

February 28, 2023 Council Meeting

The regular meeting of the Council of the City of Martinsville, Virginia was held on February 28, 2023 in Council Chambers, Municipal Building, at 7:00 PM with Mayor LC Jones presiding. Other Council Members present included Kathy Lawson, Chad Martin, Aaron Rawls and Tammy Pearson. Staff present included City Manager Leon Towarnicki, Clerk of Council Karen Roberts and Police Chief Rob Fincher.

Mayor Jones called the meeting to order and advised Council would go into Closed Session beginning at 5:30 PM. In accordance with the Code of Virginia, Title 2.2 Chapter 37, Freedom of Information Act and upon a motion by Council Member Lawson and seconded by Vice Mayor Rawls with the following 4-0 recorded vote: Vice Mayor Rawls, aye; Council Member Pearson, aye; Mayor Jones, aye; and Council Member Lawson, aye. Council Member Martin joined Closed Session later. Council convened in Closed Session to discuss the following matters: (A) Appointments to boards and commissions, as authorized by Subsection 1, (B) Interviews of prospective candidates for employment, as authorized by Subsection 1, and (C) Discussion or consideration of the investment of public funds where competition or bargaining is involved, where, if made public initially, the financial interest of the governmental unit would be adversely affected, as authorized by Subsection 6.

At the conclusion of Closed Session, each returning member of Council certified that (1) only public business matters exempt from open meeting requirements were discussed in said Closed Session; and (2) only those business matters identified in the motion convening the Closed Session were heard, discussed, or considered during the meeting. A motion was made by Council Member Lawson; seconded by Vice Mayor Rawls with the following 5-0 recorded vote in favor to return to Open Session: Vice Mayor Rawls, aye; Council Member Martin, aye; Council Member Pearson, aye; Council Member Lawson, aye; and Mayor Jones, aye.

Council Member Lawson made a motion to appoint Jennifer Nease to the Arts and Cultural Committee (Citizen) for a 3-year term ending February 25, 2023. Council Member Pearson seconded the motion with all Council Members voting in favor.

Council Member Pearson made a motion to appoint Edward Mitchell to the Arts and Cultural Committee (Citizen) for a 3-year term ending December 31, 2025. Council Member Lawson seconded the motion with all Council Members voting in favor.

Vice Mayor Rawls made a motion to appoint Doug Sharpe, Melissa Taylor, and Michael Law to the Transportation Safety Commission for 4-year terms ending December 31, 2025. Council Member Pearson seconded the motion with all Council Members voting in favor.

No other action was taken out of closed session.

Mayor Jones called the meeting to order. Council Member Martin lead the pledge to the American flag and offered invocation. Jones welcomed everyone to the meeting, stating printed agendas could be found in the back of the room and on the City website for those watching from home.

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Approve minutes from the February 14, 2023 Council Meeting – Council Member Lawson made a motion to approve the minutes as presented; Vice Mayor Rawls seconded the motion with all Council Members voting in favor.

Consider recognizing Council Member Chad Martin for his service to the citizens of Martinsville – Council Member Lawson read the proclamation which was presented to Council Member Martin along with a Key to the City. Council Member Lawson gave Martin a card, stating that she wrote her message in the card so that she would not get emotional. Mayor Jones said his first interaction with Martin was when Martin organized an all-male meeting after a local shooting. Martin is always one of the first to step up to bring people together in the community. Jones thanked Martin for the conversations and words of advice. Martin thanked his parents, sharing that they are always with him in everything he does. To the citizens, Martin said he never wanted to win the Council seat, he didn't want to fundraise but God allowed him to win to serve the community. As a good citizen, you must be available to step up when people are hurting and in need. To the City employees, you are amazing and you make Council Members look good. Martin said that City Manager Towarnicki doesn't get near the appreciation he needs, he is level headed all the time and that keeps everyone else calm in times of need. Martin will be sad for the City when Towarnicki retires. To former Mayor Teague, thank you for your mentorship for 20+ years. Martin shared that Teague would donate money and always ask to not be recognized. Council Member Lawson was Martin's second mentor, Lawson and her husband are a power team and the love they have for the community and for each other is a testament. To Rawls, Jones and Pearson, it takes a special person to serve on Council and be the face of failure or success for the entire city. Council only gets paid about \$400/month so there must be some level of compassion for the community to do what they do. Council Members are approached with concerns regularly and have no private life. Martin will miss the residents of Martinsville but there is a new life and new opportunity that he can't turn down.



