

**REGULAR MEETING ~ CITY COUNCIL
PRINCETON, MERCER COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA
December 18, 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, December 18, 2023, at 6:30 p.m. In attendance were Mayor David Graham; Vice Mayor Joseph Allen; Council Members James Hawkins Dewey Russell, Marshall Lytton and James Hill; City Manager Michael Webb, City Attorney Paul Cassell and City Clerk Kaitlyn Smith. Absent was Councilwoman Jacqueline Rucker. A quorum was constituted thereby.

I. Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance

Vice Mayor Joseph Allen presented the invocation.

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

A. Oath of Office

- a. City Clerk Kaitlyn Smith administered the Oath of Office for Probationary Firefighter Colton Morgan.

IV. Public Input

There was no public input.

V. Public Hearing

A. Comprehensive Plan 2024-2034

Mayor Graham opened up the Public Hearing by asking Princeton Economic Development Authority Director Samuel Lusk to give an overview of the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Lusk stated that the Planning Commission began the process through a review of requirements prescribed in the state code. The Commission then approved a standardized survey to be asked of all city departments heads. Monthly meetings were held between April 2022 and April 2023 on specific sections of the plan. The public was invited as well as the appropriate city officials. The city officials were interviewed by the planning commission board on the approved survey and the public was encouraged to provide feedback. The plan that is presented for approval is a summary of this information, with the addition of SWOT analysis completed by WVU and the minutes from the described meetings, in a plan format which should be used as a policy guide from 2024 to 2034. If approved today, a copy of the comprehensive plan as written will be filed with the Mercer County Courthouse. Updated Comprehensive Plans are state-mandated.

Mayor Graham wanted to express his appreciation, along with council, for the hard work that Mr. Lusk and the Planning Commission put in to the Comprehensive Plan.

After hearing no public input, Mayor Graham closed the Public Hearing and returned to regular session.

Councilman James Hawkins made a motion to approve the 2024-2034 Comprehensive Plan.

Vice Mayor Allen duly seconded the motion.

The motion carried unanimously.

Vice Mayor Allen expressed his appreciation to the commission, saying that those individuals that form the Planning Commission are a wealth of knowledge.

VI. Consent Agenda

- A. Minutes of the November 20, 2023 Council Meeting
- B. Minutes of the January 17, 2023 Council Meeting
- C. Minutes of the March 9, 2022 Budget Meeting

With corrections noted by the City Clerk, Mayor Graham asked that the minutes of the November 20, 2023 Council Meeting, January 17, 2023 Council Meeting and the March 9, 2022 Budget Meeting be committed to record.

VII. Policy Agenda

A. Committee Reports

1. Public Works and Recreation

Public Works

Councilman Dewey Russell reported that the Public Works and Recreation Committee of Princeton City Council met on December 13, 2023, with the following to report out to City Council:

Public Works' Monthly Report – Public Works Field Supervisor Terry Blankenship presented the following progress report for November:

OLD BUSINESS:

- They have continued to pick up leaves throughout the city and keeping the streets clear of them.
- They continued work on Christmas decorations and utilized the new winding stars and toy soldier decorations.
- They continued to put shoulder gravel down that where leftovers from Capital Paving.
- They continued patching and fixing potholes.

NEW BUSINESS:

- They completed 13 official service requests for the month of November along with 2 in coordination with Code Enforcement.
- They paved berms for 2 businesses per their request along West Main Street.
- They paved the back entranceway leading to the Pepsi Plant off of Monroe Street that needed to be repaired where the pipe culvert was installed along Monroe Street earlier this year.
- They installed another speed bump on Lower Pine there are now 3 altogether, one after you come off of Church Street and two on down the street at the Earl Muse Park.
- They installed 2 more additional Stop Signs at Maple and Princeton Ave intersection, this is now a 4 – Way Stop intersection whereas it was a 2 – Way stop intersection before. The mobile message boards have been posted for safety.

