

REGULAR MEETING ~ CITY COUNCIL
PRINCETON, MERCER COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA
September 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, September 18, 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

Councilman James Hawkins presented the invocation by giving thanks for this day and the opportunity to meet to help improve the community; asked for guidance during the meeting and gave thanks as we enter in to the fall season; gave thanks for the city employees from City Administration to the First Responders; without them, we would not be the strong community that we are; asked for blessings and protection of each one not only while at work, but with their families as well; asked for blessings and special prayer for Council Member Rucker for strength and healing; asked for blessings upon Scooter Smith and his road to recovery; prayed for Marie Hill as she begins her recovery; asked for strength for her and her husband James; asked for continued blessings in the community as it continues to grow and prosper throughout the year; asked for directions for both state and federal governments as we move forward; continued to pray for Ukraine that is in war with Russia and asked for a quick and peaceful resolution.

Council Member Dewey Russell 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.

Human Resource Director Brian Blankenship welcomed Boy Scout Troop 1 to the meeting. By being present at the meeting, the scouts will receive a “Citizenship of the Community” merit badge. He noted to the Boy Scouts that by attending this meeting, they will get the opportunity to see how the City of Princeton conducts a council meeting with all departments.

Mayor Graham thanked the Boy Scouts for being at the meeting.

III. Resolutions – Proclamations – Presentations

A. Proclamations

- a. Mayor David Graham presented to the Matthew French Chapter Daughters of the American Revolution the proclamation of Constitution Week September 17-23, 2023
- b. Mayor Graham presented to the West Virginia Association of Retired School and the Mercer County Association of Retired School Personnel a proclamation regarding Retired School Teachers Week September 17-23, 2023

B. Oath of Office

- a. City Clerk Kaitlyn Smith administered the Oath of Office to Code Enforcement Officer Alex Ellison.

IV. Public Input

There was no public input.

V. Consent Agenda

A. Minutes of June 14, 2023 Meeting- With corrections noted by the City Clerk, Mayor Graham asked that the minutes be committed to record.

VI. Policy Agenda

A. Committee Reports

1. Public Works and Recreation

Public Works

Chairperson Jacqueline Rucker reported that the Public Works and Recreation Committee of Princeton City Council met on September 13, 2023, with the following to report out to City Council:

Monthly Report for August

Field Supervisor Terry Blankenship presented the following report:

OLD BUSINESS

- Public Works continued mowing and maintaining the City Parks and the City Pool.
- They milled and asphalted several potholes across town and still have a few more left to do.
- They are reaching out to the company that repaired several sidewalks last year, as they now offer a “ponding remediation” process. There are 4 areas they will look at addressing. Two areas on Justin Jesse, one at the entrance to the Chuck Mathena Center, and one on West Main at North Johnston Street.
- They will be installing a drain in front of The Learning Treehouse at 382 South Wickham, crossing the road to the open ditch, to eliminate the hazardous ponding that occurs during rain events.
- The Capital Paving list is as follows:
 - North Wickham from Thorn Street just passed the rough patch at Brown Street
 - Princeton Avenue from approximately Fellers to the Ingleside Road intersection
 - Low Gap and North Walker to Forest Street
 - Church Street from Low Gap to Lower Pine
 - Park Avenue in 2 sections: full mill from Library to North Walker and from Henry to Low Gap
 - Monroe Street to city limit
 - 12th Street Extension to Fitness Center from the Highland Townhouses. We need to fix a drain at the corner of Elliot Drive and 12th Street
 - Hoge Street to Justin Jesse intersection
 - North Johnston Street from Honaker to Mahood.
 - Alleys at Mercer County School Board (both sides)
 - McConnell Alley- 7th to 8th Street

Public Works was going to pave the alley behind Cheap Thrills, but they need to install a drain system of some type before they can pave. They will self-perform this work in addition to the loop on Bacardi Street.

They will work to get the roads measured up for tonnage estimations and get it ready to advertise for bids as soon as possible. They will also compare estimates with the past two paving projects to compare whether they feel they can add additional areas. All roads with curbing will be milled at the curbs, the lower end of Park Avenue at the Library will be milled in total.

NEW BUSINESS

- Public Works completed 33 official service requests for the month of August along with 1 in coordination with Code Enforcement.

