

**REGULAR MEETING ~ CITY COUNCIL  
PRINCETON, MERCER COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA  
August 21, 2023**

A Regular Meeting of the Common Council for the City of Princeton, Mercer County, West Virginia was held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building, 800 Bee Street, on Monday, August 21, 2023, at 6:30 p.m. In attendance were Mayor David Graham; Vice Mayor Joseph Allen; Council Members Jacqueline Rucker, James Hawkins, Dewey Russell, Marshall Lytton and James Hill; City Manager Michael Webb, City Attorney Paul Cassell and City Clerk Kaitlyn Smith. A quorum was constituted thereby.

**I. Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance**

Vice Mayor Joseph Allen presented the invocation by giving thanks for this day and continued growth in the City of Princeton; asked for guidance during the meeting and for council to make fair and just decisions for the betterment of the community; gave thanks for City Administration and outstanding employees that work hand in hand together; asked for blessings and special prayer for Council Member Jackie Rucker as she and her family deal with tragedy and various issues, along with continued prayers for her health; prayed for former Councilwoman Anita Skeens Caldwell as she continues to battle severe health issues; asked for blessings upon Scooter Smith and his road to recovery; prayed for Railroad Museum Director as she continues to heal from an injury; prayed for our country in an effort to close the divide that exists in our society; continued to pray for Ukraine that is in war with Russia and asked for peace worldwide.

Council Member Marshall Lytton led in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

**II. Call to Order**

Mayor David Graham called the meeting to order.

**III. Resolutions – Proclamations – Presentations**

There were no resolutions, proclamations or presentations.

**IV. Public Input**

There was no public input.

**V. Consent Agenda**

**VI. Policy Agenda**

**A. Committee Reports**

**1. Public Works and Recreation**

**Public Works**

Chairman Dewey Russell reported that the Public Works and Recreation Committee of Princeton City Council met on August 16, 2023, with the following to report out to City Council:

### **Monthly Report for July**

Co-Director Eric Gatchell presented that the following projects were completed by Public Works in July:

#### **OLD BUSINESS**

- Public Works continued brushhogging and mowing along the roads in the High Street area, Bell Avenue and Roundhouse Road.
- Finalizing the capital paving list, and will be back to fixing potholes and asphalt work again soon.

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

- Public Works completed 30 official service requests for the month of July along with 2 in coordination with Code Enforcement.
- Fixed a drainage basin on Mikee Street and installed a new, stronger and safer grate for it.
- Assisted the Sanitary Board with hydrovaccing a hole on Ritchie Street and repaving a sewer pipe. This provided further training for Public Works in the use of the Hydrovac system.
- Fixed a drainage issue behind Kroger, repaired 15 foot of pipe.
- Replaced and installed 150 foot of pipe on Monroe Street to fix the drainage problems and work will be done soon to install 2 30x30 drainage droplets along the street to catch water off of the road and off of the Pepsi Plant's parking lot. Thank you to the Sanitary Board for supplying the pipe needed for the project.
- Repainted the turning lanes on Davis Street and also the North Walker and Honaker Avenue intersection.
- Started mowing and weed eating and maintaining the City Parks and Trails and also keeping the trash picked up so they look cleaner. Public Works has been helping and keeping a close eye on the City Pool this summer. Making sure the pool is getting chlorine, back flushing the filters, and keeping everything operational.
- Public Works helps Amanda with maintenance at the Rec Center when an issue arises.
- Four large trees have been removed in the City Park in preparation for the new ADA playground. Two were contracted out and two were cut down and removed by Public Works.
- Prepped and graded a site for the new playground that will be installed soon.

Vice Mayor Joseph Allen commended Public Works on the work they have done to spruce up the City Park.

Mayor Graham asked if the ADA playground had been finished.

Eric Gatchell replied that it would be finished the following day, August 22.

