

The Mayor's Corner

By Mayor Beth A. Taylor

Fellow Citizens,

COVID 19 is still here and is making its presence more visible by the ongoing increase in our numbers. The Town is taking this very seriously and Council has agreed to support the Recreation Department efforts to keep members of our community that use the facility as safe as possible. Beginning on July 22, a mask for each facility user is required to enter the facility. Those who choose not to wear a mask will not be admitted and will be asked to leave the facility. Those who refuse will be escorted from the facility by law enforcement.



Wytheville Police Department

There are many things that our police officers do to serve our community. Chief Joel Hash wants you to remember when you travel out of town to give the Wytheville Police Department a call at (276) 223-3300 during regular business hours. They will check your residence, and your businesses throughout the day and night for additional security. Our police officers are citizens as well and many are parents, spouses, daughters or sons. Not only are their law enforcement duties important to them, but the people they serve are very important to them as well. There have been a few recent examples of just that, when a couple of officers decided to change a flat tire for an elderly driver instead of calling a third party that would have charged this person to do the same. Our officers have been known to feed, clothe, diaper and protect innocent children when they respond to calls, day and night. We want to thank them and all other first responders who continue to protect us during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Public Works

Our Public Works Director, Chris Peeples, and Council ask that motorists please be courteous and use caution when traveling through or near a work zone and equipment.

Museums

Town of Wytheville Department of Museums staff are working on getting the three Museums ready for a grand re-opening in the fall. A new mining exhibit is in the works at the Thomas J. Boyd Museum and frequent posts on Facebook have documented this progress as staff works on a "rock" entrance to the mining exhibit. Staff has also been taking care of some needed cleaning at the Haller-Gibboney Rock House Museum and pruning the Rock House Gardens. Programs geared for families are also

being developed for the Homestead Museum site in the fall. The educational staff are currently working on a number of virtual field trip options for teachers in Wythe and neighboring counties. Andrea Burton and Betty Billingsley will be presenting via Zoom for teacher professional development workshops on August 7 and 17. They are thrilled for the opportunity to spread the word about our museums while continuing to serve local students and teachers in new and creative ways this school year. With all the work in progress, additional care is being taken to clean and sanitize each of the Museums buildings and several COVID 19 requirements are being put in place. Each facility has a touchless hand sanitizer station, masks, gloves and wipes are available. Museum staff and visitors alike will be asked to wear masks.



Introduction to the Mountain Empire Airport

Established in 1959, the Mountain Empire Airport is a public use airport that is just west of Rural Retreat in Smyth County. It is a valuable resource for businesses and industries located in Wytheville and Wythe County. It is owned and operated by the Smyth Wythe Airport Commission, a joint commission of representatives from Smyth and Wythe Counties, Marion and Wytheville. Each of these local governments provide funding to the Airport Commission.

It started as a grass strip used mostly for recreational flying. Throughout the years, as industry in the communities of Wythe and Smyth Counties has grown, so has the airport. Finally getting a paved runway in 1962, the airport was able to accept larger aircraft that needed to service the industry in the communities. The addition of fuel sales and aircraft hangers drew more people and more industry to the area as well. Today, the airport has a runway nearly a mile long which enables most larger private jets, freight aircraft and emergency service aircrafts to service our area. It also offers aircraft maintenance, which not every airport has. The airport has recently updated their ramp parking area to allow large military helicopters and other military aircrafts to safely use our airport for training. The airport is also used for a hub for emergency supplies, including food and other needs for the communities in the event of a national emergency. A courtesy car is also available to those that fly in to do business in Wythe or Smyth County. "A mile of highway will only take you a mile, but a mile of runway will take you anywhere in the world."

Council Actions

- ◆ Ordinance 1384, an ordinance amending Chapter 12, Solid Waste Collection and Disposal. This refers to maintenance of storm water ponds. The owners of these storm water ponds will need to cut/clear and mow that property at least three times per year or they may receive a penalty.
- ◆ Council adopted a resolution that endorsed the Town of Wytheville's Smart Scale Projects Priority List. The Town Council acknowledged that the Town had identified two transportation projects that meet the criteria set forth in Smart Scale, which include the 4th Street at Holston Road turn lane improvements and West Monroe Street at US 11 realignment.
- ◆ Council set two public hearings for the August 10 Council Meeting. One is for the Planning Commission recommendations to consider various sections in the Town of Wytheville Zoning Ordinance regarding side yard regulations. The other is also a recommendation from the Planning Commission for a revision to the Buffer Yard requirements.
- ◆ Budget and Finance Committee made two recommendations to Council, both of which were adopted. One authorized a donation of \$3,500 to the Wythe-Grayson Regional Library. The second one adopted a resolution approving the Town to make application for the Department of Housing and Community Development for \$600,000 in Industrial Revitalization Grant Funds that will be used toward the restoration of the Millwald Theatre. Note that the Town has already provided these funds at the time of the purchase of the Millwald Theatre to the non-profit organization, Millwald Theatre, Inc.
- ◆ Public Works Committee has been addressing mowing issues. For years, the Town has had an ordinance that required property owners in the Town to cut grass, weeds and other foreign growth on a regular basis during the growing season. The ordinance has been modified over the years to better define what areas need to be mowed and to increase frequency of mowing. All with the intention of improving the appearance of properties in Town for the protection of adjacent neighbors. Historically, the work has been contracted out and the cost assessed to the property owner. Unfortunately, the low cost that is assessed to the property owners has resulted in many more property owners skirting their responsibility under the ordinance and letting the Town mow their properties. The Town will start to impose the minimum penalty of \$50.00 in addition to the mowing fee. We hope this will motivate the property owners to assume responsibility for maintenance of their properties.

Appointments By Council

- ◆ Council made the recommendation to the Circuit Court to consider appointing Mr. Kerry Eans to the Board of Zoning Appeals. This would fill the expiring term of Mr. Harold Mills.
- ◆ Council also recommended to the Circuit Court to consider Mr. Mark Zammit as an Alternate member to the Board of Zoning Appeals.

For Your Information

Vice-Mayor Cathy Pattison may be reached by calling (276) 620-6248 or via email at cathy.pattison@wytheville.org.

I welcome the opportunity to talk to you regarding your ideas and concerns. I can be reached by phone at (276) 223-3356 or via email at beth.taylor@wytheville.org.