

**CITY OF BUENA VISTA
REGULAR (VIRTUAL) COUNCIL MEETING
APRIL 16, 2020**

The City Council for the City of Buena Vista met for a Regular (Virtual) Council Meeting on Thursday, April 16, 2020 at 6:00 p.m.

Council Members Present:	Mayor Bill Fitzgerald
Melvin Henson	Danny Staton
Stanley Coffey	Cheryl Hickman
Tyson Cooper	Vice-Mayor Lisa Clark

Members Absent: None.

ADG #1 APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA:

Motion was made by Vice-Mayor Clark to approve the agenda, seconded by Councilman Coffey, carried by Council.

ADG #2 APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM THE REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON MARCH 5, 2020:

Motion was made by Councilman Cooper to approve the above-mentioned minutes, seconded by Councilman Coffey, carried by Council.

ADG #3 ADOPTION OF AN ORDINANCE OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BUENA VISTA, VIRGINIA CONFIRMING AND RATIFYING THE DECLARATION OF A LOCAL EMERGENCY ISSUED BY THE CITY OF BUENA VISTA ON MARCH 17, 2020, MADE NECESSARY BY COVID-19 AND IMPLEMENTING EMERGENCY PROCEDURES TO ENSURE CONTINUITY OF GOVERNMENT:

Ms. Wheeler read the following Ordinance:

ORDINANCE – ORD 20-06

AN ORDINANCE OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BUENA VISTA, VIRGINIA CONFIRMING AND RATIFYING THE DECLARATION OF A LOCAL EMERGENCY ISSUED BY THE CITY OF BUENA VISTA ON MARCH 17, 2020, MADE NECESSARY BY COVID-19 AND IMPLEMENTING EMERGENCY PROCEDURES TO ENSURE CONTINUITY OF GOVERNMENT.

WHEREAS, Section 44-146.21 of the *Code of Virginia, 1950*, as amended, prescribes necessary actions precedent to a declaration of a local emergency; and

WHEREAS, the City Manager was appointed as the Director of Emergency Management for the City; and

WHEREAS, Section 44-146.21 prescribes two methods for declaring an emergency: the first is accomplished by the local Director of Emergency Management with the consent of the governing body; the second is accomplished by the Director of Emergency Management without the initial consent of the governing body, but such declaration must be confirmed by the governing body at its next regularly scheduled meeting or at a special meeting within 45 days of the declaration, whichever occurs first; and

WHEREAS, it was necessary and proper for the City Manager, acting in his capacity as Director of Emergency Management, to, on March 17, 2020, declare a local emergency and disaster in Buena Vista, Virginia, arising from the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), without first obtaining the consent of the Council of the City of Buena Vista, Virginia (the "Council"), and confirmation by the Council is now required by law; and

WHEREAS, on January 31, 2020, the United States Health and Human Services Secretary declared a public health emergency for the entire United States to aid the healthcare community in responding to the COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic; and

WHEREAS, on March 12, 2020, Governor Ralph Northam declared a state of emergency in the Commonwealth of Virginia in response to the continued spread of the COVID-19, and declared the anticipated effects of COVID-19 to be a disaster as described in Section 44-146.16 of the *Code of Virginia, 1950*, as amended; and

WHEREAS, on March 15, 2020, Governor Northam announced a ban on all gatherings of one hundred or more people statewide; and

WHEREAS, on March 16, 2020, President Donald Trump urged people to avoid gathering in groups of more than ten people; and

WHEREAS, on March 17, 2020, Governor Northam restricted the number of patrons to ten or less for certain industries including, restaurants, theaters, and fitness centers; and

WHEREAS, the Attorney General of Virginia issued an opinion dated March 20, 2020 stating that localities have the authority during disasters to adopt ordinances to ensure the continuity of government; and

WHEREAS, there have been confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Virginia; and

WHEREAS, the Council is satisfied that public health threat posed by COVID-19 constitutes a real and substantial threat to health and safety of persons and property in the City of Buena Vista, Virginia, and that it necessitated a declaration of local emergency; and

WHEREAS, Section 15.2-1413 of the Code of Virginia authorizes any locality to, by ordinance, provide a method to assure continuity in its government in the event of a disaster.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT ORDAINED by the Council for the City of Buena Vista, Virginia:

