

REGULAR MEETING

JANUARY 23, 2001

At a regular meeting of Council held this evening at 7:30 p.m., there were present: Mayor Carolyn W. Frank; City Manager Roger Baker; City Attorney Thomas H. Miller, Jr., Vice-Mayor Dorn W. Peterson; Council Member Larry M. Rogers, Hugh J. Lantz, Joseph Gus Fitzgerald; City Clerk Yvonne Bonnie Ryan, CMC/MMCA, and Chief of Police Donald Harper.

Council Member Rogers delivered the invocation and Mayor Frank led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Human Resource Director Whistleman introduced twelve new City employees; Donna Botkin, Jini Heck, Jessie Knighton, Transportation Department; C.J. Chandler, Fire Department; Matthew Csady, Alissa Sculthorpe, Lawrence Seekford, Christopher Shaver, Richard Warford, Police Department; Michael Kilty, Public Utilities Department; William Lowery, Public Works Department; and Katelyn Miller, Parks and Recreation Department.

Vice-Mayor Peterson offered a motion to approve the consent agenda, including approval of the minutes and a second reading of a supplemental appropriation for the School Board. The recorded roll call vote was taken as follows:

Vote: Yes - Council Member Lantz

Council Member Fitzgerald

Vice-Mayor Peterson

Council Member Rogers

Mayor Frank

Absent - None

A request by Beulah Holsinger for a variance was tabled until the next meeting.

Jim Deskins, Executive Director of the Harrisonburg Redevelopment & Housing Authority, and Michael Wong, Chairman of HRHA, presented an overview of a Housing Analysis Report. Mr. Wong explained that several years ago the housing authority conducted a planning study to detect the housing trend in Harrisonburg. The study identified possible problem areas of higher priced housing developments in Rockingham County, growing immigrant population, increase in demand for affordable housing, and a current over supply of student housing for JMU students. Mr. Wong reviewed many statistics contained in the report including manufacturing, agriculture, retail, government, employment and average wages in Rockingham County and Harrisonburg, immigrant employment trends, non-student housing trends, and household distribution by income. The report also showed a lack of developed R-1 zoned land, changing City policies regarding subdivision approvals, developers reporting that City requirements are more stringent and costly than those in Rockingham County. Mr. Wong said that the Housing Authority recommended using the over supply of rental housing units for students and distributing the units to non-student residents or perhaps the Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority could purchase some of the vacant housing units and provide housing opportunities through its Federal low income housing tax program. He also suggested that the City should enact an incentive program to encourage developers to build more expensive homes. Mr. Wong said, The Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority including several new members since the beginning of the new year will be meeting soon to consider specific proposals based on the findings of the report. This report will be presented at a future City Council meeting. The Housing Analysis report revealed that Harrisonburg has only 37% of homeowners compared to more than 60% rental households; however, Rockingham County has 80% of homeowners compared to only 20% rental households. There needs to be a balance between homeowners and rentals in both the Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. He said that forty-two percent of non-student renters are in public housing and the City cannot provide that much housing. The increase stems from a lack of higher-paying jobs within the City. Increasing numbers of higher income people are moving into Rockingham County, while the City houses most of the immigrant workers who do not make enough money to purchase homes. Since most of the lower wages are being paid in the poultry industries, the available labor forces consist of a stream of immigrants willing to pursue jobs in the low wage industry. The study identified that 42% of all non-student apartment units are in subsidized housing. He said that 27% of non-student households have incomes of less than \$25,000 and approximately 40% of all non-student households in the City have insufficient incomes to afford new housing.

Vice-Mayor Peterson said, He intended to bring the issue up in the upcoming planning commission work session discussing how this document can go into the development of a new comprehensive plan.@

Council Member Rogers said, There is a great disparity between the incomes in the City and the County which effects the correlation between affordable housing. Mr. Rogers also asked if the Housing Authority had a recommendation for the situation stating that we need to look at the total picture taking into consideration a correlation between those renting homes, home ownership, and crime.

Jim Deskins, Executive Director of the Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority, said that it is clear a large number of jobs are being created in the poultry industry and the people getting those jobs are living in the City of Harrisonburg. This fact is reflected in the housing study, but also is clearly articulated in

the ESL statistics regarding school age children. Balance is the key to any healthy community. Mr. Deskins said that Harrisonburg will continue growing, but if current trends are not changed, much of that growth will be in low-wage industries creating a need for low-income housing the City probably cannot meet. The increase stems from a lack of higher-paying jobs within the City. Increasing numbers of higher income people are moving into Rockingham County, while the City Atakes on the lion s share of housing for migrant workers who do not make enough money to purchase homes. He said, You cannot go down that road for very long. The result is a vulnerable City economy. With much of the economy based on a volatile industry, i.e., retail sales, and much of the growth based on low-level manufacturing, i.e., poultry workers, the City s economic base is vulnerable.

