

December 18, 2014

An adjourned meeting of the Council of the Town of Bedford, Virginia, from the December 9, 2014, regular meeting was held in the Council Hall of the Municipal Building at 3:00 p.m., December 18, 2014.

Members present: Mayor Robert T Wandrei; Councilman Robert D. Carson; Councilman Stacey L. Hailey; Councilman Steve C. Rush; Councilman W. D. Tharp; and Vice Mayor James A. Vest

Members absent: Councilman C. G. Stanley, Jr.

Staff present: Town Manager Charles P. Kolakowski; Town Attorney W. W. Berry, IV; and Clerk of the Council Teresa W. Hatcher

Delegate Terry Austin stated it was his privilege to represent Bedford in the 19th District House of Delegates. Mr. Austin said he knew that the Town's major issue was to retain the compensation that was allocated through the reversion. He said that as long as Bedford County complies with the language in the provisions of the reversion, it gives him and other legislators the ability to debate, quite heavily, that the Commonwealth honor its commitment. Mr. Austin said he had not heard any reason for concern.

Town Manager Kolakowski said that one issue is that there are no new state mandates where the state does not pay.

Mr. Austin said he disagreed when the cost of Line of Duty was shifted to the localities.

The Town Manager said the state should allow localities to utilize their revenues sources such as personal property taxes and machinery and tools taxes.

Mr. Austin said he will vote to keep the machinery and tools unless there is something equitable (user tax fee).

Mr. Kolakowski spoke about economic development and what Council would like to see: an improved emphasis on growing businesses that are already here. He said that if established industries expand, add a new service, and add new employees, those new employees should be treated as a new business when it comes down to state incentives and programs.

Mr. Austin agreed with the Town Manager and said he had toured FOSTEC. Mr. Austin said FOSTEC asked for help, but there is very little that can be done at this time. The Delegate said he will be talking with the Secretary of Commerce and Trade and a representative of Virginia Economic Development to see what can be done to grow existing businesses and industries.

The Town Manager spoke about transportation and the needs for transportation being greater than Northern Virginia and Tidewater due to the fact there is more road mileage here than elsewhere. Mr. Kolakowski listed the needs: maintenance and safety improvement on the roads and the growing need for potentially public transportation systems to accommodate people who cannot afford a car to get to work.

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Mr. Austin explained his concerns regarding transportation. He said that funding for transportation needs to be equitable and this area should get its share of the funds.

Councilman Vest asked if Economic Development funds could be used to cover some of the Machinery & Tools tax.

Mr. Austin said it was an interesting idea.

Mayor Wandrei said Centra Health was concerned last year about lack of action concerning Medicaid expansion. Mr. Austin said he thinks there will be some legislation this session. Mr. Austin said the Legislature knows there is a problem.

The Mayor said natural gas needs to be brought into Bedford County as the industries would like to have access to natural gas. The Mayor asked if the Tobacco Fund be used for such a purpose. Mr. Austin said the Tobacco Fund can be used for that purpose and said the Town should plea that to the Tobacco Commission. Mr. Austin said that Kathy Byron sits on that Commission and represents part of Bedford County and she should be the one to lobby that for the Town. Mr. Austin stated he would make that request known to the Commission. Delegate Austin said that Council should send a letter to the Commission.

Councilman Rush spoke about 599 money and the Police Department having limited resources. Mr. Austin said the Governor proposed some pay increases for first responders yesterday in Richmond.

Mr. Black asked if there were any funds available for body cameras or tasers. Mr. Austin said he not know but he would look into that.

Mr. Carson asked what Mr. Austin thought about the amended state budget. Mr. Austin said he wished there were more money. Mr. Carson said he thinks the first responders deserve everything they can get.

Mr. Austin spoke about a grant program called the Agriculture, Forestry, and Industrial Development Grant, which is a local dollar for dollar match. The grant is through the Department of Forestry and Agriculture.

Upon a question by Councilman Tharp, Mr. Austin explained that the state carries an insurance policy on the first responders who are injured or killed on duty. Mr. Austin said the state paid the premiums at first on the State Police and the Sheriff's Departments; however, the state shifted the burden of that responsibility back to the localities. Mr. Austin said that in last year's budget, the House of Delegates proposed that the responsibility be shifted back to the state and the state pick up the line of duty cost. He said with the \$2.4 million cut in the budget, that responsibility got shifted back to the localities.

Councilman Tharp said his business would be willing to provide a \$10,000 funeral at no charge for Bedford Town and County deceased first responders, if the widows would continue to receive the benefits. Mr. Austin said that could be investigated.

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Councilman Tharp encouraged members of Council to attend the Virginia Municipal League Local Government Day.

Mayor Wandrei thanked Delegate Austin for coming.

The Mayor closed the meeting at 3:53 p.m.