

Rouss Review Podcast S2E2 - Year in Review (Released 01/30/20)

Host Barry Lee: [00:05](#) Hi Barry Lee with 92.5 WINC FM and I'm excited to be at Rouss City Hall to host our second season of the City of Winchester's podcast, the Rouss Review. The way this works, twice each month, on the second and fourth Thursday, we'll explore City services, programs and events and discuss the information that you need to know. So up first is the Council BLUF or Bottom Line Up Front recap of our January 28th, 2020 Council meetings.

Host Barry Lee: [00:34](#) During the regular meeting, City Council opened the one bid received and held a public hearing for the ordinance authorizing an operational agreement and memorandum of agreement with Shenandoah University for the capital improvement and management of Bridgeforth Field and Rotary Field in Jim Barnett Park. Council reiterated with the community that Winchester Parks and Recreation and the City will retain ownership and remain in control of the associated park land. This ordinance is for an agreement for the management and maintenance of several athletic fields. After further discussion, Council voted to adopt the ordinance approving the agreement and MOA. Council also approved a resolution to set the Personal Property Tax Relief Rate for tax year 2020 at forty-eight percent as proposed by Commissioner of the Revenue Ann Burkholder. This rate is based on the 2006 rate of \$3.50 per \$100 assessed value for qualifying vehicles in the city. Council added a motion to the agenda and voted to direct the City Manager to solicit proposals from five specific executive recruiting firms in order to select a firm to assist with the recruitment and hiring process for the City's next City Manager. At the Work Session, Council discussed a resolution proposed by Winchester Public Schools requesting an additional \$1.5 million in funding from the city for the construction of the Innovation Center at the former John Kerr Elementary School. During the December 17, 2019 joint meeting of City Council and the Winchester School Board, the project update indicated a projected budget shortfall of approximately \$2.2 million. The WPS Innovation Center Steering Committee and Howard Shockey and Sons have identified several areas in which additional project savings can be realized, resulting in \$1 million in possible budget reductions. WPS has subsequently requested that Council appropriate an additional \$1.5 million for the construction of the Innovation Center. Council also discussed funding options other than incurring additional debt and wanted to continue the discussion with the City Manager and Finance staff at a future meeting. Council forwarded the resolution to the February 11 Regular Meeting for official vote. City Council also reviewed applications for real estate tax

exemption for properties owned by the Retired Clergy Housing Corporation of Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church, the Shenandoah Valley Community Residences, the Winchester Little Theatre, and Aids Response Effort. Council may consider these applications for local real estate tax exemption if the property meets appropriate state and local qualifications as a charitable organization. Council forwarded all four items to the February 11, 2020 regular meeting with a motion to deny due to their desire to stay consistent with prior decisions. Winchester Parks and Recreation Director Lynn Miller presented a resolution from the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board naming the new neighborhood park on the corner of S. Kent and E. Cecil Streets. This site was once the site of Ruth's Tea Room and was a gathering spot for area residents and visitors. Because it was well known that all were welcome at Ruth's Tea Room without prejudice, the business was considered an integral part of Winchester's social scene. The Winchester Parks and Recreation Advisory Board sought suggestions from the community as to an appropriate name for this neighborhood park. More than 100 suggestions were received and the board recommended the park be named Ruth Jackson Memorial Park. Council forwarded the resolution to the February 11 meeting for official vote. The City is a member of the Virginia Association of Municipal Wastewater Agencies, a group that closely follows regulatory issues associated with operating wastewater treatment plants. The State of Virginia has proposed some new regulations associated with the ongoing efforts to clean up the Chesapeake Bay that would have a major impact on wastewater treatment plants requiring some very costly upgrades to facilities. This would be yet another unfunded mandate on localities. The association has requested that its member jurisdictions adopt a resolution urging the state to reconsider these proposed new regulations. Council forwarded the resolution to the February 11 meeting for official vote. For more information on these topics and to view the agenda packet, visit the City of Winchester website and click "Council Meeting Agendas" under the "Government" tab.