Mr. Deskins also said, The greatest experience of my life, from a professional level, has been the opportunity to work with many people in Harrisonburg. I especially want to express my appreciation for having the opportunity to have been mentored by James R. Sipe who will remain in my heart and mind as one of the greatest citizens of the City. Without his calm level of guidance and support, I could not have survived for 21 years in a job with people shooting at you all the time. Mr. Deskins also expressed his appreciation to the various housing authority commissioners, City Council members and having a supportive staff that can get the job done without much supervision.

Michael Wong, Chairman of the Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority, mentioned some accomplishments of Jim Deskins as departing Executive Director of the Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority including the Court Square Theater, The Market Place, Bridgeport Building, Health Department Building, WHSV-TV, Harrison Plaza, Boys and Girls Club, assisting in the building of the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Judicial Complex, Craft House, Lineweaver Apartments, and working with Hope builders. Mr. Wong thanked Mr. Deskins for his many years of dedication to Harrisonburg.

Council Member Rogers presented Jim Deskins with a certificate of appreciation from the Harrisonburg City Council for 21 years of distinguished service as Executive Director of the Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority.

City Manager Baker presented the following resolution for Council's consideration of approval:

**RESOLUTION SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT
OF THE VIRGINIA BIRDING & WILDLIFE TRAIL**

WHEREAS, Harrisonburg has received information that the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, hereafter referred to as ADGIF, has set a goal of obtaining TEA-21 (transportation enhancement) funding for the purpose of creating the Virginia Birding & Wildlife Trail; and

WHEREAS, Harrisonburg has identified ecotourism as a priority in their tourism development program and it appears that the Virginia Birding & Wildlife Trail would strongly complement their ecotourism initiatives and enhance local economic development; and

WHEREAS, bird-watching and nature-tourism are rapidly growing components of the tourism industry, attracting more than two million individuals annually to existing Virginia sites and generating nearly \$700 million annually; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Birding & Wildlife Trail is intended to unify existing and potential wildlife watching sites into a single, cohesive, marketing entity; and

WHEREAS, the proposed Birding & Wildlife Trail will be a driving trail using Virginia=s existing highway system to link some of Virginia s best wildlife watching sites providing recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat awareness, and marketing opportunities; and

WHEREAS, the initial planning process for the project is being funded by DGIF funds, and subsequently anticipated to be funded in part by TEA-21 enhancement funds, for the development of the Birding Trail; and

WHEREAS, site enhancement would generally include signage, gateway wildlife gardens, roadside pull-offs, and boardwalks/lookouts.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the City Council of Harrisonburg, Virginia:

- 1. That it supports the efforts of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, in their efforts to obtain TEA-21 funding for the Virginia Birding & Wildlife Trail.**

- 2. That it directs the City staff to submit site nomination to DGIF for inclusion in the proposed Virginia Birding & Wildlife Trail.**

Adopted _____

Mayor

Attest:

City Clerk

Ruth Deskins, Harrisonburg-Rockingham Convention and Visitors Bureau Director, requested that City Council adopt this resolution in support of the development of the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail. She explained that this project is a multi-phase project with the initial coastal project being funded by a TEA-21 grant. Adoption of this resolution will begin the western phase of the project this year. She also said that bird-watching or ecotourism is the fastest growing segment of the tourism industry attracting more than two million individuals annually to existing Virginia sites. The proposed Birding and Wildlife Trail will be a driving trail using Virginia's existing highway system to link some of Virginia's best wildlife watching sites providing recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat awareness, and marketing opportunities. Council Member Fitzgerald offered a motion to support this resolution. The motion was approved with a unanimous vote of Council.

City Manager Baker presented a suggestion from the Virginia Municipal League to participate in a Virginians to Virginians program. He explained that this program would provide for a formal link between communities with similar interests, problems, etc. In the past Harrisonburg has been teamed with the Town of Blacksburg and the City of Charlottesville. It would involve contact between the jurisdictions during a two-year period with perhaps one visit sharing information with each other. Vice-Mayor Peterson suggested that good City government should already be sharing information with neighboring jurisdictions. Council Member Fitzgerald offered a motion to continue being involved in this program. The motion was approved with a unanimous vote of Council.

Police Chief Harper reported on the Police Department's staffing needs. He explained that information contained within this report is provided to inform City Council on specific topics as they relate to providing police services to the community. The report focuses on several primary issues including Police Department staffing, staffing and salaries compared to other departments, cost of a new officer, and technology. Some information used to determine staffing included anticipated level of crime in Harrisonburg, future calls for service, anticipated growth in housing, commercial development, population, programs to improve quality of service, community attitudes relating to crime, traffic problems, use of automation to supplement staffing resources, staffing support in communication and administrative. He said evaluating the department's need for additional staffing in all areas is an on-going process. This report compares Harrisonburg to other jurisdictions of similar size, population, crime statistics, and common areas such as university towns. He explained calls for service can vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Harrisonburg calls for service is anything generated by a citizen complaint or self generated by an officer. Last year the Police Department provided 26,604 calls for service@ which was 6,034 more than in 1995. It cost \$38,321 for the first year to hire and train a police officer in the City. The City does not get a return on that investment until eight or nine months later. The public safety building is an essential tool in the achievement of local law enforcement goals. The present structure occupied by the Harrisonburg Police Department was designed and constructed in 1949 to serve as the Valley Creamery. The building was used as a creamery until about 1970, and was purchased by the City of Harrisonburg to be used as headquarters for the Police Department. Colonel Harper also noted that Harrisonburg and Rockingham County are one of the last areas in the commonwealth to have separate emergency services dispatchers. In most jurisdictions, City/County police departments and fire departments are dispatched through one 911. He explained that if someone calls 911 in Harrisonburg or Rockingham County, the call is answered by the fire department dispatchers. If it's a City police emergency, the call is transferred to the police department. The same goes for county police services. He said, It's not

