

Town of Iron Gate

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December 29, 2022 Minutes

Invocation was given by Reverend David Hanks of the Iron Gate Baptist Church.

The Pledge of Allegiance

The regular Town Council meeting of Thursday, December 29, 2022 was called to order by Mayor Unroe at 7:02 pm.

PRESENT: Mayor Charles Unroe, Vice Mayor Council Member Richard Erskine, Council Members Debbie Harris, Jennifer Tyree, Kawahna Persinger, Mikki Curtis and Councilperson Mayor-elect Gary Craig; Town Clerk & Treasurer Wendy Biggs and Town Attorney Jared Jenkins. Also present were Jerry Clark with the Alleghany Journal and Ray Allen with the Virginian Review, Karen Unroe, Jimmy Jeffries and Sheriff Kevin Hall.

Mayor Unroe first noted that there would need to be an amendment under New Business for two (2) items. The first one would be for vacation day's carryover for the two (2) full-time employees and the second would be for a growers permit for chickens. Councilperson Mayor-elect Craig made the motion to amend the agenda under business to include the two (2) items requested. Vice Mayor Erskine second the motion and Mayor Unroe then asked all those in favor to say "I". All of council stated "I"; there were no "Nays".

Mayor Unroe then recognized Alleghany County Sheriff Kevin Hall. Sheriff Hall stepped forward to comment that he and the Sheriff's Department appreciated all of the hard work and effort that Mayor Unroe fostered to working with them and the community during his time as Mayor of Iron Gate. In appreciation of those efforts, Sheriff Hall presented a plaque to Mayor Charles W. Unroe. Mayor Unroe thanked Sheriff Hall and was grateful for the support that the Alleghany County Sheriff's office has given the Town.

Jerry Clark with the Alleghany Journal had also requested to be on the agenda and Mayor Unroe recognized him as well. Mr. Clark, also in appreciation of Mayor Unroe's dedication to helping to keep the community informed and working in conjunction with the Alleghany Journal, presented Mayor Charles W. Unroe with a plaque for that courtesy. Mayor Unroe then thanked Jerry Clark for the plaque.

Mayor Unroe returned to the regular agenda and asked if there were any corrections to be made in the minutes for the regular monthly meeting held on Thursday, November 17, 2022 or for the brief work session held on December 19th before the Annual Town Christmas dinner; there were none. Mayor Unroe then asked for a motion to approve the minutes for the Council meeting and work session as presented. A motion was made by Councilperson Mayor-elect Craig to approve those minutes as presented and second by Vice Mayor Councilperson Erskine. With no further questions or comments, Mayor Unroe asked for all of those in favor of approving the minutes as recorded to say "I". All six (6) Councilmembers in attendance stated "I".

Mayor Unroe noted that there were four (4) new bills to be added. The first was to NW Ace Hardware in the amount of \$133.55; the second was to Lumos for \$183.10; the third was to Compton Office in the amount of \$30.00; and the fourth one was to WEX for gas in the amount of \$459.12. Councilperson Mayor-elect Craig had questioned the electric bill for \$600.00. Councilperson Mayor-elect Craig asked if the Ferrol Avenue bill was for a pump station; Mayor Unroe stated it was and also for the tank. Councilperson Mayor-elect Craig then questioned what the signs were on the Tannery Road that were referred to in the bill. Mayor Unroe and Mrs. Biggs explained it was for the heaters at Public Works and the sign there and a couple of other lights. With no other questions about the bills, Mayor Unroe then asked for a motion to approve the receipts, disbursements, payment of the bills. A motion was made by Councilperson Persinger to pay the bills as presented and was second by Vice Mayor Councilperson Erskine. With that, Mayor Unroe asked for all of those in favor of approving the minutes as recorded to say "I". All six (6) Councilmembers in attendance stated "I".

Mayor's Report:

Mayor Unroe commented that he would wait to speak on this until the end of the meeting.

Committee Reports:

None.

Public Comments:

There were no public comments.

