

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

Soft music.

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

Hi, I'm Barry Lee with 92.5 WINC FM and welcome once again to the Rouss Review. On the second and fourth Thursday of each month, we explore city services, programs and events and discuss information that you'd like to know and need to know. So let's get started with the Council BLUF, that's Bottom Line Up Front. It's a recap of the April 14, 2020 Council meetings. During the regular meeting, Interim City Manager Mary Beth Price announced that all City Council meetings beginning with the April 28, 2020 meetings will be held virtually. The meetings can be watched live and anytime on the City's online agenda portal. Also, since the City has received several comments and questions about what is being done to help the homeless during the pandemic, Ms. Price gave Council an update. Shenandoah University and the Rescue Mission recently began an initiative to open a shelter in the Armory Building on the Shenandoah University campus. Several local organizations and the City have assisted with the effort. The shelter is expected to open by this Friday, April 17. Council adopted an ordinance providing increased flexibility for the City to ensure the continuity of government services during the state of emergency resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The provisions are in accordance with Virginia and City of Winchester laws and regulations and will expire in six months. If necessary, it can be extended by adopting the same ordinance with a new time period. Council also adopted an ordinance that would provide more flexibility and allow the City to act quickly in adopting ordinances relating to emergencies, securing financial opportunities, issuing or refinancing debt and/or reducing expenses. The COVID-19 global pandemic has caused, and is expected to continue to cause, unprecedented issues for which the City needs to be prepared to financially endure. Therefore, Council discussed and approved a Resolution which authorizes the Treasurer to obtain a line of credit to fill any potential disruptions in the City's revenues resulting from the ongoing emergency. Around \$3.2 million of revenue loss is estimated to impact the General Fund. Given the current uncertainty in the market, staff recommended the issuance of a \$10 million tax anticipatory note through BB&T. The fee to secure the funds is \$25,000 which can be paid quarterly, and the line of credit can be canceled at any time. Council held the first reading of an ordinance to set the real property tax rate for calendar year 2020 at 93 cents. Council discussed the tax rate and decided to leave it as advertised. The ordinance was forwarded to the April 28 meeting for official vote. At the Work Session, Interim City Manager Mary Beth Price provided an update of the City's FY21 budget and further reductions totaling \$3.2 million that were made since the previous meeting. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City is not expected to meet its budget revenue projections in FY20 or FY21. Therefore, several cost-cutting measures that were implemented recently are expected to carry over into the next fiscal year and several projects, positions and expenses were eliminated. Council will continue budget discussions at the April 28 meeting. 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.

Barry Lee ([03:32](#)):

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month, and here with us today is Candace Veney, Family Services Supervisor with the Winchester Department of Social Services. Welcome to the show, Candace.

Candace Veney ([03:44](#)):

Thanks Barry. I'm so happy to be here.

Barry Lee ([03:46](#)):

Let's start with the basics and discuss what is considered child abuse and neglect. I'm sure you get calls from concerned individuals who may not know what is considered abuse in terms of when social services is allowed to take action.

Candace Veney ([04:00](#)):

You're correct, Barry. First and foremost for a call to be accepted as a valid child protective service report, there must be a victim child under the age of 18 at the time the report was received by Winchester DSS. We then determine if the alleged abuser is a caretaker to the child and the caretaker is defined by the Code of Virginia as anyone who assumes care or supervision of that child among other criteria as defined by the Code of Virginia. Then we determine if what is being alleged meets the definition of abuse or neglect, which is also defined by the Code of Virginia. Our code can be found online. If the above criteria is met, Winchester DSS will respond by either completing a family assessment or an investigation to assess safety for the children. There are times when Winchester DSS does reach out to clients even if the report is not determined to be valid and met the criteria for abuse and neglect. In those cases, Winchester DSS is there to offer support and information about community resources and may assist the client.

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

Winchester Department of Social Services offers child protective services or CPS for short. Can you give us a quick overview of the CPS function in Winchester?

Candace Veney ([05:16](#)):

Our goal is to assess safety of children while assessing the risk, meaning the potential for there to be a safety concern. If a safety concern is identified, our agency works with the family to collaboratively develop solutions to their needs or their challenges. One of the ways that we do this is through family team meetings where we have the family members, natural supports and service providers that are involved with that family come together to develop solutions. When service needs are identified, we connect the parents to services that will increase their ability to protect their kids.

Barry Lee ([05:52](#)):

There's a common misconception out there that social services is quick to remove children from their families if abuse or neglect is suspected. What is the practice or goal at Winchester DSS?

Candace Veney ([06:05](#)):

Virginia Department of Social Services believes that all children do best in their own natural families and therefore, we make every effort to keep the child in their own home. Of course, there are times when our agency is unable to ensure safety and we will assume custody of a child. Removing a child from their home as our last option and only resorted to when that child's health or safety is at risk and there are no other options to secure safety. When this does occur, we then look to relatives so that the child may be placed with an appropriate relative rather than in a foster home that they are unfamiliar with. After removal occurs, the process of connecting those parents with the needed resources begins again with court oversight and all efforts are made to return the child to their parents. Our number one goal is always reunification.

Barry Lee ([07:01](#)):

So what programs do you offer for families to prevent having to remove children who may not be in the best of situations but aren't in danger?