1. That it hereby confirms and ratifies the Declaration of Local Emergency made on March 17, 2020 by the Director of Emergency Management.
2. That it understands and confirms that the Declaration of Local Emergency empowers the Director of Emergency Management with special authority and duties, said authority and duties being defined by the laws, rules, regulations and plans of the United States of America, the Commonwealth of Virginia and the City of Buena Vista.
3. That it understands and confirms that when, in judgment of this Council, all needed emergency actions have been taken, appropriate action to end the declared local emergency will be taken.
4. That the infectious nature of COVID-19 makes it unsafe to assemble a quorum of this Council in a single location, or to assemble members of the public in a single location, making it difficult or impossible for this Council and the City's boards and commissions to conduct meetings in accordance with normal practices and procedures. In accordance with Section 15.2-1413 of the *Code of Virginia, 1950*, as amended, notwithstanding any contrary provision of law, general or special, the following emergency procedures are adopted to ensure continuity of government during the pendency of the emergency and disaster created by COVID-19:

- a. That any process, procedure, or matter which requires the physical presence of the public in a city building that the City Manager has declared or in the future declares to be closed to the public is hereby suspended.
 - b. Meetings of the Council and other City boards and commissions may be held through electronic communication means (including audio, telephone, video or other practical electronic medium) without a quorum of members physically present in a single location, provided that notice of such meetings is still given in accordance with applicable laws.
 - c. Any such electronic meeting of the Public Entities shall be open to electronic participation by the public and closed to in-person participation by the public.
 - d. For any matter requiring a public hearing by law, public comment will be solicited and received via written means prior to the vote on such matter. Public comments may also be solicited and, if so solicited, received, via electronic and/or telephonic means if possible and practical. All such comments will be provided to the members of the body and made a part of the record of such meeting.
5. That the provisions in the aforesaid Section 4 shall be in effect until repealed by this Council, for a period not exceeding six months from the declaration of a local emergency. Upon repeal or expiration of the aforesaid Section 4, the matters referenced therein shall resume operation in accordance with the normal practices and procedures.
 6. Notwithstanding any provision of law, regulation or policy to the contrary, any deadlines requiring action by the City, its officers (including Constitutional Officers) and employees shall be suspended during this emergency and disaster, however, the City, officers and employees thereof are encouraged to take such action as is practical and appropriated to meet those deadlines. Failure to meet any such deadlines shall not constitute a default, violation, approval, recommendation or otherwise.
 7. That an emergency is deemed to exist, and this Ordinance shall be in effect on and after the date of its adoption, April 16, 2020.

William H. Fitzgerald, Mayor

Attest:

Clerk of Council

Date of Adoption

Ms. Wheeler polled Council as follows:

	Present	Absent	Yes	No	Abstain
Mayor Fitzgerald	X		X		
Melvin Henson	X		X		
Vice-Mayor Tyson Cooper	X		X		
Cheryl Hickman	X		X		
Lisa Clark	X		X		
Danny Staton	X		X		
Stanley Coffey	X		X		

ADG #4 RECOGNITION/COMMUNICATION FROM VISITORS:

Citizens who desire to speak on matters not listed on the agenda below will be heard at this time. Citizens who desire to speak on an item listed on the agenda, open for public comment, will be heard when that item is considered:

No one spoke. However, Ms. Kristina Ramsey read the following email that Mr. George Huger sent just before the meeting started:

Hello Council:

I recognize that you have a lot of ground to cover, so I will be to the point.

Council had a retreat on Saturday February 8th. I have tried to get minutes of that meeting and I was given a disc by Ms. Wheeler that was supposed to have the minutes/recording of the meeting. However, it is blank as far as I can tell. Since this retreat was a formal meeting of council, I would think that there should be minutes.

I have exchanged several emails with Ms. Wheeler and included the Mayor about this issue.

In previous council meetings, several citizens including myself have asked for you to communicate your vision for the city. You stated in those meeting that you planned to discuss that vision at the retreat. I think it is important that council share that discussion and any thoughts pertinent to that vision from the retreat with the public. One way of doing this would be through the minutes of the retreat. If that is not possible, I think that council should offer some written summary or current statement of your vision.

Vice-Mayor Clark said we can generate some minutes from the notes that she took at the retreat. She opined there were good presentations from the department heads, and everyone talked as a group. No vision was established but some priorities were set.

ADG #5 REPORTS:

1.) Mayor:

None.

2.) City Manager:

Mr. Scudder advised that he has been talking to Millie, Dawn, Ken, and Tom about events being cancelled at the park this summer. So far 5 events have been cancelled.

Vice-Mayor Clark opined that we should try to reschedule the bands for later in the season.

Ms. Wheeler said she would talk with the bands.

Mr. Scudder stated we are going to get the pool ready to open in case the distancing is lifted. He also advised that he has been working with key personnel and talking about PPE. He has been stressing the importance of social distancing. We have been moving workers around, so they are not in tight groups.