- They repaired a damaged section of pipe and subsequent fencing along the alley between South 2nd Street and South 3rd Street up from Harrison Street.
- They coordinated with the Board of Education to replace and patch sections of sidewalk along Douglas Street prior to the start of school.
- Filled in and installed a perimeter drain for the new ADA playground in City Park, assisted in material and equipment transport, and delivered the ground material during construction.
- Built a new asphalt walkway for the new ADA playground.
- Repainted the parking lines on the lower end of Mercer Street and on North 2nd and on North 3rd.
- Started conducting safety training for our employees, we plan to conduct these trainings in a way that covers a wide range of safety and environmental hazards.
- Public Works is working with AEP to get the new power drops installed for more Christmas Decorations this year, and they also have coordinated with the CIC on where decorations will be placed also.
- Will be shutting the pool down for the year soon, they have identified a few issues that popped up at the end of this pool season and will be looking at improvements and fixing for next year.
- They are getting our leaf truck ready for the upcoming season.

Parks and Recreation Department

Assistant Director Melinda Edwards presented the Parks and Recreation Report:

OLD BUSINESS

City Pool – Overall, the City Pool experienced a successful summer. The pool was able to remain open through the Labor Day Holiday. The facility was closed 3 days during the last 2 weeks of the season due to staff calling in or not showing up.

City Park ADA Playground – The West Virginia Playground Builders arrived on Friday, August 18th, to construct the new all-inclusive playground in the City Park. The project was completed within a week. At that time, the Public Works Department constructed a paved sidewalk leading from the new playground to the existing walkway and handicapped parking.

The playground was dedicated with a ribbon cutting on Friday, September 1st. There was a great turnout for the event, including city employees, donors, Special Olympics members and the press.

Programming

The department is still transitioning from summer to fall programming. Registration is being accepted for the itty bitty basketball leagues for boys and girls ages 3-6.

Registration will run through this week, with most of the season play taking place on October. Currently, there are 106 kids registered for the leagues.

Community Playgrounds-Basketball Goals

The department received 2 quotes from installation of the 10 new 72” polycarbonate basketball goals at the community playgrounds. The Park Board met last month and voted to accept the quotes from ECCO (Empire Construction Company) for \$15,500. The quotes includes removal and disposal of existing goals, and installation of the new goals.

There is no time frame on the completion of the project at this time. They will work our project into their schedule, but we anticipate all playgrounds being completed by spring 2024 at the latest.

NEW BUSINESS

Leagues/Programming

The department is accepting registration for Fall Youth Indoor Soccer leagues for boys and girls, ages 6-8 and 9-11. This will be the third year that the department has offered the program. Last year the program grew to 178 participants.

The department is also taking signups for winter leagues, which is the largest program of the year. This program includes JV and Varsity Little League Boys Basketball for ages 8-12 and Girls Cheerleading for ages 4-12.

The Annual Southern WV Shootout Disc Golf Tournament was held on Saturday, September 16. The event was held at Glenwood Park course. On Friday night, Greg Bishop hosted a glow round of disc golf (after dark) in the City Park. There were about 30 participants for the event.

The Park and Recreation Department was notified earlier in the day that they had were awarded at grant from the Community Foundation of the Virginias in the amount of \$10,400 to purchase three more outdoor basketball systems and a pickle ball net system.

Railroad Museum

Council Member Jacqueline Rucker presented the report on behalf of Museum Director Pat Smith for the month of August:

Numbers for August: 485 in attendance; \$651.00 gift shop sales; \$997 in Donations

September 16: Pat will be featured, along with the 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 once the old post office.

October 6: Princeton Railroad Museum will be celebrating their 17th birthday. This will feature a short skit by a new Bramwell theatrical group, historical characters 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 PHS Sensational Sixties Reunion will be held October 20. Which includes the classes of 1960-1970. The Railroad Museum will feature a tour of local museums and grave sites off North Walker with several trolley ride tours, which will also include a stop at the Library, which will showcase Jane Yearout, married to Princeton native Bill Yearout, who will autograph copies of her two books, Along the Red Dirt Road and Three Roads Out. There will be a tour of the High School. There will also be a pick up brunch stop at the Mercer Street location of the new restaurant Dabs. Expected attendance will be between 200-250.

There are two new grant employees, Ross Billings and Kevin Bartam, who are manning the Agricultural Museum. There are also two new grant employees at the War Museum, Joyce Farmer and Terry Morgan.

The Railroad Museum has 32 RVs reserved for September.

