

REGULAR MEETING

APRIL 22, 1997

At a regular meeting of Council held this evening at 7:30 p.m., there were present: Mayor Rodney Eagle; City Manager Steven E. Stewart; Assistant City Manager Roger Baker; City Attorney Earl Q. Thumma, Jr.; Vice-Mayor Hugh J. Lantz; Council Members Walter F. Green, III, and Larry M. Rogers; City Clerk Yvonne Bonnie Ryan and Chief of Police Donald Harper. Absent: Council Member John H. Byrd, Jr.

Council Member Green delivered the invocation and Mayor Eagle led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Human Resource Director McBride introduced five new City employees: Alfred Miller, Chris Furry, Lanny Dove, David Derrow, and Charles Taylor, Public Works Department.

Vice-Mayor Lantz offered a motion to approve the consent agenda, including approval of the minutes and the second reading of a supplemental appropriation for the steam plant and Police Department. The motion was seconded by Council Member Rogers, and approved with a unanimous recorded vote of Council Members present.

City Manager Stewart briefly reviewed the 1997-98 budget with City Council. A presentation was made to Council on April 8, and this document has been available to the public. He reiterated that although there was no proposed tax rate increase, according to State law a reassessment for real estate did have to be done. The overall real estate reassessment increased by 2.47%, however, the real estate rate will remain at 62 cents. He noted that in order for the City to meet its expenses, it must keep the current spread between the City and County tipping fees. Therefore, the City will have to raise its tipping fee at the landfill. The budget focuses on three primary functions which include education, public safety and maintaining the existing infrastructure. City Manager Stewart then reviewed the 12 goals from the 1996 Council Planning Session. He commented that the City is very involved in expanding the library. Historically the City has funded the library at a higher per capita level than the other two jurisdictions in the regional library. The City has proposed a 10% increase in operating funds for the library, which is significantly higher than they have funded any other City department. The City has committed in excess of \$300,000 to demolish the Schewels building to create a parking lot to serve the library and the downtown area, however, the library owns the property. In addition, the City will continue to fund the capital improvement program of the expansion of the library for \$1 million. The proposed budget is approximately \$65,250,692 or about 21% decrease in the total budget. The general fund budget, which provides many services that most citizens are interested in, is actually a 1.1% increase over the current budget as amended. The primary reason for the overall budget decrease is that many items in the current budget were one-time capital projects. Education is a very significant part of the City and next year the schools will receive approximately \$28.3 million or 42% of the proposed net expenditures in the budget and 43% of the General Fund budget. In addition, Council appropriated \$490,000 to the schools for maintenance needs and plans to appropriate another \$490,000 in July,

if possible. Mr. Stewart noted that it takes all of the property tax revenues and nearly all of the business license revenues just to fund the schools. It again speaks loudly as to the priority placed on schools. He reviewed debt service for the schools during the last ten years. He pointed out that Council had issued \$30,250,000 in general obligation bonds in the last ten years and that \$22,250,000 of that had been issued in the last five years. The City is committed to public safety and noted that the proposed Police Department budget will include adding six new employees. The Fire Department budget proposes hiring six new firefighters responding to the "Two-In-Two-Out" rule. He noted that adding six new firefighters will not completely solve the problem, but it will be a significant step forward in complying with the rule. A small funding increase has been proposed for the all volunteer Rescue Squad. This budget will accomplish a great deal for the City next year. Mr. Stewart noted that it will allow the City to live within its means and make a significant contribution to education and public safety, while maintaining the existing infrastructure. Mr. Stewart noted that many items in the Capital Outlay could not be funded because the funds were not available. These items include maintaining present equipment, delaying major repairs on the West Elizabeth Street bridge, replacing a roof at the Community Athletic Center, and delaying renovations at the Water Street Parking Deck. He also mentioned that Park Road improvements, a priority three project is not in the budget.