3.) City Attorney:

None.

4.) Council Committee/Representative:

Vice-Mayor Clark said the Finance Committee should schedule a virtual meeting.

Mr. Scudder opined they should try to have the meeting for the following week.

Councilman Cooper said he would like to meet on Wednesday, April 22, beginning at 5:00 p.m. This will be a virtual meeting.

Councilman Coffey wanted to know if any decision had been made about locals camping at Glen Maury Park.

Mr. Scudder said that local folks can camp at the park but no one else can. They must stay for a minimum of 14 days and there will be no special rate.

CONSIDER APPOINTMENTS TO VARIOUS BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, AND COMMITTEES:

ADG #6 BUENA VISTA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

AUTHORITY:

Mr. Peter Trotman has resigned. His term will expire on January 31, 2023. This is the fourth time it has appeared on the agenda. **NO APPLICANTS – ADVERTISED THE NEWS GAZETTE FEBRUARY 5, 2020; WEB SITE AND CHANNEL 18 JANUARY 30, 2020**

This item will be carried over to the next Council meeting.

OLD BUSINESS:

None.

NEW BUSINESS:

NB #1 BUDGET PRESENTATION BY CHARLES CLEMMER:

(SEE PRESENTATION IN MINUTE BOOK)

Mr. Scudder started the discussion by saying that we are looking at an \$0.08 increase in real estate tax from \$1.21 per \$100.00 value to \$1.29 per \$100.00 value. He said that back in 2016 we should have raised the taxes by \$0.03 per \$100.00 value from \$1.21 to \$1.24 but we did not. If we had raised the taxes in 2016, we would only be raising them \$0.05 instead of \$0.08 per \$100.00 value.

Vice-Mayor Clark advised that trash, water, and sewer are all going to be increased and wanted to know how much additional revenue these increased costs will bring into the City.

Mr. Clemmer said the water and sewer increase will bring in an additional \$200,000.00. However, increasing the trash by \$2.00 per month will only allow us to break even since the County has gone up on the landfill charges. He said we have been losing money on trash for the last 5 years.

Councilman Cooper wanted to know if we have heard anything back on the re-assessment.

Mr. Scudder said they will be on time.

Councilman Cooper opined if the re-assessment comes in higher, people will be paying more in real estate taxes.

Mayor Fitzgerald advised if the re-assessment does come in high, we can amend the tax rate and lower it.

Mr. Clemmer confirmed that the tax rate can be lowered if the re-assessment comes in high.

Ms. MarVita Flint, the Commissioner of the Revenue joined in the discussion. She said the re-assessment is 1100 parcels from being complete. Social distancing has made it harder for the assessors to go on the property. She said she is a little optimistic at this point. Real estate sales in the last 4 months have

been slightly higher than the assessed value that we have. The assessors have not given her a definite answer, but they are saying they are very optimistic that we will see an increase in real estate values.

Councilman Cooper wanted to know if we would be back to the levels in 2015.

Ms. Flint said she does not think so. She said as soon as she gets the figures, she will send them to Jay, Charles and the Finance Committee and let them know what the equalized rate should be. We must be very cautious because we have to have hearings for people to come in and discuss their assessment. Ms. Flint also said we should be very cautious because some people must come in and meet with the assessor. They are working with the Department of Taxation on setting up those types of meetings.

Mr. Scudder said we should also be cautious because there is the potential for lower revenues as well and we do not have a fund balance that has a lot of flexibility. He said he has been stressing that we need to build the fund balance to get to the year 2023 when the high school debt will be paid off. Between now and then we are going to have a serious cash flow crunch.

Councilman Cooper wanted to know if the tax rate of \$1.29 per \$100.00 value is going to be high enough. He said he is not advocating for a higher tax rate, but he opined we do not want to inflict pain on the citizens and then say it is not enough.

Mr. Scudder said that is what we have really tried to do here with staff and looking at the finances. As he said in his budget message, this will work if we hold it at that. It might be a low number, but he is hoping it will work.

Councilman Cooper wanted to know how much we are hoping or how much we are being realistic.

Mr. Scudder replied by saying he has tried to stress in the last couple of budget years how important it is for our numbers to be correct. We almost nailed our revenues. We were so very close and settled on \$1.29 but the world is changing as we speak. He said this is the best guess that he can come up with.

Councilman Cooper stated there are stimulus funds out there for all sorts of things. He wanted to know if someone could help us find stimulus funds or grant funds.

Mr. Kearney advised there is very little out there for the City of Buena Vista right now. He said there are proposals in DC trying to get additional money for localities. He said he is trying to keep up with all the information that is available.