Old Business:

Mayor Unroe reminded everyone that we had been working with the RVARC and ECI to submit an application to the DEQ for ARPA Funding on the SCS grant. An application was submitted to

the DEQ for consideration in the amount of \$5.2 million for a complete renovation. We are confident at this time that we will receive some portion of those funds to help with our on-going sewer collection issues. We hope that if we do not receive all of the funding in this grant, that we can leverage more grants to finish the project with funds that we have from original ARPA funds. As we all know, sewer treatment costs go up every year. Our contract with Alleghany County is based on actual contribution to the system and those numbers are going up every year. This grant application for the DEQ is a huge opportunity for the Town to hopefully get the work done to repair our failing system. If that is able to be done, it will not only bring down our costs, but enable us to repair other infrastructure issues that the Town has. Mayor Unroe and Mrs. Biggs had sat with or had conversation with the DEQ and other agencies several times in the past three years, only to be told that we couldn't get low interest or no interest loans because we have no way to pay it back. When this opportunity came about, Mayor Unroe was hopeful that this was a way for a better future for the Town. Mayor Unroe asked Mrs. Biggs what she thought. Mrs. Biggs responded that she was grateful and thankful for this opportunity to get the Town back on track. Mayor Unroe also continued to thank Gabriel Irigaray with the Roanoke Valley- Alleghany Regional Commission (RVARC) and Engineering Concepts Inc. (ECI) for all of their help during the application process, in order for us to be able to submit an application. As a community, we owe them a debt of gratitude for their services to us.

Mayor Unroe then asked if there was any other old business; with no other Old Business to be discussed, Mayor Unroe moved into New Business.

New Business:

The first amended item under New Business is to discuss the two (2) vacation days that each full-time employee has left from 2022. While these days do not automatically carryover, Council has the option to approve the two (2) days for each employee to carry over into 2023. If approved, these days would need to be used within the first quarter of 2023. With this information, Mayor Unroe asked for a motion to allow Mrs. Biggs and Clarence Wilmore, Jr. to be able to use their two (2) vacation days each from 2022 within the first quarter of 2023. Councilperson Mayor-elect Craig made the motion to allow Mrs. Biggs and Clarence Wilmore, Jr. to each use their two (2) remaining 2022 vacation days within the first quarter of 2023. Vice Mayor Councilperson Erskine second the motion. With no further discussion, Mayor Unroe asked for a roll call vote:

Debbie Harris: Yes

Jennifer Tyree: Yes

Kawahna Persinger: Yes

Mikki Curtis: Yes

Gary Craig: Yes

Richard Erskine: Yes

The motion was carried and approved.

The second amended item is an application for a Growers Permit for chickens. The application has been read and signed; the fees have been paid and the zoning has been approved for 9 chickens with three (3) people living there, which is in accordance with the ordinance. Mayor Unroe then asked for a motion to approve the issuance of the permit to Michael Prior. Councilperson Persinger made the motion to issue the permit as requested and Councilperson Tyree second the motion. With no further discussion, Mayor Unroe took a roll call vote:

Debbie Harris: Yes

Jennifer Tyree: Yes

Kawahna Persinger: Yes

Mikki Curtis: Yes

Gary Craig: Yes

Richard Erskine: Yes

The motion was carried and approved.

We have two (2) request for adjustments and Mayor Unroe would like to discuss them separately. The first adjustment request is in the amount of \$126.01 on the sewer portion of the bill. This resident had a leak in the hot water heater and the water did not go into the sewer. The hot water heater has since been fixed. Vice Mayor Councilperson Erskine made the motion to grant the request in the amount of \$126.01 on the sewer portion of the bill. Councilperson Mayor-elect Craig second the motion. A roll call vote was then taken:

Debbie Harris: Yes

Jennifer Tyree: Yes

Kawahna Persinger: Yes

Mikki Curtis: Yes

Gary Craig: Yes

Richard Erskine: Yes

The motion was carried and approved.