Councilman James Hill made note of how important the Railroad Museum is to the City of Princeton. He goes on to say that the Railroad is the reason Princeton is here, with it being an essential spot in the Virginia Rail Line along with about 140 other communities.

Princeton Public Library

Library Director Laura Buchanan reported the following for August:

Library Stats

- 72 new library cards of the month of August.
- 4,889 items circulated

Programs

- The Library hosted 22 programs with 226 participants over all.
- Finding Fergus was a collaborative program where the Library partnered with Mercer County WIC and Mercer County Public Schools in order to participate in Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library statewide read aloud event.
- The Library participated in the Athens Town Social at the beginning of August as well as Pikeview High School’s Resource Fair. The Library interacted with over 100 individuals at both of these events.
- Storytime continued to have a good turnout despite the Summer Reading Program ending with an average of 15 participants for each session.
- Between regular visitors, Turtle Tuesday, and the outreach events, Shelley interacted either directly or indirectly with 476 individuals.

Upcoming Programs of Interest

- September 20th from 11am to 12 pm. The Library will be hosting Dietician and Certified Adult Weight Loss Specialist, Clarence Tawney, from Princeton Hospital to guide us through achieving weight loss goals.
- During Autumnfest, the Library will be showing a movie downstairs in the large meeting room, a photo booth area, self-led craft and the FOL Book sale.
- Friends of the Library will be hosting Booktober Fest on October 14th from 11-2 in Princeton City Park, this is a rebrand of the Fun Walk that they did last year. There will be a variety of activities for participants to enjoy to which they will receive opportunities to be entered in a drawing for various prizes. The proceeds from the ticket sales will go toward funding library programs.
- We will be hosting author Jane Yearout on October 21st at 10:30 a.m. She will be presenting her book “Along the Red Dirt Road.”
- The Library will be holding the Guided Ghost Tours through the library again this year from Halloween. It is an opportunity for the public to experience our residential ghost and his friends.
- The Library also received a grant from the Community Foundation of the Virginias in the amount of \$3,500. The grant will go towards the idea lab, which includes upgrading two of the 3D Printers.

Mr. Hill asked if Library Director Laura Buchanan could explain to those in attendance who Shelley was.

Ms. Buchanan said that Shelley is a Red Footed Tortoise that stays at the Library through the week and will go home with her on the weekends. She is about a year old and is still really tiny. She will grow to be about 12-18 inches. She loves to visit folks and the Library uses her as an opportunity to engage students and it opens the door for conversations.

Mr. Hill commented that she also has an international following on social media.

Ms. Buchanan confirmed and also stated that she also receives fan mail and has received birthday cards.

2. Public Safety

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

Code Enforcement Department

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

COMPUTATION OF COMPLAINTS

Summary – Property Maintenance

Initial Complaints	321
Cumulative Complaints to date	48,092

AREA PATROL SUMMARY**Demolition/Renovation 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	154
Animal Control Cases	36
Impounded (dogs 2; cats 34)	36
Adopted	9
Euthanized	20
Reclaimed	0
Rescued	0
Property Maintenance Cases	118

Building Inspection (Zoning, PM, RC)

Building Permits (Res. 18; Com. 7)	24
Voided	62
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	75

Zoning Official

Certificate of Occupancy Applications:	2
Certificate of Occupancy Inspections:	2
Zoning Board Cases:	0

Rental Compliance

Monthly Revenue: \$437.50
Total to Date: \$32,097.95
Registered Units August: New Units: 3 Houses; Renewals: 7
Cumulative Total: Houses 375; Apts. 567; Other 83; Total 1,025

Vacant Buildings

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

BILLING TOTALS FOR JULY

Demolitions Billed: \$11,852.50 Payments Collected: \$90.00
 Grass, Trash & Vet Billed: \$1,557.61 Payments Received: \$170.00
 15 Invoiced for a total collection of \$260.00

Mr. Smith noted that Code Enforcement is about to launch the Vacant Building Registry on the new software.

Fire Department

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

Emergency Calls for the Month: 118

- 7 Fire Calls
 1. 1 building fires
 2. 1 response out of city limits
- 20 Vehicle Accidents / Rescues
- 83 Emergency Medical Calls
- Total emergency calls for FY 23-24: **231**

Inspections:

- 3 fire inspections
- 3 certificate of occupancy
- 14 burning permits

Training:

- 426 training hours

Vehicle Accident Billing:

- \$0 for the month.

