

**Community Development Committee  
Town of Independence  
February 20, 2024  
Minutes**

Committee Members in Attendance: Kit Marshall, Joan Collins, Mark Miller, Matthew Adams

Committee Members absent: Mary Ann Halsey

Invited Guests: Keith Weatherman, Grayson County; Laura Witt, Twin County Chamber of Commerce,  
Betsy Sherin, Crystal Cureton

Adhoc Attendees: Ronald Sexton, Laura Ratcliffe

Chairwoman Marshall convened the meeting at 2pm. It was determined a quorum was present.

Chairwoman Marshall had previously circulated to the committee members an outline (included) for discussion topics for Community Development. During this meeting the group focused on:

- Special Events – Independence Day
- Completion of Town Park
- Main Street Program
- Peach Bottom Falls Initiative
- Establish Historic District
- Streetscape
- Town Code

**Special Events – Independence Day:**

Members of the County Recreation Board attended the meeting as there had been previous discussion on how to collaborate to provide activities through the day for visitors. Feedback has been that most residents/individuals want to attend the parade and morning festival, then go to the river or other cookouts before returning to town to tailgate and watch the fireworks. One suggestion was to have activities (pool open, concert, food trucks) at the Rec park in the late afternoon/evening and to launch the fireworks from the open field near the park. Town Manager Ratcliffe stated she had asked the Public Works Director to work with the individual who does the fireworks to make sure that site is appropriate for fireworks. There has to be a certain amount of clearance around the site. Additionally, once location options are known, the location recommendation needs to be presented to Town Council for their decision. The group agreed to get that information before making a final recommendation. Other discussion about using the Rec field site was how to manage parking/access for viewing at the park. Laura Witt indicated she has a list of food truck vendors who want to participate in local festivals and that the Chamber will help promote Town events. Discussion ensued. The group decided Town Manager Ratcliffe would email all in attendance about what was learned regarding the fireworks and they would discuss at the next meeting.

**To Do:** Town Manager Ratcliffe communicate options for fireworks.

Laura Witt to send Town Manager Ratcliffe the food truck list (completed and sent to Mary Ann Halsey)

**Completion of Town Park:**

Town Manager Ratcliffe provided an update on finalizing the grading and stone work. The goal is to request quotes for completion by early March with completion by April 26<sup>th</sup>. This will be a tight timeframe but is necessary to get site open before May 3<sup>rd</sup> Market opening.

Councilwoman Marshall has been in touch with Cynthia Taylor who leads the local Permaculture group. Cynthia is willing to assist with the design of the landscaping of Town Park. The goal is to have low maintenance native/perennial plants.

Town Manager Ratcliffe is finalizing the Virginia Outdoor Foundation grant which will be used to pay for the landscaping and “furnishing” of Town Park.

The Committee agreed when Town Park is opened, they would like to do something to celebrate the opening.

**To Do:** Town Manager Ratcliffe – advertise for Town Park RFP and obtain quotes (Done – quotes are due March 11<sup>th</sup> and will be awarded March 18<sup>th</sup>)

Town Manager Ratcliffe – complete VOF grant paperwork

Chairwoman Marshall – Schedule time to meet with Cynthia Taylor regarding landscaping plan for Town Park ( Done – scheduled for 3/13)

**Main Street Program:**

There was general discussion about the Main Street Program, including explanation of our current status (Exploring Main Street). The Main Street program is a revitalization strategy. At the higher levels, it requires an independent 503c organization to form to oversee the initiative. Town Manager Ratcliffe explained that as an Exploring member, we have to attend at least one training session during the year and complete an annual report. She completed the report for 2023 in January 2024. The application for the Town is incomplete and requires a Town Council resolution supporting being a member of the Main Street Program.

The committee agreed to stay engaged with Main Street Program in the exploring stage.

**To Do:** Town Manager Ratcliffe – include item on March Town Council meeting for resolution supporting Main Street initiative and complete other outstanding application items.

**Peach Bottom Falls Initiative:**

Councilwoman Marshall presented information regarding a plan that had been created by Mt Rogers for Peach Bottom Falls. The committee discussed this is Grayson County initiative. The group identified they would like for a member of the County to update them on plan.

**To Do:** Have County representative attend future meeting to provide an update.

(Through another conversation, Town Manager Ratcliffe spoke with the County Planning Office about the project. They are happy to attend a meeting to update). Committee needs to decide when they want an update.

**Establish Historic District:**

Chairwoman Marshall presented that it is unclear if a Historic District was ever enacted in Independence. Laura Bryant with the Historical Society is getting information for the group. Town Manager Ratcliffe found Town Council minutes where the topic was to be presented at a Town Council meeting but can not find the minutes from that meeting. Councilwoman Collins that the 1908 Courthouse is on the Historic Registry. She also stated Historic Districts can be onerous for residents and she wouldn't be supportive of a formal district. Discussion ensued. The committee agreed to continue to review but to work to address certain issues such as trees/maintenance, etc. through code and not a historic district.

### **Streetscape:**

Discussion ensued regarding plans for the 2024 landscaping and plantings. The barrels through town will be reduced and grouped to provide more impact. This will also make it easier to maintain. Chairwoman Marshall is placing the order for the new containers that will be grouped at Hwy 58/21 intersection and in front of the 1908 Courthouse. Councilman Miller commented that the Beautification committee previously identified 16 areas in the commercial district for plantings and that the group should revisit that map for placement of barrels and future plantings. He also stated he felt something needed to be done to replace the barrels being removed and questioned if decorative flags could be purchased for the light poles. Town Manager Ratcliffe commented that flags on the light poles draw attention to the overhead power lines. If the goal is to not highlight the powerlines, then she would recommend not adding flags. Councilwoman Collins commented that the flags are approximately \$100 each and that the High School is adding flags. Town Manager Ratcliffe stated if the committee wanted to decorate town during the seasons, adding putting up bunting earlier in the summer would be one option. Town Manager Ratcliffe was asked to order trash cans for Town Park which are like the ones purchased last year. Litter grant funds should be used. It is estimated 4 cans can be purchased with the \$2000 the Town received. Councilwoman Collins suggested adopting a tree planting program similar to the current Benches & Rocker for Independence program. She also asked if a Town Clean up day would be scheduled soon.

**To Do:** Town Manager Ratcliffe have Town Clerk order trash cans.

Committee to finalize street scape plan and decide

if additional buntings should be ordered for this year (if budget allows)  
or added to 2025 budget request.

Whether or not to implement a tree program

Whether or not to have a Town clean up day

### **Town Code:**

Chief Adams requested the Committee focus on the Nuisance Code and Building Numbering. With mowing season starting soon, it will help the Police enforce the mowing if the code contains better guidance on what is a "nuisance". Committee members discussed there was also need to clarify about downed trees, trash, and junk in yards. Regarding the Building Numbering, Chief Adams advised the current code does not follow the VA Fire Code. The code needs to be changed to require certain size of house numbers and where they are located, particularly for buildings not on a main road.

Town Manager Ratcliffe explained the plan is to have public hearings about Town Code every three months (April, July, October, January) to give committees an opportunity to work through their review of the Code. In order to be reviewed at the April public hearing, the recommendations need to be presented at the March Town Council meeting.

**Based on this discussion, the Committee decided to meet on March 4<sup>th</sup> to review the Town Code items requested by Chief Adams.**

The next meeting will be Monday, March 4<sup>th</sup> at 2pm.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned by Chairwoman Marshall at 4:30pm

Respectfully submitted  
Laura Ratcliffe, Town Manager