The second request for an adjustment is from Kayser Memorial Presbyterian Church. They had a massive leak and the amount of the adjustment request is \$328.15 on the sewer portion of the bill. However, since this is a civic organization and since Council has previously granted a larger adjustment to the Iron Gate fire department, Mayor Unroe is hoping Council would consider giving a larger adjustment to the church than what was requested. The church has only a dozen or so members and typically uses only 100 gallons or less per month. Mayor Unroe

was unsure if Council would be willing to give a similar adjustment to that of the fire department, where the sewer portion and half of the water portion were given a credit. Councilperson Mayor-elect Craig asked where the leak was and Mayor Unroe explained that it was in a supply line going into the church. The church has contacted Randy and E.R. Gilbert to come and fix the line, which they did. The church there fore has already paid out some monies to have the leak repaired. They are still looking at \$2300.00 even with a partial credit as requested and none of the water went into the sewer- it all went into the ground. Councilperson Mayor-elect Craig then made a motion to grant an adjustment back to the normal amount per month on their regular bill. Mayor Unroe verified that the motion was to give an adjustment on the sewer portion of the bill so that all they would pay is the \$76.00 normal sewer rate. Councilperson Mayor-elect Craig stated "yes". Vice Mayor Councilperson Erskine second the motion. With no further discussion, Mayor Unroe asked for a roll call vote:

Debbie Harris: Yes

Jennifer Tyree: Yes

Kawahna Persinger: Yes

Mikki Curtis: Yes

Gary Craig: Yes

Richard Erskine: Yes

The motion was carried and approved.

Each year, the fire department requests grant funding from the Commonwealth of Virginia. As part of that grant funding, any funds that are given to the fire department, are deposited into an account that the Town has with the Commonwealth. This year, the funds have been deposited in the amount of \$15,000.00 on December 22, 2022. By law, we have to hold those funds in our account for 30 days and then by a favorable vote by Council, those funds can be released to the fire department. That process will need to be taken care of at the January 2023 Council meeting.

Mayor Unroe then read a letter from the Alleghany Highlands YMCA thanking us for the use of our Halloween decorations during their "Spooktacular". After the letter was read, he thanked Councilperson Persinger for helping the YMCA during the Halloween festivities and representing the Town of Iron Gate.

Mayor Unroe then read a letter from Brenda Lindsay, who is the Zoning Administrator for the Town of Iron Gate. In the letter, Mrs. Lindsay has decided it was time for her to step back from the position in order to spend more time with family. Mayor Unroe commented that Mrs. Lindsay has been the Zoning Administrator for many years and she has done a wonderful job. The position will be vacated on January 31, 2023 and will need to be filled. Mayor Unroe asked Councilperson Mayor-elect Craig if he would like Mrs. Biggs to prepare an ad to be placed in the newspaper, online with the Alleghany Journal and the Town Facebook page for the position

immediately. Councilperson Mayor-elect Craig replied that he would like for Mrs. Biggs to get the ads placed as discussed.

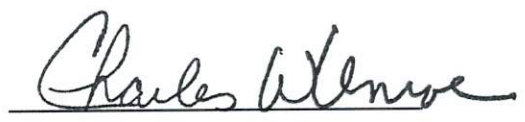
Mayor Unroe then noted that the next work session in January will fall on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Council will need to decide when they would like to meet; either the next day or the week before. Councilperson Persinger made a motion to hold the January work session on the 9th at 7pm. Councilperson Mayor-elect Craig second the motion. Mayor Unroe then asked if there were any further questions or any other discussion. With none, Mayor Unroe then asked for all of those in favor of approving the work session date to be moved to January 9, 2023 to say "I". All six (6) Councilmembers in attendance stated "I".

