

A REGULAR MEETING OF THE COMMON
COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BECKLEY CONVENED
AT 6:30 PM ON APRIL 25, 2023, IN COUNCIL
CHAMBERS AND VIA WEB-X.

PRESENT: Mayor Robert R. Rappold, Recorder-Treasurer Billie Trump, City Attorney Bill File, and Secretary Susan Miller. Council Members: Janine Bullock, Robert Canter, Robert Dunlap, Cody Reedy, Tom Sopher, Sherrie Hunter, and Kevin Price. The following Department Heads were present: Director of IT William Kelly, Assistant Director of IT Amy Evans, Chief Ed Wills with BFD, Director of Board of Public Works (BPW) Pam Frey, Chief Code Enforcement Officer Donald Morgan, Chief of BPD Dean Bailey, and Director of Parks & Recreation Leslie Baker.

The Mayor called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. The public had the option to join the meeting either in person or by WEB-X from their computer, or by phone, using the weblink or phone number provided the day of the meeting on the City's webpage at Beckley.org or the City's Facebook page.

The Mayor led the Pledge of Allegiance. Council dispensed with the reading and approval of minutes from the City Council Workshop dated April 4, 2023, copies of which had been distributed to each member. Council unanimously approved the minutes as written on a motion by Councilwoman Hunter and seconded by Councilwoman Bullock. Council dispensed with the reading and approval of minutes from the regular City Council meeting dated April 11, 2023, copies of which had been distributed to each member. Council unanimously

approved the minutes as written on a motion by Councilman Sopher and seconded by Councilman Price. Council dispensed with the reading and approval of minutes from the special meeting of City Council dated April 18, 2023, to approve the levy rates for FY 2023-2024, copies of which had been distributed to each member. Council unanimously approved the minutes as written on a motion by Councilman Price and seconded by Councilman Sopher.

Next, Council unanimously approved the renewal of Donna Ellison's three-year term on the Human Rights Committee on a motion by Councilman Dunlap and seconded by Councilwoman Hunter.

Next, Council unanimously approved the renewal of Danielle Stewart's three-year term on the Human Rights Committee on a motion by Councilman Dunlap and seconded by Councilwoman Hunter.

Next, Council unanimously approved the nomination of Shelia Hamlet to join the Human Rights Committee serving a three-year term on a motion by Councilwoman Bullock and seconded by Councilwoman Hunter.

OLD BUSINESS: The Mayor spoke highly of the new Stratton Elementary

School he and several Council members toured today. Councilwoman Bullock said that memorabilia is needed from Stratton alumni to be displayed at the school. The Mayor announced that, on the City's behalf, he will be signing the (MOU) Memorandum of Understanding with The WV Landtrust which includes the six hundred plus acres of the Piney Creek Preserve. He also stated on Thursday, April 27, Corey Lilly, Director of Outdoor Economic Development, will hold the second Project Oversight Committee meeting with (DBD) Destination By Design. Councilman Dunlap thanked Heart of God Ministries and Bishop Simms for always being available for the community. Councilman Sopher asked for clarification regarding the staffing issues for the swimming pools. The Mayor said, "the theme is, we are not giving up." The (BPW) Board of Public Works is working to assess and maintain New River Pool. The Mayor said it is likely that the pool at Black Knight will not open this year, but there is hope that the City will open New River Pool. The Mayor said people have offered help to contact certified lifeguards and help those interested in becoming a

lifeguard gain certification(s) to do so.

Leslie Baker, Director of Parks and Recreation, said they are still working hard to try to open the New River Pool including working with a local staffing agency. Ms. Baker said the YMCA has helped certify more than twenty-two lifeguards. She said they are seeking a qualified Pool Manager. Ms. Baker said in forty-seven years the New River Pool has closed for only two seasons. She said the pool is fifty years old and a structural engineer will be contacted regarding the structural integrity of the pool at some point. The City will be meeting with DBD to see what the trends are for swimming pools in the 21st century. She said the City is not considering doing away with an aquatics facility but wants to know what is trending and if the need City needs an Olympic size swimming pool. She said the City needs to meet with experts regarding this matter. Councilman Reedy asked if the City has anyone in the Parks & Rec. department that can temporarily fill in as a pool manager. Ms. Baker said no, her department doesn't have enough full-time employees. The Mayor said the City requires that the pool manager be a

certified lifeguard. Councilman Reedy asked if Council members could be kept current regarding whether the pool is going to open or not. He asked that Council be notified prior to the media so they will be prepared to respond to any inquiries from the public. Councilman Dunlap asked for an update regarding Babe Ruth and the skate park. Ms. Baker said she is hopeful by the end of May the City will have a new piece of playground equipment at Freedom Park. The Mayor said that the park at Scott Avenue is near completion. Ms. Baker said the City has the equipment for Barber and Glenn Avenue playgrounds, but work needs to be done before installation. Ms. Baker said there may be good news regarding an earmark for a new community center. She said if this particular earmark is granted, the only park out of thirteen in the City that has not been refurbished will be the park at Ridge Avenue.

NEW BUSINESS: Councilman Reedy announced that May 6th will be the first annual "Battle of Badges" fundraiser for Greater Beckley Christian School. The City of Beckley PD, WV State Troopers, the Raleigh County Sheriff's Department, and staff from Sothern Regional Jail will

participate in a charity basketball event.

Admission is by donation only and proceeds go to Greater Beckley Christian School. The event begins at 9:00 a.m.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: Mary West thanked Captain Morgan and Code Enforcement for the work they have been doing on Larew Avenue. She continued to voice her concern regarding speeding drivers on Larew Avenue.