### **Parks and Recreation Department**

Recreation Director Amanda McCabe presented the Parks and Recreation Report for July:

#### **OLD BUSINESS**

**City Pool** – The City Pool has experienced a great summer. It is hopeful that the facility will remain open every day through August 23, prior to school starting on August 24. The department intends to open for the weekend of August 26-27, as well as, Labor Day weekend September 1-3. Staffing has become increasingly difficult since all of the fall sports started back in August. However, there has only been one day this month that the pool was closed due to an inadequate number of employees.

The department's annual Back to School Bash was held on Saturday, August 5, from 12-5 p.m. The weather was very hot and the event was a huge success with almost 200 people in attendance.

**City Park ADA Playground** – The Public Works department did an excellent job prepping the site for the construction for the new ADA playground in the city park. The playground builders arrived on Friday, August 18, to begin construction of the playground. The project will take approximately 4 days. Therefore, weather permitting, they anticipate to complete the project on Tuesday, August 22.

**Summer Leagues and Day Camp**- Summer basketball and volleyball finished up last week. Day Camp will be continuing through Wednesday, prior to kids going to school on Thursday, August 24.

**Fall Leagues**- Registration for Itty and Bitty Basketball for children ages 3-6 will run through September 10, with most of the league play taking place in October.

**Starting Point Mercer County Child Protect**- For the last few years, Starting Point has been hosting their annual backpack drive in the softball field next to the Rec Center. They had prepared 800 backpacks to give away and ended up giving away approximately 500. The line was wrapped around the softball field, Public Works and across the Rec Center's parking lot. This year they also gave away clothing and shoes this year, among many other items. Director Amanda McCabe stated they still have a few backpacks left if anyone is in need of a backpack for school this year.

**Outdoor Basketball Goals**- The Recreation Center has acquired ten outdoor basketball goals for the community playgrounds. They have received two quotes so far for contracting out the job of removing and disposing of the old goal posts as well as the installation of the new goals. The Park Board will meet on Thursday to take a look at both of the quotes. Amanda states that she hopes to move forward with his project very soon. It will be a huge improvement to the playgrounds. There will be two goals placed at every playground in the city, except McKinley. McKinley is not large enough for a basketball court. Goals will be places at the following playgrounds:

- Earl Muse
- Knob
- Oliver
- Washington
- Valley

Chairman James Hill asked if the basketball goals at the park on Valley were still serviceable.

Director Amanda McCabe responded that they were the newest goals, but they still would like to replace them.

## **Railroad Museum**

Council Member Dewey Russell presented the report on behalf of Museum Director Pat Smith for the month of July:

**Numbers for July:** 511 in attendance; \$357.56 gift shop sales; \$919 in Donations

**In The Works** – Fall will be a very busy season for the Railroad Museum. On August 19, there will be a Retired Railroad Reunion. The expected attendance is over 100. **Pat appeared on WVVA In Focus on Sunday, August 13, along with the host of the reunion, James Taylor, to discuss how the railroads were instrumental in the growth of Princeton and Bluefield. Pat was asked to return to speak on the founding and growth of Mercer County.**

**September 8-9:** The Railroad Museum will be featured at the Heritage Festival at Glenwood Park. Pat will be presenting lectures to students all day on the 8<sup>th</sup> and to adults and children all day on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

**September 16:** Pat will be featured, along with a former postmaster at the library to discuss the history of Mercer Street. Presentation will include a tour of the new post office and a tour of the library, which was the old post office.

**October 6:** Princeton Railroad Museum will be celebrating their 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. This will feature a short skit by the new Bramwell theatrical group, historical characters will be roaming around, and the musical calliope will be traveling Mercer Street, Stafford Drive, Walmart and Lowes parking lots announcing the birthday celebration. They will also be giving away free birthday cake.

**October 20:** The Sensational Sixties Reunion will be held October 20-21. It will include a tour of the Railroad Museum, Agriculture Museum and the Unauthorized Vehicles Museum on Saturday, October 20. They will be offering refreshments.

**October 28-30:** The Virginian Crazies will be holding their yearly reunion at Twin Falls State Park. A visit to the Museum is a planned activity and it is expected they will also visit the other two adjacent museums.