Mayor Unroe then spoke to everyone about his time as a Councilperson and then as Mayor. He reminisced that when he was elected the first time, that the Town had just come out of a lawsuit and the Town had to liquidate almost all of their assets to pay the settlement. Then there was a period of time when the clerk in that period would call every Wednesday and ask what to do about payroll; there wasn't any money for payroll. Mayor Unroe would reassure her that there would be money there by Friday for payroll. And it was. While our employees never went without a paycheck, they didn't always get a raise every year and they did get a Christmas gift. We haven't had any calls like that for a very, very long time. Money will always be tight here because it's a small Town with some income from a few businesses and funding comes more from the pockets of our 355 citizens more than anything. That's why this grant for the sewer system and potential upgrades are so important for the Town and the residents. We hope that once we receive funding from the VDH Office of Drinking Water, that upgrades and repairs and a pressure reducing valve can be installed to help with pressure issues and to bill more accurately. Mayor Unroe honestly believes that the Town is on the verge of a major financial upswing. We are now be able to pay the bills on time. It wasn't so long ago that when a motion to pay the bills was made, that it was made to also say "as the funds become available". It's not a lot of money and we're still struggling, but we at least have a little money in the bank. While we have come a long, we still have a long way to go and Mayor Unroe believes that it can be done. The Town is not the people who sit up at the Council table; it is those who live here, work here and raise their families here. Those people have rallied and shown their spirit and survival for this small Town and its future. Mayor Unroe hopes that he was able to contribute a small piece of vitality to the future of Iron Gate. It has been an amazing journey; learning about the way government works and working with the Sheriff's department and the staff there; working with the County and working with the supportive staff at the Allegheny Journal. It has been a great few years being able to work with Allegheny County's Commonwealth's attorney and Delegate Austin, which is something I never thought I would be able to have the opportunity to do. Mayor Unroe noted that he has been able to work with fantastic Councils and three fantastic Town Clerks (Pam Warren, Roxane Unroe and Wendy Biggs). He was thankful to have been able to share and enjoy such a journey with everyone and to have been the Mayor for eight years; thank you all.

Councilperson Vice Mayor Erskine then stood and asked Mayor Unroe to come around to the front of the council table. Vice Mayor Erskine then thanked Mayor Charles W. Unroe for his service to the Town of Iron Gate and wished him well in future endeavors as he presented him with a plaque from the Town of Iron Gate, Town Council and Town employees. As Mayor Unroe read the plaque, he commented that he was glad he read it out loud. He had forgotten one group of people who absolutely are the best to work with. While they may be small in numbers, they are fierce. Never in eight years as Mayor have they never turned down a call to come in; in cold, wet, freezing conditions or in the middle of the night or the hottest days of the year, they have always been there. The Town crew deserves a huge, huge thank you from everyone in Town for their dedication. Mayor Unroe then thanked Councilperson Vice Mayor Erskine.

Mayor Unroe then asked Councilperson Mayor-elect Craig if he had a few words that he would like to share. Mayor-elect Craig was thankful that Mayor Unroe would be still be around to ask questions and seek guidance from, as there would be a lot to learn that he doesn't know. He addressed the "senior", or more seasoned Council members, to say that he will look to them for guidance as they go down this new road. He hopes that Council will work together to take Iron Gate into the future; they don't do it for the pay as it is a voluntary position. They are all in it together because they love this little Town and want it to succeed. There will be opportunities to come and Mayor-elect Craig looks forward to tackling those opportunities head on with Council, Mrs. Biggs and the Town crew. Mayor-elect Craig also will meet with Sheriff Hall soon to discuss our contract with them for law enforcement and also looks forward to working with Sgt. Chris Fisher with the Neighborhood Watch program. While it will be a little bumpy getting going, he believes that we will all get through it. Mayor-elect Craig thanked Mayor Unroe for having the confidence in him when he knows other people didn't and for that reassurance. Mayor Unroe then thanked Mr. Craig and commented that he was going to pass the gavel to Mayor-elect Craig that came from Town Hall, which had burned down. The building was then razed and Mayor Unroe's uncle, Jared Jenkins' father, retrieved the gavel from the trash on the way to the transfer station. Mayor Unroe's aunt and cousins then hung onto it and when he became Mayor, they presented it to him. When they did that, he committed to them that he would make sure that as long as he had anything to do with it, it would be the official gavel in the meetings of the Iron Gate Town Council. Mayor-elect Craig then stated that he would carry on the tradition.

There being no further new business to be discussed, a motion to adjourn was made by Vice Mayor Councilperson Erskine and second by Councilperson Mayor-elect Craig at 7:50pm. Mayor Unroe then asked all of those in favor of the adjournment to say "I". All six (6) Councilmembers in attendance stated "I".



Charles W. Unroe, Mayor



Wendy S. Biggs, Clerk