

JOINT WORKSHOP: TOWN COUNCIL & PLANNING COMMISSION

Gate City Workshop Minutes
March 02, 2026
156 East Jackson Street, Gate City, VA
6:30 PM

I. WORKSHOP MEETING CALLED TO ORDER AT 6:38 PM BY: Mayor Jamie Lawson

II. ROLL CALL: Town Clerk, Kristie Tipton

	PRESENT	ABSENT
Mayor, Jamie Lawson	X	
Vice-Mayor, Kevin Barnett	X	
Council Member, Wallace W. Ross, Jr.	X	
Council Member, Pat Elliott	X	
Council Member, Dexter Harmon	X	
Council Member, Allen Dougherty	X	
Planning Commission Chairman, Mitzi Wilson	X	
Planning Commission Member, Jo Ann Castle	X	
Planning Commission Member, Margaret Falin	X	
Planning Commission Member, Scott Cleek	X	
Town Manager, Greg Jones	X	
Town Attorney, Michele Brooks	X	

Others present: Mike Still, Kingsport Times News; Gabe Edmunds, Scott Co. Virginia Star; Tim Williams, Scott Co. Building & Zoning Official; Jeff Fleenor

III. Workshop

1. Discuss amending R-1 & R-2 Zoning definition to include “Tiny Homes” as an accessory structure. *(with Planning Commission)*

Mayor Lawson – I think Greg has a draft. Do you want to talk about that?

Greg Jones, Town Manager – Let me go over this because it gives us a little bit of structure and maybe a little starting point. What I’ve done is taken a lot of comments that I’ve heard from Council and the Planning Commission. I’ve also looked at what other counties to see what they were doing and I drafted it, this is barely even a draft – it’s just a structure for us to go by. I wanted to go back and change some of the definitions a little bit because originally the Planning Commission had

made a recommendation back to the Town Council to include Tiny Homes as a definition as far as the accessory structure. If that had went through, the accessory structure would have been up to three (3) foot off the boundary, and it would have been treated the same as any other type of shed or garage. So, in the code itself, instead of using accessory structure, the terminology is accessory dwelling unit (ADU). That matches the actual code itself rather than accessory structure.

Planning Commission Member – that was our proposal initially.

Greg Jones – It says structures in what I had. The purpose of the ordinance is to limit the accessory dwelling units, including tiny homes in residential zoning districts, while preserving neighborhood characteristics, preventing overall density and ensuring compliance with Virginia Residential Code. Like I said, this is barely even a draft. It's kind of providing me with a little bit of structure so that we can get things in it that you want to see. Any comments?

Jo Ann Castle, Planning Commission Member – No, that's basically the state code, every bit of it. It's in appendix Q of the state code.

Pat Elliott, Council Member – I have a question. I think I already know the answer, I just want to clarify. In Section 4, #4 [of the draft], "An ADU shall not be permitted on a vacant lot." If I owned a lot, one of these small 30-to-40-foot lots here in town and nothing was on it, I could not put one of these on it, correct?

Jo Ann Castle – You could not put a structure on it that's called an ADU. You could build a house, based on current zoning and building codes, any size you want. You just could not have an ADU.

Pat Elliott – So, an ADU is 400 square feet or less, so if I went 500 square feet...

Jo Ann Castle – You're just putting a little house your lot, just a little house.

Pat Elliott – Thank you. That's what I thought, but I wasn't sure.

Jo Ann Castle – They're basically the same.

Greg Jones – There's not any size limit in the zoning codes as far as a regular home. You just have to use setbacks.

Jo Ann Castle – Any size you want if it's just a little house. You just have to comply with the building codes. The only thing that's limited is by the state code. Anything else you [Town Council] want to do or prevent from being built at all. You don't have to have tiny homes anywhere in town if you don't want to. But anything else you use to limit it is your [Town Council's] decision.