- They took down and removed 4 large trees hanging over the road along South 2nd Street, for the Safety of the Parade Route as well as for traffic, one of which was highly dangerous with a dead trunk of a tree laying against the others.
- They assisted and coordinated with the Police and Fire Departments for the Veterans Day Parade as well as on the Christmas Parade. They are getting better and more coordinated with this every time they do this, and each year they will be getting better and better.
- They built an additional 88 Barricades just in time for the Christmas Parade and now have approximately 290 fully finished and will be building more for next year. They feel like the barricades did help keep people safe and understand that more are needed and will build more as they are able too.
- There are several street lights out in town many of which happened recently that they plan to start working on them as soon as possible or getting them reported so that they can be fixed.
- They have all the plows and spreaders on the trucks ready to go and they have already been actively monitoring the roads and putting salt down in places where needed with the recent snow/ ice activity.
- Over the next couple of months they plan to do work in the big city park trimming out limbs from trees in preparation for the crane truck that will be coming to install the new ADA Bathrooms up there as well as build a pad for it to sit on and getting the plumbing installed to it. While in there, they want to do some work around shelter #2 to improve water drainage and taking a tree out near the stage and working on the walkway leading up from the steps as you enter the park.
- They also plan to explore along the main pipe culvert on Lower Pine to help with fixing the culvert connections as they come across them to try and help mitigate standing water down along through there, as well as build a new headwall for the main culvert pipe as time and weather allows.

Councilman James Hill said that he spoke to Mr. Arnold Palmer recently, and Mr. Palmer was happy with the drainage work that had been completed on Lower Pine Street.

Parks and Recreation Department

Assistant Director of Parks and Rec Melinda Edwards presented the Parks and Recreation Report for November on behalf of Director Amanda McCabe:

OLD BUSINESS

Fall/Winter Programs

The JV and Varsity Youth Coed Soccer leagues are currently running 6 days a week. There are a total of 179 kids and 19 teams competing in this 3rd year program. These 2 leagues will finish up right before Christmas break.

Directly following the holidays, the department will enter into its' largest program of the year, Boys Little League Basketball for ages 8-12 and Girls Cheerleading for ages 4-12. Currently, there are a total of 311 individuals signed up for the program (97 JV boys, 92 Varsity boys, and 122 cheerleaders).

Winter Projects

The 3 additional basketball goals and pickle ball net system purchased with Community Foundation Grant Funds (\$10,401) have arrived on site and are being stored, awaiting installation. ECCO (Empire Construction Company) intends to have all of the goals installed by the end of March, 2024. There will be 2 courts at Knob and 1 court at every other playground in the city except for McKinley, which is not large enough for a court. These other playgrounds include Earl Muse, Valley Street, Oliver Avenue, and Washington Avenue.

In addition, the 7 new trash receptacles for the city park have arrived on site and are also awaiting installation. This will make a total of 17 new receptacles installed in the City Park within the last year and half.

Princeton Public Library

Library Director Laura Buchanan presented the Report for November:

Library Stats

- They made 63 new library cards during the month of November and circulated 3,875 items.
- The new board games the Library has added to circulation are doing well.

Programs

- The library hosted 24 programs with 178 in participation.
- They hosted the Beckley, Bluefield and Princeton area Geocachers for an event that included watching short films that represented geocaching. This event was organized by Anne Pelchar. Geocaching is a fun way to experience the outdoors and local areas by using GPS to locate caches that are hidden everywhere in the world.
- The Princeton Senior High School Madrigals gave a sampling of their talents to get everyone in the mood for the holidays.
- The Library was an official write-in location for NaNoWriMo again this year and had a wonderful turnout of amateur novelists of all ages, two of whom met their word count goal to become NaNoWriMo winners.