Noah Kapp with “At Work” (a staffing agency) said that in four days his company recruited seven potential lifeguards. At Work has secured funding from local community members to cover the cost of certification. He said lifeguard training classes begin April 28th and openings are available for individuals that are interested. He said if At Work is authorized to assist the City, he believes they can recruit the necessary personnel required to keep the pools open all summer. The Mayor asked Mr. Trump, Recorder Treasurer and Ms. Baker, Director of Parks & Rec. to work with Mr. Kapp to obtain a proposal for this work. Ms. Baker said that she and Jenna have the proposal from Mr. Kapp and have been working on it along with Human Resources. Mr. Kapp said they

also discussed a pool manager, and the candidate will be taking her lifeguard certification test Friday. Next, Alishia Dowdin, whose nephew just passed away from a recent shooting, spoke asking for help from the City to ensure kids safety in East Park and other parts of the City. She said kids are no longer playing outside due to fear in East Park. She said the youth need to feel safe to be outdoors playing and riding bicycles. The Mayor offered his condolences to Ms. Dowdin and assured her that the City's internal investigation, as well as the FBI and the State Police, are working on the recent shootings. The Mayor said there will be more patrols in East Park and residents will see State Police vehicles, as well as unmarked cars containing law enforcement. Chief Bailey said eight to nine officers are working around the clock on this situation and are trying to stop the violence. Chief Bailey said he worked all weekend, and the Beckley PD is doing all it can to help. Councilman Reedy said Chief Bailey's brother, Dave Bailey, is a Community Resources Officer who is trying to get community events (such as the one recently at Lewis Ritchie Apartments) coordinated.

Councilman Reedy thinks this will help bring the community and the police officers together. The Mayor said the City of Beckley PD has a precinct at Lewis Ritchie Apartments where they hosted a community event which was well attended, and he thinks this is a good place to start. The Mayor complimented Councilwoman Bullock's newspaper article to try to get the youth interested in church and church activities. Ms. Dowdin suggested that counselors reach out to the children at Woodrow Wilson High School to sponsor apprenticeship training for various careers by allowing the children to spend time on the job or in the office with people in various careers. The Mayor said companies such as Little General and Chick-fil-A have been helpful in doing this. Ms. Dowdin said law offices, police offices, engineering firms, real-estate offices, and various other career paths need to be laid out for the youth to participate in to give them options and help educate them about various careers. Ms. Dowdin said this needs to start with local leaders working with kids of middle school age. The Mayor said he and the CEO of the YMCA met today and discussed getting a group

of volunteers together whom youth look up to which could help guide them on the right path. Ms. Dowdin said she is here to help. Next, Christina Baisden said she is asking the City to create an Aquatics Recreation Director position who would implement programs such as swimming lessons and water aerobics. She said incentive programs are needed to help at risk youth. The Mayor said the YMCA has a year-round program offering swimming lessons. Next, Braxton Berry voiced his concerns regarding drugs and gun violence in the City. Ash Baisden voiced her concerns regarding gun violence and her safety when she leaves her house. She asked the City to keep the pools open. Next, Pamela Boyden was asked if she wanted to speak because her name was on the sign-up sheet; she declined. Tina Pannell thanked the Mayor for “showing up”. She thanked him for being there for her. She encouraged unity. She asked for leaders in the community to adopt Juneteenth while she works to get a 501 C-3 status. She is asking for financial support to get started. She asked for volunteers to help also. She thanked Beckley PD for sending delegates to events. The Mayor

thanked her for all the work she does for the community. Next, Shelly Creasy spoke regarding a streetlight that is out at Beaver Avenue and Westmoreland. The Mayor said power poles in the City that have a light out get reported to the power company and the City marks the pole with a pink, surveyor's ribbon to let the power company know which pole needs a light. The Mayor asked Pam Frey to follow up on this streetlight. Ms. Creasy said her nineteen-year-old son is terrified because of the shootings in the City that have occurred within the last week. She voiced concerns regarding the lack of safety on the rail trail. She said there is no police presence by car, on foot, or on a bicycle on the trail and the trail needs cameras. The Mayor assured Ms. Creasy that the City is working to solve the crimes as fast as it can. The Mayor said Beckley Housing Authority has received a grant for cameras. Mr. Kelly, Director of IT said that a grant has been submitted to cover the length of the rail trail (3.2 miles) with cameras. Councilwoman Bullock asked Chief Bailey if the Raleigh County Sheriff's office is handling the murder Ms. Creasy referred to. Chief Bailey said yes. Next, Pamela Hammens

offered employment opportunities through Workforce WV. She's hoping to help with employment for the youth and for the situation with the pools. The program was formerly known as Empowered Employment and is now Transitional Jobs. If an individual is unemployed for thirteen weeks, they may qualify for employment with this program. She said they are provided insurance through the federal government through Workforce after being employed for six months and working thirty-two hours weekly. She said this program could have helped with the lifeguard shortage. She said Transitional Jobs works with any organization, any facility, and any business in WV. She said the employees have liability insurance through Workforce WV. For more information contact the program's Business Services Manager, Amanda Dawson at 304-253-3611. Councilman Sopher asked what is the age at which an individual can begin working there. Ms. Hammens said fifteen years old with a parent or guardian's signature. Councilwoman Bullock asked if this program has had contact with the federal prison. Ms. Hammens said the Federal

Bonding Program could help. She shared a copy of the various programs offered through Transitional Jobs with Council members.

The Mayor said it has been inferred that the possible pool closing is a decision City Council made. He said City Council and Ms. Baker have worked hard and are continuing to work to try to solve the staffing issues so the pools can open this year. Council unanimously approved a motion to adjourn which was made by Councilwoman Bullock and seconded by Councilman Sopher. The Mayor adjourned the meeting at 7:40 p.m.

Mayor
Recorder-Treasurer