



## **GATE CITY TOWN COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES**

**July 14, 2020**

**190 Beech St., Gate City, VA 24251**

**6:30 PM**

**I. PUBLIC HEARING MEETING CALLED TO ORDER AT 6:52 P.M. BY: Mayor – Bob Richards**

**II. ROLL CALL – Town Clerk – Lydia Morales**

|  | PRESENT: | ABSENT: |
|--|----------|---------|
| Mayor, Bob Richards                    | X        |         |
| Vice Mayor, Robin Richards             | X        |         |
| Council Member, Allan “Cotton” Roberts | X        |         |
| Council Member, Roger Cassell          | X        |         |
| Council Member, Wallace W. Ross, Jr.   | X        |         |
| Council Member, Tyler Kilgore          | X        |         |
| Town Manager, Greg Jones               | X        |         |
| Town Attorney, Michele Brooks          | X        |         |

Others present: Frances Perry; James Gose; Jim Addington; Justin Miller, Chief of Police; Ron Kindle; Debbie Kindle; Roger Fraysier; Allen Reed; Jason Snapp, Mattern & Craig; Mike Carrico; John Ferguson; Tyler Hallstead

**III. NEW BUSINESS**

**Solicit Public Input Concerning the Proposed Temporary Closure of King Avenue**

**IV. PUBLIC COMMENT**

**Frances Perry, Gate City Frontier** - Frances Perry stated that she is the member in charge of promotions for Gate City Frontier and comes tonight to present their reasoning for the temporary closure of King Alley. Frances Perry stated that sometimes things are not fully explained to the general public and thus the public draws an opposing attitude without knowing all of the facts. Frances Perry stated that the Gate City Frontier is a community of people who are interested in doing everything possible to stir interest in the town, particularly the downtown area as it is the hub of the town itself. Frances Perry stated that the idea of having this alleyway closed for a few months is to have a place where we can showcase our concern for local citizens and visitors to come together for fun, fellowship, and recreation. Mrs. Perry stated that we have experienced an increase of walkers through town since the onset of COVID 19 and we think people have discovered their town in a new and different way.

Mrs. Perry stated that what the Gate City Frontier is proposing would be to have a nice attractive place to welcome any and all who visit our downtown. Mrs. Perry stated that they would in no way prohibit the reopening of the alleyway once the outdoor season ends. Mrs. Perry stated that all decorations and furnishings would be removed and the alley would be reopened to the public, granted it might cause some people to have to change their usual way of entering and exiting from Jackson Street. Mrs. Perry asked are we not willing to give a little so that we can see how this might be something that would cause a new interest for our citizens and any visitors that would come our way? Mrs. Perry stated that this might just turn out to be the very thing to spur new interest and help Gate City move forward. Mrs. Perry stated that

we will never know if we aren't willing to test the waters. Mrs. Perry stated it could possibly turn out so well that we would want to make it a permanent thing in the future where it could be utilized throughout the year, not just for summer months but Valentine's Day, Easter, May Day, Memorial Day, Back to School Celebration, Veteran's Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas! Mrs. Perry stated that this request comes before the Council with 100% support of the Gate City Frontier. Mrs. Perry stated that she has a petition that has been signed by 27 people in the downtown area in support of the closure.

**Roger Fraysier, Operations Manager SCTC** – Mr. Fraysier stated that on behalf of Scott County Telephone, we embrace your idea, but not the location. Mr. Fraysier stated that due to COVID-19 the SCTC lobby as well as many other businesses, are closed and only have the drive-thru available. Mr. Fraysier stated that a large percentage of employees at the main office are working remotely from home and because of that he believes that the traffic counts would be significantly higher because there are employees who use King Alley on a daily basis. Mr. Fraysier stated that in the past, SCTC has never opposed closing King Alley for any of the town's concerts or any other events. Mr. Fraysier stated that he has personally worked with Mr. Cassell to provide a parking lot and electricity for the town's setups. Mr. Fraysier stated that at the first of the month, it gets very congested on Woodland Street due to customers accessing the drive-thru to make their payments. Mr. Fraysier stated that on June 8<sup>th</sup> at the SCTC Board of Directors meeting, a vote was taken and unanimously passed to oppose the closure of King Alley. Mr. Fraysier stated that the board believes it will be detrimental to access for employees and customers.