Upcoming Programs for December-January

- Mercer Street shops is hosting the first “It’s Midnight Somewhere Piñata Party: An Early Bird Countdown” This event is targeted towards children and those who may want to either start their New Year’s Eve festivities early or who don’t wish to stay up until midnight. There will be light refreshments, crafts, and the grand finale of a piñata popping at 8pm in the library parking lot.
- They do not host any special event programs in January due to weather and to allow staff and patrons down time from the holidays, however, we still have our regularly scheduled programs happening. These include:

- The Friends of the Library Book sale on January 8th & 9th
- Adult Crafternoon on January 13th
- Lego Club on January 15th
- Scribblers of the Library January 16th
- Chronicles of Yarnia January 18th
- Pokémon Card Exchange January 23rd
- Dungeons & Dragons January 25th
- Teen Art Club January 30th
- Two Book Clubs January 20th & 24th
- And Storytime every Friday

Those interested can call or visit the library’s website for more details and times.

Miscellaneous

The requirements for the MLIS degree have been completed by Mrs. Buchanan. This was the necessary degree as stated by the West Virginia Library Commission to become the director of Princeton Public Library. Records are evaluated by the University between December 18th and January 26th to ensure all requirements have been met. The Library Board meets on December 20th, at which time she will hopefully know an official date to which she will be granted the title, Library Director.

Council congratulated Mrs. Buchanan on completing the requirements for MLIS degree.

2. Public Safety

Councilman James Hill reported that the Public Safety Committee of Princeton City Council met on December 13, 2023, with the following to report to City Council:

Code Enforcement Department

Monthly Report for November 2023- Councilman James Hill presented the following monthly report for November in absence of Code Enforcement Director Ty Smith:

COMPUTATION OF COMPLAINTS

Summary – Property Maintenance

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------|
| Initial Complaints | 218 |
| Cumulative Complaints to date – | 48,925 |

AREA PATROL SUMMARY

Demolition/Renovation Programs Status

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| Condemnations/Unsafe in Process | 3 |
| Demolitions in Appeals Process | 0 |
| Demolitions w/Notice to Proceed | 0 |
| Total Demolitions to Date | 769 |

Animal Control & Property Maintenance

| | |
|----------------------------|----|
| Complaints this Month | 81 |
| Animal Control Cases | 13 |
| Impounded (dogs 0; cats 0) | 0 |
| Adopted | 0 |
| Euthanized | 0 |
| Reclaimed | 0 |
| Rescued | 0 |
| Property Maintenance Cases | 68 |

Building Inspection (Zoning, PM, RC)

| | |
|------------------------------------|--------------|
| Building Permits (Res. 11; Com. 9) | 20 |
| Total Inspections | 38 |
| Total Project Costs | \$818,168.00 |
| Permit Fees | \$2,693.00 |

Flood Plain Management & Property Maintenance

| | |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Flood Plain Determinations: | |
| Flood Plain Permits Issued | 7 |
| Property Maintenance Case Total | 35 |

Zoning Official

| | |
|--|---|
| Certificate of Occupancy Applications: | 3 |
| Certificate of Occupancy Inspections: | 1 |
| Zoning Board Cases: | 0 |

Rental Compliance

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Revenue in \$587.50; Total to Date: | \$34,095.45 |
| Registered Units: New Units: 13 Houses; RENEWALS: | 4 |

Total: 1,043

Vacant Buildings

Registered Vacant Buildings Registered 1; Total 44.

Vacant Building Fees Collected: \$200.00

BILLING TOTALS:

Demolitions Billed: \$10,807.50

Payments Collected: \$290.00

Grass, Trash & Vet Billed: \$35.00

Payments Received: \$80.00

9 Invoiced for a total collection of \$370.00

Fire Department

Councilman James Hill presented the following report for November 2023 in the absence of Fire Chief Matt Mould:

Emergency Calls for the Month: 117

- 4 Fire Calls
- 3 building fires
- 12 Vehicle Accidents / Rescues
- 81 Emergency Medical Calls
- Total emergency calls for FY 23-24: **591**

Inspections:

- 5 fire inspections
- 3 certificate of occupancy inspections

Training:

- 516 training hours
- National Traffic Incident Management.
- Fire extinguisher training was provided for employees of Princeton
- Railroad Museum and Ace Hardware.
- FF A. Peyton completed C.I.T. course with Lt. Beeman and FF Nunn serving as assistant instructors.
- A Firefighter 2 class was conducted at the Fire Training Center.

