

Town Council Special Meeting
GoToMeeting
Wednesday, August 11, 2021
3:33pm

Mayor Paulin, Vice Mayor Sitoula and Councilman Albright met in special meeting on Wednesday, August 11, 2021, on the GoToMeeting platform. Also, in attendance were Town Manager Ryan Hicks and Town Clerk Andrea Brady.

The purpose of the special meeting was to discuss American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds. The Council discussed how this first disbursement would be used.

Mayor Paulin suggested \$75,000 for façade grants, a large business assistance grant for \$275,000 (RXBSA), \$200,000 in non-profit assistance grant (USBTA), \$50,000 in business assistance mini grants and then balance out with infrastructure needs based on the Town Manager's recommendations.

Town Manager Hicks has an extensive list of infrastructure needs and he listed a few, which included the following; East Poplar stormwater, new well at well 3 location, replace all pumps at WWTP, software upgrade at WWTP, dire need for a new backhoe for water sewer repairs, new dump truck needed, well 4 upgrade, well 5 may need to be blended with 6 or 4, capping well 2, the Henderson project, I&I issues and new well off of Diffenbach. Town Manager Hicks stated that there is a possibility of a County partnership on the East Poplar stormwater project and the new well at the well 3 location.

Mayor Paulin suggested Town Manager Hicks start preparing a budget amendment from the rough numbers for what he outlined as well as the needs the Town Manager Hicks listed.

Town Manager Hick stated that the Town is receiving \$2.9 million and has received \$1.45 million in the first disbursement and will receive 2nd disbursement 1 year later.

Vice Mayor Sitoula discussed the need to address the East Poplar stormwater issue immediately and water is vital to the population and those needs the Town Manager listed should be the highest priorities.

Vice Mayor Sitoula asked about how the Town will handle optical fiber, and the need to prioritize it for the growing community and stated Town Manager Hicks will know the best what is needed in the Town and said it should be deferred to him.

Town Manager Hicks discussed the existing backbone for broadband that is already in place in Town and there is funding on the horizon for residents to tap into that service. Town Manager Hicks suggested using the ARP funds for the other needs at this time and wait for the new dollars to address broadband.

Vice Mayor Sitoula spoke about with the pending completion of the Boardwalk project, they need to think of ways to make it more easily accessible to all residents and suggested the possibility of a nature trail that runs from the Village Green to the Boardwalk. Mayor Paulin agreed and stated that the Henderson property project would also tie into this.

Town Manager Hicks stated that with \$600,000 already used with the Mayor's ideas for the ARP funds it leaves only \$800,000 and that limits the projects that he can complete in relation to infrastructure.

Mayor Paulin stated the large business assistance grant and the non-profit assistance grant need to be done with this disbursement of ARP funds, but the other items can be pushed back a year. Vice Mayor Sitoula also suggested that the funding towards broadband should also be started with this disbursement of funding. Town Manager Hicks reminded Council that the Town is a member of Maryland Broadband and could submit an RFP through them. Mayor Paulin suggested that if needed the Town could offer incentives to bring in broadband companies.

Vice Mayor Sitoula asked about converting town buildings to natural gas. Town Manager Hicks stated that the quote for the senior center was almost \$100,000 and that was with the grant taking care of the portion to run the line. Town Manager Hicks received an excellent price for down at the old PNC building and he is currently waiting on a second quote for the Senior Center.

Town Manager Hicks will implement the whole amount for the first disbursement into the budget through a budget amendment but there will need to be further discussion on wants and needs.

The Mayor requested to discuss additional items including the MOU requested by RXBSA, COVID vaccine protocol and the 101st Anniversary Celebration.

The Council discussed the MOU requested by RXBSA. RXBSA has stated they need it to hold onto State financing for their project which includes a proposed grocery store. Mayor Paulin stated that RXBSA will be given the large business grant to assist with the project.

Vice Mayor Sitoula stated that the Council should not be in a binding agreement and a generic template partnership is the furthest he is willing to recommend, with no particular dollar amount or promises made. Vice Mayor spoke about the previous issues involved with this project and the high-pressure tactics being used with Town Manager Hicks.

Town Manager Hicks read the 8 items listed in the MOU.

Item 1, the Town purchasing the land behind the building to put in a parking lot. The Council has already decided not to purchase the property and this item will be removed.

Item 2, a data request. Council agreed.

Item 3, infrastructure buildout request. The Council was not in agreement with this request. The Town would not be able to run the requested electric and sewer lines. The Council will take the request for water lines under consideration.

Item 4, waiver of impact fees and costs. Council agreed to a waiver of the impact fees since it is an existing building.

Item 5, provide additional funding to assist with the project/grant assistance. The Council agreed to provide assistance with applying for grants.

Item 6, waiver of all past due utility costs, and abate utility costs for 1 year from date of opening. The Council will take the request for a waiver under consideration. The Council will not abate the utility costs for the property.

Item 7, coordinate with them on design and development of parking area.

Item 8, hold harmless if despite all good faith efforts this proposed grocery store project does not come to fruition.

Mayor Paulin stated RXBSA is getting their financing through DHCD and DHCD has requested a written deal showing the Town is working with and is in partnership to help move this project along.

VM suggested a simplified statement, not the detailed MOU, the Council cannot commit to an agreement to waive everything. Mayor Paulin suggested the verbiage be changed to state they will consider the waiver of utilities. Town Manager Hicks reminded the Council that RXBSA wants the commitment now, not a promise for consideration.

Council agreed to a generic commitment stating they will consider the other requests as the project moves forward. Town Manager Hicks will remove items 1 and 6 and alter 3 to remove the sewer and electric but leave in the possibility of water hook up assistance. Town Manager Hicks will forward the revised MOU to Town legal counsel for further guidance.

Mayor Paulin discussed COVID protocol. Charles County has issued the mandate requiring masks inside of all facilities, which does include Town facilities. Base and active-duty personnel will be required to have the vaccine by September 15th. Mayor Paulin asked if this is something the Council is interested in doing or asking legal for their opinion. Councilman Albright suggested waiting to see if a mandate comes out before going to the expense of legal counsel guidance. Vice Mayor Sitoula suggested a weekly negative test result requirement could be instated if there is an employee or employees who do not want to get vaccinated. The Council decided to wait to see what mandates are issued at the Federal and State level and to see how things move forward to mirror other policies.

Mayor Paulin stated that with the area on the uptick with COVID cases, the Council will need to decide how to safely move forward with the 101st Anniversary Celebration. The Town will have to make sure we are doing all necessary precautions to make the event COVID safe. Mayor Paulin suggested further discussion during the September Town meeting. Councilman Albright mentioned the potential for weird weather in September, and the need for a rain date. Mayor Paulin asked Town Manager Hicks to reach out to the fireworks vendor to find out what dates would be available for a rain date.

Mayor Paulin shared that he received a call that the building that used to house George's is under contract to bring a new restaurant to town and asked if the Council would like to waive the fees and fines currently due on the property to assist with the sale. Mayor Paulin stated that he is in favor of the proposed waiver. Council agreed.

With no further discussion, Mayor Paulin adjourned the special meeting at 4:16pm. Mayor Paulin made a motion to move into closed session per §3-305(b)(1). Councilman Albright seconds the motion. Motion carried. The Council moved into closed session at 4:17pm.


Andrea Brady, Town Clerk