



**TOWN OF INDEPENDENCE
REGULAR SCHEDULED COUNCIL MEETING
TUESDAY JUNE 10, 2025
329 DAVIS STREET
INDEPENDENCE, VIRGINIA 24348
5:00 PM**

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Mark Miller, Vice Mayor Joan Collins, Jason Cassell, Buddy Halsey, Kit Marshall, Aaron Davis, and Lance Hart.

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT: None.

TOWN STAFF PRESENT: Kathy Knutson, Town Manager, Roger Brooks, Town Attorney, Matthew Adams, Police Chief, Terry Osborne, Public Works Director, and Kim Farmer, Town Clerk.

CITIZENS & GUESTS: Shannon Miller, Makayla Miller, Sandy Venzie, Larissa Venzie, and Michelle Pridgen.

COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion for Council to go into closed session citing VAFOIA Section 2.2-3711, to discuss personnel and contract negotiation asking the Town Attorney Roger Brooks to stay. **COUNCILMAN BUDDY HALSEY** seconded; motion carried with all ayes.

COUNCILMAN AARON DAVIS made a motion for Council to go into open session citing VAFOIA Section 2.2-3712 that only matters in closed session were convened for and permitted under was discussed. Mayor Miller asked for a roll call vote:

**Jason Cassell – I So Certify
Kit Marshall- I So Certify
Aaron Davis – I So Certify**

**Buddy Halsey-I So Certify
Joan Collins – I So Certify
Lance Hart – I So Certify**

- Public Hearing (2025-2026 Proposed Budget)
 - Mayor Miller opened the public hearing to take comments on the proposed 2025-2026 budget. With no comments Mayor Miller closed the public hearing.
- Call to Order

- o Welcome/Decorum- Mayor Mark Miller called the meeting to order this 10th day of June 2025 and declared a quorum present.
- o Approval of Agenda, Consent Agenda, Meeting Minutes-Mayor Mark Miller asked for a motion. **VICE MAYOR JOAN COLLINS made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

Summary:

The town council meeting on June 10 Monthly revenues were at 91%, with expenses including a \$154,000 engineering cost for the lake view project. The sewer I & I project is at 45% completion, with a loan of \$305,110, and the rest a grant. Officer Joseph Holderfield became a state-certified firearms instructor. The utility director reported a 5.65-inch rainfall increase, reducing water flow by 10 million gallons. The council approved a 3.5% credit card fee and discussed park maintenance and volunteer efforts. The next meeting is scheduled for July 15.

Coordinate with volunteers to move and spread mulch around the town park before Kids Day on June 20th.

Action Items:

[X] Engaged with Robinson Farmer Cox and Associates for the 2025-2026 audit. **COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL made a motion to accept the agreement with Robinson Farmer Cox Associates as presented for the 2025–2026-year end. COUNCILMAN LANCE HART seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

[X] Adopt the Hazard Mitigation Plan. **COUNCILMAN LANCE HART made a motion to adopt a Hazard Mitigation Plan and authorize Town Manager Kathy Knutson to sign all documents for the plan. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

[X] Implement the 3.5% credit/debit card fee with a \$5 minimum charge. **VICE MAYOR JOAN COLLINS made a motion to adopt the 3.5% card fee. COUNCILMAN BUDDY HALSEY seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

[X] Schedule a public hearing on July 15th to discuss amendments to the grass and weed maintenance ordinance. **Councilman Jason Cassell made a motion to hold the public hearing July 15th to take comments on the proposed grass and weed maintenance ordinance. Councilman Lance Hart seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

[X] Independence Police Department withdrawal from New River Criminal Justice Academy and become a member of Southwest Virginia Criminal Justice Academy. **COUNCILMAN LANCE HARD made a motion to withdrawal from the NRCJA and to**

**become a member of the Southwest Virginia Criminal Justice Academy.
COUNCILMAN AARON DAVIS seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

Achievements:

Officer Holder became a state certified firearms instructor with a 99% average.
The wastewater I&I project is already showing positive results in reducing water flow.
A big water leak was found and fixed twice on Library Street.
The town's lead and copper testing results were all good.
The first summer feeding program for children was held with great turnout.
Cooper's art auction for the "Making Grayson Grow" fundraiser was successful.
The swing set installation at the town park has begun.
The first cooking demonstration of the year had a record attendance of 300 people.

Challenges:

Caustic lines broke at the wastewater plant, requiring repairs.
Some two-inch water meters are having problems, affecting radio reading capabilities.
Additional lead and copper issues require sending notification letters to some residents.
The town is facing credit card processing fees, costing thousands of dollars annually.
Water tanks in town need maintenance, which will require cost assessment and planning.

Collaboration:

The police department is working with state police and sheriff's office for July 4th events.
The police chief requested approval to switch from New River Criminal Justice Training Academy to Southwest Virginia Training Academy.
Coordination with AEP regarding electrical upgrades for the food truck at the Town Park.
Collaboration between town officials and volunteers for park maintenance and improvements.