## **Princeton Public Library**

Library Director Laura Buchanan presented the report for the month of July:

### **Library Stats**

- 91 new library cards for the month of July. The high number is primarily due to the Summer Reading program. Parents will make library accounts for their children during this time.
- There were 4,846 circulations for the month of July.

### **Programs**

- The Library host 29 programs with 292 participants over all.
- For the end of the Summer Reading Party on July 29th, the Library has a bounce house and snow cone maker from Jamz Jumpin Fun, pizza and other snacks, and led children through several fun activities that allowed them one last chance to earn tickets and prizes for the Summer Reading Program.

### **Upcoming Programs of Interest**

- The Library will be going to Pikeview High School for their resource fair and freshman orientation event. This is good to let students and parents know what resources the library has available to them.
- The Library was invited to Concord's Town Social on Sunday, August 20. Shelley was a big draw.
- On September 23<sup>rd</sup> at 11:30, retired Postal Worker Joe Besenyei will take participants on a tour through the Library and reveal the building's history of being a United States Post Office. This not only provides an opportunity to learn about the library building's past, but about Princeton's past as well. Pat Smith from the Railroad museum will be there as well.
- August is the end of the Library's Harry Potter Escape Room, however, because it was in such high demand, we are making it available as a requested paid event for team building and parties. Those interested can call the library for more details.
- The Library's Sitting in Motion Class was unfortunately cancelled.

Chairman James Hill asked if there was a way to deliver books and the older population, especially in the winter months when it is harder for them to get out due to the weather.

Director Laura Buchanan said that it is something they could explore. She stated that the local nursing homes have a designated person that will and request that. She also said something they are exploring and doing some research on is what they can do for the aging population. Such as going to the nursing homes and bringing books, offering curbside and extending the checkout period.

## **2. Public Safety**

### **Code Enforcement Department**

**Monthly Report for July 2023** – Code Enforcement Director Ty Smith presented the following monthly report for July:

**COMPUTATION OF COMPLAINTS****Summary – Property Maintenance**

Initial Complaints	224
Cumulative Complaints to date –	47,771

**AREA PATROL SUMMARY****Demolition/Renovations Programs Status**

Condemnations/Unsafe in Process	0
Demolitions in Appeals Process	0
Demolitions w/Notice to Proceed	0
Total Demolitions to Date	766

**Animal Control & Property Maintenance**

Complaints this Month	102
Animal Control Cases	30
Impounded (dogs 2; cats 28)	30
Adopted	11
Euthanized	3
Reclaimed	0
Rescued	0
Property Maintenance Cases	102

**Building Inspection (Zoning, PM, RC)**

Building Permits (Res. 18; Com. 7)	25
Voided	0
Total Inspections	31
Total Project Costs	\$1,465,199.00
Permit Fees	\$3,834.50

**Flood Plain Management & Property Maintenance**

Flood Plain Determinations:	
Flood Plain Permits Issued	4
Property Maintenance Case Total	32

**Zoning Official**

Certificate of Occupancy Applications:	2
Certificate of Occupancy Inspections:	1
Zoning Board Cases:	1

**Rental Compliance**

Revenue in July \$3,375.00; Total to Date:	\$32,097.95
Registered Units July: New Units: 2 Apts; RENEWALS: 127	
Cumulative Total: Houses 372; Apts. 567; Other 83; Total 1,022	

**Vacant Buildings**

Registered Vacant Buildings July Registered 0; Total 41.  
 Vacant Building Fees Collected in July 0

**BILLING TOTALS FOR JULY**

Demolitions Billed: \$11,942.50      Payments Collected: \$290.00  
 Grass, Trash & Vet Billed: \$1,490.00      Payments Received: \$210.00  
 15 Invoiced for a total collection of \$500.00

Mr. Smith made note that the reports have changed. This is due to the new iWorq System for their department. Both he and Melissa Meachum like the new system and believe it will do well.

Vice Mayor Joe Allen asked about the status of the grant period regarding demolitions.

City Manager Mike Webb replied that nothing has been announced yet.

