

Barry Lee (00:03):

Hi, Barry Lee with 92.5 WINC FM hosting our City of Winchester podcast, The Rouss Review. We do this twice, each month, on the second and fourth Thursday. We explore City services, programs and discuss information that's helpful to you. Up first is the Council BLUF, a Bottom Line Up Front recap of the August 11, 2020 Council meetings.

New Speaker (00:26):

At the Special Meeting, Council resumed discussions of proposed SMART Scale funding applications with several modifications for the proposed South Pleasant Valley Road improvement projects. These improvements at Wingate Drive, Parkview Avenue and in front of Starbucks were proposed by the VDOT safety study conducted earlier this year. The estimated cost of the Pleasant Valley improvements recommended for SMART Scale funding is \$5.4 million. If the applications are approved by VDOT funds will be available in 2025, and there is no requirement for the City to provide matching funds. Council approved the resolution authorizing staff to apply for the SMART Scale funding for the South Pleasant Valley Road improvements only. At the regular meeting, Council adopted an ordinance to amend City Code and increased the fee imposed on criminal and traffic cases that are tried and convicted from \$10 to \$20. This change is allowed due to a recent Code of Virginia amendment. Council also adopted an ordinance to amend City Code, allowing civil penalties to be applied if a property owner fails to timely submit a plan for demolishing or repairing a derelict property. This amendment establishes a maximum civil penalty of \$500 each month that a plan is not submitted to the locality. The General Assembly recently amended the Virginia Code to authorize localities to impose civil penalties if a property owner fails to timely submit a plan for demolishing or repairing a derelict property. There are currently several buildings within the city, which meet the derelict building definition and could be subject to these civil penalties. Implementation of this proposed ordinance would assist the City with pursuing remediation efforts with the owners of these blighted properties. At the Work Session, Commissioner of the Revenue Ann Burkholder provided an overview to Council as to why she reversed her denial and is now approving the properties purchased by the Winchester Little Theater and Shenandoah Community Residences as tax exempt. After reviewing the language of the General Assembly tax exempt designation grants, it was determined that the real property purchased by both organizations should have been included in each entities tax exempt designation. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit this area, the City stopped disconnecting water service to customers that have not paid their bill and have ensured that all customers have water service. During these difficult times, this procedure is still in place and as expected, there are a significant number of customers that are past due on their account. As of August 11th, there were 969 customers, primarily residential that are delinquent on their account for a total amount of approximately \$341,000. Council discussed with staff how to proceed when service disconnections resume. There are currently no federal or state restrictions that would prevent the City from shutting off service and many water utilities around the country have resumed disconnections for delinquent accounts. Council requested that staff draft a payment plan and propose a process that could be implemented to assist families and landlords when the City decides to resume disconnections in the future. Staff is currently researching whether CARES Act funding can be used to provide relief for those who are behind on their payments. Staff will look into the options and return to a future Council Work Session to provide more information for further discussion. Council began discussions on potentially forming committees to dive deeper into discussions on issues and projects, make decisions more efficiently, have more opportunities to be proactive, and work more closely with staff. Potential Council committees may include a public safety committee and a finance committee. Details on how the committee structure would operate will be discussed at a future meeting. For more information on

these topics and to view the agenda packet or watch the meeting video, visit the City of Winchester website [www.winchesterva.gov] and click "Council Meeting Agendas" under the "Government" tab.

Barry Lee ([04:36](#)):

COVID-19 may have put a halt on a lot of fun activities this summer, but there are several facilities open in Winchester community parks that will help keep you active while you practice social distancing. Here with us today is Winchester Parks and Recreation Director Lynn Miller to give us an overview of those facilities. Thanks for joining us today. Lynn.

Lynn Miller ([04:55](#)):

Well, Barry, I'm pleased to be here. I appreciate the invitation.

Barry Lee ([04:59](#)):

So, obviously, I guess the summer is usually the busiest time of year for Winchester Parks and Recreation. I mean, we've got summer camps, the pool opening and general recreation activities. So, what's it been like this summer in the park dealing with the pandemic?