At 7:58 p.m., Mayor Eagle closed the regular session temporarily and called the evening's public hearing to order. The following notice appeared in the Daily News-Record on Friday, April 11, 1997.

**CITY OF HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA  
PROPOSED BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 1998  
For information and fiscal planning purposes only**

**A public hearing will be held by the Harrisonburg City Council on Tuesday, April 22, 1997 at 7:30 p.m. in the Harrisonburg Municipal Building, 345 South Main Street, Harrisonburg, Virginia. Interested citizens are encouraged to attend and express their views.**

<u>Revenue-By Funds</u>	1997-98 As <u>Proposed</u>	1996-97 As <u>Amended</u>
General	40,479,629	39,992,136
School	28,300,152	27,101,288
General Capital Projects	600,000	12,236,571
Water Capital Projects	1,265,000	1,745,396
Sewer Capital Projects	991,900	1,843,225
Sanitation Capital Projects	20,000	5,546,457
Water	4,665,332	4,333,738
Sewer	5,239,277	5,601,316
Public Transportation	2,805,875	2,644,463
Sanitation	4,991,254	5,268,335
Parking Authority	197,395	319,230

Central Garage	458,138	592,005
Central Stores Operating	<u>73,104</u>	<u>97,585</u>
Gross	90,087,056	107,321,745
Inter fund transfers	(23,110,072)	(22,958,947)
Net	<u>66,976,984</u>	<u>84,362,798</u>

**Expenditures - By Funds**

General	40,479,629	39,992,136
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Copies of the proposed budget in its entirety are available for public review in the City Manager's office, 345 South Main Street, Harrisonburg, Virginia and the Rockingham Public Library, 45 Newman Avenue, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

Steven E. Stewart  
City Manager  
City of Harrisonburg, Virginia

Mayor Eagle called on anyone present desiring to speak either for or against the 1997-98 budget.

Cathy Stevenson, Chairman of the Harrisonburg City School Board, appealed to Council to fully fund the board's proposed increase of approximately \$1.8 million in the operating budget. She said if the Council's proposed budget is adopted, the School Board will have to cut its budget and the effect will be devastating. She listed a number of programs that could be affected by the cut, including reading programs and additional personnel or possibly salaries.

Robert Frazier, School Board Member, commented that a reduction in the School's budget request will seriously impair the School Board's ability to address daily needs and program initiatives. The full \$1.8 million request of local funding will allow the School Board to continue to provide the quality education that students deserve and tax paying parents demand. Because of the 1983 annexation, the schools now have 3,600 students compared to 2,700 in 1983. Over the past ten years the relationship between the Council and the school system has been positive in providing modern facilities for the students' education. He suggested that City Council and the School Board consider working on a financial plan that would allow the expediency of renovations of the school buildings. Les Bolt stated that the presentation of tonight's budget, along with the public relation article that appeared in the newspaper, states that City Council is aware that the schools have serious, severe, and long term needs that are not currently being addressed. Nevertheless, funding the schools at this level will not solve the basic problems or take the children into the 21st century. Although he said the appropriated \$490,000 funding provided this year and the \$490,000 funding to be appropriated next year are welcome funds that will do some good, they will not address some substantial technology needs, curriculum needs or substantial resource needs that the schools will have to have to prepare kids for the next century.

Mary Jane Simmers, a teacher, said that the City's third-lowest tax rate among Virginia independents Cities was a disgrace. She said we have had the bragging rights but it cannot continue especially about computer technology.

Tim Hulings said that he wished he could say that the library is a mediocre library, but it is not. He said that the library is in the bottom percentile of libraries in the state from the point of public support, replacement of books and automation. The library is limited by the support that it receives from the jurisdictions.

Dan Todd, Library Association Board Member, said that he has been involved in establishing the library in Timberville. While comparing our library to our sister Cities of Staunton, Winchester, and Waynesboro, Harrisonburg is not doing enough to bring the library up to a first rate library.