Mr. Smith commented that they are actively looking for house and commercial structures that need demolished.

**Fire Department**

Fire Chief Matt Mould presented the following report for July 2023:

**Emergency Calls for the Month: 113**

- 7 Fire Calls
  1. 3 building fires
  2. 3 responses out of city limits
- 12 Vehicle Accidents / Rescues
- 81 Emergency Medical Calls
- Total emergency calls for FY 23-24: **113**

**Inspections:**

- 0 fire inspections
- 1 certificates of occupancy
- 14 burning permits

**Training:**

- 508 man-hours spent on training
  - Probationary FF Josh Gray completed his Firefighter 1 certification.
- Code Enforcement worked with the Fire Department to allow firefighters to train on some of the condemned structures before demolition. Chief Mould commented that it gives the Fire Department real world exposure and helps them tremendously.

**Vehicle Accident Billing:**

- \$0 for the month.

Total for FY2023-24: **\$0**

**Other Updates:**

- Probationary FF Noah Hendricks submitted his resignation with his final day being July 17<sup>th</sup>, leaving the department with one vacancy.
- Ladder 1(2006 Smeal 75 ft ladder truck) is out of service. It was taken to Roanoke for repairs required by the annual inspections report.

**Upcoming News:**

- Interviews to fill the vacant position will begin as soon as possible.
- The Fire Department may look in to accepting new applications and schedule a hiring test date in the fall.
- An event with Star 95 on Saturday, August 26<sup>th</sup>, will allow kids to get up close and excited about big trucks and emergency vehicles.

**Police Department**

Police Chief Gray presented the following report for July:

**Call Report** – During the month of July Princeton Police Officers responded to 624 calls, made 22 arrests and issued 353 citations.

**Testing Date-** Testing was the held the Saturday before Council. Six showed up for testing, but two had to be sent home for various reasons. Two failed the physical ability test and the other two passed the physical and written test. Chief Gray has already instructed the Detectives to start background checks.

**New Hire** – William McGuire was hired back as a Patrolman for the Police Department. He is coming back from the state after working with them for about a year.

**Training** – Lt. Pugh will be going to Nashville for a Tac Ops class. After the class, he will be certified to certify officers in the deployment of chemical munitions. Patrolman Owens is in Detroit this week for a CIT (Crisis Intervention Training) paid for by Southern Highlands. Chief Gray will be going to Chattanooga for training funded by ROCIC.

**Interdiction Team Stats** - During the past month, the interdiction team met 4 times. The team is comprised of certified officers from the department. Together they have seized 6 stolen guns. One of which was out of Los Angeles. 7 vehicles were towed, 69 Misdemeanors arrests and 1 Felony arrest. 26 drug incidents and 272 citations issued.



Councilman Dewey Russell stated that an officer spoke to him earlier that day and thanked him for letting the department start the interdiction team.

Mayor Graham stated that it was a big morale booster.

Chief Gray confirmed that it was. He also stated that a lot of things they do aren't talked about, but something like this needs to be. The officers involved worked hard to make it a success.

### 3. Finance and Administration Committee

#### Finance Department

**July 2023, Financial Report** – Finance Director Brian Conner reported that as of the end of July, the first month of FY2024, the actual revenues collected stood at 14.95% compared to the budgeted amount of 8.33%, while actual appropriations spent were 9.11%. Total funds available for City operations at the end of July were **\$3,215,317**.

#### Noteworthy Expenditures for July:

Virginian Asphalt Paving . . . .	\$78,000.00 (WVDEP)
PEIA . . . . .	\$57,897.08
Quarterly Library Allocation . .	.\$31,375.00

Chairman Lytton continued by reporting the Finance and Administration Committee approved and recommended to City Council the July 2023, Financial Statements and Report **and he so moved**.

Vice Mayor Joseph Allen duly seconded the motion.

The motion carried unanimously.

**Resolution: Transfer of Property to WVDOT** — Mr. Lytton reported the Finance and Administration Committee approved and recommended to City Council the transfer of property of property of South Second Street from Brick Street to the railroad crossing to the West Virginia Department of Highways, and **he so moved**.