Vehicle Accident Billing:

- \$1759 for the month
- Total for FY 23-24: **\$2274**

V. Other Updates:

- FF K. Nunn completed his 2nd year of apprenticeship.
- FF J. Shafer passed his final apprenticeship exam and will complete his 3-year Apprenticeship on December 9th.
- C.A.R.E. Event with Southern Highlands was held November 2nd at City Hall.
- PFD now has an MOU with Southern Highlands supporting their C.I.T. program.
- Colton Morgan began his employment with PFD on November 29th.

- All vehicles are in service.

VI. Upcoming News:

- ESCAPE Fire/EMS training conference at Pipestem is February 20th-25th.
- A C.I.T. class will be held February 26th – March 1st.
- The Fire Department was awarded funding through the state for new hazmat suits.
- Lt. Shaguoury will be retiring at the end of January.

Police Department

Police Chief Tim Gray presented the Police Report for the month of November:

Call Report:

Offenses: 443
 Arrests: 20
 Citations: 191

Chief Gray commended the Public Works Department on a job well-done helping with the Christmas Parade.

- 1 officer completed C.I.T Training at the Rescue Squad at the end of November.
- Patrolman Shrewsbury attended C.I.T Training in Fort Myers, Florida and was able to get certified in Critical Incident Stress De-Briefing. This will help first responders and community members in times of stressful events or situations. This training was paid for by Southern Highlands.
- Night Time Qualifying was completed at the end of November.

3. Finance and Administration Committee

Councilman Marshall Lytton reported that the Finance and Administration Committee of Princeton City Council met on December 13, 2023, with the following to report to City Council:

Finance Department

November 2023, Financial Report – Finance Director Brian Conner reported that as of the end of November, the fifth month of FY2024, the actual revenues collected stood at 48.77% compared to the budgeted amount of 41.67%, while actual appropriations spent were 46.67%. Total funds available for City operations at the end of November were **\$2,854,583**.

Noteworthy Expenditures for November:

AAA Paving and Sealing. . . \$103,495.92
 PEIA \$73,391.90
 Morgan Stanley \$39,994.98 (Fire & Police Pension)

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

Councilman Dewey Russell seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

Transfer of Funds from Coal Severance:

Chairman Lytton continued by reporting the Finance and Administration Committee approved and recommended to City Council to authorize Finance Director Brian Conner to transfer funds from Coal

Severance to submit payment for Tyler Technologies Accounting Software, **and he so moved.**

Vice Mayor Allen seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Transfer Funds from Capital Equipment

Chairman Lytton continued by reporting the Finance and Administration Committee approved and recommended to City Council to authorize Finance Director Brian Conner to transfer funds from Capital Equipment for headsets for the Princeton Police Department SWAT, and **he so moved.**

Councilman James Hawkins seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

Authorization of Fund 26 Opioid Settlement

Finance Director Brian Conner reported that this was requested to be created by the State to handle revenues from Opioid Settlement.

Chairman Lytton continued by reporting the Finance and Administration Committee approved and recommended to City Council to authorize Finance Director Brian Conner to create Fund 26 Opioid Settlement, **and he so moved.**

Councilman James Hill seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

Authorize Opening Bank Account Fund 26

Councilman Marshall Lytton reported the Finance and Administration Committee approved and recommended to City Council to authorize Finance Director Brian Conner to open a bank account for Fund 26, and **he so moved.**

Vice Mayor Joseph Allen seconded the motion.

The motion carried unanimously.

