



November 11, 2024
Town Council Approved Minutes

- CALL TO ORDER: Mayor Whited opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m. Council members, Drew Beard, Fred Catlin, Jean Goodine, Patrick O’Connell, Brad Schneider, and Gail Swift were present. Town Manager/Clerk Barbara Batson was present and Town Attorney Mr. Martin Crim attended remotely.
- APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA: Mr. Catlin requested a discussion regarding the pathway to the post office be added to the agenda, under old business. Mr. Catlin made a motion to approve the amended agenda, Ms. Swift seconded and a roll call vote was taken:

Mr. Beard voted “yes”	Mr. Catlin voted “yes”
Ms. Goodine voted “yes”	Mr. O’Connell voted “yes”
Mr. Schneider voted “yes”	Ms. Swift voted “yes”
Mayor Whited voted “yes”	
And the motion passed 7-0.	

- MINUTES: Ms. Swift motioned to accept the minutes for October 15, 2024, Mr. Schneider seconded and a roll call vote was taken:

Mr. Beard voted “yes”	Mr. Catlin voted “yes”
Ms. Goodine voted “yes”	Mr. O’Connell voted “yes”
Mr. Schneider voted “yes”	Ms. Swift voted “yes”
Mayor Whited voted “yes”	
And the motion passed 7-0.	

REPORTS:

Mayor’s Report: Mayor Whited shared that he had the distinct honor and pleasure to attend the event the high school hosted honoring veterans. He thanked the students and administration for putting on a great show, that included great music and some local veterans who encouraged young folks to consider public service.

Mayor Whited took a few minutes to talk about veterans. He served 10 and a half years in the Navy then spent time as a civilian Department of Defense staff, where he has done a few tours at the Pentagon. As some of you may know, the corridors of the Pentagon are filled with beautiful portraits. You'd expect portraits of former Secretary Generals and Admirals, but there is also some wonderful work of ships, aircrafts, and our service men serving overseas. One that's always stuck with him is when you come in the formal entrance it has a beautiful sweeping view of the mall and there's a big grand staircase as you go up to the Secretary of Defense's office and on one of the landings there's a beautiful big painting of a military family kneeling in prayer.

It's not clear what kind of church they're in or who they are, they're facing away from you, but underneath that painting is a quote from Isaiah, it says "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Here I am. Send me!" Since the founding of the Republic just about 250 years ago 41 million Americans have raised their right hand and swore an oath to the Constitution and served our country and they have answered; "send me" when the country asked. Mayor Whited shared that he thinks it's important to pause and remember that as we come to the end of a very tumultuous political season, to think about the fact there's 41 million Americans that were Democrats, and they were Republicans, and they were black, and they were white, and they were Latino, and they were Asian Americans, who said there's much more that binds us together than splits us apart. They represented the best of democracy and liberty and I think it's important for us to think about that and I know it's become common place for folks to thank the veterans for their service, but I also encourage you that when you see a veteran, pull them aside and talk to them about their stories and offer a special thank you.

On to the lighter business of the Town, I am happy to report that Mountain Diva Boutique on Main Street anticipates opening the weekend before Thanksgiving. You may have noticed the construction going on where the bank used to be. I also spoke with Natasha Currey, and she anticipate opening her jewelry business sometime in the early spring.

Mayor Whited also reported he is working on a possible solution regarding the stairs at 322 Main Street. The Inn is planning on burying the power lines in that area, and he wants to talk to VDOT about widening the sidewalk. He also shared that the town office will move on December 1 across the gymnasium from its current location. He understands that Social Services is moving into Rush River commons this week and Rapp at Home will also be moving there in the next couple of weeks.

December 8 is the Christmas parade in Little Washington and he will be hosting an open house at town hall 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. before the parade. The town holiday party will be held on December 15, 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Treasurer report: There was no report.

Town Attorney: Mr. Crim reported that the voluntary settlement agreement has been submitted to the court and we are awaiting a judge to be appointed. Also, the path license agreement has been finalized with Mr. Jimmie DeBurgh.

Zoning Administrator: Mr. Steve Gyurisin submitted a written report

Planning Commission (PC): Ms. Caroline Anstey reported that the PC had a robust discussion with Foster Harris House, Gather VA LLC., regarding their rezoning application. She reported that most of the public comments expressed concern with doing "spot zoning", they felt it set a bad precedent. The property is located in residential zoning and the make-up of the neighborhood is residential. The PC recommends that TC not approve the rezoning application for this property.

She also reported that Rush River Commons (RRC) gave a presentation of its plans for RRC II. It's a big development and the PC has asked RRC to come back with more details. The PC did a walking tour around town, they were joined by Mr. Jim Abdo, and appreciated hearing his plans for his properties in town.

Architectural Review Board (ARB): There was no report.

OLD BUSINESS:

- a) Path update: Mr. Catlin reported that he and the builder for the path, had a good meeting with Mr. Drew Mitchell, who's property the path will cross, he was able to address Mr. Mitchell's concerns. The approvals for the additional properties have already been finalized.

NEW BUSINESS:

- a) Public hearing for rezoning application for Foster Harris House, 189 Main Street:

Mayor Whited opened the public hearing at 7:17 p.m.