PROCLAMATION

HONORING COUNCIL MEMBER CHAD MARTIN

WHEREAS, Chad Martin has served as a member of Martinsville City Council for over seven years, from January, 2017 through February, 2023; and

WHEREAS, Chad Martin has also served the City as Vice-Mayor from January, 2017 through December, 2020; and

WHEREAS, Chad Martin has displayed outstanding dedication to the City of Martinsville and its citizens while performing his duties as a public servant; and

WHEREAS, it is highly appropriate that we thank Chad Martin for his contributions and leadership during his tenure on Council, which has helped make Martinsville an even better place to live, work, and raise a family;

NOW THEREFORE, on this 28th day of February, 2023, the Martinsville City Council hereby proclaims their thanks and appreciation to Chad Martin for his dedication and service to the citizens of Martinsville as a member of Martinsville's City Council.

LC Jones
Mayor

Hear an overview of the February 27, 2023 Southside neighborhood tour and meeting – City Manager Towarnicki summarized the Southside neighborhood tour and meeting that was held at Wesley Memorial Church. The next neighborhood meeting will be in the West End area March 24. Council Member Pearson would like to see a more user-friendly report posted to the City website with how concerns are addressed.

Hear information related to the establishment of a new board titled “Community Advisory Board” – Council Member Pearson provided a brief summary of the new board which will not impact citizens reaching out to Council members. Community members live in these neighborhoods and they see the issues day in and day out. The committee will be comprised of those community members who will formulate, analyze and study feedback from fellow neighbors and bring solutions to Council members. The advisory board would work with neighborhoods and allow Council Members to make better decisions from true feedback. The Board will communicate with Council Members and with citizens using information flyers and including information in church bulletins. This Community board will provide better 2-way communication. There will be 8-10 members and more details will be posted to the City website soon. This board will give the citizens a voice. Council is also looking into a Youth Advisory Board with high school students and Martinsville High School attendees with the opportunity to approach Council with youth related suggestions, concerns and solutions. The Youth Board would also have input on City parks. It gives local youth leadership and

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mentorship opportunities. Council hopes to receive a lot of applications once these boards are advertised. Vice Mayor Rawls said five Council members can get a lot done but 30-100 more people will make much better progress.

Hear an update from United Way of Henry County and Martinsville regarding the housing eviction prevention program – MHC UW Executive Director Phil Wenkstern updated Council Members on United Way locations and grants received by the local chapter. 87 individuals have come through United Way intake requesting a total \$170,000 for rental assistance. They've served 68 individuals with \$87,000 applied to rental assistance with a \$2,000 cap on individual rental assistance requests and a \$500 cap on utilities requests. United Way works with the landlord in addition to the tenant to ensure they don't get evicted for a minimum 30 days once that assistance is provided. United Way follows the Housing First model when assigning funds. In 2023 so far, 58 individuals have requested assistance with 21 approved for \$63,000 in rental and utilities. They have recently hired a Community Health Worker who is bilingual. All rental assistance is paid directly to the landlord, not the tenant. Vice Mayor Rawls requested a year-over-year analysis; Wenkstern said they could look into that around June/July once the new program has been in place for 1 year. Rawls said that reliable transportation is also a concern for residents to be able to hold down a job. Wenkstern said that was one of the most expensive concerns to address. Council Member Lawson mentioned a ride-share program and potential opportunities to work with employers. Rawls suggested a meeting with Piedmont Community Services and Grace Network to ensure everyone is on the same page and aware of what each organization has to offer. Wenkstern said he would be willing to meet with those groups to better network options together. Rawls questioned the Habitat for Humanity program, asking if there was still a branch in Martinsville since he hasn't seen any homes built by them in about 5 years. Wenkstern said the Department of Labor has some good organizations also. There are properties in the City landbank and empty lots that could offer potential for building. Council Member Martin said there is a misconception that people who are struggling financially are lazy or not working, so many have a good worth ethic but they are still underemployed.