Mr. Scudder said he is getting ready to have a Zoom meeting with other localities through VML to talk about help for cities.

Councilman Coffey wanted to know what our financial rating is with the State.

Mr. Kearney said the only time we were ever rated was when we got the golf course bonds and our rating then was a B-.

Mr. Scudder stated that our rating will not help us any with trying to borrow money.

Mr. Kearney also said the rating does not affect our ability to borrow money.

Council Member Hickman wanted to know if Council is still looking at making other cuts since our fund balance will still be in trouble.

Vice-Mayor Clark said that we will need an additional \$19,000.00 to break even.

Councilman Cooper said again that the suggested rate of \$1.29 per \$100.00 value is not high enough.

Council Member Hickman said we either need to increase the rate or make more cuts in departments.

Vice-Mayor Clark asked Council Member Hickman if she got the email from Mr. Scudder today showing the deficits.

Council Member Hickman said she did get the email from Mr. Scudder.

Vice-Mayor Clark asked her if she saw where the schools are getting cut \$300,000.00 from the State.

Councilman Cooper wanted to know if the funding level is still higher than this current year.

Vice-Mayor Clark said it is not.

Councilman Coffey wanted to know if the \$300,000.00 cut was for the next 2 years.

Vice-Mayor Clark said it is for this year only.

Council Member Hickman asked Mr. Scudder if he could shed some light on the cut for the schools.

Mr. Scudder said the sheet that he shared he has not dissected yet. He said that he and Spencer from Rockbridge County were looking at the sheet. The revenue

in the FY2020 school budget from the State was \$7,706,783.00. The proposed FY2021, which has now been adjusted, is \$8,905,568.00. The sheet that he shared with everyone reduces that amount in the adjusted budget by \$297,397.00. If you make the adjustment and you include the \$22,122.00 Federal reduction, from the year 2020 number on page 4 of the school boards budget, that would still be an increase, based on last years revenues of \$69,266.00. It is not as much of an increase that was anticipated in the earlier adopted Governor's budget. Based on the numbers he has it would still be an increase from the State funding from FY2020. All of this just came out a few hours ago.

Council Member Hickman said they had discussed the payment of the athletic field that was paid off 3 or 4 years ago as one of the reasons they were suggesting cutting the school funding. We are still giving the schools the money for the payment in the amount of \$184,000.00 even though the loan has been paid off. As tight as we are having to cut our costs, she cannot justify paying a loan that has already been paid. She said she has a child in the school system and does not want to cut the school system. She opined we have no other choice. We are still in a sinking ship even with raising the revenues and the tax rate, so we must make some decisions based on those figures.

Mr. Scudder said based on the math that Vice-Mayor Clark did, this is a fund balance issue. We need to maintain the fund balance so we can have some cash flow room.

Vice-Mayor Clark stated we have talked about having a vision for the City. She opined if we call our City a sinking ship now and we continue to chop up holes in it we are going to have too many holes to fix. She said she does not want to create a budget that takes away from everything that is good. Some of our biggest costs right now are coming from things that are out of our control such as CSA and the jail costs. Research shows the stronger your education program is the more you provide for your children that are in poverty. She has said this before to Council; in Kindergarten through 8th grade, 100 percent cent of our students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Over 75 percent of the kids at Kling are below the poverty rate. She does not understand how reducing public education or public safety is going to help decrease our jail costs or our CSA costs. She feels it is time as a Council to say we stand for something and support the things that are working and look at the things that are not. The \$300,000.00 cut, while it might look like on paper that it is still an increase, it is not. Dr. Keeler has already prepared his budget. He is going to have to go back and redo the entire budget. School employees are pretty much guaranteed there will be no raise for them with at least a 10 percent increase in cost because of

these cuts. We will probably lose programs and lose some personnel unless they can get creative. They have not gotten that far in talking about it since the numbers just came out today. She is not sure where the money is going to come from in the budget that Dr. Keeler has already presented. As a Council we need to figure out what our priorities are, and we need to support them. She said again how reducing public safety and public education is not going to do our community any good. Those are just her thoughts and she thinks it is time for Council to stand up for something rather than chopping away at everything.

Council Member Hickman stated that she understands what Vice-Mayor Clark is saying but what she is saying is it does not make sense to buy a new vehicle and you pay it off and you continue to make payments on it. She does not feel that anyone in the City or Council member just wants to hack away at the schools. That is not what she is suggesting. She wants to know what we are going to do about the fund balance. Are we going to do what we must do to have a fund balance or we just going to ignore it?

