

Barry Lee (00:04):

Hi, Barry Lee with 92.5 WINC FM, excited to host the second season of the City of Winchester's podcast, The Rouss review. In this episode, I'll provide an overview of this week's Council meetings and talk with City staff about the City's recent reopening and changes that you may not be aware of. After that, keep listening for the Now U Know segment and then some current announcements to keep you informed. So, let's get started.

Barry Lee (00:28):

Up first is the Council BLUF, a Bottom Line Up Front recap of the September 8, 2020 Council meetings. At the regular meeting, Council adopted an ordinance to authorize the acquisition of a property near Wyck Street and 700 Fairmont Avenue for the construction of a storm water management pond as part of the North Cameron Drainage Improvements Project. A pond at this this location would be capable of holding a significant amount of runoff from Fairmont Avenue that eventually reaches North Cameron Street causing flooding issues. Funding for the purchase of this property was budgeted for in the five year capital improvement plan, and half of the cost will be reimbursed by VDOT revenue sharing funds. Council also established a finance committee and public safety committee with three councilors serving on each. More details about structure and meeting schedules will be decided soon. Council reviewed a request to rezone 654 Fox Drive for a proposed development plan with 39 new residential units. The proposed development would be built on a property with acreage in both the city and county. Since the item was a first reading, no action was required. The ordinance will appear on the September 22, 2020 regular meeting for public hearing and official vote. Council continued discussions regarding changes to an agreement between the City and Shenandoah University for the improvement of four ball fields in Jim Barnett Park, due to COVID-19 budgetary impacts the University wishes to revise the schedule, to break the project into two phases. First, they'll complete improvements on two fields this year in preparation for John Handley High School's 2021 baseball and softball seasons. The remaining improvements will be delayed to a later date next year. The ordinance will appear on the September 22, 2020 regular meeting for public hearing and official vote. At the work session, Council discussed the second round of CARES Act funding the City will receive totaling over \$2.4 million. The City plans to expand the parameters to help aid local daycares and provide utility rent and mortgage assistance. Staff has enlisted the help of several nonprofits to achieve a fair and balanced process to distribute the CARES Act funds and a memorandum of agreement with the United way was proposed to disperse the funds. The United way has a well established criteria based distribution process that will help get these funds to the people that need them the most. And they work with many nonprofits in our community. Funds would go toward utilities, rent, and mortgage assistance, not administrative fees, and be paid directly to the utility provider to cover unpaid bills caused by COVID-19 related hardships. The City has set aside \$300,000 for utilities assistance with a maximum amount per household set at \$2,000 and \$100,000 for rent and mortgage assistance with the maximum amount set at \$3,000 per household. Winchester Fire and Rescue Interim Chief Culp provided an update on the implementation progress of the master plan recommendations to-date. Improvements have been made to staffing levels on apparatus and in the Fire Marshall's office, as well as internal policies. Memorandums of understanding between the department and the volunteer companies are being explored. Quality management and annual training programs have been formalized, and the command and support staff structure is being implemented to improve operational efficiency and communication. Since this item was for discussion only, no action was required or taken. For more information on these topics and to view the agenda packet, or to watch the meeting video, visit the City of Winchester website and click Council Meeting Agendas under the Government tab.

Barry Lee ([04:22](#)):

September has arrived and with it, a lot of changes are happening here at the City of Winchester. Joining us today to provide the details is the City's Communication Director and producer of this podcast, Amy Simmons. [Applause] Welcome, Amy.

Amy Simmons ([04:37](#)):

Thank you, Barry.

Barry Lee ([04:38](#)):

Did you like that big round of applause?

Amy Simmons ([04:39](#)):

I loved it.

Barry Lee ([04:40](#)):

Well, now, you've got some news that's going to make a lot of people happy. And why don't you share that with us.

Amy Simmons ([04:47](#)):

Well, just in case our listeners, haven't heard, I'm happy to report that almost all city buildings are now open to the public. Yeah, we're very excited about that. Many buildings like City Hall, the social services office, and the Creamery Building had been closed since mid-March, so we're excited to be able to see everyone again. The Rec Center in Jim Barnett Park has been open with reduced hours for a while now, but they're back to normal operation. They have also reopened the indoor pool and the gymnasium with reduced capacity.

Barry Lee ([05:15](#)):

This is great news. You know, it's been a while since we've had anything normal happening, right? So, remind everyone what those normal operating hours are for the Rec Center and other buildings.

Amy Simmons ([05:26](#)):

Sure. The Jim Barnett Park Rec Center is open Monday through Friday from 5:00 AM to 9:30 PM, on Saturday from 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM and Sunday from noon to 6 PM. And during these times there'll be offering some designated lap swim and general swim times and aqua fitness classes at the indoor pool, as well as some drop-in basketball and open gym times. The drop-in indoor pickleball times will also be added in October. So they're excited to continue to add more programs as we get through the fall. The schedule for these is available on the facility section of the park website at [www.winchesterva.gov/parks](http://www.winchesterva.gov/parks). City Hall is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. And the Commissioner of the Revenue's office and Treasurer's office are open from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM, but staff is always available by phone or email until 5:00 PM. And the social services office at 24 Baker street is open from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM.