Lynn Miller ([05:14](#)):

Well, Barry, quite honestly has been a very unusual spring and summer. Summer is a very, very busy time in the park without a doubt, but this year has been much different. The pandemic has kind of muffled everything, if you will. We're trying to get programs started but we're slowly starting those up. We have to certainly recognize the safety of the public, the safety of our staff, what phase of the reopening program that the governor has prescribed we're in, but there's still a lot of activity in the park. It's not that we're closed down and dormant, by any stretch of the imagination. So, we are progressing every day.

Barry Lee ([05:55](#)):

So give us an overview of outdoor park facilities that are currently open and are there any specific requirements at each?

Lynn Miller ([06:03](#)):

Well, the athletic fields, we do have those open now and we have organizations such as Winchester Baseball that are running and utilizing the athletic fields. That is good. It's certainly not to a degree of what it was previous years. We were really pleased to be able to get the outdoor pool open. We presented the plan to the City Manager to open the outdoor pool. She reviewed it, approved it, and, we were able to get that open. That's been open since Phase I for lap swim, but, in phase two, we progressed a little bit further. We could have more than one person in a lane for lap swim and when we got into phase three, we were able to go in to where it had lap swim, we could have exercise classes such as aquatics aerobics as well as general swim. But, again, it's different because with general swim, by the time we look at social distancing, we can only have 35 people in the pool. So, consequently, we're doing that on a reservation basis. Other activities than the pool, we had the playgrounds reopened. They're getting a lot of heavy use, not quite what they once were. We have not been able to get the shelters open. The shelter, the social distancing, and the rental rates on that, where we're wrestling with that on a day to day basis. The dog park is certainly open. We encourage people to bring their pets and come to the dog park. And, well the basketball courts are reopened. The tennis courts are reopened. We

have a lot of people that are playing pickleball. So for those that haven't taken up pickleball, you ought to go down and watch and get involved. So, again, we're progressing. The other thing that we saw from the time the pandemic was announced and really came into effect, and that's a large number of people that are using the various trails. We're seeing more people in the park using the trails there as well as the Green Circle Trail throughout the city. We encourage that. That exercise is extremely good from a physical standpoint, but also from a psychological perspective. We talked about activities in the park and now we ought to talk about social distancing because it is certainly a criteria. Getting individuals to understand what social distancing is, if you just look at it as it is basically presented in the reopening plan is six feet. And people normally say, well, I need to be six foot from a person, but it's not that it's six feet in all directions. So you're actually talking about 144 square feet. If you're doing an activity such as a Zumba or water aerobics, or, where you're physically exercising that six feet goes to 10 and that 10 feet automatically changes the 400 square feet. So, there really creates a tremendous reduction in the occupancy load of an area, including the pools.

Barry Lee ([09:03](#)):

How much longer will the outdoor pool be open? It usually closes on labor day, correct?

Lynn Miller ([09:09](#)):

The last three years we've been keeping the pool open until about the middle of September. This year, however, due to the pandemic, the staffing concerns, and the health concerns, we had and just financial concerns, we really can't afford to operate the indoor and outdoor pool. So, this year, we planned to close the outdoor pool on labor day, which is the 7th of September. And then on the 8th of September, we anticipate we will open the indoor pool.

Barry Lee ([09:37](#)):

Let's talk about the indoor facilities, what facilities are open now and what COVID-19 requirements do you have there?

Lynn Miller ([09:45](#)):

Well, the indoor facilities are very limited at the present time. We have been able to reopen the building on limited hours. We're open Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. The racquetball court is available for use indoors. Otherwise we're really very, just restricted. We do have summer childcare, and again, that's very restricted where we would normally have between 80 and a hundred children within the summer camp due to social distancing and available space, we're only able to accommodate no more than 32 this year. Social distancing, again, is applied in the same manner there as it would be outside in the swimming pool, or if we're doing Zumba. It's six feet, unless you're exercising. If you're exercising then it's supposed to be 10 feet. So we really hope, well maybe I should back up just a second. We've had to utilize the entire gym for our childcare program, so, that has taken the gym out of play. As we go into the fall, into a fall program for childcare, we will move them into a smaller area and the gym will reopen. So, we're looking at athletic, as well as, community recreation programs in the fall within the gym.

