

**Town of Bluefield  
Town Council  
Special Called Meeting  
Minutes  
March 18, 2020**

The Bluefield, Virginia Town Council held a Special Called Town Council Meeting on Wednesday, March 18, 2020 at 6:00pm in the Council Chambers of the Town Hall located at 112 Huffard Drive, Bluefield, Virginia.

**PRESENT**

Don Harris, Mayor  
Jarrod Bailey, Councilmember  
Chuck Presley, Councilmember  
Ron Holt, Councilmember  
Anglis Trigg Jr., Vice-Mayor

**ALSO PRESENT**

Mike Watson, Town Manager  
Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk  
Matt Freedman, Town Attorney  
Billie Roberts, Comm. Dev. Coordinator  
Rachel Looney, Administrative Asst.  
Shane Gunter, Police Chief  
8 Members of Public

**ABSENT**

Jimmy Jones, Councilmember

**CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Harris called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**INVOCATION AND PLEDGE**

Mayor Harris led the Invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Business Regarding Special Called Meeting**

***VDH-Robin Jackson/Paige Lucas***

Ms. Jackson presented and went over a slide show. She stated that there was a call system in place during business hours for the general public but the system was jamming due to so many calls. She stated that there were 4 different kinds that caused common cold symptoms...SARS and MERS caused severe lung infection and were spread through coughing, sneezing or close personal contact and peaked around day 5. She stated that they were not sure where it came from but it was a respiratory illness that included fever, cough and shortness of breath. She stated that 80% of the cases were not severe and they were taking reports from China. She stated that those reports changed every day and that it originated in the Hubei Providence, median age of 51 and lasted for a period of 2 weeks and up to 21 days. She stated that there were cases everywhere and

in 162 countries. She stated that as of noon there were 77 cases in Virginia-1,278 that had been tested and 2 deaths but none in the Southwest Region.

Paige Lucas stated that it had almost doubled since yesterday.

Ms. Jackson stated that everyone should avoid all nonessential out of the country travel and in the US if an employee traveled then they would be asked to take 14 days off. She stated that they were asking everyone to avoid groups of more than 10 which was being enforced. She stated that the US was responding by surveillance, where to test, she stated that there was one antiviral that was being used and the 1<sup>st</sup> phase of the vaccine testing was done but they were 12-18 months out from a developed vaccine. She stated that VDH was engaging other clinical providers and providing them with daily guidance, using epidemiological interventions to prevent the spread and education and information was on their website [www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus). She stated that the statewide call center had been activated (877) ASK-VDH3, targeted outreach and education was in place for community mitigation to help communities prepare and to slow the spread of the virus. She stated that social distancing was important and needed to be done immediately to flatten the curve. She stated that Healthcare would not be able to handle the flow and that Italy did not do these things and they were now seeing the effects of it. She stated that restaurants were limited to 10, meetings were limited to 10, 6ft distancing, hand washing, etc. needed to done. She stated that our health systems did not have Robust Health Facilities and if we needed drastic ICU's that our system would not be able to handle it if we did not flatten the curve. She advised that if employees were sick that they should not go to work and that the flu was still in our area and if your kids were sick to stay home. She stated that grocery stores were cutting back on their hours to clean and stock and churches were doing online services to help limit the transmission. She stated that they would continue to work with hospitals, doctors, etc. and encouraged those age 65 and older to stay home, those on blood thinners, HIV positive, cancer, pregnant, diabetes, heart/lung issues to all stay home. She stated to help prevent the spread that we needed to wash our hands with soap and water or to use sanitizer up to the wrist, avoid touching your face, cover your cough, etc. She encouraged partners to review their operations plan, support the COVID-19 work force at the local/state level and to work closely with the Health Departments. She advised that door knobs/handles, kitchens, bathrooms, etc. needed to be thoroughly cleaned. She stated that there was currently no vaccine but the CDC was working night and day to find one which would take 12-18 months. She stated that they did not know the source of transmission and were still trying to find the viral shedding timeframe. She stated that they were receiving 50-75 calls per day from doctors' offices, emergency rooms, etc. She stated that for testing the Richmond lab required specific requirements and that most ER's could send their tests through LabCorp. She stated that the hospitals were meeting people at the door and asking them several questions before allowing them in. She stated that testing was of concern and they were working on it and they had to protect the communities because we have a vulnerable population. She stated that Emergency Response teams should be getting some equipment.

Mayor Harris stated that South Korea subdued the virus in a short time.

Ms. Lucas stated that they had a lot of testing early in the outbreak that helped them self-quarantined.

Council thanked them for coming.

