

TOWN OF GATE CITY – TOWN COUNCIL WORKSHOP
GATE CITY TOWN HALL, 156 E. JACKSON ST.
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2007

PRESENT: Council Cassell
Council Herron
Council Perry
Vice-Mayor Tipton
Mayor Jenkins

ABSENT: Council Hurt

Values Exercise

Art Meade opened the meeting at 8:05 AM. He introduced himself, explained his title and employment history. He began the Values Exercise, which was a mental warm-up. He asked the Council history questions relating to the area and basic U.S. history in general. He discussed the history of the Bill of Rights. He said local government is not discussed in the Constitution.

Can the community's leadership articulate its goals for the town's future?

The Council discussed improving the main street in Gate City. One of the main challenges involves residents not believing the town can be improved. A historic structure that was torn down discouraged people. The historic registry could possibly help encourage the town. Art Meade talked with the Council members about why they originally joined the Council. Everyone on the Council wants to improve the community.

Art Meade discussed the Gate City Revitalization Plan that is to be funded by a grant. He talked about the population of Gate City and consumption statistics. He discussed sections of the Revitalization Plan. He said success was measured using a scientific approach. He said the Plan was credible.

What mechanism(s) might enable the town to achieve goals for the future?

Art Meade asked how the children of Gate City today will view what the Council is doing right now. The Council discussed regulatory control of local government. They talked about making residents follow ordinances such as cleaning up properties and punishing those who litter. They talked about 'ruffling the feathers' of local residents. They talked about limited resources and limited time. Some of the residents are distracting to the progress of the town. A past issue involved an embezzlement matter. The town has been through a lot of town managers and has had police department issues in the past.

Art Meade asked what other concrete evidence existed to show revitalization is being utilized. It was suggested that there was positive reinforcement from Beautification Day and other projects. Art Meade asked about façade restoration. It was mentioned that there is no money to support that project. Art Meade asked about the town's financial state. It was said that there is only a couple hundred thousand dollars in the general fund, nothing extra. Art Meade asked about generating extra revenue. Extra revenue is vital to the town and the Council would really like to receive more money through grants.

Art Meade asked about the commitment level of the Council if the only method of receiving additional revenue they are willing to attempt is through grants. He suggested a cigarette tax and discussed the beneficial revenue involved. The Council discussed the pros and cons of a cigarette tax. It was suggested to do what the Council can do before adding a cigarette tax. The employment of Robert Mullins was discussed. It was mentioned that Mullins had condemned some properties and that he was looking into the theater issue. It was said that Mullins has performed what has been asked of him. The Council agreed that the condemned properties need to be addressed.

Capital Improvement Plan

Art Meade used the Manville/Red Hill Rd. projects as an example. He explained how a small, relatively inexpensive project is a big deal to a really small community. He said street projects are continuously ongoing. He suggested going the extra distance towards a Capital Improvement Plan. He suggested being more proactive than reactive.

Rita Tipton brought up the Main Street Project. It was suggested that a Board of Directors is needed for the project, including a president, vice-president and secretary. It was said that the Economic Development Committee just got started. There is a core group of town residents who take responsibility and an outer core group of residents who make complaints and hinder progress. One of the priorities of the Economic Development Committee is to work on the business packet for new businesses. The Council discussed what it will take to improve the town. Scott County pulled the funding for the Crooked Road.

Art Meade said the Council is on target and is ready to embrace improvement. He asked the Council to think about how they will pull themselves up without the help of a grant. He asked the Council to think about educating the public to understand how windfall revenue would be used for improvements. He said it would be a proposed strategy to be voted upon.

Art Meade suggested that the Planning Commission needs to develop a document involving a proposed resolution that states the intent of the town, as to what they would do if the liquor-by-the-drink were successful and the town experienced windfall revenue. The document should state as a matter of intended policy of the town through this resolution that if windfall revenue occurred, this is what the town would do with the money. It would not be a contractual commitment, but a clear, public statement of intent of what the town policy would be. Art Meade asked the Council if they doubted the strategy. It was suggested that land availability is the main obstacle blocking new restaurants from coming into Gate City.

Features of the VA local government landscape:

Art Meade discussed the history behind the Town Manager/Council form of government. He explained how this type of government was formed to deal with corruption and the politics behind politics. This form of government is the dominant form of local government today. He talked about the Council/Manager paradigm. He distributed a Do & Don't advisory worksheet with suggestions for the Council and the Town Manager. He extensively discussed each tip and gave some examples.

He suggested that each Council member, if newly elected, should spend a half-day block of time with the Town Manager to discuss the budget. He said the meetings will be most effective if held on a one-on-one basis. He suggested that the Council be courageous politically. He suggested the Council attend some VML meetings.

Successful Public Hearings

It was asked if the public hearing sessions of the Council meetings could be timed. Art Meade said that with a set of time cards, time restrictions can be imposed within reason. He explained the importance of having the same time limitation for every speaker.

Art Meade suggested dressing the part at public hearings as to generate an atmosphere of seriousness and respect. He also discussed maintaining control at public hearings. He explained that without control there is a breakdown of communications. He explained what to do if a meeting gets out of control. He advised to respect the person who has the chair, and to require members who choose to speak to do so at a podium with a microphone. Speakers should properly identify themselves for the record before making a comment.

Conflict of Interest

Art Meade explained that if a Council member has a conflict of interest, their obligation at a vote is to disclose that information for the record and they are not supposed to participate in any closed meetings. He explained that the Commonwealth's official website is www.virginia.gov. and the site is open to everyone. He discussed the Virginia

code and gave an example of conflict of interest. He suggested discussing unclear situations with the town attorney.

Freedom of Information

Art Meade explained how an individual who requests special notification for meetings is legally entitled to that notification.

VA FOIA

Art Meade discussed aspects of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act.

Documents & Records

Art Meade explained how certain documents can be downloaded off the internet. He mentioned a local law specialist named Greg Haley, who recommends taking a roll call vote for any and every vote.

Art Meade suggested distributing copies of material when requested. He explained that when the Council returns from a closed session and a motion is made; the news media should be called if they have already departed the meeting, to let them know if a decision was made. He suggested calling routinely.

Art Meade ended the meeting at 1:30.

Mark V. Jenkins, Mayor

Jessica Kaarlela, Town Clerk