Beverly McGowan said that the City's attention to infrastructure, public safety and education was on target, but that the focus needed to be sharpened. She also urged that the tax rate be increased.

Bill Boyd, President of the Board of Trustees of the Library, said that the library board is not comfortable in accepting the proposed 10% increase in funding. Mr. Boyd said, "As well as being the third-lowest tax rate City we enjoy the privilege of being one of the lowest funded and operated libraries. The library board is unable to continue providing an equal quality product. A member of the Board of Page County stated that since the City of Harrisonburg was not meeting its requirements, they would cut their funding by 25%. The downtown library is diminishing in its importance."

Steven Blatt representing Keister Elementary School urged the Council to stop finger-pointing and develop a financial plan to solve these problems at the schools. He said that he was also concerned about the police protection in the City and that City Council needed to solve all of these problems. Among possible solutions, he suggested that Council and School Board should participate in a parent-sponsored forum to get questions answered. He requested that the City conduct its own maintenance code inspection of the schools so, "We will have some base line to figure out whether these are really maintenance problems that are serious or not. I want my children to have the same type of structure to go to school in that the JMU students rent from their landlords and I don't think that is too much to ask."

Bonita Sonifrank proposed five statements to City Council and the School Board. She said, "#1) We believe that we are owners of a public education system, #2) As owners we bear a responsibility to participate in the system, #3) The accountability of the system, its employees and its funding rests with us and the rest of the system owners, #4) Our children's future depends on the improvement of the system, and #5) This improvement depend on all participation." We promise to live up to our role as owners of the public school system and suggest that major commitment to education cannot begin soon enough.

Kathy Phillips suggested that everyone take down the brick walls and work together. Our children deserve the best education that they can get.

George Thompson commented that prior to moving to the Shenandoah Valley with his wife in 1983, he lived in Madison, Wisconsin. He noted that last year by an overwhelming choice Madison was selected out of all towns and all scales as the number one City in America to live in. He said that although he would not like to have the tax rate of Madison, you get what you pay for. People from all over the world visit Madison to see how it can integrate environmental quality and preserve its natural heritage and culture heritage.

John Parcell stated that finding out that the City is in the lowest tax rate for a City of its size with the commitment that it has and the problems with the schools, does not make him feel good. He would support a tax increase to help fund some of the problems with the schools. There being no others desiring to be heard, the public hearing was declared closed at 8:35 p.m., and the regular session reconvened. Council Member Green offered a motion that the 1997-98 appropriation ordinance be approved for a first reading. The motion was seconded by Council Member Rogers, and approved with a unanimous recorded vote of Council Members present.

✓ Mayor Eagle stated that it was a real pleasure to welcome members of the Board of First Night Harrisonburg and community supporters of this wonderful annual arts event that contributes so much to our community. Mayor Eagle noted that with so much going on in Harrisonburg that it was important to take time out once and a while to thank the people for the things they do to make this area a better place to live. The people who bring First Night to the Shenandoah Valley on New Year's Eve work throughout the entire year in preparation for the wonderful celebration we all have the opportunity to enjoy together. It is a celebration that is family oriented and non-alcoholic and it reminds us of the good things about ourselves and others. He recognized Dr. Carol Kefalas who has served as president for First Night for the past two years and Anne Stephens who has served as Executive Director for the past five years. Dr. Kefalas and Mrs. Stephens thanked the City for its support, the many contributors, supporters and sponsors who make First Night happen. Mrs. Stephens said that it is truly a community event by the community and for the community and without the contribution and support of the businesses it would not happen. She recognized the many participants of First Night 1996 including Mountain Valley Corporation, Daily News-Record, HEC, Rocco, Rockingham Heritage Bank, Rockingham Memorial Hospital, Showalter-Stauff Insurance Agency, Rotary Club, Tennaco Packing, Shenandoah Pride, Nielsen Construction, James McHone Jewelry, Litten & Sipe, RE/MAX Realty, WLR Foods, Warner Cable, WHSV-TV, and the City of Harrisonburg. She noted that many people had signed the Resolution Quilt including City Council. The quilt will be on display at the Quilt Museum, library and many public schools.

