



**TOWN OF INDEPENDENCE
REGULAR SCHEDULED COUNCIL MEETING
TUESDAY JULY 15, 2025
329 DAVIS STREET
INDEPENDENCE, VIRGINIA 24348
5:00 PM**

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT: Kit Marshall.

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: Sandy Venzie, Larissa Venzie, Richard Hughes, 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
Joan Collins – I So Certify**

**Buddy Halsey-I So Certify
Aaron Davis – I So Certify**

Lance Hart – I So Certify

- Public Hearing (Grass and Weed Ordinance)
 - Mayor Miller opened the public hearing to take comments on the proposed grass and weed maintenance ordinance. Mayor Miller turned the public hearing over to Town Manager Kathy Knutson.

- Town Manager Knutson introduces the meeting's purpose: to discuss and approve or disapprove the new town code to update the grass and weed maintenance ordinance.
- Town Manager Knutson highlights changes made at the recommendation of Mr. Roger Brooks, including clarifications on ornamental bushes and flowers, and definitions of wooded areas and agricultural fields.
- Town Manager Knutson explains the change from seven days to ten business days for notices and the addition of "business days" to the five-day period.
- Town Manager Knutson mentions the issue of residents not mowing their yards, which costs the town money and time, and seeks council members' input.

Public Comments:

Sandra Venzie raises concerns about properties not being excluded from the ordinance, despite being considered fields.

Town Attorney Roger Brooks clarifies that properties over half an acre are considered fields.

Town Manager Knutson emphasizes the focus on fines and fees for repeat offenders who do not mow their yards.

Sandra Venzie expresses uncertainty about how their properties would be classified under the new ordinance.

Discussion on Managing Vacant Fields and Accepted Farming Practices

Larissa Venzie asks if Sandra Venzie properties would be considered abandoned properties.

Sandra Venzie clarifies that the properties are not abandoned but are not used for tilling, planting, harvesting, grazing, or mowing.

Town Manager Knutson suggests that the properties could be managed in accordance with accepted farming practices.

Mayor Mark Miller and Sandra Venzie discuss the current and potential future use of the properties, including the presence of bamboo on church property.

With no other comments Mayor Miller closed the public hearing.

- Call to Order

- o Welcome/Decorum- Mayor Mark Miller called the meeting to order this 15th day of July 2025 and declared a quorum present.
- o Approval of Agenda, Consent Agenda, Meeting Minutes-Mayor Mark Miller asked for a motion. **COUNCILMAN BUDDY HALSEY made a motion to approve the agenda, consent agenda and minutes as presented. COUNCILMAN LANCE HART seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

Summary:

The town council discussed and approved updates to the grass and weed maintenance ordinance, clarifying definitions and increasing notice periods to 10 business days. Concerns were raised about residents not mowing their yards, which costs the town money. A proposal to eliminate candy distribution during parades due to liability was debated, with suggestions to hand out items directly. The council also considered implementing a parade registration system to ensure compliance with VDOT regulations and to manage event logistics better. Additionally, a new ordinance for unrestrained dogs was proposed, and the success of the pavilion rental agreement was noted.

Action Items:

[X] Approval of the proposed ordinance for grass and weed maintenance. Mayor Mark Miller asked for a motion for the ordinance. **COUNCILMAN AARON DAVIS made a motion to approve the ordinance as presented. COUNCILMAN JASON CASSELL seconded; motion carried with all ayes.**

Town Staff Reports and Updates:

Town Clerk, Kim Farmer, provides reports for June, including G&A revenues at 99% and expenses at 96%, water revenues at 99%, and sewer revenues at 103%.

Town Clerk, Kim Farmer, mentions the receipt of the fifth disbursement for the sewer project and the completion of training to access tax returns for business licenses and meals tax.

Police Chief, Matthew Adams, reports on the successful Fourth of July event, the upcoming Christmas in July event, and the participation of the fire department in directing traffic.

Public Works Director, Terry Osborne, provides updates on water department issues, including valve problems and the upcoming arrival of a new programmer.

Discussion on Public Works Staffing and Emergency Preparedness:

Councilman Jason Cassell suggests hiring a third person for public works to handle emergency situations, citing limited help during peak times.

Mayor Mark Miller and Town Manager Kathy Knutson discuss the possibility of hiring a part-time or contractor to handle emergency situations.

Town Manager Knutson emphasizes her willingness to handle emergency situations and mentions her experience in the Air Force.

Mayor Mark Miller agrees to look into hiring a third person for public works.

Town Manager Report and Parade Registration Proposal:

Town Manager Knutson discusses the Fourth of July debrief meeting and the creation of an Event Guide for future events.

Town Manager Knutson proposes eliminating the practice of throwing candy during parades due to liability concerns and suggests handing out items directly to children.

Town Manager Knutson proposes implementing official parade registration to ensure compliance with VDOT regulations and to manage the event more efficiently.

Town Manager Knutson outlines the reasons for the registration process, including liability, compliance, and maintaining a family-friendly environment.

Discussion on Parade Registration and Entry Fees

Councilwoman Joan Collins suggests starting the parade registration process next year during line up.

Town Manager Knutson proposes drafting a uniform parade entry form and agreement for review.

Town Manager Knutson discusses the potential revenue from charging entry fees for parade participants, including schools, veterans, first responders, and commercial entities.

Councilwoman Joan Collins doesn't think the Town should charge entry fees for parades.

Proposal to Establish an Ordinance for Unrestrained Dogs:

Town Manager Knutson introduces a proposal to establish an ordinance for unrestrained dogs within the town limits, citing the need for consequences in the current ordinance.

Vice Mayor Joan Collins supports the proposal and suggests adding a tethering law to prevent dogs from being left tied out for extended periods.

Police Chief Adams mentions the county's lack of a tethering law and the need for the town to establish its own ordinance.

Town Manger Knutson agrees to rewrite the proposal and discuss it at the next council meeting, with a public hearing to follow.

Pavilion Rental Agreement and Food Truck Outlets:

Town Manager Knutson reports on the success of the pavilion rental agreement and the upcoming launch of a website for booking the pavilion.

Mayor Mark Miller inquiries about the fees for food trucks using the pavilion, and Town Manager Knutson confirms that the fees are the same for all users.

Town Manager Knutson mentions the delay in installing food truck outlets due to the electrician going off grid, but progress is being made.

Mayor Mark Miller thanks the town employees for their efforts during the Fourth of July event and mentions the new storage building for ATVs in the town park.

Community Development and Park Updates:

Michelle Pridgen, Independence Farmer's Market, thanks Kathy and Kit for their efforts in handling a vendor incident at the farmers market and reports on the success of the Fourth of July event.

Michelle Pridgen, Independence Farmer's Market, provides updates on upcoming events, including the berry festival, tomato festival, and apple festival, and mentions the positive impact of Healthy Kids Bucks on market attendance.

Michelle Pridgen expresses appreciation for the efforts of the town employees and the success of the Farmers market.

Final Discussions and Meeting Adjournment:

Mayor Miller adjourns the meeting, with the next committee meeting scheduled for August 5.

-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.