Host Barry Lee:

[04:53](#)

Over the course of 2019 Rouss Review's inaugural year, we produced 22 podcasts. We covered topics from crime trends to recycling to infrastructure projects, Winchester history, and local events. It was an exciting year and to talk about some of the things that the City accomplished in 2019, City Manager Eden Freeman is here. Welcome back to the show, Eden

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- Eden Freeman: [05:14](#) Hi Barry. Thanks. Thanks for having me. I've been looking forward to having a chance to sit down and chat with you.
- Host Barry Lee: [05:19](#) I've heard you mentioned before that most everything the City does is centered around the strategic plan. So before we get started with the State of the City discussion, maybe an overview of the City's strategic plan.
- Eden Freeman: [05:30](#) Absolutely, and you are entirely correct. Everything that the City does is for the advancement of Council's adopted strategic plan goals including what departments submit as their fiscal year budget requests. The City's strategic plan was first adopted in December of 2015 to outline priorities, objectives, strategies, actions and targets to accomplish over the next five years and it's also reaffirmed annually to ensure that we're on track with Council's goals and priorities. Every two years, Council reviews the plan to make necessary changes or updates and we provide semi-annual and annual progress updates to Council. While I think everybody's probably familiar with what the City's mission statement is, I'm really proud of it because it underscores all of the work that we do for our community and I want to make sure, again, that people know what that is. The City's mission is to provide a safe, vibrant, sustainable community while striving to constantly improve the quality of life for our citizens and economic partners. The vision of the City, that complements that mission, is to be a beautiful, vibrant city with a historic downtown growing economy and great neighborhoods with a range of housing options and easy movement. Now as someone who is originally from Metro Atlanta, I can tell you we have easy movement in the city of Winchester.
- Host Barry Lee: [06:51](#) All right, so specific goals that we can review.
- Eden Freeman: [06:53](#) So we've got four goals that are included in Council's adopted strategic plan. The first one is to encourage sustainable economic growth and partnerships through business and workforce development. The second is to promote and accelerate revitalization of catalyst sites and other areas throughout the city. And catalyst sites are those properties that are typically viewed as being under-utilized or underperforming and we'd really like to see them come back into really good use and be a vibrant part of the community. Great example of that is Ward Plaza. The third is advanced the quality of life for all Winchester residents by increasing cultural recreational and tourism opportunities, enhance and maintain infrastructure and promote and improve public safety. And our fourth and final

goal is to improve City services and advanced the strategic plan goals by promoting a culture of transparency, efficiency, and innovation. That is our more inward-looking goal and is what we have really spent a lot of time working on over the last few years as we've put out greater information to the community to make sure that they stay up to date on the work that we do to improve their lives.

Host Barry Lee: [08:07](#) Excellent. Excellent. Well thank you for doing that and let's start the year in review discussion off with some of the City's major successes in 2019.

Eden Freeman: [08:15](#) Absolutely. I'll start with a local favorite, our annual informational calendar. The 2019 calendar year marks the first time we mailed the calendar to all Winchester residences. The calendar provides a wealth of information about City services and our community has really begun to rely on the information and they look forward to receiving it each year. Another thing that is definitely near and dear to my heart is the budget and the City's financial sustainability. I am pleased and happy to report that our AAA bond rating was reaffirmed for the third time by Standards and Poor's. That is extremely important to the financial health of Winchester because that means that we have a great credit score, so to speak. If you want to think of it in personal terms, that means that having that highest credit rating that a locality can receive gives us the ability to borrow funds to do capital projects at a cheaper price than what it would be if you were borrowing money and you didn't have a good credit score. There are only 11 cities in Virginia that have that triple a bond rating.

Host Barry Lee: [09:21](#) Wow. Wow. There's something to be proud of. And speaking of capital projects, you know we talked about some of those on our podcast last year.

Eden Freeman: [09:29](#) Oh yes. You did. Our Public Services Department bid out and/or began at least 12 new and much needed infrastructure projects in 2019; some of those projects include water treatment plant repairs, water tank replacement, North End sidewalk improvements, phase one of the North Cameron Drainage Improvement Project, Hanley Library, HVAC replacement, Creamery Building renovations, the parks maintenance building construction, ADA-related paving and concrete work, and much, much more.

Host Barry Lee: [10:04](#) That is one heck of a list of projects to start all at one time.

