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Martinsville City Council Neighborhood Meeting for the Westside area was held on April 27, 2015 at Albert Harris School, 710 Smith Road, Martinsville, VA at 7:30 PM, with Mayor Danny Turner presiding and Council members present including: Vice Mayor Jennifer Bowles, Gene Teague, Mark Stroud, and Sharon Brooks Hodge. Staff present: Leon Towarnicki, Eric Monday, Karen Roberts, Wayne Knox, Coretha Gravely, Sean Dunn, Eddie Cassady, Dawn Vaughn, Kenneth Draper, Andy Powers and Ted Anderson.

Mayor Turner called the meeting to order and asked Andy Powers to give an update on the Council tour of the Westside area and to present his property maintenance report.

Mayor Turner expressed concerns about “dump” locations. *Andy Powers explained that there is no dumping allowed on any property in the City. If there is dumping on private property the owner will be held responsible unless we witness someone else actively dumping trash at that location.*

Mayor Turner asked about Bulk Trash rules. *Andy Powers explained that bulk trash will not be picked up unless it's been called in and added to the schedule. If bulk items sit at a location for an extended amount of time, Property Maintenance will get involved and require the property owner to dispose of the bulk trash by a deadline date. If the bulk items are not cleared by the deadline the property owner could be charged for the City to dispose of those items. City Attorney Eric Monday added that there are some items that the bulk trash truck will not pick up so those items would be the responsibility of the property owner to dispose of.*

Mayor Turner asked the Fire Marshall to explain the current burn law. *Fire Marshall Ted Anderson explained that residents can not burn until after 4:00pm and the fire must be extinguished by 8:00pm. After May 1st the timeframe is extended from 9:00am to 8:00pm. He requested that the residents be mindful of the weather, specifically wind & dry conditions to prevent those fires from getting out of hand. He added that the Fire Department would be happy to look at debris and burn sites and offer advice free of charge.*

Mayor Turner asked the Police Chief to explain the event he has planned. *Police Chief Sean Dunn informed the citizens and council about the May 5, 2015 Police Summit at Martinsville High School from 6:00pm-7:30pm. He said this summit is planned to build better relationships with the community, to educate the community on what the Police Department is doing, how they are being held accountable, to explain the body cameras and other procedures that go on “behind the scenes”. Chief Dunn recognized Cynthia Ingram for her help in organizing this Summit. He said this is the first of several meetings he hopes to organize and future meetings will allow more two-way communication and question & answer sessions. Mayor Turner requested that the Police Chief provide and demonstrate a chest camera at the next meeting.*

William Eggleston, 1507 Roundabout Road – trash is getting thrown into the street and bulk trash left for weeks, he wants the Police Department to look at that area and have it cleaned up. *Vice Mayor Jennifer Bowles acknowledged the trash and assured that it would be cleaned up.*

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Garland Hairston, 110 Pony Place – expressed continued concern about jobs not being offered to minorities specifically in the Police Department, stated that of the last three hired in PD there were no minorities. *Chief Dunn recognized that the Police Department unfortunately does not currently “mirror” the community, explained there are challenges associated with minority recruiting and that he plans to discuss this in depth at the Police Summit in May. He corrected Mr. Hairston by explaining of the three hired there was one white male, one white female (who has since left the department) and one African American male. He met with Human Resources in September about filling these three vacancies. A letter was sent to every local minister asking for recommendations of potential candidates to fill these positions but the academy was starting soon so there was a short window of opportunity. He recognized Sandy Hines who is heading the Recruiting Committee, explaining that high quality recruiting standards will remain a top priority. Mr. Harris expressed concern that the racial concerns throughout the US will begin to filter over to our area. Chief Dunn explained that he shared that concern which is why he plans to engage more with the community with the Summit in May. He recognizes that more needs to be done and the Police Department is committed to minority recruitment efforts.*

Cynthia Ingram, 1163 Yorkshire Rd – expressed concern about the intersection at Pine Hall Rd and Yorkshire Rd, she says traffic turning left onto Yorkshire from Pine Hall Road are crossing into oncoming traffic in the right lane and there is potential for an accident. She requested a medium be installed or a center line to keep traffic separate. *City Manager Leon Towarnicki said a painted center line is a possibility and that the City will look at this location to see if space allows for a medium or a divider of some kind.*

Ms. Ingram asked about the City plans for the Paradise Inn. *City Attorney Monday advised that Westside residents should provide guidance to what they want, explaining a huge federal tax bill and a smaller bill owed to the City by the property owner. City Attorney Monday said this location is a potential candidate for demolition and that the City schedules cleanup of this location several times each year. This location is not listed as historic property, not to say it couldn't be listed and restored. A few organizations have expressed interest in restoration but for the City to restore and operate the building would not be a viable option. He stated that it may be cheaper to build a replica instead of restoring the current building. A public hearing is not required before demolition but it is suggested to allow the community to voice opinions. Ms. Ingram said the City should come up with a timeline for the community to set goals. Council Member Hodge stated that there had been several requests for the Paradise to be treated & restored like the Henry Hotel but she says the building is too deteriorated.*

Bonnie Draper, 707 Fourth St – wanted to confirm that a decision has already been made to demo the Paradise? *Council Member Hodge denied that decision had been made; she said we would need a developer to come forward to restore this building but no one has offered a viable plan because*

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of the condition of the building. Mayor Turner explained that it would cost more money to fix the building because of considerable foundation problems. City Attorney Monday confirmed that no decision has been made to the outcome, that this location is open to developers but Westside residents still need to offer opinions otherwise it may continue to sit and deteriorate.