PEDA/CIC/PLRA

Grand Openings/Ribbon Cuttings: 29 in 2023 so far

Most Recent:

- **Big Back's Burgers & Brews**, located at 806 Thorn Street, was held Nov. 16 at 11:00 a.m.
- **Botany Tropicals**, located at 749 Mercer Street, was held Nov. 16 at noon.
- **All Ways Caring**, located at 116 7th Street, was held Nov. 30 at 11:00 a.m.
- **ACE Hardware Princeton**, located at 1055 Stafford Drive, was held Dec. 7, at 11:00 a.m.

Upcoming:

- **Visit Mercer County/Mercer County Convention & Visitors Bureau** (New Princeton Office), located at 215 South Walker Street, scheduled for Dec. 14 at 11:00 a.m.
- **Barkingham Palace**, Roses Plaza, date to be announced
- **Jimmies Pizza**, date to be announced
- **Studio K**, date to be announced

- **Valero Gas**, date to be announced
- **Jamacia Mi Hungry**, date to be announced

Newsletter

The June to December newsletter is in the design process. The newsletter will include similar items as the last one, incorporating details of upcoming 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. The Newsletter will be ready by January committee meetings

Press Releases

Continued to create and send out press releases to all local media outlets.

- Notable releases that received coverage for this month include:
COP: Make It Sparkle and Christmas Parade
PEDA: Business Works Q3 Recipient
ACE Hardware of Princeton

Social Media

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

Post Reach: 108,179

Post Engagement: 38,375

New Page Followers: 737

Followers: 7,567

Reactions: 9,810

Shares: 1,728

Photo Views: 9,629

Media Campaign

Further, PEDA is once again putting on a “Shop Local, Shop Princeton” media campaign. PEDA has paid for advertising through Facebook Advertising, Star 95, First Media Services, WVNS, and WVVA. This campaign is to encourage our community to purchase their holiday gifts within Princeton instead of businesses elsewhere.

This campaign will conclude on 12/31.

Community Improvement Commission

- The CIC will be putting on the Make it Sparkle, Princeton, business Christmas Decoration contest again this year. Businesses will be ranked by selected judges and based on 1st, 2nd, 3rd places as well as a People’s Choice award given to the participating business with the most Social Media likes. Judging will take place on 12/21/23.
- The CIC received a \$2000.00 beatification grant request from ACE Hardware, which has since then been processed
- CIC also received a \$2000.00 beatification grant request from the RiffRaff Art Collective, which the CIC has referenced to City Council for review.

Councilman Dewey Russell congratulated Mr. Lusk on graduating from Liberty University with his Masters in Public Administration.

Riff Raff Arts Collective Façade Grant

Mr. Lytton reported that the Finance and Administration Committee approved and recommended to City Council to approve the Façade Grant Application for Riff Raff Arts Collective in the amount of \$2,000, and **he so moved.**

Councilman Dewey Russell seconded the motion.

Councilman James Hill stated this grant program was created to help new businesses with signage and frontal facades. This was for new starts, not necessarily murals. Funding a mural will cut down on funds available for new businesses. He noted that last year, money was added to the fund so that it would be available to those new businesses instead of having to turn their applications down. Mr. Hill remarked that murals should be privately funded, because if you fund one you will eventually have to fund them all and some of those murals could have offensive art. That art could be discriminating against someone and could turn in to legal trouble. Mr. Hill asked his fellow Council Members to consider these things before they vote.

The motion carried with all voting in favor except for one opposed, Councilman James Hill.

Transfer of Property of Twelfth Street

The City currently owns 1.54 acres of land on Twelfth Street, across from Southern Highlands, including the parking lot and Dr. David Mullins' office. The EDA would use this property as a revenue source with negotiations ongoing with a local entity. There is an active lease between the City and Mr. Mullins, but Mr. Lusk believes this can be ended by mutual consent to allow this transfer to happen.

Councilman Marshall Lytton reported the Finance and Administration Committee approved and recommended to City Council to Transfer 1.54 acres of property on Twelfth Street to the Princeton Economic Development Authority, and **he so moved.**

Vice Mayor Joseph Allen seconded the motion.