Mr. Steve Gyurisin submitted a written report regarding the PC's recommendation to not approve this application for rezoning. The report is attached to these minutes.

Mr. Evan Addams, owner of Foster Harris House, introduced his wife, Mrs. Bethany Addams. He shared that they love the story of the Town of Washington and would love to share this story with additional guests. He referred to an affidavit that was previously submitted, it contained concessions they are willing to offer, if the rezoning is approved. He asked TC to consider approving the rezoning application so they would be able to accommodate more guests.

Mr. John Sullivan, an adjacent property owner, shared that he thinks Mr. Addams is a nice person, but he's concerned with the town doing spot zoning. The block has been residential for decades. He doesn't think it's fair to the neighbors, one in particular, to allow more guests at that location. Although the owner is saying they will do things like have quiet hours, that's not something that would be easy to enforce, and it would be unfair to make a neighbor call the sheriff's department. He also shared that someone spoke at the PC meeting about the increase in tax revenue. Mr. Sullivan doesn't think the additional 3k – 5k in revenue is worth it.

Ms. Maryann Kuhn, 218 Main Street, agreed with Mr. Sullivan. She mentioned that this property was zoned village residential in 1950 and subsequent managers have been able to manage it with the number of existing guest rooms. She asked that TC consider the surrounding neighbors, especially Ms. Nancy Buntin, who's family has lived in that house for decades. What will happen to any concessions when the owner of Foster Harris House leaves.

Mayor Whited closed the public hearing at 7:26 p.m.

Mr. O'Connell asked how many rooms are currently used. Mayor Whited responded there are authorized to use 5 guest rooms. There are an additional 4 rooms, 3 of which would be guest rooms and the other for the onsite manager. Ms. Anstey pointed out that Village Residential only allows for 5 guest rooms to be used. Mr. O'Connell asked when the property was remodeled, did the owner know they wouldn't be able to use the additional 4 rooms? Mr. Catlin said they did, and they used the 4 rooms as a private residence.

Mr. Schneider agreed with Mr. Sullivan's concern about spot zoning. If we change this property then other owners will expect their rezoning to also be approved. He feels we will begin to lose the character of the town doing this type of spot zoning. He doesn't think its in the best interested of the town to rezone this property.

Ms. Swift said she loves what the owner is trying to do with the property but agrees with the PC's recommendation, and doesn't agree with spot zoning.

Mr. Catlin thanked the PC for all the work they did on this issue, but he does struggle that it was a 2-1 vote to not recommend the rezoning. He shared that he heard the state legislature will be revisiting the issue of special use permits for bed and breakfast establishments. He would like a chance to see what comes out of the next legislature session. The PC did a review of the comprehensive plan in 2018, he would like to see another one down to get a sense of the entire community. He said if we vote now, we have to go with the current restrictions imposed by the state legislature. If we wait, there may be more options.

Ms. Goodine asked how this would apply to subsequent owners, and Mayor Whited replied that we cannot bind future owners, which includes a special use permit. She also asked when the state meets, and Mayor Whited said they meet in the spring.

Ms. Anstey said VA Code allows you to do spot zoning if it's in the public's best interest. She feels we've had more change in the last five years than the last 150 years. If we want a new comprehensive plan, Rush River Commons II should be placed on hold. The current comprehensive plan focuses on boosting housing. People in town think we need to wait on RRC II until after RRC is complete, and up and running.

Mr. Catlin replied that he felt is was a bold statement that there has been more change in five years, than in 150 years. He pointed out the population has decreased and there has been a reduction of businesses in town. We are at a crossroads and it's a good time to figure out our direction moving forward.

Mayor Whited said that he is clearly "pro-business" and has scars from dealing with the bond holders during COVID. The town would be in a difficult position if the primary business in town went away. He prefers to take the additional \$3,000 in lodging taxes, instead of imposing a property tax. He thinks that it's premature to make a decision now, if we wait till a later date there may be more options available. Perhaps provisional zoning may be an option, instead of a special use permit. Depending on the applicant's thoughts, he suggests tabling this issue. Mr. Addams said they are willing to wait on the application to a later date.

Mayor Whited made a motion to table the application for rezoning by Foster Harris House, Mr. Catlin seconded, and a roll call vote was taken:

Mr. Beard voted "yes"

Ms. Goodine voted "yes"

Mr. Schneider voted "yes"

Mayor Whited voted "yes"

And the motion passed 7-0.

Mr. Catlin voted "yes"

Mr. O'Connell voted "yes"

Ms. Swift voted "yes"

PUBLIC FORUM: Mayor Whited opened the public forum at 7: 51 p.m., there was no comment and the public forum was closed.

Mr. Catlin made a motion to adjourn, Mr. Beard seconded, and a roll call vote was taken:

Mr. Beard voted “yes”

Ms. Goodine voted “yes”

Mr. Schneider voted “yes”

Mayor Whited voted “yes”

And the motion passed 7-0.

Mr. Catlin voted “yes”

Mr. O’Connell voted “yes”

Ms. Swift voted “yes”

THE NEXT REGULAR MEETING OF THE TOWN COUNCIL IS
December 9, 2024.

Barbara Batson, Town Manager/ Clerk

Attachments:

Zoning Administrator’s report

Rezoning application for Foster Harris House

Letter from Mr. Evan and Mrs. Bethany Addams