Council Member Mark Stroud asked City Attorney Monday to touch on the Federal entanglement with the Paradise. *City Attorney Monday explained that there is a \$350,000 tax bill – stating that someone needs to come forward with a viable plan to restore, demolish or leave as is.* Ms. Ingram said the building is only a shell, she understands the sentiment of the building but that the property owners in that area want changes.

Vice Mayor Bowles asked how to make the Paradise a historic site. *City Attorney Monday explained that one problem could be with the ownership, which the current property owners could object to the plan. The property can be nominated as a historic site since it is over 50 years old. Another concern would be the condition which could prevent it from becoming a historic site.* Council Member Hodge asked what the restrictions are to be labeled a historic site. *City Attorney Monday explained that historic tax credits have specifications of how to restore the property to its original condition and appearance to obtain financial incentives.*

Assistant City Manager Wayne Knox announced that there are still two or three available lots at Academy Place valued at \$10-\$15,000 each that the City will donate to anyone with the down payment to build a home. There is a new home in that area that should be completed within the month.

Shirley Frasier, 1310 Cardinal Lane – wants to know if the City plans to pave Cardinal Lane, she is concerned with the condition of the road and says it has not been paved in the 37 years she has lived there. *City Manager Towarnicki said that the Public Works department is working on a schedule now but he is not sure if Cardinal Lane is on the list. He explained that the crack seal that is being applied helps to extend the life of the pavement – it's not pretty but it helps to maintain the road.* Council Member Gene Teague agrees that Cardinal Lane needs to be repaved. *City Manager Towarnicki said he would check that schedule and report back to her. Council Member Stroud explained how the crack seal helps to prevent further deterioration of the pavement. He said Cardinal Lane looks as bad as the road he lives on & said there are several roads in the City that need the same attention.*

Council Member Hodge asked about West End Park – do the people who live near the park want to see it fixed or not? Ms. Frasier says she has mixed feelings. She feels that the children need a place to go but she lives far enough away from the park so as to not be directly affected. Mr. Hairston also commented on the appearance of the park and the need to have it repaired. He says the park looks terrible, that the children need a place to go and that Baldwin Park is an option but its wet & cold. *Council Member Hodge asked if we would get backlash from the neighbors if we fix*

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the park & make it available to kids. Mayor Turner commented that some residents prefer to leave it closed because it gets too loud.

Chad Martin (address?) - Also commented on the park. He inquired about the meeting he had previously with the Mayor and staff regarding a community race relations meeting and the promise for one to be held in April. He also expressed concern that staff at the schools does not “mirror” the student body. He expressed a concern of what happened in Ferguson happening in our area. *Mayor Turner acknowledged that he, staff, and the Police Chief did have that discussion with Mr. Martin but shortly thereafter Piedmont Community Services developed plans for a race relations meeting/discussion which was by invitation only. There was no reason to duplicate efforts and it was also known that the Police Department was moving ahead with plans for its summit/discussion. After the PD summit and pending discussion from that meeting, a decision would be made regarding future meetings.*

Tony Jones, 612 Third Street – commented that West End Park was a “walk-up” park and it was discouraging that neighborhood youth had no place to play basketball. Mr. Jones also commented on a project he was involved with to help the youth of the community but felt discouraged after talking with City staff regarding the details. He also inquired about the Housing Office building and future use, and how that decision will be made. He expressed concern about the voting precinct located at the Housing Office & if it would remain there. Ms. Ingram also inquired if voting precinct would be maintained. *Councilmember Hodge indicated that no options have come forward from the community with a viable business plan and at this point, the only request received has been from the School Administration. Staff responded yes, the voting precinct would remain and if any changes happen that would affect this voting precinct location that it would be through a public/open process. The building can still be used as a voting precinct but someone needs to step forward with more ideas of how the building can be used.*

Mr. Jones also requested an amount that has been spent on the Martinsville Mustangs/Phillies since the team began in the 1980s. *City Manager Towarnicki said the City could go back & view previous budgets but “in kind” contributions would be hard to determine and this overall would be a big task to get an accurate number. City Attorney Monday responded that Mr. Jones would need to request a policy decision by Council to allocate the staff and time to investigate the amount contributed. Mr. Jones again stated he wanted to know the total to see how much money the City lost on the team when they can’t afford to build a community center on Westside. He asked if the City would be open to discuss a Community Center on Westside. Councilwoman Hodge said they would discuss a Community Center if the residents can provide a business plan. They need a viable plan of who would be responsible for staffing, insurance and liability. Ms. Frasier inquired on whether the City would take any responsibility for a Community Center. Council*

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Member Hodge responded that the budget does not allow it at this time but if the community would give us a plan then it can be discussed.

Mr. Hairston – commented about an issue involving a bus that drops a school child off in his neighborhood. He said in the mornings, the bus travels down Cardinal Lane to Crestwood Court and picks the child up, but in the evening around 2:30 pm, the bus comes down Pony Place, turns into Cardinal Lane and stops to let the child out. The bus then backs out of Cardinal downhill into Pony Place- a dangerous place to turn around and the child walks home from there. Indicated he has contacted School Transportation about this but no changes have occurred and no one will return his calls. *Council Member Teague replied that a note would be sent to the school board requesting his concern be addressed. Council Member Stroud suggested that Mr. Hairston contact Robert Williams of the School Board, he feels this may be a better avenue of communication.*

There being no further business, Council Member Stroud motioned that the meeting be adjourned, and Council Member Hodge seconded the motion. Mayor Turner adjourned the meeting at 8:59pm.

Leon Towarnicki
Deputy Clerk of Council

Danny Turner
Mayor