✓ Mayor Eagle recognized the achievement of the Harrisonburg High School Band which completed in a band contest that included seven states. The Women Corps placed third, the Mixed

Chorus placed second, and Triple Trio and Company were awarded a first place trophy in the National Choir Division. Also, they awarded the Harrisonburg Blue Streaks Marching Band a rating of excellence with an indoor color guard performance. These students work long and hard and take their own time to participate in these events before and after schools. The instructors put a lot of time into it.

✓ Planning and Community Development Director Turner introduced a recommendation for a conveyance of Devon Lane right-of-way to the City and a request by Edmond Blackwell, agent for applicant, for a Final Plat approval of Foxhill Townhomes, Section 1. She said that this final plat involves dedication of approximately 17,966 square feet for the extension and alignment of Devon Lane and also the platting of 21 townhouse lots. It is hoped that with future phases of this development that Devon Lane will be connected to Lois Lane if Lois Lane becomes a public road so that it will provide access from Port Republic Road to Peach Grove Road. This phase was approved by Planning Commission. Council Member Rogers offered a motion to approve this request as presented. The motion was seconded By Vice-Mayor Lantz, and approved with a unanimous vote of Council Members present.

✓ Steve Jackson, representing the City schools, presented a request for the City Manager to sign an application for a grant for the Virginia Preschool Initiative for At-Risk Four-Year-Old Children. Mr. Jackson said that this is a continuation of an existing program, local funds are the same as the current year, and are in the School Division's budget. Council Manager Rogers offered a motion to authorize the City Manager to sign the application. The motion was seconded by Council Member Green, and approved with a unanimous vote of Council Members present.

✓ City Manager Stewart announced that the Finance Department had received the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting awarded by the Government Finance Officers Association. The Certificate of Achievement is the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government and its management. Mr. Stewart also recognized Lester Seal, Director of Finance, and the entire Finance Department. He said that the CAFR has been judged by an impartial panel to meet the high standards of the program including demonstrating a constructive "spirit of full disclosure" to clearly communicate its financial story and motivate potential users and user groups to read the CAFR.

✓ Public Works Director Baker presented a brief report on the demolition of the Schewels's furniture building. He said that the contractor ran into some difficulties in demolishing the building so one lane of South Main Street will be closed a little longer than had been anticipated. The Public Works Department has designed a plan for the parking lot containing 29 metered parking spaces with two of the spaces being handicapped. They will install a bike rack at the back of the parking lot. The project should be completed in four weeks.

✓ Public Utilities Director Collins announced that Superior Industrial Maintenance Company has been awarded a contract to repair and paint the Washington Street Water Tank. He said that they will sandblast both the interior and exterior of the water tank. The project should begin in May and be on line for the JMU students in late August or early September. Council Member Green

offered a motion to approve the contract. The motion was seconded by Vice-Mayor Lantz, and approved with a unanimous recorded vote of Council Members present.

City Manager Stewart announced that the City is considering a land purchase that would add 10 acres to Hillandale Park. He noted that there are no current plans to develop the property. Council Member Rogers offered a motion to purchase this property. The motion was seconded by Council Member Green, and approved with a unanimous recorded vote of Council Members present.

City Manager Stewart announced that the City is also considering purchasing a 38<sup>+</sup>-acre tract of land along Pleasant Valley Road to be used for soccer. This property is still in negotiations, but it should allow the City to develop soccer fields much earlier than developing soccer fields at the Smithland Road property.

