code 15-106 about what we can do and the \$50 is there so we think we are on solid ground. Mr. Majure asked if this was the existing return check policy? Mayor Hodnett replied this is the one that we recently just started going by based on the problem that Ellen was talking about at the last meeting about the NSF's on the auto-checks. She is asking that we officially adopt this as our policy. Attorney Eller questioned the last sentence about delinquency and only being cash payments. Mr. Poindexter stated if you take out the first no it will flow a lot better. Also at the first there, I would say customers instead of residents because it could be an out-of-town property owner. Customers will be notified by certified mail for each returned (ed past tense) check. Attorney Eller stated in this third one, we are going to say customers instead of residents. Mr. Knowles stated under the electronic payments, too. Mr. Poindexter stated it states on it "customers account will not receive credit;" under that I would change the "all" to "any." I think that would be clearer – will not receive credit for any declined electronic payments. Mayor Hodnett asked if we wanted to pass it or get it corrected then passed? Mr. Majure asked if this was pressing? Mayor Hodnett replied yeah, so there is the change of "resident" to "customer" and the few grammar errors. A motion was made to approve the returned check policy as presented, with the changes discussed.

Motion: Mr. Majure

Second: Mr. Knowles

Passage: Unanimous

### **Report from Mayor – Gary Hodnett**

Mayor Hodnett stated I don't really have much to say; does anyone else have anything to say? Attorney Eller stated I am glad we got the plaza. Mayor Hodnett stated I did appreciate the work that you put in. You put in a lot of extra hours and a couple of trips to Chatham, so John you did a great job on it. Attorney Eller replied I am glad to help; once you got the price, we had to make it happen. Mayor Hodnett stated it was worthwhile and a little extra hard work is nothing as long as we got it. I think that this will be something good for the town for a long time, and I suspect most of the people in the town when they heard that we had purchased it were truly surprised. I do believe that they thought this was something they would never see the day come for, based on the conversations I've had with them. Mr. Majure stated I've had conversations like that. Mr. Poindexter stated it finally broke a decades-long log jam. Mayor Hodnett stated thank everyone for coming.

The meeting adjourned at 7:32 PM.

*Kelsie Anderson*

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Kelsie Anderson, Clerk

*Gary Hodnett*

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Gary Hodnett, Mayor