

**WISE TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL-CALLED MEETING
MONDAY, JANUARY 7, 2019; 7:30 P.M.
WISE MUNICIPAL BUILDING COUNCIL CHAMBERS
501 WEST MAIN STREET - WISE, VIRGINIA 24293**

Minutes

Members Present:

Jeffery Dotson, Mayor
Teresa Adkins, Vice-Mayor
Laura Taylor-Baugh
Billy Bartlett, Jr.
Caynor Smith, Jr.

Members Absent:

None

Public Expression:

There being no one from the public audience wishing to comment, Mayor Dotson closed the floor to public expression.

Discussion of a Request from Wise Rescue Squad, Inc.:

Tim Dotson, Captain of the Wise Rescue Squad, Inc., presented a general overview of the Wise Rescue Squad and the steady decline in not only revenue sources, but the number of volunteers willing to serve. He emphasized that the problems experienced with the Wise Rescue Squad were not exclusive to Wise, but rather were problems occurring with volunteer rescue squads across the state of Virginia, as well as the nation.

Captain Dotson attributed the loss of revenue primarily to: 1) healthcare reform which led to decreased Medicare and insurance reimbursement, 2) rapid decline in the coal industry which resulted in local job losses and an increase in uninsured rescue squad transports, and 3) loss of generous donations from coal mining companies. He continued that the other reason for the dire financial condition of the Squad was the decline in volunteers to serve, leading to increased reliance on paid personnel. Dotson stated that in hard economic times, people were working longer hours and multiple jobs, which left little time for volunteering. He added that with the aging population, there were fewer young people who were willing or able to volunteer. He emphasized that the Wise Rescue Squad maintain some of the highest trained volunteers of any local rescue squad with 90% certified paramedics. He stressed that the Squad continues to lose trained volunteers to privately owned ambulance services and other health care employers. Dotson noted that the Wise Rescue Squad currently had two full-time paid Emergency Medical Technicians on staff. He advised that all bills had been paid to-date and there was a \$10,000 balance remaining which would cover their January 17th payroll.

Steve Blankenbecler, deputy coordinator for Wise County Emergency Management and a member of the Board of Directors for the Wise Rescue Squad, confirmed that the Squad had done everything possible to stay afloat. He added that the financial situation was now at the point that they had to have financial help in order to continue providing rescue services. He stressed that all of the agencies in Wise County were in financial trouble. Blankenbecler cautioned that the County would be in trouble if faced with a serious emergency situation.

Mayor Dotson reminded that the Wise Rescue Squad was providing services in locations outside the Town of Wise that had no volunteer rescue squads. Captain Tim Dotson responded that the squads had mutual aid agreements with one another.

Councilman Caynor Smith, Jr. stated that a regional solution should be considered as was discussed in a 2014 meeting of officials from Wise County, neighboring towns, and emergency service organizations. He noted that Wise Rescue Squad had to contend with two privately owned ambulance services. He added that Galax County had developed a regional emergency service and the county prohibited any private ambulance service from operating in the county. Smith suggested that Wise County and the

surrounding towns meet to discuss the issues and find a solution. He thanked the Squad for bringing the situation to the attention of Council and the County Board of Supervisors.

Michael Hatfield, Wise County Administrator, stated that he had previously met with the Town Manager and Captain Dotson and was informed of the situation. He said the Board had agreed to donate \$8,000 to the Squad in order to meet the upcoming payroll. He also said that an informal group of people had been formed to begin brain storming to try to come up with a plan of action. In addition, he noted that a county workshop was scheduled for January 10, 2019 to discuss the state of the local rescue squads county-wide. Hatfield stated that some short terms plans would need to be developed while working on a long-term solution.

Mayor Dotson recounted the Town of Wise contributions to the Wise Rescue Squad including a full-time paid employee whose primary duties involved emergency services, provided a building for the organization for \$1, and provided annual donations. Mayor Dotson stressed that he considered the issue with the rescue squad the responsibility of Wise County rather than the Town of Wise. He added that the Town would be willing to help because everyone needed the services of the rescue squad.

Closed Meeting:

Councilman Smith moved to convene into a closed meeting for the purpose of and including:

Legal Matters – Consultation with legal counsel employed or retained by a public body regarding specific legal matters requiring the provision of legal advice by such counsel as permitted by Virginia Code §2.2-3711(A)(8).

Councilman Bartlett seconded the motion that passed 5-0.

**Councilman Caynor Smith, Jr. left the meeting and did not participate in closed meeting discussions.*

Regular Session:

Councilwoman Laura Taylor-Baugh moved to reconvene into the regular session. Councilman Billy Bartlett, Jr. seconded the motion, which carried 4-0.

Certification of Closed Meeting – CM Resolution #1, 2019:

Town Clerk/Treasurer Robin Meade, read Closed Meeting Resolution #1, 2019, “Resolving and certifying that to the best of each member’s knowledge (i) only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements by Virginia law were discussed in the closed meeting to which this certification resolution applied, and (ii) only such public business matters as were identified in the motion convening the closed meeting were heard, discussed, or considered by the Town Council of the Town of Wise,” and the vote was recorded by roll call:

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| Jeffery Dotson, Mayor | “Aye” |
| Teresa Adkins, Vice-Mayor | “Aye” |
| Laura Taylor-Baugh | “Aye” |
| Billy Bartlett, Jr. | “Aye” |

Adjournment:

There being no additional business to come before the governing body, Billy Bartlett, Jr. moved to adjourn the meeting. Teresa Adkins seconded the motion that carried 4-0.


Robin R. Meade, Clerk of Council


Jeffery W. Dotson, Mayor