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

Other Updates:

- Started advertising and accepting applications for Probationary Firefighter.

Chief Mould noted that the Fire Department posted on social media that they were accepting applications and the posts were seen approximately 12,500 times combined.

Upcoming News:

- Fire extinguisher training with MCTEC in September.
- WV Fire Marshals Association Conference September 6-7
- Swift Water Rescue training in September through WV Division of Emergency Management
- Lt. Aaron Beeman will attend Crisis Intervention Team training September 11-15 with Southern Highlands
- Hiring test will be on Saturday, October 14, beginning at 9 a.m.

Police Department

Police Chief Gray presented the following report for August:

Call Report – During the month of August Princeton Police Officers responded to 673 calls, made 56 arrests and issued 395 citations.

- The Police Department has begun Flex Training for the new 911 system. The training should be finished by Thursday, September 14th.
- Chief Gray went to Chattanooga with Sgt. Gibson and Detective Gibson for a Law Enforcement Conference this past week.
- The department is planning a DUI Checkpoint for later this month. This is dependent on state funding.
- Southern Highlands is doing a Crisis Intervention Training this week. The department has one officer in training and another officer helping instruct.
- Detective Severt stated that the U. S. Marshals conducted an operation called Blue and Gold Shield which targeted mainly sex offenders and other violent offenders. This operation lasted two weeks and yielded 39 arrests during this time. This task force was also part of the arrest of the escapee from Arkansas. He was a convicted child molester and was arrested in Lewisburg. The arrest made headlines on Fox News as well as other local news outlets.
- Lt. Pugh was part of a Tac Ops class last month which included classes on combat leadership. He is now a certified instructor for the deployment of chemical munitions. Other classes included solo officer response to a shooter and tactical threat recognition. He has an upcoming class which will qualify him as an instructor in the form of flash bangs and other distraction devices as well as lethal impact munitions.
- Patrolman Owens will be moving to the West Virginia DNR in October.

3. Finance and Administration Committee

Finance Department

August 2023, Financial Report – Finance Director Brian Conner reported that as of the end of August, the second month of FY2024, the actual revenues collected stood at 20.70% compared to the budgeted amount of 16.67%, while actual appropriations spent were 20.22%. Total funds available for City operations at the end of August were **\$2,755,542**.

Noteworthy Expenditures for August:

PEIA	\$74,673.64
Morgan Stanley	\$40,053.18 (Fire and Police Pension)
KS Statebank.....	\$13,695.37 (Two Police Cruisers)

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

Council Member Jacqueline Rucker duly 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:

- Ace Hardware of Princeton – 1055 Stafford Drive. Retailer – Jeffrey Butler;

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

Princeton Economic Development Authority

Chairman Marshall Lytton reported the following for the month of August for PEDDA Director Sam Lusk:

Grand Openings/Ribbon Cuttings: 22 scheduled in 2023 thus far

Dab’s Country Cookin’, located at 301 Mercer Street, and was held September 1 at 11:00 a.m.

Business Spotlight

Continuing to spotlight businesses on social media.

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.

- Notable releases that we received coverage for this month include Corner Shop Company’s Façade Grant, Princeton Business Works, EB Fungi and the ADA Playground.

Social Media

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

Post Reach: 47,415

Post Engagement: 5,965

New Page Followers: 140

Followers: 6,525

Reactions: 1,340

Shares: 361

Photo Views: 1,900

Other News

We expect to have the title to the properties purchased at the December 2022 Tax Sale by the end of the year. Community members have already expressed interest in buying these parcels from the Land Reuse Agency. We expect to turn them over quickly to those that want to develop them for residential or business purposes.

COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT COMMISSION

- An order with CMS for 20 Toy Soldiers has been placed with CMS
- There is currently a pending Façade Grant Application for Muffler Man in the amount of \$1,961.00.

Mr. Lytton reported the Finance and Administration Committee approved and recommended to City Council the Façade Grant Application for Muffler Man in the amount of \$1,961.00, and **he so moved.**

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

Resolution: Community Center Funds- Mr. Lytton reported the Finance and Administration Committee approved and recommended to City Council a resolution seeking matching funds for the Community Center through Governor Justice’s Congressional Directed Spending Non-Federal Project, **and he so moved.**

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

Resolution regarding Thorn Street Bridge Construction- Mr. Lytton reported the Finance and Administration Committee approved and recommended to City Council a resolution express its extreme concern about a proposal to fully close the Thorn Street Bridge during the multi-year construction of a new bridge, **and he so moved.**

Councilwoman Jacqueline Rucker seconded the motion.

