

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

Upbeat music

Barry Lee ([00:04](#)):

Hi, I'm 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 Winchester Department of Social Services staff about adoption and foster care services. After that, keep listening for the Now U Know segment and some current announcements to keep you informed. So, let's get started.

Barry Lee ([00:28](#)):

Up first is the Council BLUF, that's a Bottom Line Up Front recap of the November 10, 2020 Council meetings. At the regular meeting, Mayor Smith announced that the November 10th meeting was Councilor Bill Wiley's last council meeting as he has been elected to the House of Delegates. Councilor Wiley said farewell and provided an overview of how he intends to represent the Winchester area as Delegate. Upon the applicant's request, Council tabled the proposed ordinance to rezone 6.23 acres at two 22 Spring Street to allow for 192 multi-family residential units and two commercial buildings. Council began discussions at the October 27, 2020 Work Session and made a motion to deny the request, but provided the developer the opportunity to address Council's and the adjacent neighborhood's concerns before the official vote. Council will continue discussions at the December 8, 2020 Work Session. Council discussed a revision to a memorandum of agreement with the United Way regarding the management of the City's CARES Act grant program for past due rent, mortgage and utility bills. The original agreement approved by Council included \$100,000 for rent and mortgage assistance and \$300,000 for utility assistance for those impacted by COVID-19. The United Way recently reported that City residents are requesting assistance with rent and mortgage payments more than for utility bills. Therefore, staff recommended the minor revision to the MOA stating that the United Way will have the discretion and flexibility to use the total \$400,000 in CARES Act funding for the two programs combined to better meet the needs of the residents as applications are received. Council agreed with the recommendation and urged residents to apply since the funds must be allocated by December 31, 2020. At the Work Session, Council discussed a proposed ordinance that would amend section 20-26 of the City Code to allow the Police Department to enforce trespass notices on private property. Virginia Code authorizes localities to establish a procedure in which owners, lessees, custodians, or any other person lawfully in charge of private property to designate the purpose of enforcing trespass notices. These designations are granted to the locality's law enforcement agency voluntarily in writing and kept on file at the agency. This proposed ordinance would provide the Winchester Police Department the ability to accept such designations and issue and enforce trespass notices on behalf of those legally in charge of the private property. Remaining on or returning to a property after being lawfully barred constitutes a violation of City Code section 16-12 and Virginia Code in conjunction with this proposed ordinance. The Winchester Police Department is in the process of finalizing an internal policy, documentation procedures, and standardized forms for carrying out this public safety service. These internal measures will be ready to implement if Council approves the proposed ordinance. Council forwarded the proposed ordinance to the November 24, 2020 meeting for first reading. As previously discussed with Council at the August 11, 2020 Work Session, the City discontinued water shutoffs for past due accounts in March (2020), when the COVID-19 pandemic first started in our area. As of Tuesday, November 3, there were 1,342 past due accounts, which totals over \$500,000. Recently the General Assembly approved a state budget that includes proposed provisions directly related to utility

bills. This budget was sent to the gGovernor, but was then returned to the General Assembly for further revisions. The budget's provisions are expected to include a moratorium on utility disconnections, mandatory repayment plans and CARES Act funds to assist customers with repayment of utility balances that have accrued more than 30 days. The primary provision requires localities to offer repayment plans to customers that are past due on their account. The customer can select the term of the repayment plan ranging from six months to two years. Council has the ability to exempt the City from the moratorium on service disconnections since the total amount of the past due balance for all accounts exceeds 1% of the budgeted annual operating revenue for the City's Utility Fund. After discussions, Council authorized staff to move forward with the proposed program. This means water service could be shut off for customers that do sign up for, or do not meet the obligations of their repayment plan. In addition, Council agreed with staff's recommendation to resume service disconnections for non-payment no earlier than February, 2021. The application for utility bill payment assistance is currently available on the United Way of Northern Shenandoah. Valley's website. More information about the payment plans will be provided to customers soon. For more information on these topics and to view the agenda packet or watch the meeting video, visit the City of Winchester website and click Council Meeting Agendas under the Government tab.

Barry Lee ([05:48](#)):

November is National Adoption Awareness month, so, we thought we'd talked a little with Winchester Department of Social Services Family Services Supervisor Rebecca Hopkins and Family Services Specialist IV Marissa Wilcom about the foster care and adoption services provided locally. Welcome to the show ladies.

Rebecca Hopkins ([06:06](#)):

Well, thank you for having us. We're happy to be here.