Kevin Barnett, Vice-Mayor – I know of at least one instance in the past two years where a primary residence burned down and the homeowner didn't have the finances to rebuild the home completely, and they were wanting to build a tiny home.

Jo Ann Castle – They could live there on their own property while their home is being built.

Pat Elliott – According to this instead of building a 20' x 20' is build a 24' x 20' and it's 480 square feet and they're good to go. As far as that goes, a 21' x 20' because that puts them over 400 square feet.

Jo Ann Castle – If they have the space, it will give them a place to live while building their primary residence.

Greg Jones – I don't think any one of our ordinances are going to handle one hundred percent of the problems we've got.

Jo Ann Castle – That's why my first recommendation was to be by Special Exception only. Anything else wouldn't matter, as long as it was done by Special Exception.

Greg Jones – You could still do that in here [draft ordinance amendment] and just build that into it.

Jo Ann Castle – I'd do that only. I wouldn't do anything else.

Greg Jones – The reason why I suggested we do that is that way we would have some kind of precedence [guidelines] so no one comes back and hit you with favoritism or anything else like that.

Pat Elliott – Tim Williams, what's the county got in place?

Tim Williams, Scott Co. Building & Zoning Official – The county already has allowances for Tiny Homes. They must meet Virginia Residential Building Codes, which is pretty much everything you have in there [draft ordinance amendment], but the egress limits are reduced. The ceiling height reduces to 6'8". The insulation has to follow energy codes be R-60 for the ceiling, R-15 for walls, and R-19 for the floor – minimum allowable. Setbacks must comply with fire codes. One room has to be 120 square feet. Yard barns won't qualify under the building code – would have to have more robust framing etc. This draft is pretty good as it is.

Greg Jones – Does Council wanting to do this to all three residential districts or just one specific district?

Allen Dougherty, Town Council Member – Can you do it by Exception? Like by exception R-1 and R-2 and have it open in R-3?

Greg Jones – We can have them all of them.

Michele Books, Town Attorney – You can use Special Exception for all of them.

Allen Dougherty – Would that be a burden?

Greg Jones – That's entirely up to you [Council].

Mitzi Wilson, Planning Commission Chairman – I personally think we need to look at R-1 because most of those are your subdivisions, which a lot of them have their own rules. That's what you're going to be running into if we got any for R-1.

Pat Elliott – R-1 is single family homes? R-2 is multi-family dwellings?

Margaret Falin, Planning Commission Member – R-2 can have multi-family dwellings.

Mitzi Wilson – R-3 is your residential mobile homes, right?

Jo Ann Castle – The difference between R-1 and R-2 is the size of the lots – primarily.

Michele Brooks – My personal opinion, if you have a Special Exception & Use permit, it gives you a lot more control in case of something...it's a few more hoops to jump through, but at least you're controlling a little bit more of how the building is done.

- Planning Commission stated they would like to do all by Special Exception. Mayor Lawson and Michele Brooks stated they would still like to have an amendment to the existing ordinance and have the Special Exception requirement.
- *After discussion ceased, Mayor Lawson went around the table and asked each Council Member and Planning Commission Member if they had any further questions. Notes were then made for suggested revisions to the draft.

2. Council Salary Increase (Town Council)

- Discussion began based on the two salary comparisons that were included in the Council packet. Attention was drawn to the St. Paul, VA salaries (\$500.00 for Mayor and \$30.00 for Council Members) from the chart provided by Michele Brooks.

Wallace W. Ross, Jr., Town Council Member – How long has it been since we've done a salary increase?

Michele Brooks – I've been Town Attorney for sixteen (16) years and it hasn't increased during that time.

Wallace W. Ross, Jr. – I think \$300.00 is a good starting point. It may sound like a lot, but I think it's a fair assessment. We do more meetings and conferences now than we used to. If anybody runs, it costs to advertise – costs have changed. I talked to some other person who said that the \$100.00 wasn't worth for them to serve to be interested in.

Allen Dougherty – Has money been a motivator? Has it brought more people out to run for office?