Planning and Community Development Director Turner commented that an article which appeared in the newspaper suggested that by the year 2003 or 2004 the City should reach a static population. She said that she felt like some clarification was needed because of the article. When the Community Development Department was preparing a slide show for presenting the Comprehensive Plan at a work session, newspaper reporter, Jeff Mellott, was present. Although one slide portrayed that the City's population was growing, one graph indicated that a percentage of growth had been decreasing. Mr. Mellott commented that if the City continued in a trend like this maybe sometime the City would get to a point where it would level out its population growth. After the work session, they discussed that the department had not really done enough research on this to find out if this should be presented to the public during the Comprehensive Plan presentation. They decided to not include this particular slide in the presentation; however, since a media representative was present, the idea was planted. Mrs. Turner commented that she had spoken with Mr. Mellott and noted that since it was a state trend in declining population growth over the last several years as well, she did not think it was something particular to the City and it did not merit a lot of attention. Then it was published in the Daily News Record. She also noted that the state is growing; however, it is growing at a smaller rate.

Tom Bundrick wanted some clarification on the purchase price of the approximately 38 acres located on Pleasant Valley Road. He also questioned what would be done with the sewer lines on the property. Mr. Stewart commented that nothing has to be done with the sewer lines, but some sewer man holes may have to be lowered or raised.

Walter Kurt stated that he owned SEI, Inc. He said that he had aggressively been pursuing purchasing one of the bank buildings in the downtown area. He noted that he does have documentation that will attest to this fact. He expressed his concern regarding JMU purchasing these bank buildings.

Dr. Cathy Slusher apologized for not being present during the public hearing on the budget. She said that cuts made from the budget will not have the profound impact on her or others, but will impact the future citizens of the City. She encouraged Council to look beyond this year and consider the future citizens of the City when approving the budget to make sure that our foundations, principles, and initiatives will stand firm and keep the City strong.

Beverly McGowen said that she was concerned about the budget and soccer. She said that as a soccer mom with three children playing soccer, she was alarmed that Council would consider purchasing property on Pleasant Valley Road to be used for soccer fields. She suggested that all soccer fields for the children playing in the City's recreation league should be located in a park atmosphere.

At 9:29 p.m., Vice-Mayor Lantz offered a motion that Council enter an executive session for discussion and consideration of personnel and prospective candidates to be appointed to the Blue Ridge Community College Board of Trustees, Private Industry Council and Social Services Advisory Board and the evaluation of a City department, exempt from the public meeting requirements pursuant to Section 2.1-344(A)(1) of the Code of Virginia. Consultation with the City Attorney and briefings by staff members pertaining to probable litigation, exempt from public meeting requirement pursuant to Section 2.1-344(A)(7) of the Code of Virginia. Discussion and consideration of the acquisition of real estate to be used for public purposes, exempt from public meeting requirements pursuant to Section 2.1-344(A)(3) of the Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended. The motion was seconded by Council Member Rogers, and approved with a unanimous vote of Council.

At 11:27 p.m., the executive session was declared closed and the regular session reconvened. City Clerk Ryan read the following statement which was agreed to with a unanimous recorded vote of the Council: I hereby certify to the best of my knowledge and belief that (1) only public matters lawfully exempt from open meeting requirements pursuant to Chapter 21 of title 2.1 of the Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended, and (2) only such public business matters as were identified in the motion by which the executive or closed meeting were convened were heard, discussed or considered in the executive session by the City Council.

Council Member Rogers offered a motion to approve purchase of 38± acres known as Callender property located on Pleasant Valley Road at a cost of \$190,000 to be financed over three years at 6% interest with \$50,000 down, contingent upon the City's Engineering Department performing appropriate engineering and feasibility studies to determine the practicality of developing the property for at least six soccer fields. The motion was seconded by Vice-Mayor Lantz and approved with a unanimous vote of Council Members present.

Council Member Green offered a motion to renew City Manager Stewart's employment agreement from July 1, 1997 through June 30, 2000. The motion was seconded by Council Member Rogers, and approved with a unanimous recorded vote of Council Members present.

At 11:30 p.m., there being no further business and on motion adopted the meeting was adjourned.

  
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CLERK

  
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MAYOR