Deliverables:

Swing set installation at the park, to be completed before next weekend.

Fourth of July decorations to be put up soon, including a banner across main street at 136 East Main Street.

Google Calendar for park rentals to be created and invites sent out.

Mulch to be spread at the park on Saturday, July 14th at 8 AM.

Kids Day event scheduled for July 20th.

Park weeding day set for July 24th.

Company Updates:

The town council meeting for next month has been moved to the 15th at 6 PM.

A public hearing will be held on July 15th regarding amendments to grass and weed maintenance ordinances.

The council approved changing the credit card processing fee to 3.5% of the total transaction.

The town park rental agreement was updated, including a release of liability clause.

The food bank "Feed Independence" has grown to distributing 400 boxes per month.

Open Questions:

Water tank maintenance needs to be addressed, with information to be presented at the next committee meeting.

Water bill consequences discussion tabled for future consideration.

Further discussion needed on allowing bistro tables and chairs to be rented as part of park rentals.

Public hearing scheduled for July 15th to discuss amendment of grass and weed maintenance ordinance.

Outline:

Approval of Minutes and Audit

Town Mayor Mark Miller closes the public hearing and proceeds with the regular town council meeting for June 10.

Motion to approve the minutes from the previous meeting is made and carried.

Motion to approve engagement of Robertson Farmer and Cox for the 2025 audit is made and carried.

Town Clerk Kim Farmer provides a town financial report, detailing monthly revenues and expenses, including a 91% bank stock tax and a \$154,000 expense for the lake view project.

Police and Sewer Project Updates

Police Chief Matthew Adams reports on Officer Holder's state certification and condolences for Jay Alderman, a state trooper in Grayson County.

Motion to approve withdrawal from the New River Criminal Justice Training Academy and join the Southwest Virginia Training Academy is made and carried.

Utility Director provides His written report, detailing the wastewater project's impact and ongoing issues at the wastewater plant.

Various leaks and repairs at the wastewater plant are discussed, including a leak on Library Street and issues with two-inch meters.

Town Park and Lawn Mowing Consequences

Town Manager Kathy Knutson discusses updates to the town park rental agreement, including year-round availability and a release of liability clause.

A Google Calendar for town events is mentioned but not yet sent out.

Discussion on increasing the refundable damage deposit for town park rentals to \$100 for both residents and non-residents.

Town Manager Knutson updates the town park rental agreement to include cleanup and removal of trash created by events.

Hazard Plan and Water Tank Maintenance

Town Manager Knutson presents the hazard plan for adoption, with a motion to approve and allow Town Manager Knutson to sign the adoption page.

Water tank maintenance is tabled for the next committee meeting.

A motion to adopt a three and a half percent credit card fee for transactions is made and carried.

Town Manager Knutson explains the rationale behind the credit card fee change, including a minimum transaction amount of \$5.

Mayor's Report and Community Updates:

Mayor Miller reports on the summer feeding program for children, and the first give-out at Feed Independence, and Cooper's art auction for Making Grayson Glow.

Mayor Miller mentions meeting new residents and the importance of welcoming them to town.

Town Manger Knutson discusses the need for a public hearing on grass and weed maintenance amendments, scheduled for July 15.

Mayor Miller announces the next month's council meeting date as the 15th at 6 PM.

Community Development and Park Updates:

Councilwoman Kit Marshall reports on the erection of a swing set at the town park and the closure of the VOF grant.

A new shed at the park will house bistro tables and chairs, and the food truck electric upgrade is complete.

Michell Pridgen, Independence Farmers Market, thanks Mayor Miller and Shannon Miller for their efforts with Food Independence.

Councilwoman Kit Marshall discusses the need for mulch at the park and coordination with volunteers for the Kids Day event on July 20.

Final Discussions and Meeting Adjournment:

Town Manager Knutson suggests planting butterfly bushes and window boxes around the new shed at the park.

Town Manager Knutson offers to help with mulching and other park maintenance tasks.

Mayor Miller highlights the success of the food bank, now providing 400 boxes a month.

The meeting is adjourned with no further comments from the participants.

-Meeting Decorum-

All official meetings are to be observed by the following decorum:

- Behavior during all official meetings shall be consistent with the behavior exercised in any court or legislative room found within the Commonwealth of Virginia; and,
- There shall be no outbursts, heckling or other forms of disrespectful behavior by any individuals present within these chambers; and,
- People wishing to speak shall do so respectfully and in accordance with the applicable Rules of Procedures and/or at the specific direction of the presiding official; and,
- Out of respect for the official business being conducted, for those conducting the official business and for those present for same purpose, there shall be no private conversations taking place in the audience or other forms of distractive behavior or nuisance; and
- Please turn off cell phones and other such devices before entering the meeting room.