Barry Lee ([11:08](#)):

When the schools reopen, will you be offering the after-school program?

Lynn Miller ([11:12](#)):

We anticipate, yes. And it would be a program that basically will mirror that of the Winchester Public Schools. We anticipate providing childcare, all day childcare, on Mondays and Tuesdays, and Thursdays and Fridays. Um, but not on Wednesdays. Wednesdays will give an opportunity for our staff to look at the curriculum to plan for future days, as well as, for us to do have one day of heavy cleaning and sanitizing. But we do anticipate that. That is currently under review by the City Manager and hopefully within the next day or two, we'll have that.

Barry Lee ([11:46](#)):

Do you know yet, Lynn, when the registration will open and how many students you'll be able to accommodate.

Lynn Miller ([11:52](#)):

No, we don't know the date until we get approval, but we anticipate we'll be able to accommodate between 18 and 22 students. And some of that will be dependent on siblings.

Barry Lee ([12:02](#)):

And what about the pavilions and meeting rooms? Are you taking reservations right now during Phase III?

Lynn Miller ([12:09](#)):

Well Barry, we are not taking reservations for pavilions or rental rooms. Quite frankly, you take one of the largest pavilions that we have, if you apply social distancing to it, you can only have 12 people, where we're advertising normally between 101-105 people. So, looking at the fee to rent a pavilion and try to apply that to 12 people or 10 people or two people, just is not really fair to our patrons, quite frankly. Same thing with the room rentals. We take the second largest area that we have that we could use as a rental, where we normally have a hundred and some people in it, now we can only accommodate 21. And again, how do you apply a rental rate to 21 people and you have a birthday party and confined to 21 people or the next room down to 12 people. So, currently we're not taking reservations with those. We're really struggling with what to do and how to do that because we do get calls every day about the rental of rooms and the pavilions. The position we've taken with pavilions is it is on a first-come first-serve basis. So, if somebody wants to come in and have a family reunion, we encourage them. We have a sign up to use social distancing, but there's just no rental being applied at the present.

Barry Lee ([13:33](#)):

How are you keeping people safe at park facilities regarding social distancing and disinfection?

Lynn Miller ([13:39](#)):

I already covered the social distancing aspect of how we're trying to protect the people, but the other important part is that we do a heavy cleaning and sanitizing. We put a very stringent program in place for sanitizing and heavy cleaning. As an example, every morning, all the playground equipment and all the playgrounds that have equipment in the city are sanitized. And if we have the opportunity, we may go back and do that a second time. The same thing with the cleaning of the building, the cleaning and the sanitizing, if there's a meeting, even an internal meeting within the building, and we have six people in the room, we sanitize before we had the meeting, we sanitize afterwards. Thus far, I think we've been

fairly successful and we want to continue that success rate, because we certainly don't want staff or the public that may be in the building to become ill with the virus. And as far as swimming, little less danger with regards to swimming, because I have not been able to find any information or documentation of a transfer of the virus from person to person that are involved in swimming, particularly in a pool of this chlorinated. The same thing seems to hold true to some degree for even in lakes and in other facilities, not really certain why that is, but the same thing holds true there. We have a very stringent program for cleaning and sanitizing our locker rooms.

Barry Lee ([15:02](#)):

So what about the fall? Are you able to plan for any programs or events for this fall? And do you have any plans to reopen the Rec Center?

Lynn Miller ([15:10](#)):

We hope to have events and we hope to have programming this year. We hope to have it through community recreation. We hope to be able to do Zumba. We're going to move some things back into the gym once the gym is freed up from childcare. We were planning an athletic program. We're planning an aquatics program. The room rentals are still questionable. We have to overcome the issue with social distancing, and once we do that, once we're able to address that issue and increase the occupancy load, we'll be able to do room rentals and other activities.