**Mike Carrico, Resident of Gate City for 26 years** – Mr. Carrico stated that he and his partners developed Moccasin Hills, has been a taxpayer for a number of years, and believes he has contributed thousands or millions of dollars in tax revenue to the town. Mr. Carrico handed out the 2014 traffic study which recorded 150-160 people using King Alley on a daily basis. Mr. Carrico stated that the new traffic study performed by Mattern & Craig shows a traffic count on King Alley of a low of 495 vehicles to a high of 528 vehicles. Mr. Carrico asked the council if they believe that to be a significant number of vehicles? Council Member Tyler Kilgore stated yes and Council Member Roger Cassell stated that he was surprised. Council Member Allan "Cotton" Roberts stated that he did not believe the numbers are accurate because he lives directly beside of King Alley. Mr. Carrico stated that it was a traffic study requested by Council, performed by Mattern & Craig, and spent tax payer funds of \$1,470. Town Manager Greg Jones stated that it was done at his request. Council Member Allan "Cotton" Roberts stated that he thought Mr. Carrico requested it. Mr. Carrico stated that he did not have the ability to request it because he is just a citizen here. Mr. Carrico stated that coming out of the north side of town, there is only one traffic light and it is located on King Alley. Mr. Carrico stated that Gate City Frontier is asking to close the only access to a traffic light on Jackson Street. Mr. Carrico asked the Council what type of adverse effects they believe the closure will have on Walgreen's and the elderly citizens who utilize the drive-thru to get their medications? Mr. Carrico stated that Jack Hamilton changed his prescriptions from CVS to Walgreen's because he is 86 years old and felt safer coming out at the traffic light when he picked up his medications.

Mr. Carrico asked if the Council believes that you can see for ingress and egress off of Cleveland Street? Mr. Carrico stated that if you come down Woodland Street, you have buildings all the way down that cars park in front of. Mr. Carrico asked the Council if they believed they could see from both directions when entering Jackson Street? Mr. Carrico asked what and who will it benefit to close this street? Mr. Carrico asked why choose that street that has the only traffic light when there are other streets that have very little traffic? Mr. Carrico asked why not close a street near the theatre project? Mr. Carrico asked why not put the entertainment in the town parking lot that is owned by the town already? Mr. Carrico asked how much more money is the town planning to spend on putting tables in King Alley? Mr. Carrico asked where the money is coming from? Mr. Carrico asked if trees will be planted? Mr. Carrico asked why \$8,000 of tax payer money was spent to pave King Alley if the town is wanting to close it? Mr. Carrico asked if a study was done prior to the last council meeting to see the benefits of it or any type of survey of the citizens or tax payers of the town? Mr. Carrico stated that the town did not do that, they just decided to close it because somebody wanted to close it. Mr. Carrico stated that the mayor stated that Gate City Frontier wanted green space in the town and initially wanted to close it permanently but now it is temporarily.

Mr. Carrico asked if the taxpayers that asked for the green space in town are the same ones that use King Alley for ingress and egress to the drug store or to pay their telephone bill at SCTC, which is probably the largest employer in the town of Gate City? Mr. Carrico stated that he spoke to a member of the fire department about firetrucks on Woodland Street. Mr. Carrico asked if a large firetruck can go up Woodland Street or do they have to utilize King Alley and the traffic light? Mr. Carrico asked if a house is on fire up there, can you close the only access there or does it make you liable? Mr. Carrico stated that an elderly citizen has no way to get out onto Jackson Street or Kane Street. Mr. Carrico asked what obligation does the town have to those people to ensure their safety and well-being? Mr. Carrico asked if there are other places in town where the Frontier can “test the waters” and put some green space in? Mr. Carrico asked if the building on Jackson Street, that is an eye sore with the awning falling off of it, could be taken down and a nice green space be put there? Mr. Carrico asked if the parking lot on Cleveland Street could be utilized instead?

Mr. Carrico asked Town Manager Greg Jones what it would do to him if his drive thru was closed for green space? Town Manager Greg Jones stated that it has been closed. Mr. Carrico asked how do customers pay their water bills? Town Manager Greg Jones stated that they can use the night deposit box. Mr. Carrico stated that this is essentially closing Walgreen’s drive-thru. Mr. Carrico stated that it is the only drug store in town that you can drive-thru if you are afraid of COVID-19 or you don’t want to interact with people to get your medications. Mr. Carrico stated that as a Council, there is an obligation to all of the citizens of the town of Gate City to look out for the best interest of all. Mr. Carrico stated that we have all suffered from the Coronavirus and understands that restaurants and businesses are suffering as well. Mr. Carrico stated that he knows Council Member Roberts needs somewhere for his patrons to eat their meals. Council Member Roberts stated that this is not what it is about and don’t accuse me as the one who wants it closed for my purposes. Mr. Carrico stated that it is adversely affecting all restaurants and he is only using Council Member Roberts as an example. Mr. Carrico stated that we all need to work together to be able to survive. Mr. Carrico stated that part of the parking spaces in front of his office and Council Member Robert’s office could be used if some barriers were put in so that tables can be placed there. Mr. Carrico stated that the closure would adversely affect him and he could use a different route, but he has used the street for 20 years and that his father also used that street to go to the drugstore. Mr. Carrico stated that he asks that the Council do what they feel is right and in the best interest of all of the citizens of the Town of Gate City and all of the citizens who patronize the Town of Gate City.