Barry Lee ([06:08](#)):

Now, Rebecca, you are the supervisor for Winchester Department of Social Services foster care and adoption unit. For those who may not be aware, what kind of services do you provide to local families?

Rebecca Hopkins ([06:24](#)):

DSS provides services to children and families to ensure that they are safe and to decrease the risk of maltreatment. Families are provided with foster care services when the child comes into foster care because a child was removed from their home due to it being unsafe. Services are provided to the parents and caretakers to be able to help remedy those conditions. And there's lots of different services that we provide to the family to help support that connection with what their needs are

Barry Lee ([06:55](#)):

And Marisa, your turn, you are a Family Services Specialist IV. What role specifically do you play within the department?

Marisa Wilcom ([07:03](#)):

I am the Family Partnership Meeting Facilitator that bridges the gaps between the department, families, service providers, attorneys, and natural supports in a family centered and strength-based atmosphere. And I have previously worked adoption and foster care cases for three years and have been with the

department working in overall child welfare cases for six years. The department offers access to services such as substance abuse, mental health, parenting, anger management, domestic violence, et cetera, through a foster care plan to promote the goal of reunification with the biological parents or to achieve placement with a relative. If the children are not able to be reunified with the parents, then the department will make efforts to locate relatives throughout the span of the foster care case for the children to be adopted within the family or with their foster parents. The department has a goal set by a Virginia Department of Social Services and the courts of reunifying within one year and adopted within two years. The child must be in the foster care placement for at least six months prior to the department, giving consent for adoption. The department assists in supports and services for the child through foster care and adoption.

Barry Lee ([08:25](#)):

Alrighty, before we can really talk about foster care and adoption, I feel like we need to first talk about child protective services. What all is involved in CPS, Rebecca?

Rebecca Hopkins ([08:35](#)):

So child protective services is really kind of the first step to the department's involvement. Initially, our agency receives an initial report from a concerned member of the community that results in a determination of response if something is needed. Whether it's a screen out or if it goes into an actual case such as a family assessment or an investigation, there's an assessment of the safety for the child to be able to occur so we can figure out what type of intervention is needed. And if it's determined that an intervention is needed, then we look at what safety intervention that needs to occur to make that child safe. At that point, we really look at if a safety plan is needed to create that a safe and stable environment with an individual who is appropriate. That can lead to an in-home or an out-of-home plan with biological family.

Rebecca Hopkins ([09:31](#)):

It can be with fictive kin, it can be with a close family friend or family relative. And we really try to maintain that child in the community and the home with people that they know so that they can keep contact with their teachers, their schools, you know, clergy, religious affiliations, coaches, mentors, family. All of those people that children are connected with. We want to keep them in the area with the people that they know with the people that they love and that they're comfortable with. When there's an inability to place a child with their family or friends who the department can deem as appropriate, that could result in a safety action being taken as an emergency removal, which means that the child would need to come out and be placed into a state approved foster home. And that can either be a local foster home or a foster home that's located really anywhere around the state

Barry Lee ([10:21](#)):

National adoption month focuses on educating communities on the importance of finding forever homes for children in foster care. I'm curious to know how many Winchester city children are currently in foster care, and how many are currently waiting to find permanency through adoption? Marissa, what can you tell us?

Marisa Wilcom ([10:40](#)):

There are currently 50 children in the Winchester Department of Social Services foster care system and there are 16 children between the ages of three and 17. With the goal of adoption, seven children are

still looking for their forever homes. Foster care is intended to be a temporary solution for children who have been removed from their birth family homes due to neglect, abuse, abandonment, or other endangerment to their health and or safety. Every effort is made to help the child remain or return with his or her family. However, when reunification or the process of returning a child to his or her birth family is not possible, then adoption occurs as a permanent outcome in the best interest of the child. Becoming a foster parent is also the first step in the adoption process.

Barry Lee ([11:29](#)):

So does the area have enough foster parents? I mean, what happens when you remove a child, but you don't have an available foster home? Does that ever happen?

Rebecca Hopkins ([11:37](#)):

The area really could always use more foster families. There are plenty of times that we remove a child from their biological home and they have to enter into the foster care system to be placed in a foster home and we don't have local homes available. It happens. It's not something that we want to happen, but it results in us having to place a child anywhere in the state of Virginia. I have had children in my work experience where we've had to place them six and a half hours away in Virginia. But, that's a pretty far place to have to be away from your local community and from your family. We've also placed kids on the eastern shoreline. We have kids in the southern part of Virginia. They really are having to be placed all around the state because we don't have enough foster homes in this local area. We do always try to start with the kinship care to be able to get our children who we're working with that have to go into foster homes to be able to reside in a family member's home, a kinship home where they can be safe and appropriately cared for. If we don't have a kinship family, a relative, someone who is a fictive kin to be able to utilize them, we definitely look at our local families for foster care to see who it is that can accept that child. During those times that we don't have a local family, then we have to look outside the local area and that's where we have to place kids anywhere in the state of Virginia.