Council Member Dewey Russell seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

**Abandonment of Property on Webb Street** – City Manager Mike Webb stated that there is a section of land behind CMS off of Roger Street that is not used. CMS would like to expand their building, but would need to close off the alley first.

Mr. Lytton continued by reporting the Finance and Administration Committee approved and recommended to City Council to City Council to abandon a portion of city of property on Webb Street, Caperton Avenue and two unnamed alleys, and **he so moved**.

Council Member James Hill seconded.

The motion carried unanimously.

**Cable Franchise Agreement: Comcast** – Princeton Economic Development Director Sam Lusk stated that Comcast reached out to him and is interested in coming in the City of Princeton, which would give the residents another cable option. Mr. Lusk stated he has been working with Comcast on the agreement.

Mr. Lytton reported the Finance and Administration Committee approved and recommended to City Council to authorize the City to do the necessary notices and set the necessary Public Hearings for the Comcast Cable Franchise Agreement, and **he so moved.**

With a second from all Council Members simultaneously, the motion carried unanimously.

**Architect and Engineering Proposal** –The committee met earlier in the month to look of proposals from different Architect and Engineering firms. Mayor David Graham states that the committee would like to recommend E.T. Boggess Architect.

Council Member Marshall Lytton reported that the Finance and Administration Committee approved and recommended to City Council to recommend E.T. Boggess Architect, Inc. for the Municipal Complex Community Center, and **he so moved.**

Vice Mayor Joseph Allen seconded the motion.

The motion carried unanimously.

**B. & O. Tax Incentives** – **ON MOTION**, Councilman Marshall Lytton reported that the Finance and Administration Committee approved and recommended to City Council the following businesses in the City for the 100%, 1 year, B. & O. Tax Incentive for new businesses:

1. Dab’s Country Cookin’ – 301 Mercer Street. Restaurant – Antoinette Barnes;
2. Audrey Higgins (Salon 304). – 225 Mercer Street. Cosmetologist;
3. R&M BBQ LLC – Mobile Food Vendor, Mark and Robin Kraha;

Council Member James Hill seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

### **Princeton Economic Development Authority**

PEDA Director Sam Lusk reported the following for July:

**Grand Openings/Ribbon Cuttings: 21 scheduled in 2023 thus far, with 19 already held, 3 upcoming**

#### **Upcoming**

- Daily Bread – New location on Mercer St.

- Southern Charm – WV Medicine Gift Shop
- Dab’s Country Cookin’- Restaurant

## **Business Spotlight**

### **Upcoming**

- A Taste of Memphis
- Hillbilly Cycle Sales
- The Sophisticated Hound Brewing Company
- The Tie Dyed Tarantula

## **Newsletter**

The June to December newsletter is in the design process. The newsletter will include similar items as the last one, incorporating letters Grand Openings, Ribbon Cuttings, and Business Spotlights. It will also again highlight the Beautification Grant, Princeton Business Works Grant, and the One Year Business and Occupancy Tax Forgiveness.

## **Press Releases**

Continuing to create and send out press releases to all local media outlets. There have been several stories in the media that were due to the press releases being sent out.

## **Social Media**

Sites for PEDA and City of Princeton results, last 28 days:

Post Reach: 50,866

Post Engagement: 13,067

New Page Followers: 165

Followers: 6,374

Reactions: 1,932

Shares: 1,472

Photo Views: 4,039

## **Website**

The website has the following features:

- Business Community Directory
- Available Commercial Property Database
- New, Existing, and Expanding Business resources
- Princeton Community Information.

We are still planning a workshop with the local realtors to be able to use the PEDA website.

## **Other News**

- PEDA has to-date distributed \$66,492.50 of the \$100,000 incentive for the asbestos abatement, HVAC upgrades and electrical costs. More information about the opening dates will be shared during the upcoming council meeting.
- PEDA is in the process of working with the Chamber of the Two Virginias to partner in the creation of the area Revolving Loan Fund for small business development. This

would be to establish a fund for loans in the \$1,000 to \$20,000 range. More details will be shared as the two organizations are able to come together on specifics.