***BRMC-Richard Cox***

Mr. Cox stated that he was the Director of Facilities/Emergency Manager and they had developed a well-rounded COVID-19 with Dr. Dirk Stanley leading. He stated that there were two stages with the first one being containment (keep COVID-19 out as much as possible). He stated that they were cleaning twice per day and that those who had it were sent home to recover. He stated that there were 60 in the ER with issues other than COVID. He stated that they were limiting visitation to one identified visitor, no meetings, all external events had been cancelled, well visits in clinic offices had been postponed and the guidelines for staff were either the expected where the physician called or the Health Department called and those were taken into a room with a HEPA Filter or the unexpected who just showed up and were stopped at the door and asked questions to know whether to isolate or turn them away. He stated that they had screening rooms at the other doors and it was working very well. He stated that an instant notification system was sent out to the leaders on any changes, concerns and document alerts that were sent to Dr. Stanley for review of relevancy before sent out. He stated that they had suspended the Volunteers Services since they were the highest at risk group, vendors and sales reps were restricted unless it was a medical necessity and the cafeteria had closed the dine in area but was providing grab and go/box lunches. He stated that they were having 3 meetings per week. He stated that Phase II was a surge of patients and positive tests which could panic our population. He stated that limited staff and resources could become a concern and right now they had a stable supply but with panic buying it would hurt them if a surge were to happen and they would have to make a decision on comparable products. He stated that they had the ability to transfer critical patients and if presented with a large number of people for testing that they would look into doing drive through screening testing outside of the hospital if they were not systematic. He stated that one week out, the hospital was stable with no positive tests but they were planning for the next step.

Mayor Harris asked if a patient were to test positive would they have people trained to see who they had been around.

Robin Jackson, VDH stated that as soon as they were notified they immediately did contact tracing as to where the person had been and who they had been in contact with. She stated that all Health Departments had this in place which was required by the law for all diseases.

Mayor Harris thanked everyone for coming and giving an update.

Ms. Jackson stated that for public transit/transportation that there could be no more than 10 people on the bus and they had to be spread out. She stated that a lot of areas were doing shadow busing to follow and pick up those others.

Mayor Harris stated that our transit was looking into the guidelines.

Ms. Jackson suggested asking the passengers to sign in and before boarding asking if they were sick, etc.

***Tazewell County Administrator-Eric Young***

Mr. Young stated that VDH was regularly giving them updates and that he had a conference call with CDC on Friday at 3 p.m. He stated that they also had a conference call with the Governor on Monday at 10 a.m. and he would let the Town know any updates. He stated that the Administration Offices and the Courthouse were shortening their hours and would close at noon on Fridays and reopen at noon on Mondays to allow for additional cleaning, the Supreme Court would be holding off on non-essential cases, the Visitors Center and Animal Shelter were closed along with the Building Inspectors Office which was closed but accepting online applications. He stated that employees that worked for him that were age 65 and over he was asking them to stay home and not charging their paid leave along with personnel who had health issues. He handed out pictures of the EMS building progress and stated that it would be slowing down as well because the painter was 65 years old and would not be working right now.

***Tazewell County Board of Supervisors-Charlie Stacy***

Mr. Stacy stated that he was there to answer any questions and stated that the manner in which we moved forward would fall on them. He stated that he planned to be protective of our community and in talking with Melanie Protti-Lawrence he understood that they had to close their business following the directions given. He stated that there were consequences for those who were having to shut down and they needed to hear from them what they could do. He stated that if we did not give respect to this Health Crisis that it would leave a mark. He stated that the disease was already here but we had a lot of territory and if we took the opportunity to hunker down that it would stunt the growth. He stated that it was best to tell our people and support each other because incomes will be affected and they will be looking to us for reassurance. He stated that they needed to adopt policies protective of the community and he would push information down to the Towns as soon as they were told but that it would change daily.

**CITIZEN COMMENTS**

Melanie Protti-Lawrence, owner of Anytime Fitness and Lawrence Brothers stated that she had to shut down all three of her Anytime Fitness locations in Bluefield, VA, Princeton and Wytheville. She stated that it was her social obligation to flatten the curve and the domino effect for others. She stated that her daily basis usage was 60+ year olds, those who had health issues and were trying to getting healthier, etc. She stated that her daily average of customers was 98-198 and speaking on behalf of small businesses she appreciated the rallying around them and to keep in mind when making decisions what the mandates would do for small businesses. She stated 2-4 weeks would severely impact her ability to operate and as of April 1<sup>st</sup> she would have no income because she could not charge people for services they were not obtaining. She stated after

2 weeks she would lose employees and she needed what help she could get to keep those good employees. She stated that they were sending employees home at Lawrence Brothers who were sick for two weeks with pay because most of her workers could not afford the time off without pay.