Consider options for filling a vacant Council seat – City Manger Towarnicki explained the City Charter which explains two options to fill a Council vacancy. The last time there was a vacancy mid-term, Council held a public hearing to collect names of individuals willing to fill the seat and accepted online applications. This must be done within 30 days otherwise it goes to a special election. The public hearing could be held at the March 14 meeting to solicit names and interviews could be scheduled between March 14-28 with the chosen candidate being sworn in and seated at the March 28 council meeting. Council Member Lawson made the motion to set the public hearing for March 14. Vice Mayor Rawls seconded the motion with interested parties attending the March 14 meeting to express their interest. Applications could be submitted any time before March 14 but Council will require those individuals to

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have their name spoken at the meeting also. All Council Members voted in favor.

§ec. 2. - Composition; election and terms of members; to be continuing body; **filling of vacancies**; removal of member for absenteeism.

The council shall be elected as provided by general law. The council shall consist of five members, who shall be elected at large and serve for a term of four years from the first day of January next following the date of their election and until their successors have been elected and qualified.

The terms of councilmen shall be staggered. Two councilmen shall be elected in the year in which their predecessors' terms in office expire and three councilmen shall be elected in the year in which their predecessors' terms in office expire. The incumbents' successors shall be elected every four years thereafter.

Provided, however, those councilmen initially elected following the amendment of this Charter in nineteen hundred seventy-five shall not take office until the expiration of the terms of their predecessors, thereby their initial term shall be for a term of three years ten months.

The council shall be a continuing body and no measure pending before such body shall abate or be discontinued by reason of the expiration of the term of office or removal of said body, or any of them. When a vacancy occurs in the council, it shall be filled by a majority vote of the remaining members within thirty days of such vacancy. If a majority of the remaining members cannot agree, or do not act within said thirty-day period, and if at least one hundred eighty days remain in the unexpired term at the expiration of said thirty-day period, the council, immediately upon expiration of said thirty-day period, shall petition the Circuit Court of the City of Martinsville to issue a writ of election to fill such vacancy. Upon receipt of such petition, the court shall issue the writ of election, directed to the secretary of the Electoral Board of the City of Martinsville, designating the office to be filled and the time and place of holding such election; and, upon receipt of such writ, the said secretary shall publish a copy thereof at not less than ten public places within the city or publish the same in a newspaper of general circulation at least ten days before such election. No such special election shall be ordered held within the sixty days prior to a general or primary election. Any member of the council who shall be voluntarily absent from three regular meetings of the council consecutively, may be removed from office by resolution of the council declaring his seat vacant.

(Acts 1975, Ch. 416; Acts 1977, Ch. 132, § 1; Ord. No. 2010-02, 6-22-2010)

Consider approval of the consent agenda – Council Member Lawson made a motion to approve the consent agenda as presented; Council Member Martin seconded the motion with all Council Members voting in favor. Lawson asked that information on the opioid funding being added to a future agenda for disbursement for the drug court. City Manager Towarnicki explained that the funds are in a special account and they anticipate that some of those funds will be awarded to the drug court. Judge Greer is looking to hire a law clerk to assist in the drug court which would use some of those funds but there would be an invoice for that. All Council Members voted in favor.

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BUDGET ADDITIONS FOR 02/28/2023				
ORG	OBJECT	DESCRIPTION	DEBIT	CREDIT
01102926	436415	Categorical Federal - DMV Grant		2,622
01311085	506129	PD - Radar Units	2,622	
		DMV Grant Funds for Radar Equipment		
Total General Fund			2,622	2,622
FY23 - Capital - School Construction				
16101917	416601	Capital- Categorical State- School Construction		217,110
16579369	508217	School Project - School Construction Grant	217,110	
		School Construction Grant Program Entitlement*		
Total Capital - School Construction Grant			\$ 217,110	\$ 217,110
FY23 - School - Operating Fund				
18101917	404002	School - Categorical Other State Funds		200,000
80004600	566056	Security - Non Capital Equipment	200,000	
		State Security Equipment Grant Award		
18101917	404002	School - Categorical Other State Funds		24,000
71001300	561620	VTSS - Supplemental Salaries & Wages	10,720	
71001300	562100	VTSS - Social Security	820	
71001300	563000	VTSS - Purchased Services	2,195	
71001300	563142	VTSS - Professional Development	8,850	
71001300	566000	VTSS - Materials and Supplies	1,415	
		VTSS/PBIS Grant		
Total School Operating Fund			\$ 224,000	\$ 224,000
FY23 - Opioid Fund				
75100908	482918	Opioid Settlement Funds		126,789
75100908	503837	Opioid Abatement Programs	126,789	
		Opioid Settlement Funds - Wilmington Trust		
Total Opioid Fund			\$ 126,789	\$ 126,789