Barry Lee ([13:16](#)):

Let's talk about the requirements and process involved in becoming a foster family, Rebecca.

Rebecca Hopkins ([13:21](#)):

To become a foster family in Virginia, it is a pretty long list of things that that need to be done. And the reason for that is really making sure that the home that is approved for a child to go into is a safe and a stable environment as it can possibly be. There's a number of licensing requirements that have to be done. Our local CFW Foster Families, which stands for Clark-Frederick-Winchester, works with the three locality departments, Frederick Clark and Winchester, to be able to certify and approve foster families. Some of those licensing requirements are the Child Abuse and Neglect Central Registry, criminal background checks, provider home visits, confidentiality, and corporal punishment agreements. A copy of your driving record has to be provided, your driver's license and automobile insurance. There's various physical examinations and screenings that need to be completed for couples who are married or divorced. We need to have those marriage or divorce certificates. And, there's references that need to be completed. Training that has to be done. It's called a PRIDE training or for kinship families. It's a form of pride training that is specific for individuals who have family members in the system. And those classes are available through the CFW foster care resource family coordinators. So, the informational sessions with the CFW Foster Families are typically held the fourth Thursday of the month at 5:00 PM for approximately one hour. Due to the current health crisis, informational sessions are actually being held

virtually via Microsoft teams. If you're interested in attending and finding out just more about foster parenting and really just exploring your interest in it, you can contact CFW by contacting 540-665-5688, or look them up on Facebook. It's a quick, easy way to be able to find out some information and get into contact with them. For the sessions that they are having in November and December, they're actually going to be held on the third Thursday of the month due to the holidays. So, we're looking at November 19th at 5:00 PM and December 17th at 5:00 PM.

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

If someone is interested in adopting, do they have to go through the foster parent process first? And what all is involved in adopting a child locally?

Rebecca Hopkins ([15:53](#)):

They do have to go through the same foster parenting process through the Foster Families of CFW. The requirements are the same. The majority of our CFW families are actually dual approved. It's one of the requirements that we have that you become dual approved by not only being eligible to foster children, but then also meeting the criteria to adopt them as well. So, the process for the approval is the same.

Barry Lee ([16:23](#)):

We hear a lot about children in foster care who do not get adopted and age out. Marisa, what happens to those children?

Marisa Wilcom ([16:30](#)):

Yeah. So all of the teenagers in Virginia who age out of foster care at the age of 18 are offered the opportunity to be a part of Fostering Futures, which is a program designed to assist them with a monthly stipend, gaining employment, attending vocational school or college, gaining independent living skills, housing, medical benefits, et cetera, until they are age 21. And this program is designed to lessen the hardships or negative outcomes that their future may hold. It is extremely difficult to find homes for teens due to their trauma level and the amount of services needed to support them in their healing process. Children who age out of foster care are more likely to be sexually trafficked, have early pregnancy become incarcerated, homeless, struggle with substance abuse, and stabilize their mental health. And actually the current statistics are one in two will develop a substance abuse dependence. One in four won't graduate with a GED or diploma. Seven and 10 will become pregnant before age 21. 60% of boys will be convicted of a crime. One in five will be homeless within a year. 50% will be unemployed by 24. And there are currently more than 23,000 kids that age out of the United States foster care program.

Barry Lee ([17:58](#)):

Well, Marisa, it sounds like it's very important to find forever homes for children who are not able to be reunified with their families. What has your experience been lately with children in foster care that you have worked with?

Rebecca Hopkins ([18:10](#)):

Since September of 2019, I have completed 16 adoptions and 12 of them completed thus far in 2020. The department has multiple pending adoptions that will be completed before the end of the year. So, we are very excited about children finding permanency, especially around the holidays, which tends to

be difficult times for families, especially children. We also have seven children that are currently finding homes to achieve permanency. And the majority of the children adopted are adopted by the foster parents they are placed with. And foster parents can include their relatives who have gone through the foster parent licensure process.

Barry Lee ([18:51](#)):

People may not understand the role of social services and have negative perceptions that may not be founded. So Rebecca, are there any misconceptions that you'd like to clear up while you have the mic?