much time, but if you're the caller and you have an emergency, it's too much time.

Some discussion by Council Members relative to the report included significant accumulation of leave balance, maintaining current staffing, only being fully staffed for six months during the last nine years, salaries being a major issue, increase in calls for services, very little community policing, and increased calls from the public housing areas.

City Manager Baker presented a request for a supplemental appropriation for the Fire Department. He explained that these funds were donated as a partial beneficiary of a local estate. The donation will be used to purchase a thermal imaging camera, as well as other equipment for the department. Vice-Mayor Peterson offered a motion to approve this request for a first reading:

\$19,889.67 chge. to: 1000-31809 Donations

\$19,889.67 approp. to: 1000-320232-48113 Equipment

The recorded roll call vote was taken as follows:

Vote: Yes - Council Member Lantz

Council Member Fitzgerald

Vice-Mayor Peterson

Council Member Rogers

Mayor Frank

Absent - None

Cheryl Talley appeared before City Council stating that she was one of the newer commissioners of the Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority. She said people are more likely to engage in criminal activity to gain money. Jobs that pay a fair wage and communities that have people earning a fair wage also corresponds with lower crime rates. The Harrisonburg Young Achievers has been committed over the last five years to teach children as young as seven the possibility of job creation and entrepreneurship for themselves. The theory is that you can create a business if you have the tools in which to do so. Jobs and education also have an impact on crime. She said that housing is a regional problem which also includes Rockingham County. Housing is not just the problem of Harrisonburg.

Vice-Mayor Peterson said that various road plans for the CAP program were mentioned in an article appearing in the Daily News-Record. The article also suggests using federal and state funds to relocate railroad tracks outside the northern limits of the City. This would be a great benefit to the traffic in the City and JMU. He suggested that City Council should approach the administration of JMU with these suggestions to explore ways of receiving funding to help the railroad make a change in the routing. Council Member Lantz said AI agree with the suggestion and it is worth a try, but we would have more success moving Massanutten Mountain than getting railroad tracks moved. Council agreed for Vice-Mayor Peterson to discuss this issue with the president of James Madison University.

City Manager Baker announced that a planned work session between City Council and School Board had been canceled for January 30th and he will notify everyone when another work session has been planned.

At 8:55 p.m., Vice-Mayor Peterson offered a motion that Council enter a closed session for the purpose of discussing and considering prospective candidates for appointment to the following boards and commissions: Harrisonburg Electric Commission, Harrisonburg Building Code Board of Appeals, Social Services Advisory Board, Shenandoah Valley Airport Commission and the Blue Ridge Disability Services Board. A closed session is permissible for this purpose pursuant to Section 2.1-344-A.1 of the Code of Virginia (1950), as amended (the Code). IN ADDITION, the purpose of the closed session is for the discussion of actual or probable litigation with legal counsel and staff members. A closed session is permissible for this purpose pursuant to Section 2.1-344.A.7. IN ADDITION, the purpose of the closed session is for the discussion of acquisition of real estate. A closed session is permissible for this purpose pursuant to Section 2.1-344.A.3 of the Code.

At 10:10 p.m., the closed session was declared closed and the regular session reconvened. The following statement was agreed to with a unanimous recorded vote of the Council: I 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 matters as were identified in the motion by which the executive or closed meeting were convened, were heard, discussed or considered in the closed session by the City Council.

Vice-Mayor Peterson offered a motion that John N. Neff, 456 Myers Avenue, be appointed to a first term on the Harrisonburg Building Code Board of Appeals to expire on November 30, 2005. The motion was approved with a unanimous vote of Council.

Vice-Mayor Peterson offered a motion that Ben Melton, 241 Paul Street, be appointed to a fourth term on the Blue Ridge Disability Services Board, to expire on February 1, 2004. The motion was approved with a unanimous vote of Council.

Vice-Mayor Peterson offered a motion that Joe Bowman, 1155 Rockingham Drive, be appointed to a fifth term on the Shenandoah Valley Airport Commission, to expire on January 28, 2004. The motion was approved with a unanimous vote of Council.

At 10:11 p.m., there being no further business and on motion adopted the meeting was adjourned.

CLERK

MAYOR