Barry Lee ([06:24](#)):

So, we mentioned in the intro that there's a lot of changes. So, let's start right here at City Hall. What's new there?

Amy Simmons ([06:30](#)):

Well, that's where most of the changes are occurring. The biggest being a few offices have moved. First, is the Utilities Billing Customer Service desk, which was previously located in the center of the main floor lobby. You know, between the two large staircases. They were located there, but now they've moved down a short hallway, as soon as you enter the front door. So you come in the front door from Cameron Street, you take an immediate, right, go down a little hallway. They're down there in their new offices. If you'd rather not climb the stairs to the main entrance, you can enter City Hall on the Boscawen Street side through our accessible entrance and take the elevator to the second floor. And now I have to say that confuses a lot of people because in most buildings, the first floor is the main floor, right? But in City Hall, the main floor is the second floor. So when you go into the elevator from the Boscawen Street entrance, and you want to visit the Utilities Customer Service desk, you will need to go to the second floor. But beware, Barry, there are two buttons in the elevator for the second floor. So make sure you push the button with the star next to it.

Barry Lee ([07:28](#)):

Okay. Making a note here. All right, note taken. So, that's easy enough to remember the star means main floor. What else is different at City Hall?

Amy Simmons ([07:36](#)):

Well, to help with the flow and social distancing, we're asking people to enter through the Cameron Street or Boscawen Street door and then when you need to exit, you can go back to the Boscawen Street door through the elevator, or take the back door facing Loudoun Street. But I also want to mention that the parking spaces behind City Hall are no longer available for government visitor parking.

Barry Lee ([07:59](#)):

Okay. That's good to know. So, what other City Hall offices have moved?

Amy Simmons ([08:03](#)):

The Commissioner of the Revenue and the City Treasurer's offices, which were located in City Hall, have moved out and are now located in the Creamery Building at 21 South Kent Street. They have beautiful new office over there on the ground floor and the door is accessible from Kent Street. So, the Commissioner of the Revenue and Treasurer's offices are where residents and businesses will go when they want to pay taxes, update tax information, or handle business license requirements. Also, the economic and workforce development and purchasing staff have moved and are now located on the main floor of City Hall. They were scattered at various locations, so now they're back home where they belong.

Barry Lee ([08:39](#)):

What if someone doesn't want to visit a location in-person due to COVID-19 concerns or just can't get there during regular hours? What options do they have, Amy?

Amy Simmons ([08:48](#)):

Yeah. Thank you, Barry. Because we are still in a State of Emergency and pandemic, we still need to keep indoor traffic at a minimum to continue to slow the spread of COVID-19. So, we encourage people to skip the trip and continue to use our online services and drop boxes or contact staff by email or phone when they need assistance.

Barry Lee ([09:06](#)):

What type of online services are available to us?

Amy Simmons ([09:10](#)):

We have a lot. So, let's start with, uh, you can pay bills online. Utility bills, taxes, ambulance fees, parking tickets, parking rental spaces at the downtown garages, and code enforcement fees. Links, and more information to these are online. We have a bill pay web webpage that lists all those out. It's [www.winchesterva.gov/billpay](http://www.winchesterva.gov/billpay), or just click the pay online button at the top of the website [[www.winchesterva.gov](http://www.winchesterva.gov)]. There is a convenience fee for online bill pay for all but utilities. The bill pay vendor charges a processing fee, and it does not come back to the City. You can also pay by phone if you'd rather do that and avoid the convenience fee. We have those listed on the bill pay webpage as well. So, you can also apply for Virginia Social Services benefits through CommonHelp [commonhelp.virginia.gov](http://commonhelp.virginia.gov) and you can do that 24/7. You can apply for help with food childcare, heating, cooling bills, healthcare and cash assistance. We also have many of our forms online that you can download, print and submit using the drop box, mail, you can fax it, or email it to staff. We're excited to report though, I'm very excited about this and I've been wanting this for a very long time, that we're hoping to, by the end of the year, we should have most of our frequently-used forms available to complete and submit entirely online. So, you no longer have to download them, fill them out, attach them to an email or fax them or bring them by. You can do everything you need to do without having to leave that form online. So, we also have, I think I've mentioned many times before, we have a service request system called City 311. You can submit FOIA requests, public records requests, you can search our frequently asked questions database, and also submit a service request. So if your trash is missed or recycling collection is missed, you can let us know through that portal. If you need a new recycle bin, you just submit it, takes two seconds, and, they'll just drop one off for you. If you see a pothole that needs to be fixed, street light out, street sign down, and there's many more, you can just submit those through 311. But then we also ask that you, if you want to track the progress of your requests or communicate with the staff that has assigned, you can create an account, and then we can communicate back and forth through the portal. We also have interactive GIS maps, that's Geographic Information Systems. So things like text maps, property search portal, floodplain map, voting districts, school districts, bus stops, and so much more. You just go to the GIS website and you can search through those. And then, of course, our website has anything and everything you would want to know.