- Eden Freeman: [10:08](#) It does seem like a heck of a lot to do all at once when we already have a number of projects going on from 2018; but we have to apply for funding sources several years in advance and when the funding finally comes through, we have a limited timeframe to get those projects completed and on that specified timeline. But the good news is, because the funding was approved so far in advance, both at the state level and during the City's five-year capital improvement plan process. We plan for those projects in advance and make sure that we're appropriately staffed and resourced to get them done.
- Host Barry Lee: [10:43](#) And now you mentioned 2018 projects that were still ongoing in 2019, did you get any of those finished in 2019?
- Eden Freeman: [10:50](#) Yes we did. But most of the work done in 2018 was getting ready for the large number of projects that there were to do in 2019. We did finish the Kent Street and Woodstock Lane Improvement Projects and doesn't Kent street look amazing with the new sidewalks and repaved roads? It looks good, but that project actually included more than what is on the surface. We also replaced all of the underground water, sewer and storm water infrastructure for improved utility service for residents in that area. The improvements on Fairmont Avenue were part of the City's four-year water meter and sidewalk improvement project. 2018 saw the bulk of the work which included new sidewalks, trees, curb and gutter, storm water infrastructure, and a repaved road, but the project was officially completed in 2019.
- Host Barry Lee: [11:42](#) Excellent. Let's move on to public safety. That's always a hot topic.
- Eden Freeman: [11:46](#) It sure is. I have always told our team, if we don't have a safe community then we don't have anything. Unfortunately, 2019 was the one-year anniversary of when we lost Winchester Police Officer, Hunter Edwards. The department and the staff that knew him best are taking it one step at a time and working through the grieving and healing process. A Memorial garden was installed at the Timbrook Public Safety Center in his memory, along with Sergeant Ricky Timbrook's memory and other officers that have been impacted over the years while off duty. The WPD also participated in No Shave November in honor of Hunter. And that's a big deal since officers are currently not permitted to have facial hair, but there is a possible change coming because of the success of the event and the positive impact on morale. Our public safety teams were

able to continue their public outreach programs in 2019, such as the extremely popular Kids and Cops Camp. One of my favorites, Color with a Cop. I like to color. The junior, teen and adult Citizen Police Academies, Coffee with a Cop, North End Summer Kickoff, Stuff-A-Truck, Trunk or Treat, National Night Out, and the Timbrook Food and Toy Drive to name a few. A couple of new programs implemented in 2019 include the one-day Citizen Police Academy, which is an abbreviated version of the police department's three-month Citizen Academy. Winchester Fire and Rescue also hosted a chili cook-off to benefit a local food bank before the holidays. I'm very proud of the work our police officers, firefighters, emergency management, emergency communication and EMS professionals do in the community that's above and beyond their regular responsibilities as public safety personnel.

New Speaker: [13:36](#)

We also did a podcast on the City's new Text to 911 program last year. Maybe a word about that.

Eden Freeman: [13:42](#)

Oh, of course, and that was a much-needed emergency service in today's world. I find personally that it's sometimes easier to text somebody than it may be to call them, although I'm still working on getting my momma comfortable with texting me. The City's Emergency Communications Center received a \$150,000 grant in 2018 that paid for all but \$89 of the cost of the Text to 911 system. The new technology was launched in 2019 and it is working great. Although the system is available to use, there are still some things that are better communicated by phone as we are all well aware. Therefore our dispatchers still urge residents and visitors to call when they can and text when they can't.

New Speaker: [14:30](#)

Hey, what about that shiny new green fire truck?

Eden Freeman: [14:32](#)

Oh wow. That is something that I am especially proud of. In 2018, the City purchased its very first City-owned ladder truck, which is housed at Rouss Volunteer Fire Company. It finally arrived and was put in service in 2019. For folks who may not be aware, the City operates a combination fire system and excluding the new City-owned ladder truck, all fire and emergency apparatus as well as the fire stations are actually owned by volunteer fire companies, not by the City. We're very excited to have the opportunity to purchase this equipment and further our commitment to providing excellent emergency response services to our community.

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- Host Barry Lee: [15:12](#) And on a personal note, what 2019 accomplishments are you most proud of?
- Eden Freeman: [15:17](#) My answer is always the same. I am most proud of our amazing City team and the work they do every day to serve our community. Local government isn't the most glamorous job and we often only hear the negative, but the work that we do is vitally important and in many ways life changing to our residents and visitors.
- Host Barry Lee: [15:38](#) Each year the City puts out an annual report, which I assume will include some of these accomplishments. So will you be doing that again this year?
- Eden Freeman: [15:45](#) Most definitely. We are currently working on the printed report with the goal of distributing it in March. And Mayor Smith provided his video annual report at Council's meeting earlier in January. It also included a nice little blooper reel. The video is also be posted on our social media pages, including YouTube and on our website.
- Host Barry Lee: [16:09](#) Alrighty. Well Eden, we want to thank you and your staff and thank you for the year update. Sadly, we're going to be saying so long to you in March.
- Eden Freeman: [16:19](#) Yes, you are.
- New Speaker: [16:21](#) I know that most everybody knows about the move to South Carolina and your last day will be when, March 16th? Wow. And City Manager for five plus years.
- Eden Freeman: [16:32](#) Yeah. I'm going on five and three quarters, although a little over five and a half years.
- Host Barry Lee: [16:38](#) Wow. Thanks for the incredible job you've done. We're going to miss you, but all the best of luck to you and your family and a safe travels to South Carolina, but we still got her til March.
- Eden Freeman: [16:47](#) That's right. I'm going to be around for a little bit longer and, and I absolutely want to thank the community for all the support that they've given me over the years. 2019 was a very difficult year on a personal level and without the support of this amazing team and the community here, I would not have made it through.

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- Host Barry Lee: [17:06](#) Oh, and you know, who could ever forget our video where you helped us once and for all celebrate the uh, the city's big anniversary 275th. The bicenterqua...
- Eden Freeman: [17:18](#) Now Barry, we've practiced this before, but I also want to thank people for helping us celebrate Winchester's bicenterquasquinary this year.
- New Speaker: [17:34](#) Show off [laughter]
- Eden Freeman: [17:34](#) Throughout the year, so many organizations offered events, partnered with the City's planning committee and brought attention to Winchester's rich and fascinating history. Area residents also came out to support those events and take part in the fun. The planning committee, organized by the Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society, did an absolutely amazing job and I'd say the celebration was a huge, huge success.
- Speaker 3: [17:58](#) Hey, thanks so much for being our guest today and again, all the best in the future.
- New Speaker: [18:04](#) Thank you, Barry. It's been my pleasure.
- Host Barry Lee: [18:09](#) It's time for the Now U Know segment where we talk about interesting City of Winchester facts you may not be aware of or important information you need to know. Continuing with the end-of-year theme, here are some interesting stats concerning the City's public safety services provided during 2019. The Winchester Emergency Communications Center handled 20,370 9-1-1 calls with 74% of those calls were made with wireless devices. The 9-1-1 calls were answered by a dispatcher in less than four seconds on average. The new Text to 9-1-1 system was launched in the fall of 2019 and three emergency texts were received. The Winchester Police Department handled 499 thefts, 70 grand thefts, 22 motor vehicle thefts, 6 robberies, 6 rapes, and 78 breaking and entering incidents in 2019. All these totals are lower than 2018 totals, except theft. Theft crimes increased by 27 incidents. The WPD also made 2,282 arrests, 150 DUI arrests and issued 3,331 traffic violations and 3,980 warning citations. Officers also investigated 568 vehicle crashes and initiated 7,894 vehicle stops. Get up-to-date crime statistics and crime maps on [winchesterpolice.org](http://winchesterpolice.org). For Winchester Fire Rescue, personnel handled 4,707 EMS calls and 1,482 fire calls. Only 60 of those fire calls were for structure fires with the



majority being requests for mutual aid to large structure fires in neighboring localities. EMS calls for cardiac arrest resulted in a resuscitation rate of 38.10 percent which is above the national average of 29%. This information and more will be included in the City's 2019 annual report to be released in the coming months. Well, if you didn't before, Now U Know!

Host Barry Lee:

[20:15](#)

And before we go, here are some upcoming events and activities that are offered by the City of Winchester and partners. Save the date for Old Town Winchester's Chocolate Escape, Saturday, February 8th. There's going to be plenty of tasty chocolate treats, special deals, live music and fun activities to get you ready for Valentine's Day. The public input session for the Fire and Rescue study is going to be held Monday, February 10th from 6:00 to 8:00 PM at the Jim Barnett Park Rec Center. The consultant will provide an overview of the study and department prior to the discussion and launching the online survey. Winchester Parks and Recreation is offering several bus trips in February and March. Register now for the snow tubing trip to Bryce resort, February 22nd, the Philadelphia Flower Show trip on March 7th, or the Top Golf trip on March 22nd. Call (540) 662-4946 or you can register online at [winchesterva.gov/parks](http://winchesterva.gov/parks). In March, the Winchester Police Department will launch Defrost, a new true crime podcasts that will detail a cold case in hopes of bringing closure and finding new leads. We'll be bringing you more details as the launch date is set. And last but not least, save the date for the Rouss City Hall Reveal Event. On February 26th the City's going to be celebrating the recent completion of City Hall's renovation and Charles Broadway Rouss's birthday with refreshments and guided tours of the beautiful historic building.

New Speaker:

[21:44](#)

Thanks so much for joining us on this. The second season of the Rouss Review podcast is filled with interesting conversation and information you need to know I'm Barry Lee with 92 five wink FM. We'll be back on the second Thursday in February at 5:00 PM. So long for now.