The motion carried unanimously.

Mayor David Graham stated for those in attendance of the meeting that the construction company had offered a lesser amount for the project if the bridge could be torn down completely. He stated that would mean no access to the East end of Princeton through Thorn Street for about two years. The City, along with a few other agencies decided to write letters in opposition to that offer. He believes that the Department of Transportation went back to the original offer of keeping one lane open during the construction.

Councilman Hill noted that about 14,000-15,000 vehicles travel that route per day and it would be difficult to funnel them all through Brick Street and on to Rogers Street to reach the East end of Princeton.

City Attorney

City Attorney Paul Cassell reported the Second 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.

Mayor Graham left regular session and entered in to a Public Hearing for the Second Reading of the Amended Ordinance Article 1900 “Personnel Guidelines and Procedures” at 7:20 p.m.

Mayor Graham asked if City Manager Mike Webb could elaborate on this Ordinance.

Mr. Webb stated that it is increasing funds for the Public Works Department clothing allowance. He says it is to help with the increase in gloves, boots, vests and other safety gear that employees need for the department.

After no public input, Mayor Graham returned to regular session at 7:21 p.m.

Mayor Graham asked if there was a motion to approve Second Reading of the Amending Ordinance Article 1900 "Personnel Guidelines and Procedures."

Councilman James Hill made a motion, with a second from Vice Mayor Joseph Allen.

The motion carried unanimously.

City Attorney Paul Cassell noted that next of the agenda was the First Reading of an Ordinance that is adding the section of restrictions regarding the location of homeless shelters in the City. He stated that it had been approved by the Planning Commission the week prior.

Mayor Graham asked Mr. Cassell to elaborate.

Mr. Cassell read the following:

1381.20 Homeless Shelters- No homeless shelter shall be allowed as a use in any zoning district if the homeless shelter is located within one-half mile (1/2) of any school, preschool, daycare, library or public park. Any homeless shelter not prohibited by this section must still comply with all existing regulations or requirements.

Councilman James Hill made a motion to approve the First Reading.

Council Member Dewey Russell seconded the motion.

The motion carried unanimously.

City Manger

City Manager Mike Webb presented City Council and all those in attendance with a Power Point Presentation where it went over the following topics:

- County Commissioner Greg Puckett painted the front of the Mad Hatter's Bookstore.
- The second round of demo program should begin in the next month.
- LED Streetlights were installed on Beckley Road and Upper and Lower Bell Streets.
- Public Works worked on a storm water project using an extra pipe to help control flooding on Roger Street.
- Public Works helped Grants at Athens Crossroads with their ditch line work.
- Public Works also helped those at Mercer School install a new sidewalk before school starts.
- Appalachian Power is installing power drops for Christmas Lights. Currently they are installing 31.
- Daily Bread will be opening a second location on Mercer Street soon.
- A new gas station is under construction at the corner of South Wickham and Rogers Street. They are installing new tanks and moving right along. There is not a definite opening date yet.
- Behind Burger King, there is a new building being constructed. It will house a new business and apartments when completed.
- Music in the Park- new bleachers have been installed for guests to sit and enjoy the music.
- ADA Playground Grand Opening was held. The playground equipment is being enjoyed by children from all around the area.
- The Fire Training Center fencing is being installed.
- Sanitary Board is working on the sewer line towards Church Street
- A water line was ran for the Pollinator Garden in the City Park.
- First Friday- the last "First Friday" of the summer had a good turnout.

- Bids will be accepted soon for the Thorn and Straley Avenue sidewalk project.
- Thorn Street Bridge Project has been bid out and will take about 2 ½ years to be completed. This project could begin soon.
- Autumnfest already has about 70 vendors lined up for 30th. The event will be from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Councilman James Hill mentioned that Cruise In for September was a good success.

Human Resources Department

Human Resources Director Brian Blankenship stated that he assisted Code Enforcement and Public Works with hiring two young men recently. He says they are tremendous hires for us and are doing extremely well.

Adjournment

With no further business, Mayor Graham adjourned the meeting at 7:37 p.m.