Pat Elliottt – Can we financially afford it?

Allen Dougherty – I think that's the first question, is can we afford it? Cause if we can't afford it, we can't do it. When we do our next year's budget?

Greg Jones – Doing it already.

Allen Dougherty – So we're in the process. We haven't had our first meeting yet, but you're preparing the budget, and I'm wondering if it makes sense to model it at different levels to see what we can afford.

Greg Jones – That's what I do anyway. I have to do that with the employees. I have to determine what the cost of rate increase is ...

Allen Dougherty – So you kind of model it to see if we can afford it or not. And if you can't afford it, I mean if you don't have the money to do it, how can you do it?

Pat Elliott – It's a \$15,600.00 a year increase.

Mayor Lawson – Can the town financially afford it?

Allen Dougherty – Maybe another question to ask, beside the salary survey is has it improved the number of candidates that they get out? Because it's really about getting people out to participate in elections, to run. So, the question is did you have 10 or 15 candidates opposed to what you used to have. Has the money been a motivator or has it just been money that you've spent? Because if it's not been a motivator then we need to find something else.

Mayor Lawson – It's kind of a moot point if it doesn't motivate.

Greg Jones – Let me pull the numbers together and see where it lands [using Michele's St. Paul numbers of \$500.00 for Mayor and \$300.00 for Council] and we'll go from there.

Pat Elliott – I could be comfortable with \$300.00 for Mayor and \$200.00 for Council.

Dexter – I'm good with \$300.00 for Mayor and \$200.00 for Council.

Kevin Barnett – How about in the middle? Between \$300.00 / \$200.00 and \$500.00 / \$300.00'

Allen Dougherty – How about we consider a larger range? Just to look at it. See how it impacts us and if so, at what level when did it start impacting the run [for office].

3. Community Park Hours *(Town Council)*

Mayor Lawson – Any suggestions on that? Grogan is [closed] dusk to dawn, correct? How about 6:00 am to 12:00 am [closed]?

- Discussion covered: if the park should be gated and if there is going to be lights (it is) and if the limits should be on a timer. I think it needs to be gated.

Greg Jones – Do you want to fence off the whole thing?

Mayor Lawson – What about 4 x 4 posts with chains?

Kevin Barnett – What about the electric car charger? If it's gated, they won't have access [to charge their cars].

Greg Jones – That's inside the park.

Mayor Lawson – If we close the park, it won't be accessible. We can do it on a trial basis and see how it goes [not gating off access].

Michele Brooks – We can always change it.

4. Food Trucks on Jackson Street *(Town Council)*

Allen Dougherty – What's our motivator? To make money?

Greg Jones – To make sure food trucks are complying with Virginia Department of Health (VDH).

Pat Elliott – I suggest \$100.00 per event and have a current VDH license. Community Park, weren't we thinking about moving food trucks to it?

Dexter Harmon – How about the school? We could exempt them? Are we just talking about Jackson and Water streets?

Michele Brooks – How about no food trucks within 100 feet or so in front of a restaurant?

Pat Elliott – How about we get something going and tweak it as we go? Start simple.

Kevin Barnett – Gate City Frontier (GCF) is favoring the school for events now.

Allen Dougherty – What about keeping it in the middle of town with a non-compete? Maybe have an event coordinator to prevent that?

Mayor Lawson – Set \$100.00 fee and keep it as it is [location]?

- Someone suggested not charging non-profit organizations the fee.

Dexter Harmon – Is GCF a non-profit?

- Someone answered, yes.

Michele Brooks – School or churches should be exempt? Instead of non-profits?

IV. Adjournment:

Motion made to adjourn.

Motion by: Pat Elliott
VOTE: Aye: 5
Nay:
Absent:
Abstain:

2nd by: Dexter Harmon

****Motion Carried***

*Mayor Lawson adjourned the workshop at **9:33 PM**.



Mayor, Jamie Lawson



Town Clerk, Kristie L. Tipton