Mr. Holt stated that in his conversations this week they talked about the real economic effect it would have on our area and that there were some resources out there that would help the small businesses to hopefully recoup some of their loss. He told her that he would be praying for her and her family.

Mayor Harris asked if she was open 24 hours a day.

Mrs. Protti-Lawrence stated that they were until yesterday when they closed all 3 locations. She stated that it was impossible to limit the capacity to 10 because of their high usage of customers.

Mayor Harris stated that they were all going to have to tighten their belts.

Mrs. Protti-Lawrence stated that they would do all that they could and would put in personal money if they had too but beyond 4 weeks would hurt them. She stated that she had turned off all utilities to the one in Princeton and Wytheville which would save them \$100's per day.

Mr. Presley stated that there was a stimulus package possibly coming and some tax credits.

Mrs. Protti-Lawrence stated that she had talked to her bank and they were willing to let her pay interest only for 6 months on her loans.

Mayor Harris stated that the Town would be adopting an Emergency Resolution tonight.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

***Resolution: Declaration of a Local Emergency Discussion, POSSIBLE MOTION TO ADOPT, ROLL CALL VOTE (attached at end of minutes)***

Mr. Freedman read the entitled: Resolution: Declaration of a Local Emergency Discussion, POSSIBLE MOTION TO ADOPT, ROLL CALL VOTE. He read the Resolution in its entirety attached at the end of the minutes. He stated that if council was good with what was presented then he would need a motion to adopt and a Roll Call Vote.

Mr. Holt made a motion to adopt the Resolution: Declaration of a Local Emergency Discussion. Mr. Presley seconded the motion.

Vice-Mayor Trigg:	Yes
Councilmember Presley:	Yes
Councilmember Bailey:	Yes
Mayor Harris:	Yes

Councilmember Jones: Absent  
Councilmember Holt: Yes

The motion passed unanimously by Roll Call Vote.

### ***COVID-19 Emergency Mitigation Efforts***

Mr. Watson stated that the resolution passed was in order for the Town to enact measures to protect our citizens during the current state of emergency declaration and to appoint the Town Manager the authority and powers listed under VA Code 44-146.21©. He went over the following slideshow.

#### **-Proposed Measures:**

- Temporary prohibition of public entry/use of town buildings or facilities. He stated that the doors would be locked and there would be a sign posted encouraging phone communication.
- Fincastle would be used for meal preparation for the disabled, elderly, or indigent. He stated that they would also be delivering as well.
- Adherence to the federal and state ban of gatherings of 10 or more. He stated that meetings would be cancelled or done through conference calls.
- Establish a procedure for seniors, disabled, etc. to receive daily welfare checks via town hotline, staffed in part by volunteers. He stated that he had talked with local churches who were willing to check on folks daily.
- Ban official travel by town employees outside of Tazewell County during the course of the state of emergency to be approved by Town Manager.
- Work with local healthcare providers to identify testing sites as they became available. He stated that the drive was to have more testing sites at different locations.
- PTO for staff who may contract COVID-19. He stated that some employees had the time to take off but some did not and this would allow them to take time off without losing money or sick time.
- Graham Transit to limit occupancy, accompanied by regular sanitation. He stated that they did not have enough drivers to shadow routes unless they cut some routes. He stated that the new rules would be advertised on the buses.

He stated that he would have a meeting with staff and then get all of this information out to the public, on social media, website, sign, etc.

#### **-Ultimate Goal:**

- Our ultimate goal was to try and lower the curve and right now we were ahead but we did not want to wait.

-Local Resources for Information:

- Call VDH COVID-19 hotline at 877-ASK-VDH3. He stated that the meeting would be put online ASAP and he hoped to also include the power points as well. He stated with the Resolution it would allow us to work together and that many of our employees relied on getting their paychecks. He stated that water cutoffs were done on Monday before we were made aware of all the stipulations that had come out by the State Corporation Commission but that we were not regulated by the SCC. He stated that it would be hard for people to catch up if they did not pay their bills.

**COUNCIL COMMENTS**

Mr. Trigg stated that all of the presentations were good.

Mrs. Protti-Lawrence stated that she had friends and family who lived in Italy/Spain who she had personal contact with and stated that Italy did not listen to the warning for social distancing, etc. and were now facing real consequences for not taking action. She stated that she did not want that to be us that we needed to listen and observe. She stated that she did not think we should overreact but to get it across to those not listening and that 475 people had died today.

**ADJOURN**

Mr. Trigg made a motion to adjourn the meeting 7:32 pm. Mr. Presley seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

Vice-Mayor Trigg:	Yes
Councilmember Presley:	Yes
Councilmember Bailey:	Yes
Mayor Harris:	Yes
Councilmember Jones:	Absent
Councilmember Holt:	Yes

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Don Harris, Mayor

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Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk