

Intro ([00:00](#)):

Intro music

Barry Lee ([00:03](#)):

Hi, Barry Lee with 92.5 WINC FM, excited to host the second season of the City of Winchester's podcast, The Rouse Review. We do this twice a month on the second and fourth Thursday. We explore City services, programs, and events, and we'll discussed the information that you need to know.

Barry Lee ([00:21](#)):

Up first is the Council BLUF, that's a Bottom Line Up Front recap of the June 9, 2020 Council meetings. Mayor Smith thanked the community, law enforcement officers and first responders for working together and holding a peaceful 'I Can't Breathe' event on Friday, June 5th. Mayor Smith also read a proclamation he signed officially expressing support for the Black Lives Matter movement and the end to systemic violence, both overt and institutional, towards Black communities and individuals. During the City Manager's report, Interim City Manager Mary Beth Price asked Winchester Police Department Chief John Piper to provide an overview of the department's policies and practices regarding use of force, deescalation techniques and intervention policies. Chief Piper will be joining us in the next segment to discuss these policies and practices in more detail, so stay tuned. At the regular meeting, Council adopted an ordinance and associated resolution authorizing the issuance and sale of up to \$37 million in utility revenue bonds for ongoing utility infrastructure projects. The City has several utility infrastructure improvement projects currently in progress and additional funds were expected to be needed this year in order to complete the projects. This proposed ordinance will authorize a revenue bond issuance of \$33 million with a term of 30 years. For the first two years, the interest only payments will be capitalized into the loan. And for the third year, the payments will be interest only since the bonds are to be repaid with utility revenue. This payment structure is necessary to allow the next three water and sewer rate increases to be delayed one year each due to the COVID-19 pandemic. No general fund tax dollars are being used to pay for these projects. The City's Development Services Director Shawn Hershberger provided an overview of economic development efforts to assist local businesses navigate through Phase II of Virginia's reopening plan. The City is providing as much regulatory flexibility as possible as businesses trying to offer different services and follow restrictions and guidelines outlined by the governor. In addition, outdoor dining permit regulations have been expedited city-wide. In Phase II, the Economic Development Authority has suggested that Council consider a temporary closure of Boscawen Street to allow for additional outdoor dining opportunities and increased pedestrian flow in Old Town. The temporary closure is being recommended Friday at 5:00 PM through Sunday at 4:00 PM, until businesses are able to return to pre-pandemic operation. Council expressed interest in closing Boscawen Street immediately to help downtown businesses and researching what would be needed to implement a town center atmosphere in the Old Town primary district. At the Work Session, Council discussed two draft resolutions, accepting federal and state funds for the operation of the City's public transit system. Every year City Council is required to approve a resolution to accept the funds and to certify that the City will follow all applicable requirements. The fiscal year 2020 funding totals are \$439,000 in federal funds and \$324,178 in state funds. Council forwarded the resolutions to the June 23, 2020 Regular Meeting for official vote. For more information on these topics and to view the agenda packet, visit the City of Winchester website [www.winchesterva.gov] and click "Council Meeting Agendas" under the "Government" tab.

Barry Lee ([03:50](#)):

The tragic death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 25, 2020 has caused a great deal of unrest in communities across the country. Nationwide people are questioning police practices, raising concerns about racial inequality and calling for change to address these concerns locally and provide an overview of local police policies and practices. We welcome Winchester Police Chief John Piper to the show. Thank you so much for being here today, Chief.

Chief Piper ([04:18](#)):

Thanks for having me.

Barry Lee ([04:19](#)):

I can imagine it was hard for you and your team to accept the unfortunate circumstances surrounding George Floyd's death. How has his death impacted the Winchester Police Department and your officers?

Chief Piper ([04:31](#)):

Well, I've said publicly that all of us that saw the video of Mr. Floyd's death were disgusted and disturbed. And those of us who consider ourselves law enforcement professionals are just as upset as many people in our community. So having said that, of course that's gonna impact how people view police in general, but it's my hope that people in this community and those who visit Winchester understand that we do have a professional police department and that the men and women of the department care about people in this community and that we care about how we police this community. We're always going to do things that perhaps people have questions about, and we're always going to make mistakes. That's part of the nature of this job, but I think we're all, I know that we're all committed to moving forward and doing better each and every day.

Barry Lee ([05:18](#)):

As expected, George Floyd's death and the manner in which he died has caused a ripple effect across the country. Understandably, we all want what happened on that tragic day to never happen again. But some groups in other communities have turned to violence to make their voices heard. When rumors of protest were circulating in Winchester, many residents and business owners were concerned about the possibility that looting and violence could also happen here. What did you and your department experience leading up to and during the protests and events that occurred last week in old town?

Chief Piper ([05:49](#)):

For the protests and marches that occurred on Friday [June 5, 2020], we were in close contact with the organizers early and often. And so I've always say that the good and bad of social media is that: the good is it can share a lot of information with people in our community, but the bad, unfortunately, is that misinformation gets shared. And so I think this was a perfect example where people were posting rumors and speculation, copying and pasting other people's posts, and it wasn't really based on reality. So, we were, of course, inundated with questions, legitimate concerns from people in our community, business owners and others who had concerns about outside agitators coming in. There were rumors about people being bused in from Baltimore, Washington, D.C., professional protestors who may not have had the best interest of Winchester in mind. We also heard about groups such as Antifa coming in, staging bricks. All of that turned out to be false. And while we were fully prepared to deal with the possibility of outside agitators or people coming in disrupting an otherwise peaceful protest, that was not the reality here in Winchester. So, we were glad to be able to yes, prepare for that, but also coordinate with the true organizers of the protest and make sure that everything went off peacefully.

During the protest, of course, our number one priority was to make sure that the safety of everybody involved, including the protestors was kept in tack. And so we were fortunate to have mutual aid assistance from the Frederick County Sheriff's Office. We had assistance from, of course, our Fire and Rescue Department who were ready and available in the event that medical or fire emergencies popped up during the incident. And also the City Sheriff's Office had folks on standby. We did up staff a little bit to make sure that while people were protesting, they were safe and that people didn't go into the street and that we didn't have any violence or disruptions to traffic. I was very, very proud of the organizers and the folks who took part in the protest and very proud of this community for how they protested. They had some legitimate concerns about policing in the United States, and we understand that. But I think what happened here in Winchester should be an example of how things should happen. Unfortunately, when you look around the country and you see rioting and officers getting assaulted and people go into jail, that's not what we wanted here. So I'm very proud, again, of how this community responded.

Barry Lee ([08:17](#)):

That's great to hear. Another hot topic in the country right now is use of force. What is the Winchester Police Department's policy on use of force?

Chief Piper ([08:26](#)):

One of the first things I did when I became Chief in September of 2017 was form a policy review work group. That work group was tasked with reviewing all of our policies, starting with the critical ones, such as use of force, taser, citizen complaints, how we adjudicate those, and to make sure that we're comparing, contrasting those policies against professional police organizations, such as the International Association of Chiefs of Police, Police Executive Research Forum, and other major police departments around the country to determine what the best practices were. Of course, we want to make sure that our use of force policies reflect the values of the people who live and visit Winchester, but we also want to make sure that they protect our officers and protect people, everybody that we're coming into contact with. So, our policy is in line with all of those things. We did make some changes and some of those changes, I would encourage people to go to our website at Winchesterpolice.org and visit those policies. We are in the process of reviewing all of our policies, again, starting with the critical ones. And after they've been vetted and approved and signed by me, they're being posted on our website for public consumption. Because I do feel strongly that the community needs to know what its police department policies are. And so I would encourage people to go there and visit them. There's everything from deadly force in an extreme situation where the officer or someone else's life is in danger, the proper application of expandable batons to taser policies. And so our policies reflect the values, I think, of this community, and we're going to have ongoing discussions with stakeholders in our communities to make sure that's a fluid process. That if we need to make minor changes, then we can do that. But our policies already contain many of the things that people nationally are asking for from their police departments. We have in our policies, currently, a strong statement on the value and sanctity of human life. We have a mandate that officers use de-escalation techniques whenever possible when they deal with suspects. Our officers have in policy and in practice and in training a duty to intervene. If they see another officer using an inappropriate level of force, and they also have an obligation to immediately report that excessive force or misconduct to a supervisor, we have in our policy prohibitions against firing and moving vehicles, prohibitions of choke holds and other things. Again, those that people across the country and in this community are asking for. I'm proud of our policies. I'm always open to suggestions and making changes if they make sense. But I think people largely would be very happy and

proud of the policies that the Winchester Police Department has right now. And again, encourage people to go online and review them for themselves.

Barry Lee ([11:20](#)):

What about training? I'm sure officers are trained on these tactics regularly. Correct?

Chief Piper ([11:25](#)):

In the Commonwealth of Virginia, of course, our training as police officer starts in the Basic Academy. Our officers in Winchester go to the Skyline Regional Academy, both for the initial training to become a police officer and also for the required in-service training. That's required in the Commonwealth of Virginia by the department of criminal justice services. But that really is just the beginning of what we expect our officers to be competent in here in Winchester. We have in-house and occasionally we'll bring some people from the outside to make sure again, that we're doing things that are in the best practice of law enforcement in 2020. Each year that I've been Chief here, we've mandated and followed through of doing de-escalation training. We do training on critical incident handling and we do training for all of our officers on crisis intervention team training. So many of our calls for service are dealing with people who are in either an altered state of mind because of drugs or alcohol, or they're dealing with some kind of mental health issue. And those situations present unique challenges, both for the people that we're dealing with and also for law enforcement. So we want to make sure that whenever possible, that we are de-escalating those situations to make sure that not only our community members are safe when they interact with police, but our officers are safe. The last thing we need to do is rush into situations and start making assumptions, whenever possible. We need to slow things down, take a deep breath, use our training and de-escalate to make sure that everybody goes home safe at the end of the night. And we're going to continue to do that in 2020. We're gonna continue to build in scenario-based training tabletops and work with other folks here in the city to make sure that we are bringing the best training possible to the men and women of the police department.

Barry Lee ([13:15](#)):

Another concern, stimulating questions of police officers is whether or not they have a duty to intervene in situations similar to what happened in Minneapolis. What is the policy here in Winchester?

Chief Piper ([13:26](#)):

So again, our policy on use of force does have a strong statement of the sanctity of human life and an officer's duty to intervene. So what does that mean? What that means is that if I'm an officer on the street and I see one of my co-workers doing something that's a policy violation, or even more severely, an inappropriate or excessive amount of force being used, that officer has a duty to not only report that to a supervisor when the incident is over and to document that, but they have a duty to stop that illegal or improper action. I'm proud to say that [improper use of force] doesn't happen here in Winchester, but if it did, and we had an officer that was using an inappropriate or excessive amount of force, I would expect, and we would demand from other officers on the scene that they would intervene and stop that to make sure that the person and the officer were safe. That is included in our policy and it's a strong statement in there. We reinforce that through training and during the hiring process.

Barry Lee ([14:33](#)):

With the COVID-19 restrictions in place, people may be wondering why the event and protest held on Friday was allowed. Can you speak to that?

Chief Piper ([14:42](#)):

That's a great question. I certainly received a lot of feedback. Some of it negative from people in the community about why I decided to approve a special event application, a permit to hold a protest on Friday, two events. And I understand those concerns. Most of those questions revolved around the fact that we are still in Phase II in the Commonwealth of Virginia and that our gatherings are supposed to be limited to 50 people or less. So that was a judgment call that I made as the Chief. City Code requires that I review all special event applications and that I approve them and work, of course, with other City entities to make sure the events go off safely. My thought process in approving that in consultation with the City Manager, of course, was that we need to work with the people who are organizing these events. Had we not had visibility, as far as the route, number of participants, the agenda and other items, in my opinion, we would not have been in a position to be able to provide adequate security, both for the protestors, as well as the business community, and other people who may be visiting the downtown mall. So these decisions that I have to make as Chief, sometimes they're not always the easiest ones to make. However, I thought this was in the best interest of not only the protestors and the organizers who were trying to organize this event, but also the city as a whole. While we did approve this permit, we certainly had more than 50 people, the organizers and I both strongly encouraged, and I was happy to see, that most people who participated in the events did have face coverings.

Barry Lee ([16:21](#)):

So, what's next? Where does the Winchester Police Department and our community go from here?

Chief Piper ([16:27](#)):

Even before this incident, this tragic incident that happened in Minnesota with Mr. Floyd, we had been in dialogue with key stakeholders in our community, including the NAACP and many others who have a vested interest in moving Winchester forward and working with the police department. Those conversations have continued. So Mayor Smith and I have been in contact with the NAACP and several other community activists and we're in the process now of setting up a community forum. Of course, there'll be limited in-person participation because of the COVID-19 restrictions, but initially what we're looking at doing something is on June 27th. I know that Mayor Smith will be putting out some additional information as far as the location and how folks who can't be there in person can submit questions and ask policy questions and about how their police department serves them. So I will be there and I look forward to more information coming out shortly from the city about how folks can participate virtually who can't be there in person. But beyond that, it's important that people have a vested interest in their police department, that they understand what our policies are and that they work with us. We're always willing to learn. We're never going to be perfect and we want to make sure that we're hearing from people in the community.

Barry Lee ([17:49](#)):

Great. Thank you, Chief. Is there anything else you'd like to discuss before we let you go?

Chief Piper ([17:54](#)):

I just want to remind people that this police department in Winchester is fully engaged with this community. And I'm very proud of the community outreach events that we've done as a police department, since I became Chief here. And some of those events, as many people in the community listening right now know, are things that deal with the young people in our community. We have a Kids and Cops camp every year, we have a teen and adult and now a youth academy. They get filled up very

quickly and I'm very proud of the diversity that we have as far as the participation. Those are great opportunities for people in our community to come in and see our police officers as men and women, not just as someone who is out arresting people in the community, because that's an important part of what we do, but it's certainly not all that we do. We've done many, many community outreach events through a diverse area of the city and in a variety of different ways. As chief, I am committed to continuing those, to make sure that we maintain an open dialogue and that we're listening to what people want and what they expect from their police department. I'm very proud of the men and women here. It's a difficult time to be in law enforcement, I know that. I appreciate the sacrifices that they make and that their families make each and every day to keep this community safe.

Barry Lee ([19:10](#)):

Chief Piper, thank you so much for being on the show and thanks for all you and your officers do every day for our beautiful community and stay safe.

Chief Piper ([19:20](#)):

Thanks for having me, Barry. It was great talking to you again.

Barry Lee ([19:23](#)):

Next step is the Now U Know, segment where we talk about interesting City of Winchester facts that you may not be aware of or important information that you need to know. This week's segment focuses on the special event and the assembly permit process, as outlined in City Code. A public assembly is defined as any pre-planned meeting, demonstration, picket line, rally, or gathering of more than 10 people for a common purpose. These types of gatherings and events tend to interfere with pedestrian or vehicular traffic or the normal use of any public property or space open to the general public. Therefore, a permit is required. A special event means any public assembly, which occurs on public property that requires the closure of street, sidewalks or parks; where over 25 people are anticipated to gather and participate; or requires approval by City departments beyond the required assembly permit. This may include fairs, festivals, carnivals, sporting events, races, markets, dances, and exhibitions. Spontaneous events do not require a permit. A spontaneous event is an unplanned or unannounced coming together of people, animals, or vehicles in a parade or public assembly in response to unforeseen circumstances or events first coming into public knowledge within five days of the parade or public assembly. The City's special event permit approval process requests that all applications for special events and parades be submitted 60 days prior to the planned event to allow for review and processing. Public assemblies require a completed special event permit application be submitted at least five days prior to the planned assembly. Additional forms may be required for events held in Old Town, Winchester, or a city park. For more information about these requirements and more visit Winchesterva.gov/specialeventpermit. Well, if you didn't know before now, you know.

New Speaker ([21:17](#)):

And last but not least, here are a few announcements to keep you informed. Due to a positive COVID-19 case, all WinTran routes and services are canceled through June 17th. Before routes resume on June 18th, all buses will be properly sanitized. The outdoor pool in Jim Barnett Park is open for lap swim and swim team practices only for Phase II of the Governor's reopening plan. Lap swim times and occupancy were increased to 24 individuals and three people per lane. Reservations are not accepted, however, a waitlist will be started when capacity is reached for those who'd like to wait on park property for a lane to become available. General swimming is not permitted at this time. Winchester Parks and Recreation

will also offer water aerobics and Aqua Fun fitness classes in the outdoor pool beginning June 17th. Capacity for these classes is set at 14 people and is first-come first-served. No registrations or reservations will be taken. Check the parks aquatics webpage [www.winchesterva.gov/parks/aquatics] for the lap swim and upcoming class schedule. More Jim Barnett Park facilities are expected to reopen in the next two weeks. Please check Winchesterva.gov/parks for updates. The next Winchester Pop-up Market ordering deadline is Monday, June 15th at noon. Pick up your order at the Jim Barnett Park Rec Center drive through between 11:00 AM and 1:00 PM on Tuesday, June 16th. Available items include meats, vegetables, and household supplies. Visit the Winchester popup market page on myshopify.com. The deadline to submit feedback on the 11 improvement concepts recommended by VDOT for South Pleasant Valley Road is June 14th. For details and the link to the survey, please visit the City's website and enter "Pleasant Valley Road improvements" in the search bar. Well, that's going to wrap it up for this week's Rouss Review podcast. Thanks so much for joining us. I'm Barry Lee with 92.5 WINC FM. We'll be back on the fourth Thursday in June at 5:00 PM. Take care and stay safe.

New Speaker ([23:24](#)):

Outro music