Vice-Mayor Clark stated when the money was left in the school budget, it was left there so the schools would not have to ask for any more funding. That is how they have been able to function for the past several years. It seems it has been 6 years since the school system has asked for an increase because the City provided level funding. She does not feel there is any other school system in the State of Virginia that has gone 6 years without asking for more money for their operations.

Council Member Hickman stated that 4 years ago it was \$184,000.00 that was left in the school budget so that was an increase of \$184,000.00 then. She opined if it is not being paid, it must be an increase. She asked Mr. Scudder if she was correct.

Mr. Scudder said it was one of the points he discussed several years ago when they discussed level funding. We did not reduce the school's amount when we paid the loan off.

Vice-Mayor Clark said that while the \$184,000.00 is not going to pay off that loan anymore, it did not increase. It was \$184,000.00 4 years ago and is still \$184,000.00 today. There has been no increase.

Council Member Hickman opined there is no where else to cut. There is one other area that was discussed at the finance meeting. She opined it is a hard conversation, but Council is still going to have to have make it.

Councilman Coffey wanted to know if it will still be level funding with the \$184,000.00 left in the budget for the schools.

Vice-Mayor Clark said it is the same money amount regardless what it is spent for. She said that when you look at the sheets that Mr. Clemmer gave out, and you talk about cutting the schools \$184,000.00 or \$200,000.00 plus the \$300,000.00 from the State, that is \$500,000.00. If you look at the sheets that Mr. Clemmer gave out and look at the public library from 2016 to 2019 and we take \$35,000.00 from them it will only take them back a few years. We had people come to Council and talk about funding the library. She said that about 70 percent of them were home schooled and if they were in public schools, they would have access to a library. She opined it is more room to cut at the public library than the public schools.

Councilman Cooper said he does not disagree with Vice-Mayor Clark but there are multiply reasons why people home school.

Vice-Mayor Clark said she is not knocking being home schooled. If a home-schooled student called her and asked to use her library, she would let them do so if it meant reducing the funding to the 4 libraries, we have in the school system now.

Councilman Cooper said he totally understands what Vice-Mayor Clark is saying and he knows that she and the other principals would do that.

Council Member Hickman said if that is what we must do it is fine. She said we are going to have to get money from somewhere. We are holding back \$300,000.00 to \$400,000.00 worth of bills a month that cannot be paid. We are going to have to make sure that we are doing what we need to do to get where we need to be. If we raise taxes and other revenues and at the end of the budget, we are still not where we need to be, it does not make any sense.

Councilman Coffey stated that he does not want to raise taxes and he does not want to cut anybody. Our only option after that is to look at a reversion. If you revert to a town you must worry about whether you keep your schools and if you keep them can you afford to support them as a town. He said he does not know if the tax rate for the town and the county will be as high or higher than what we are paying now. He opined the citizens are going to have to decide whether we convert to a town or stay a city.

Council Member Hickman said if you are looking at a reversion, you are looking at 3 to 4 years out. It will cost \$50,000.00 to \$100,000.00 to have the study done

and then it is 3 years out before we can get there. She opined we are going to have to cut somewhere and she is trying to figure out where.

Vice-Mayor Clark thinks part of their next step needs to be to define what the priorities are. Define our vision and work from there. We just cannot chop, chop, chop everything.

Council Member Hickman said she has spent months going over each department trying to figure out what can be done. She wants to make a decision based on the facts that will make sense. She stated again she does not want to cut the schools. She has a child in the school system. She opined if they could find money somewhere else instead of cutting the schools, she would be all for it. She sees one other department that can be cut about \$35,000.00. When they lay the budget out, they are going to have to be realistic about where we are even with raising the taxes and the water/sewer and trash.

Vice-Mayor Clark said she wanted to go back to her original thought. We have maintained our deal on the budgets that have been created over the past 5 or 6 years. We paid what we said we would pay, and we collected what we thought we would collect. The things that have hurt us are things that are out of our control.

Council Member Hickman said she agrees. She opined we need to lobby our congressmen to do something about these mandated costs that we have to pay that we have no control over. They are killing small cities.

Vice-Mayor Clark said again that reducing things that support our youth or provide safety for the public are only going to create reasons for those mandated costs to go up.

Councilman Cooper said that also includes the library. We keep talking about equalized rates; why are we talking about equalized rates? His rates go up. He said he knows this is not going to earn him a whole lot of points, but we are talking about increasing the tax rate by \$0.08 to equalize it to what it was 5 or 6 years ago. Almost nothing he pays is the same rate it was 5 or 6 years ago. He opined if we are going to do this, forget \$0.08; \$0.12 is as painful as \$0.08.