**Frances Perry, Gate City Frontier Promotions Representative** – Mrs. Perry stated that the Gate City Frontier is asking for the closure to be done on a trial basis this season alone. Mrs. Perry stated that is not a street in town that is level enough to do anything that we are talking about doing on. Mrs. Perry stated that Gate City Frontier is not taking any money out of the town budget and that they work on their own money from donations. Mrs. Perry stated that we are creatures of habit but we need to learn how to adapt to new things. Mr. Carrico stated that he respects Mrs. Perry’s position just as he asks her to respect his.

**Council Member Wallace W. Ross, Jr.** – Council Member Wallace W. Ross, Jr. stated that the Mattern & Craig survey reported that on June 30<sup>th</sup>, there were 495 vehicles, July 1<sup>st</sup> there were 565 vehicles and July 2<sup>nd</sup> there were 528 vehicles. Council Member Ross stated that on the first of the month there are a lot of senior citizens that use the drive-thru to get their medications and use the light to get back out. Council Member Ross stated that you can go right onto Cleveland Street but traffic is moving too fast to turn left. Council Member Ross stated that it is the same situation on Woodland Street. Council Member Ross asked what impact will it have on our older citizens if we close the alley. Council Member Ross stated that Mr. Carrico’s idea of marking off the parking lot and putting chairs there is a good idea or putting tables in front of Nickels place. Council Member Ross stated that he believes the closure would be a hardship on a lot of citizens who cannot make it as fast and use the light. Council Member Ross stated that his father also used the Alley when he went to the drugstore or when he went to Kingsport.

Council Member Roger Cassell – Council Member Roger Cassell asked Mr. Jason Snapp how the traffic count was performed? Mr. Jason Snapp stated that the count was done by tube counting. Mr. Snapp stated that there is a computer device that has tubes that run across the road and when a car drives across it, it clicks and counts a car. Mr. Snapp stated that the tubes were set up for three full days. Frances Perry

stated that she has no doubt that the traffic count was not that high because people told her that they were told to come through King Alley at a certain time so that the traffic count would be very high. Mayor Bob Richards stated nevertheless, the count is what it is and can't be changed. Council Member Ross stated that he received several phone calls from citizens concerned about closing the Alley.

**Dr. Tyler Hallstead, Walgreen's Pharmacist** - Dr. Hallstead stated that he has worked for the Broadwater Walgreen's for five to six years. Dr. Hallstead stated that he has a high population of elderly citizens that use his pharmacy and that this is his only issue. Dr. Hallstead stated that he has some patients that probably shouldn't be driving based on the medicine that they are on and because of this, their response time is delayed and if they did not have a stoplight to pull out of, it would make a difference for them. Dr. Hallstead stated that Black Bird Bakery added more concrete on the street in order to place more tables. Dr. Hallstead stated that there are a lot of options on the table for progress.

**Mr. John Ferguson, Member of the Board of Directors SCTC** – Mr. Ferguson stated that SCTC is trying to put high speed internet in through the rest of Scott County. Mr. Ferguson asked if the Council has ever considered putting a traffic count on all of the entrances to the main office? Mr. Ferguson stated that people paying their bills usually use that street whether they are going in or coming out. Mr. Ferguson stated that there are several ways to get in but King Alley is the best way. Mr. Ferguson stated that this way we have a light that tells us when it is safe to go back out on the highway. Mr. Ferguson stated that years ago, we decided that we were going to make SCTC the best telephone CO-OP in the United States and many people think we have succeeded in doing that. Mr. Ferguson stated that we are very proud of what SCTC does for Scott County.

**Walgreen's Representative** – A representative from Walgreen's stated that the drive-thru averages 200-300 cars per day and it would be higher if it wasn't for COVID-19 right now because we are doing a lot of mailing. The representative stated that if you come between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. in the afternoon the line will be backed into the road.

## **V. PUBLIC HEARING CLOSES AT 7:30 P.M**

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Bob Richards – Mayor

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Town Clerk – Lydia Morales