

January 9, 2023 Work Session

A work session for the Council of the City of Martinsville, Virginia was held on January 9, 2023 in Council Chambers, Municipal Building, at 6:00 PM with Mayor LC Jones presiding. Other Council Members present included Kathy Lawson, Chad Martin, Aaron Rawls and Tammy Pearson. Staff present included City Manager Leon Towarnicki and Community Development Director Mark McCaskill.

Mayor Jones called the meeting to order.

Conduct a work session on (1) city's proposed 2023 Legislative Agenda and (2) Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) List: City Manager Towarnicki explained the Legislative Agenda that is updated on a yearly basis. Council Member Lawson asked to confirm that "properly funding of the Public Defender's Office" had been added to the list. Council Member Pearson had questions about the two Capital Consultant lobbyists for the City, what are they paid and how long have they represented the City. Towarnicki said he would look into the salary but that they have been working for the City for about two years and explained that these are not the same lobbyist used for reversion. Vice Mayor Rawls asked about the general framework of the document and said as an executive, if he were to receive a document in this format he would have questions and would be confused about the list of thirty requests and what the top three priorities would be. Rawls requested a notation be made on the items that are most urgent.

City Manager Towarnicki summarized the Legislative agenda line-by-line, explaining specific items in more detail. Vice Mayor Rawls shared opinions about NCI and the staff, stating that it was originally a good idea and the staff has been amazing but in 2023, he wonders if NCI has any value and if so, could it serve as a conference center instead. Rawls said that NCI would not be at the top of his list and would prefer to see that removed from the Legislative Agenda. Council Member Lawson would like to see continued support for NCI to build relationships with other 4-year institutions of higher learning but she's unsure if that would be part of the legislative agenda. She feels they have missed their mark and have work to do. Rawls discussed school consolidation and questioned if the incentives would matter if the funds were increased. Lawson would prefer to leave that item on the Legislative Agenda but expand on the details. Rawls said it would be worth while to reach out to someone with the Board of Education and get their thoughts.

City Manager Towarnicki continued to the Economic Development section. Vice Mayor Rawls requested that Item #2 regarding blighted properties be considered an urgent item and asked that the most urgent items be listed at the top of the Legislative Agenda. In regards to Item #7, Rawls said he had not seen the contracts on the Henry County PSA agreement with the City and the reopening of the Lower Smith River Wastewater Treatment. Council Member Lawson said it is senseless to put that expense on the Henry County tax payers when the City is only at 50% capacity even with the Henry County waste. Towarnicki explained if Henry County reopens their plant a half mile from the City's plant, the cost for both for operations will increase significantly.

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Lawson verified that this item is not part of the City's lawsuit against Henry County. Related to Item #9 and support of the Virginia Grocery Investment Fund, Council Member Martin requested to add verbiage to support the continued funding of the State Commission of Food Insecurity Act.

City Manager Towarnicki continued with the Governance section. Vice Mayor Rawls questioned Item #1, stating that he had not read the Annexation Moratorium Study. Towarnicki summarized that study which looked at issues related to annexation. Towarnicki said he would be happy to send that study to Rawls. Council Member Lawson said there is a permanent moratorium against Martinsville. Towarnicki recommended leaving that item in the Legislative Agenda, stating that there was a lot of research that went into the study and that it was a well written document with strong recommendations. Rawls shared that he is not a fan of annexation. Towarnicki suggested that Item #2 be left in the agenda in case of reversion but that Item #3 could be removed. Towarnicki explained Item #4 and the difference between how the City Police Department and County Sheriff's Departments are funded; the General Assembly has never fully fulfilled that obligation. Rawls asked that Item #7 be marked urgent. Rawls questioned Item #17 and what is currently being paid. Council Member Pearson asked for more information on Item #20. Community Development Director Mark McCaskill explained how other states are handling Item #21 and the decriminalization of marijuana.

City Manager Towarnicki discussed the next section on US Congress. Vice Mayor Rawls asked about the success rate under "Entitlement Cities". Towarnicki said the City has been successful with most of those grant applications. Towarnicki said he needed to look into Item #3 and whether it would still be valid.

Council Member Lawson asked again to include proper funding for the Public Defender's office. Vice Mayor Rawls asked about the supplemental funding provided as a locality, and asked if they were holding back money they are supposed to be giving the City and not fulfilling their obligations or are we saying that the salaries are not appropriate. Lawson confirmed both, because they do not have enough funding to fund the amount of people the office should have and they are underfunded based on current rates.

Council Member Lawson requested that the verbiage be strengthened in the section on derelict properties and to allow the locality to assess a fee appropriate for their circumstances.

Council Member Pearson asked to confirm the items that should be considered priorities on the list including Economic Development Item #2 for blighted properties, Item #8 on expanding grants and also Item #7 under Governance. Rawls said he would send Towarnicki verbiage for #7 under Education.

City Manager Towarnicki moved forward with the CEDS list. Community Development Director Mark McCaskill explained the need for the CEDS list and said this list has been built over the last several years. The descriptions are general and needed to remain general to better qualify for grant applications. There was an item related to blighted properties that was left off

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of the list when the format was updated but that has been added back. McCaskill and Council Members discussed the property purchase by the YMCA for a new location and revitalization of Uptown Martinsville. Rawls said he is supportive of the MiNET and fiber optic expansion. Looking through some of the housing projects, Rawls feels that a lot of housing projects should focus on families with fixed incomes.

City Manager Towarnicki said the CEDS list will be added to the January 24 agenda for Council's approval. Council may contact him with any other changes or additions before then.

With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 7:30pm

Karen Roberts, Clerk of Council

LC Jones, Mayor