The motion carried unanimously.

Resolution: West Virginia Water Development Authority

This resolution is for the application of additional funding for the development of a wave pool, splash pad and concession stands on the developable land beside City Hall. This resolution indicates that the City would be requesting 1.5 million for this project from the Water Development Authority and would be matched dollar for dollar as funds are available.

Chairman Lytton reported the Finance and Administration Committee approved and recommended to City Council a Resolution for the West Virginia Water Development Authority, and **he so moved.**

Councilman James Hill seconded the motion.

The motion was carried unanimously by roll call vote, as follows:

Dewey Russell: Aye
 Marshall Lytton: Aye
 James Hawkins: Aye
 Joseph Allen: Aye
 James Hill: Aye

David Graham: Aye

Resolution: Meeting Notices

City Attorney Paul Cassell noted that the City is trying to modernize the notice requirements to better suit the citizens of Princeton.

Mr. Lytton continued by reporting the Finance and Administration Committee approved unanimously and recommended to City Council a Resolution regarding meeting notices, and **he so moved**.

Councilman James Hawkins seconded the motion.

The motion carried unanimously.

Resolution: USDA Community Facilities Loan

This resolution was to satisfy the funding requirements needed for the construction of the Princeton Community Center through the authorization to apply for a USDA Community Facilities Loan. The USDA's current interest rate is 3.87% and will be lowered to 3.75% starting on January 1, 2024. This resolution describes a loan for one million one hundred and thirty four thousand dollars over the term of 40 years. Going through the USDA, rather than a local bank, would save the city hundreds of thousands making the municipal complex more affordable.

Mr. Lytton continued by reporting the Finance and Administration Committee approved unanimously and recommended to City Council a Resolution regarding the USDA Community Facilities Loan, and **he so moved**.

Vice Mayor Allen seconded the motion.

The motion was carried unanimously by roll call vote, as follows:

Dewey Russell: Aye
 Marshall Lytton: Aye
 James Hawkins: Aye
 Joseph Allen: Aye
 James Hill: Aye
 David Graham: Aye

Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve Holidays

Mr. Lytton reported that the Finance and Administration Committee approved and recommend to City Council to give City of Princeton employees ½ day on December 22nd, for the Christmas Eve Holiday, and December 29th, for the New Year's Eve Holiday, and **he so moved**.

Councilman James Hill seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

VIII. City Attorney

City Attorney Paul Cassell presented the following:

Second Reading and Public Hearing of an Ordinance Amending Section 1799-4 “Officers of the Board” and 1799-9 “Acquiring Property Through Tax Sales” of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Princeton, West Virginia.

Mr. Cassell noted that ordinance contains a few administrative corrections and additions with regard to the Princeton Land Reuse Agency.

Mayor Graham left regular session at 7:23 p.m. and entered in to a Public Hearing.

After no questions or comments from the public, Mayor Graham returned to regular session at 7:24 p.m.

Vice Mayor Joseph Allen made a motion to approve the second reading of an Ordinance Amending Section 1799-4 “Officers of the Board” and 1799-9 “Acquiring Property through Tax Sales” of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Princeton, West Virginia.

Councilman James Hawkins seconded the motion.

The motion carried unanimously.

IX. City Manger

City Manager Mike Webb gave a presentation and update of events and improvements going on in the City for the month of December 2023.

Councilman James Hill presented his annual wish list and goals he would like to see the City accomplish in the New Year, including: concrete poured and dirt being moved on the Municipal Complex Project; curbs edged and painted; Christmas decorations at the entrance of Ingleside Road, South Walker, the Courthouse, Rogers Street, Locust Street, Beckley Road and Athens Road; items for the Princeton Police Department including an armored bearcat truck, investigation van and security camera; Public Works obtain a 70 foot tree-trimming truck and is hopeful for a traffic study in the area of Morrison Drive due to an upcoming increase of traffic from WVU Medicine PCH.

Adjournment

Mayor Graham, along with Council, wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.