Council Member Hickman said that Vice-Mayor Clark has been talking about low income and those types of things. Our middle class might be able to carry that burden a little better. She wanted to know if we are going to break the back of the taxpayers.

Councilman Cooper said he does not disagree. He said he has no desire to see people leave because they cannot afford the tax rate here. At the same time, he does not know what to do. We have services that we provide; no one wants to sacrifice the schools. He opined he does not know what else there is to cut. He feels the school district can be exceptionally creative, given 1 or 2 years. Three months is being unrealistic. He does not understand why we operate 4 schools for 900 students. The middle school budget is just over a million dollars and they service 100 students. We have 2 elementary schools also that each serve around 200 students and their budget is less than the middle school's budget. He said asking Council to completely overhaul everything and asking the school system to overhaul everything in 3 months is not feasible.

Mr. Scudder said we are not going to change anything dramatically like Councilman Cooper said in any of the systems we have. We have cut and balanced budgets and cut and balanced budgets. He refers to the line on the fund balance that we have shown over the last 4 or 5 years. We have had some good years. We did raise tax rates and we did raise some fees, but we also made a heck of a lot of cuts at times. He said that Lisa and Melvin know that because they have been working together for over 8 years. The fund balance chart that our auditors show every year at fiscal year end does not lie. We must comply with that trend line. That is why we must do what we are talking about doing. The same discussion was held last year, the same topic of discussion was held the year before that, and we said we were going to have to get together and do something different and nobody has done that. We have tried and done things, but this issue of the school funding is a reoccurring issue every year. Last year we said we were going to give them another year and then we were going to cut, the year before that we said the same thing.

Vice-Mayor Clark said she does not remember ever saying that or hearing that. She said that the folks that are making the school budget would have been aware of that.

Councilman Cooper said we are where we are. He agrees with Lisa's points and he supports it. If we are not careful, we will end up costing ourselves a lot more in the long run. He said he does not mean that just in dollars. He means in human lives also. He said he would try to figure out how to pay twice the tax rates if he knew that our lives and our children's lives are not being destroyed. He said he would not need to because the jail costs would come down; the CSA costs would come down; but he does not know how to fund everything at level funding; at level tax rates.

Vice-Mayor Clark said the other thing that has happened that has been a trend this year is because of the programs and because of the success the schools are seeing. The school's enrollment has increased this year from what it was last year. The high school has gotten close to 30 students from the County this year because of the programs that we are able to offer and because of the assistance and because of our community. She opined that folks are starting to see what we are made of and they want to come here. Reduction in school funding equals increase in inequity. We already have the highest poverty in the area; we are already funding the lowest amount per pupil. To reduce that, a family moving into our town is going to look and say WOW. Rockbridge County or the City of Lexington are funding \$1,500.00 to \$2,000.00 more per pupil. What do you think the choice is going to be?

Ms. Sherry Wheeler from the City of Buena Vista Public Schools said that 38 kids joined the high school this year after school had already started. A majority of the kids did come from Rockbridge County High School. We also need to look at the fact that we are a low poverty school division. After tomorrow we will have given out over 20,000 meals to the kids in Buena Vista. Some of those kids are kids that are home schooled that don't even attend our schools. Ms. Wheeler opined the schools are helping the City as much as they can. If you look at the news and look at Buena Vista, the only thing that is positive in this City is the school division and our kids.

Councilman Cooper said that he whole heartily disagrees with Ms. Wheeler on her point that the only positive thing in Buena Vista is the school division and the kids. He said that he is incredible grateful for the school district. We do have new businesses coming in and we are increasing the number of people at the university and it is growing at an incredible rate. He does not disagree that the school district is fantastic. He will have 5 children in the school district this fall. The thing that he is most grateful for is that if school enrollments have increased this year, that breaks an 8-year trend of declining enrollments. He is grateful the school district and administrators finally realized we were bleeding to death. We need to keep that trend going. If the school district continues to grow it is going to cost more. The question is are we going to fund the school district more? Can we work with the school district and the school board in creative ways to continue to be frugal and still be affective with the funds that are available? With all the good things that are happening, we just don't know what COVID-19 is going to do to the world. Thus far our factories have not been hit hard but if this goes on much longer, they will get hit hard and that will turn everything back around.

Ms. Sherry Wheeler stated that she agrees that SVU is a major deal in Buena Vista and she is thankful that SVU is here. She opined that SVU does not have

the same financial burden that the City schools have. Ms. Wheeler said the schools have cut back as far as they can cut back. Right now, at the middle school they have 1 teacher for 2 grade levels. She said she does not know how much more frugal the schools can be. She said when you talk about being frugal when she looks outside and there are 8 people in 2 trucks picking up her leaves it is ridiculous to her. Maybe that should be looked at.