**PEDA Board Appointment-** Mr. Lytton reported the Finance and Administration Committee approved and recommended to City Council the appointment of Ty Smith to fill the vacant PEDA spot in lieu of Lee Lewis resigning, **and he so moved.**

A second was made by Council Member Dewey Russell and the motion passed unanimously.

## **COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT COMMISSION**

The Community Improvement Commission recommends the approval of 3 beautification grants:

- Corner Shop Company \$1,267.58
- Bombshell Studios \$1,450.00
- Carl Pennington Insurance \$1,100.00 (originally \$2,000 but adjusted based on qualifying expenses)

The CIC is meeting with public works on August 23, to determine a Christmas decoration plan. This will be communicated to council when completed.

## **City Attorney**

City Attorney Paul Cassell reported the First Reading of the Amending Ordinance Article 1900 “Personnel Guidelines and Procedures” in regard to the clothing allowance changes previously approved by Council. This ordinance will be adopting a few changes to Clothing Allowance 4.08. Public Works was approved an increase in the clothing allowance from \$500 to \$750. Also, to reflect all other departments, under Administration/Staff will change the wording so everyone can be eligible for the Clothing Allowance at the beginning of each Fiscal Year.

**Ordinance Amendments to Personnel Guidelines and Procedures** – A motion from Council Member James Hill and a second by Councilman Dewey Russell.

The motion carried unanimously.

## **City Manger**

City Manager Mike Webb noted that he would be going to a pre-construction meeting with Public Works Co-Director Eric Gatchell soon. Mr. Webb continued by saying he wants to make sure there are plans in place for traffic control and a timeline of the project. He stated that it is a big project coming up and he wants to make sure the City is prepared.

## **Human Resources Department**

Human Resources Director Brian Blankenship stated that he continues to assist departments in looking for and hiring good qualified candidates to bring in to our City.

## **Council Roundtable**

Mayor David Graham opened up the roundtable by asking Councilman Dewey Russell to begin.

Mr. Russell said that he loves the City and is honored to serve on Council. Mr. Russell goes on to say that all City Employees are amazing and thanked them for doing a great job. He also stated that he is very proud of the Princeton Public Library and all of the activities they have going on. Mr. Russell also welcomed City Attorney Paul Cassell full time with the City

Councilman Marshall Lytton thanked those in attendance. He also added a job well done to all Department Heads, City Manager, City Clerk and City Attorney.

Councilman James Hill is very happy to see Comcast move in to city limits. He also would like to remind people to be mindful with school starting back soon and watch going through school zones. Mr. Hill stated that the progress that has been made on the flood control and drainage issues in the city has been great. He would like to thank all the departments for getting involved in helping fix the issues, but especially Public Works. He went on to say that the Thorn Street Bridge Project has been in the works since late 2016 and we are finally getting to the fruition of it. Lastly, Mr. Hill is very thankful that Chief Gray and his officers are getting involved in Critical Incident Training.

Vice Mayor Joe Allen thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and a special thank you to all administration and department heads. Mr. Allen also stated that he was proud to see the cohesiveness of everyone working together and the progress that the City is making, including the park. We will continue to make improvements to the park and make it a top notch facility where everyone will want to come to. Mr. Allen is also looking forward to the new Thorn Street Bridge. The Vice Mayor stated that the August Cruise In was one of the biggest crowds he had seen. He also welcomed the new City Clerk, Kaitlyn Smith.

Mayor David Graham started off by thanking everyone for attending the meeting. He went on to say that it has been a good summer with many great activities. Mayor Graham also reflected on the growth of the City, adding that we now have a full time Attorney. Mayor Graham wanted to thank all healthcare workers and first responders for their sacrifices and dedication of keeping everyone safe through COVID. He also welcomes the new City Clerk, Kaitlyn Smith, to her first council meeting.

Mayor Graham adjourned the meeting at 7:32 p.m.