Barry Lee ([11:49](#)):

Is there a list of those services somewhere on the website so that people can that?

Amy Simmons ([11:54](#)):

Sure. Yeah. We actually created a reopening webpage recently on our website and that provides a list of the frequently used online services, as well as a list of staff contacts. There's also a list of the hard to find and new office locations and a video if you prefer a guided tour. A link to the reopening webpage is [www.winchesterva.gov/reopening](http://www.winchesterva.gov/reopening) or you can also find a link on our coronavirus webpage.

Barry Lee ([12:18](#)):

Alrighty. You mentioned drop boxes. What are they used for and where are they located?

Amy Simmons ([12:23](#)):

The drop boxes are a great way to submit paperwork or payments without having to really step foot inside a city building or buy a postage stamp. They're available 24/7 and they're located at, we have three, they're located at City Hall in front of the building facing Cameron Street. There's one at the Creamery Building in the vestibule. So, the little glass entryway area, on the side, there's a drop box there, and it's secure. And there's also one at a social services and social services also has a lot of their forms by their drop box. So, you don't even have to go inside. You can just grab the forms out of the little container by the Dropbox and submit it right there. The only thing that we ask is that if you need to pay in cash, that you don't do that through the drop box.

Barry Lee ([13:08](#)):

Alrighty. So, the message is skip the trip whenever possible, but if you need to visit a City building, we're now open.

Amy Simmons ([13:15](#)):

Yes, that is correct. And remember, we aske you to wear a mask, practice, social distancing while you're inside, and please stay home if you're sick.

Barry Lee ([13:22](#)):

Alrighty. Hey, before we let you go, what was that reopening information URL for City buildings again?

Amy Simmons ([13:28](#)):

Yeah. It's [www.winchesterva.gov/reopening](http://www.winchesterva.gov/reopening).

Barry Lee ([13:32](#)):

All right. Easy to remember, Amy, thank you so much for the good news. Stay safe.

Amy Simmons ([13:36](#)):

Thanks, Barry.

Barry Lee ([13:39](#)):

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 you need to know. Since local schools have reopened, this week's segment explains school bus and pedestrian laws and a few safety tips. So, when approaching from any direction, the law says, motorist must stop for stopped school buses with flashing red lights and an extended stop sign and remain stopped until everyone is clear and the bus is moving again. When there's a school bus stopped on a multi-lane road with no media or barrier, vehicles traveling in all directions must stop. If the school bus is on the opposite side of a divided road with a median or barrier, motorists traveling in the opposite direction are not required to stop. However, drivers should be prepared for students entering or exiting the school bus and crossing into their lanes. Please drive cautiously and watch for children gathering near bus stops and walking in groups to and

from the bus stop or school. Drivers should be extra alert for children walking or bicycling to school when backing out of a driveway or leaving a garage; driving in neighborhoods with school zones; or where there are no sidewalks in the neighborhood. According to the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles, most school bus incidents happen when students are traveling to the bus stop or getting on and off the bus. Parents and guardians should talk to their child about crossing the street safely and here's some tips from the DMV. If students have to cross the street in front of the bus, they should walk on the sidewalk or along the side of the road to a point at least five giant steps or 10 feet ahead of the bus. Before crossing students need to make sure they can see the bus driver and that the driver sees them. When the bus approaches, students should line up at least 10 feet away from the curb and the street. And when the bus comes to a complete stop and the door opens students to check for traffic once more before boarding. And remember, as of July 1, 2020, drivers are now required to stop, not just yield for pedestrians. Also, passing a vehicle stopped at a crosswalk is now specifically prohibited. Well, if you didn't know before now, you know.

Barry Lee ([15:53](#)):

And last but not least, here are some announcements to keep you informed. The public restrooms at the splash pad on the southern end of the Loudoun Street Mall are now open. Spotted lanternfly, still a growing issue in Winchester. We ask for the community's support with squashing the invasive insects when you see them and destroying any egg masses. Also check your vehicle before you take off. These insects are great hitchhikers, which can increase the spread. Find more information about what to do if you find spotted lanternflies on your property or vehicle on the Virginia Cooperative Extension's website. The Jim Barnett Park outdoor pool is now closed, but the indoor pool is open with limited capacity for lap swim, general swim and fitness classes. Reservations are accepted for general swim and fitness classes. Call Winchester Parks and Recreation at (540) 662-4946. Since space is limited, please contact the park if you cannot make your reservation. The gymnasium in the Jim Barnett Park Rec Center is now open for drop in basketball and open gym. Please note that games are not permitted during drop in basketball. Check the parks website for the schedules, stop by the Rec Center or call (540) 662-4946. Due to the pandemic, the City's annual 9/11 Memorial event was canceled and in its place, a virtual memorial will be held on September 11th with a video. Watch it on YouTube, Facebook or Comcast cable channel six.

Barry Lee ([17:26](#)):

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