Councilman Cooper says he hates to get into stone throwing. He said he does not know how to operate a school district; with that being said he is not sure he knows how to run a leaf crew either. Councilman Cooper opined that everybody must pull together, or like Council Member Hickman said, we are done. He said we really need to start studying reversion if we are not committed to taxing our citizens to the point that we can afford to offer the services that we currently offer. He opined there is always room for improvement, but we are not going to find another \$100,000.00 in the City budget to cut without significantly damaging our ability to serve and our ability to grow. Again, that is the question; which direction do we want to go? He said again: Do we really want to equalize the rate?

Council Member Hickman said again that she really does not want to cut the schools or cut anything. She is trying to figure out how we can maintain a fund balance. She said she has been researching this for months trying to figure it out because she is new to Council and she has been trying to make sure she was actually doing her research. She is trying to figure out what we need to do to survive as a City. It is all about where we can get the money to continue to operate.

Councilman Coffey expressed his concern on how SVU is putting more burden on the WWTP that they cannot afford to have at this point.

Councilman Cooper said that is our fault as a Council. We should be charging the rates to be able to sustain the WWTP. He said he pays a lot more in water, sewer, and electricity than he did 12 years ago because his family has grown. If the rates are sufficient to maintain the infrastructure, who sets the rates? It is on them. We did not raise the rates, or we did not manage the money well. He totally agrees but you cannot blame a business or a household for growing and say it is their fault for growing. It is the City's job to provide the infrastructure.

Councilman Coffey said it is not our fault that the WWTP cannot handle more growth.

Council Member Hickman said she agrees with Councilman Cooper to a point. She disagrees about SVU. She said she knows it is a non-profit and the City loves the school and is glad it is here. She feels that SVU does not pay enough

taxes to the City. The school pays \$8,800.00 whereas her one household pays between \$2,500.00 to \$3,000.00 per year. She feels the City should receive more compensation from SVU. Council Member Hickman said she has done some research on other places with universities located in them but not enough to say that SVU should pay a certain amount. With the school expanding, our tax base decreases. What do we do to compensate for the tax base decrease?

Councilman Cooper said the language that is being used is saying that he is not a part of Council and not a part of the City. Again, we as a City Council, are not asking the correct rates from the citizens, the businesses, or the non-profits, then it is on us. Just like we are concerned about raising the tax rates and the water and sewer rates, we need to be careful and have those same concerns. If we go back and negotiate with any or all the non-profits, we need to remember to be sensitive with them as well. Most of our non-profits, with the university being the exception, really do live on fixed incomes. He agrees we need to look everywhere and if we are looking to raise rates, we need to raise rates and forget this equalization stuff. Let's go talk to everybody and say this is what we need to do across the board. He said he knows we are not just looking at one place and he admires all the stones that Council Member Hickman has looked under. He opined that is not a lot out there so we really have to pull every single lever we can and make it through this. He said he does not relish a tax rate of \$1.31 or \$1.33 but he does not know what else to do.

Mr. Scudder said we are set for the advertisement at \$1.29.

Councilman Coffey wanted to know if there is a 2 percent increase for City employees in the budget that total \$88,000.00. He said he worked for the City for several years and did not have a pay increase. This is the time where everybody needs to bite the bullet and do what we need to do. He opined the school employees should not get a raise if the City employees do not get a raise. He asked Vice-Mayor Clark how much a 2 percent raise would be for school employees.

Vice-Mayor Clark said she does not have that number and does not know for sure that it will not happen. With the schools being cut \$300,000.00 from the State, the raises will probably be the most likely places to look to cut to make up for some of the lost funds from the State. She understands what Councilman Coffey is saying but she said that Council does not set salaries or finance business for the school board.

Councilman Coffey said he wants to give the City employees as much as they deserve, and they deserve more than 2 percent. However, a 2 per cent raise for the City employees and for the school employees is just not feasible.

Vice-Mayor Clark stated that the school board will decide if the school employees get a raise and if it is feasible for the school.

Councilman Coffey opined the school board should be thinking like Council is. They should say this is not the year.

Vice-Mayor Clark suggested that Councilman Coffey go to a school board meeting and tell them his feelings.