Rebecca Hopkins ([19:03](#)):

Absolutely. We as an agency believe that children do best when they remain with their families and within their community. And so it really is something important to us to make sure that if we can't keep children safe in their homes, that we find a home locally that allows them to maintain all of their connections. When children cannot remain in the home, we have to consider relatives replacement before we ever place a child into a foster care home. It's our job and it's really a part of what we want to do is find a family member, find someone who's appropriate and meets the department's alliance and expectations for being a safe and appropriate caretaker. Really, the last thing we want to do is take a child from a situation that we, as an agency, feel is dangerous for that child and then put them into another situation that could be considered dangerous, as well. Foster care is the last resort for child protective services to keep children safe. We need to keep them safe. It's our duty, it's our job, and to keep them safe within the family whenever it's possible. It's important to know that only by court order may a child be removed from his or her parents. So, it's not something that the agency can just come in and take a child from their home, absent the intervention of the court. And another important thing to know is foster care staff are really required to work with the child and the family to return the child back to the home. As soon as possible. Marisa had talked about some deadlines that needed to be met and some state mandates that we have in regards to returning children home. So, there are timeframes that we have to meet, and it's our not only our job, but this is really a passion that we have as a human services field.

Barry Lee ([20:55](#)):

Rebecca and Marisa, thank you for all you and your staff do for local children in need. And thank you for being on the show today.

Marisa Wilcom ([21:02](#)):

Yes. Thank you very much. I appreciate, um, expanding the knowledge in the community for adoption.

Rebeca Hopkins ([21:09](#)):

Absolutely. And we enjoy being here and really just talking to everybody and letting them know what foster care and adoption is about and celebrating adoption month and the importance of finding permanency for children who have entered into the foster care system.

Barry Lee ([21:23](#)):

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. Rebecca and Marisa covered some local statistics for adoption and foster care in Winchester, so in honor of National Adoption

Awareness Month, this week's Now U Know, segment focuses on the adoption stats in the U.S. as provided by [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov). Did you know that there are over 122,000 children waiting to be adopted who are at risk of aging out of foster care without permanent family connections? Approximately one in five children in the us foster care system waiting to be adopted are teens. Only 5% of all children adopted in 2019 were 15 to 18 years old. The risk of homelessness and human trafficking is increased for teenagers in foster care. And according to the most recent reports of the 122,000 children and youth waiting to be adopted, 52% are male, 22% are African-American, 22% are Hispanic, 44% are white. The average age is eight years old. 11% are between 15 and 18 years old. And the average time in foster care is 31 months. If you can open your heart and home to a child or teenager in need of a stable and loving home, please contact CFW Foster Families at (540) 665-5688, extension 185. Training and a wealth of support is available for foster families in our area. You won't have to do it alone. Well, if you didn't know before now, you know.

Barry Lee ([23:09](#)):

And in this final segment, here are several announcements to keep you informed. Do you need help getting caught up on your past due City of Winchester utility bills? Apply to have a portion or all of the past due amount paid for you with the City's utility bill assistance program. This CARES Act grant program is being managed by the United Way of the Northern Shenandoah Valley, and also offers help with mortgage and rent payments. Visit [UnitedWaynsv.org](http://UnitedWaynsv.org) and click the CARES Act rent and utilities assistance program link in the menu. Apply now as all funds must be allocated by December 31st. Applications for Crisis Assistance from the Virginia Department of Social Services Energy Assistance Program will be accepted through March 15, 2021. Crisis Assistance is designed to help households overcome energy emergencies that cannot be resolved by other resources. Apply by visiting [commonhelp.virginia.gov/access](http://commonhelp.virginia.gov/access), or by calling (855) 635-4370. On November 4th, Winchester Public Schools held a groundbreaking ceremony at the former Douglas School on North Kent Street. The former school for African-American children was started during the period of segregation in 1927. Winchester Public Schools will be renovating the historic building into a museum to honor local black history and the students that attended, public spaces for the community to use and administrative offices for Winchester Public Schools and the school board. If you're looking for a rewarding career, that makes a difference in the lives of others, apply for an open position with the City of Winchester, a variety of jobs are available from electrician, custodian, police, officer maintenance, technician, sanitation worker, child protective services, worker, foster care worker, lifeguard water treatment plant operator or trainee, and much more. Apply today. Click the jobs tab on the City's website at [www.winchesterva.gov](http://www.winchesterva.gov).

Barry Lee ([25:17](#)):

Well, that's 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 second Thursday in December at 5:00 PM. Bye for now and stay safe.