Business from the Floor – James Dalton, 104 Lincoln Street expressed his concern that Council rides around the streets and they report on the same houses and the same cars but nothing gets done. How did the City let some of the locations get so bad? The City pays more attention to larger projects that take away from the smaller projects like the houses on Southside. Dalton has confidence in Council and that they’ll start doing something different to address those issues. The City needs to fix the fire hydrants and the sidewalks when they get torn up to prevent people from walking out into the street. Council can’t keep riding around and not taking action. Mayor Jones said Dalton’s frustration is also Council’s frustration and he agrees that some of the same issues have been issues for a while, that is the purpose behind creating the Community Advisory Board which will receive more input from the community.

Mike Sanguadolche of 708 Starling Avenue shared details about the Transportation Safety Commission and encouraged residents to apply for Boards and Commission vacancies. Council Member Martin and Vice Mayor Rawls thanked Sanguadolche for his willingness to step up and make a difference in the community.

Comments by City Council – Council Member Martin thanked Kendall Davis and Police Chief Fincher for the amazing work they do for the City. Martin says he has never felt uneasy during a police stop in Martinsville. Martin said God is in control and Council will have a tough budget to deal with. Lawson said a resident questioned where the Emergency Housing Commission would meet, Vice Mayor Rawls confirmed that the meetings would be in the City Manager’s

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Conference Room 208 and are open to the public. Lawson thanked Council Member Martin for his service. She reminded residents of Hazardous Waste Day on April 22. There is a link on the City's website to have the Fire Department come to your home and install smoke detectors or you can contact the Fire Marshall office directly. The Red Cross recently performed an educational program at Albert Harris, there was a QR code on the printed material that can be scanned and send a message to the Red Cross when residents need service. Lawson complimented the program at The Walker Center about Black History Month and the organizers behind that. Council Member Pearson reminded residents that March is Women's History Month. The Fast Track Trade Show will be held March 7 and March 8 will be open to the public with a \$2 admission or 2 nonperishable food items. Fast Track is a great opportunity for residents to see local businesses and talk with them. Pearson said March 2-6 is Read Across America, she encourages resident to read and highlight the love of learning with the children. Pearson will be encouraging residents to apply for the Community Advisory Board and the Youth Advisory Board. Vice Mayer Rawls reiterated that Chief Fincher's service is greatly appreciated and it's encouraging to see the Chief of Police walking the streets like other officers. Rawls asked residents to be assertive, step up to help the city and don't wait to be asked. When people see you doing good things, they will follow your lead. Rawls said Council is working on a system, app or website component of some kind to see specific concerns and how those are being addressed. Anyone interested in joining City Council, please reach out to Rawls or anyone on Council with their questions. Mayor Jones thanked everyone for attending and those who watched online. Jones encouraged residents to apply for board vacancies. Jones encourages residents to step up and the be change in the community that they want to see.

Comments by the City Manager – City Manager Towarnicki shared that the City has a booth at the Fast Track Trade Show. He encourages residents to walk around and see all of the businesses represented at the trade show. He has been meeting with the Mayor and Vice Mayor along with Spencer Thomas, Martinsville hospital CEO and NCI Director Joe Sumner, both sharing some encouraging news. Thomas and Sumner have been invited to a future Council meeting to share updates. Towarnicki told Council Member Martin that it's been a pleasure to work with him and he wishes him the best of luck.

There being no further business, Council Member Lawson made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:30pm.

Karen Roberts, Clerk of Council

LC Jones, Mayor