Councilman Coffey explained that this year the \$88,000.00 saved from not giving City employees a raise and the school employees not getting a raise, could be part of the cut that we would have for the schools. He said he understands that the \$184,000.00 payment that the schools received after the loan was paid off was to keep level funding for the schools. He said that he admires Vice-Mayor Clark for being a principal, a teacher and for being someone who looks out for the kids. He said Vice-Mayor Clark is also a litigator for the schools.

Vice-Mayor Clark said she is also trying to be a litigator for the City. She said again if we cut public safety and education to a point that those agencies can't appropriately do their jobs, provide programs, work with their students to get them out of poverty, to change the cycle that some of them are stuck in, then we are only increasing the CSA costs and higher jail costs.

Councilman Coffey said at this point we should be thinking about what we need and not what we want.

Vice-Mayor Clark opined they are the same. We need to provide these services and she thinks we want to.

Councilman Coffey stated that he feels we want to but some of them we cannot provide.

Vice-Mayor Clark said as a Council we must set some priorities and she thinks everyone knows what hers are: public safety and public education. She feels the WWTP will be taken care of through separate financing. She agrees with Councilman Cooper that part of it is a rate issue. We have not collected water or sewer money to even pay those bills for years. According to the sheet that Jay and Charles provided we are still below surrounding people.

Council Member Hickman said that on the other side of that there is nothing we can do about what happened years ago. The only thing we can do now is recoup and do what we can. She feels that raising the real estate tax rate by \$0.08 is plenty on the taxpayers. She opined that we cannot break the backs of our taxpayers. She said she advocated against a tax increase last year because she was never told where the City was and what kind of shape the City is really in.

Mayor Fitzgerald wanted to know when the budget must be approved.

Mr. Scudder said the end of May.

Councilman Cooper advised the budget must be posted next week.

Mayor Fitzgerald suggested the Finance Committee meet and go over more stuff and the discussion be continued at the next Council meeting.

Council Member Hickman said she wanted to clarify something that she has said. She said that she did say that as far as other cuts she looked for and what she could find was a \$35,000.00 cut from the police department budget due to the reduction of our officers in the DTF. She thought that could be done through attrition and not cutting someone's job; we do not want to do that, and she understands that. She figured how many officers we have and based on the number of hours is how she came to her conclusion. She had a meeting with Chief Hartman and Mr. Scudder and discussed some of her concerns. She still feels the same way about cutting the police department by \$35,000.00. There is only 1 DTF officer from the surrounding areas and at this point, in her opinion, we can only do 1 representative. We cannot have 2 on the DTF at this point. What we would like to have is just not feasible because of the shape the City is in financially.

Mayor Fitzgerald asked Mr. Scudder to make sure that everybody gets an email for the next Zoom meeting of the Finance Committee.

Ms. Wheeler said that she will advertise the Finance Committee meeting tomorrow for the meeting on Wednesday, April 22, beginning at 5:00 p.m. via Zoom.

Councilman Cooper wanted to know when the budget and tax rates will be published.

Ms. Wheeler said they will be published in next week's News Gazette. We will have the Public Hearing on May 7 and should adopt the budget at the May 21 meeting.

Vice-Mayor Clark wanted to know if Mr. Scudder had heard anything from the State about extending the deadline for the adoption of the budget.

Mr. Kearney said there has not been an extension for the budget deadline.

Vice-Mayor Clark said if we adopt the budget and then come back with a higher assessment, we could make an adjustment if we needed to.

Ms. Wheeler wanted to make sure she understood if you had to have another public hearing if the tax rate is increased and if it is decreased you do not have to.

Mr. Kearney said she was correct. He said you can modify your budget and take things away, but you cannot increase it without public notification.

Councilman Cooper wanted to know if Council felt comfortable with raising the real estate taxes \$0.08 per \$100.00. He said a lot of their conversation has been that \$0.08 is not going to be enough.

Ms. MarVita Flint, the Commissioner of the Revenue, said as far as the tax rate goes for real estate, you can have the public hearing in May and adopt the rate and when they get the final numbers for the reassessment, you can have another public hearing at anytime to adjust the rate as long as they have not printed the tax book. The tax book is generally not printed until the middle part or end of August. By law the tax book has to be done by September 1.

Councilman Cooper suggested we advertise the tax rate with a \$0.12 increase versus the \$0.08 increase. If we go with \$1.33 it will put about \$80,000.00 into the fund balance.

Everyone agreed to advertise the tax rate at \$1.33 per \$100.00 value with the exception of Council Member Hickman.

Vice-Mayor Clark asked Kristina to post the budget and increases to the web site along with the report that Mr. Clemmer presented tonight.

ADJOURNMENT – There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.

WILLIAM H. FITZGERALD, MAYOR

Dawn M. Wheeler, Clerk of Council