Barry Lee ([15:44](#)):

Thanks so much, Lynn, for taking the time to join us on the show. And is there anything else you'd like to cover before we let you go?

Lynn Miller ([15:51](#)):

No, Barry, you know, we'd encourage the community to use the parks and rec department and the facilities. We think there's a gem in Jim Barnett Park, no pun intended there, as well as the neighborhood parks and certainly the trails. And, we're there for any questions. Don't hesitate to give us a call.

Barry Lee ([16:12](#)):

Alrighty, thanks for all you do. Stay safe.

Lynn Miller ([16:14](#)):

Thank you, Barry. Appreciate it.

Barry Lee ([16:17](#)):

Now it's time for 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 provides an overview of the Winchester Green Circle Trail. The Green Circle Trail is a designated pedestrian and bicycle trail system that connects areas of historic, recreational educational and natural interests throughout the city of Winchester. Where possible the route follows local streams, emphasizing the restoration protection and interpretation of natural resources and urban green spaces. Some of the major destinations the trail connects to include Jim Barnett Park, Old Town Winchester, Abrams Creek Wetlands Preserve, Shenandoah University, Museum of the Shenandoah Valley, and

other museums. The length of the entire trail is 6.3 miles. Some of the trail uses existing sidewalks and some trail portions were constructed such as the lighted portion along Town Run adjacent to South Kent Street. There are several spur trails off the main path that can be utilized such as the Shawnee Springs Trail or the trail through Abrams Creek Wetlands Preserve. For those who would like a half loop option, a spur trail is designated through the center of the Green Circle that connects to John Hanley High School and provides a 4.55 mile loop option. Currently, the City is constructing a missing section of trail on West Jubal Early Drive between Harvest Drive and Valley Avenue. This section of the trail will connect existing paved sections. A few other sections of the permanent trail remain to be constructed, but currently a majority of the trail is finished and ready to use. Please note that riding bicycles is prohibited on the Loudon Street Mall, so, a different path is designated with green arrows on the street for bicycle is traveling on the trail in downtown Winchester. Visit WinchesterVA.gov and search "green circle trail" for information on the different trail sections and to view the mileage map. Well, if you didn't know before now, you know.

Barry Lee ([18:24](#)):

And last but not least, here are several announcements to keep you up to date. Make plans to attend the free regional virtual job fair for the Northern Shenandoah Valley on August 19th. There are two sessions, so register for the virtual job fair at 12:30 pm or 2:30 pm at www.Eventbrite.com. Winchester Parks and Recreation will host two public forums to discuss the proposed indoor pool schedule and COVID-19 requirements. Stop by the Jim Barnett Park Rec Center on Thursday, August 13th at 6:30 PM or on Saturday, August 15th at 9:30 AM to participate in the discussion. Space is limited and masks are required. The Center for Voter Information recently mailed absentee ballot applications with prepaid return envelopes to Virginia resonance. The Virginia Department of Elections has no affiliation with this group, nor coordinates with any third party groups on campaign efforts. Some of these return envelopes are addressed to the incorrect registrar's office. The Virginia Department of Elections encourages all voters that would like to receive an absentee ballot for the November election to apply electronically on their website at www.elections.virginia.gov/voterinformation. If you have already applied for an absentee ballot, you do not need to submit a new application. Beginning this week, Census Bureau workers will be visiting homes in our area that have not self-reported and completed the 2020 census by mail, online or phone. Here's how to verify their identity. Check to make sure they have a valid ID badge with their photograph, a U.S. Department of Commerce watermark, and an expiration date. It's not too late to complete the short census survey online or by phone. Visit www.2020census.gov or call 1-844-330-2020. Language support is available in 12 non-English languages for both the online and phone options.

Barry Lee ([20:29](#)):

Well, that's going to do it for this week's Rouss Review podcast. Thanks for joining us. I'm Barry Lee with 92.5 WINC FM. We'll be back on the fourth Thursday in August at 5:00 PM. So long for now and stay safe.