Candace Veney ([07:10](#)):

When a need is identified, our agency works diligently to connect the family to any needed resources. These resources could be related to food, clothing, or household items. In these types of cases. We work closely with the food banks and local community organizations to connect the family with those needed items. Other needs for our clients can include services related to their mental health or treatment for substance abuse concerns. When these issues arise, our agency makes referrals to community providers to assist the client with these needed services. Virginia Department of Social Services also manages the disbursement of federal programs such as TANF, SNAP and Medicaid, which we also assist the client in applying for these services when needed.

Barry Lee ([07:57](#)):

And if someone suspects a child is being neglected or abused, what should they do?

Candace Veney ([08:01](#)):

They can report suspected child maltreatment by calling the statewide child abuse and neglect hotline at (804) 786-8536

Barry Lee ([08:12](#)):

I can imagine that with all the childcares closed, that there are many parents who may consider leaving their children home alone so they can work to provide for their families or run to the store. Are you seeing that trend recently?

Candace Veney ([08:25](#)):

We do commonly receive reports regarding unsupervised children and we understand that COVID-19 has caused many daycare facilities to close or even limit the number of children they're able to provide care for at this time. This does put a lot of pressure on our families to meet their needs.

Barry Lee ([08:42](#)):

So how young is too young to be left at home alone unsupervised?

Candace Veney ([08:47](#)):

First, let me say that is important to note that unattended children of any age can get hurt or even killed without proper supervision. Winchester DSS does share some guidelines to the community to assist parents and their decision regarding this topic. However, it is vital to understand that not every child is the same and their age may not equate to their developmental abilities to be left alone. We do have some age-specific recommendations and I'll share them with you now. So we say that seven years and under should never be left alone for any period of time, including in cars, yards, or playgrounds. If your child is between eight and 10 years old, you could consider leaving them home alone. However, no longer than one and a half hours and only during the daylight time. If you have a child between 11 and 12 years old, they may be left alone for up to three hours, but not at night or in circumstances that would require inappropriate responsibilities. For a child that's 13 to 15 years old, they may be left unsupervised, but never overnight. Parents should take several things into consideration before leaving

their children home alone. One of those is the age and maturity level of that child. Another is the availability of a parent, guardian or any other caretaker that could be reached by phone or in person in case there was an emergency. Another thing is the child's awareness of how to react to an emergency situation. For example, if there's a fire or the power goes out, how would that child react? You should also consider the health of that child. Are there extenuating circumstances that would impede that child and being able to react to certain situations? The child's awareness of the danger of appliances such as stoves or irons or any other unusual hazards in your home. I know some city residents do have wood stoves in their home, which could cause an additional hazard. And, of course, you should always consider the child's reaction to being left alone. If you look at all of these considerations, they will help you determine if the child is prepared to care for themselves home alone.

Barry Lee ([11:01](#)):

So once the parent has determined that their child is ready to stay at home alone, what suggestions do you have to help them prepare their child and to keep them safe?

Candace Veney ([11:11](#)):

That's a great question. First, we would suggest having a trial period. Leave the child home alone for just a short period of time while staying close to home. Another idea is to role play the situation. Act out a possible situation to help your child learn what to do in case an emergency or a visitor shows up to the home. Establish some rules. Make sure your child knows what is and what's not allowed when you are not home with them. Set clear limits with these rules. Discuss the emergencies that could happen, what is an emergency and what they should do in case that were to happen. Check in frequently. Call your child when you're away to see how it's or have a trusted friend or a neighbor be able to check in with them. Talk about it. Encourage your child to share their feelings about staying home alone and don't overdo it. Even for a mature responsible child, they shouldn't be left home alone too much.

Barry Lee ([12:11](#)):

Thank you Candace, so much for this important information and all that you and your team at Winchester DSS do to help our families and children in need. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Candace Veney ([12:22](#)):

If you or anyone you know is in need of assistance at this time, please visit our website, [www.WinchesterVA.gov/dss](http://www.WinchesterVA.gov/dss) and then click on the CommonHelp button on our homepage.

Barry Lee ([12:34](#)):

Thank you, Candace. Stay well.

Pause ([12:34](#)):

Barry Lee ([12:39](#)):

Now 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. This segment is all about how to plant your own "Victory Garden". During World War I and II, Victory Gardens were gardens planted both at private residences and on public land to reduce the pressure on the public food supply brought on by

the war effort. With the ongoing Stay-at-Home order and the reduction in some food supplies, consider starting your own vegetable garden. The Virginia Cooperative Extension says that April is a good time to plant vegetables such as asparagus, beans, carrots, lettuce, onion, peas, potatoes, and more. Since vegetables vary widely in their preferred growing conditions and tolerance to hot and cold temperature extremes, selecting appropriate planting dates is a critical component of successful vegetable gardening. To help with this, the Virginia Cooperative Extension offers many resources on their website about planning your garden and getting started; preparing garden beds; when and how to plant your crops; small space gardening; troubleshooting plant problems; crop specific guides; processing your crops; and more. Visit their website at [ext.vt.edu](http://ext.vt.edu) and click the "Lawn and Garden" tab and then "Vegetable Gardening" for details. So this April, give vegetable gardening a try and if being in the dirt isn't your thing, show your appreciation for those who do and shop local at our area's many farmers markets. Well, if you didn't know before, now you know.

Barry Lee ([14:16](#)):

And let's check out a few ways that you can stay active and connected during the Virginia Stay at home directive. Winchester Parks and Recreation has posted a couple videos on their website and Facebook page to help you stay active while doing your part so far. Videos of a yoga class and instructions on how to reduce food waste and grow your own vegetables in a pot or a bucket had been posted. To find these videos and the others coming soon, visit [WinchesterVA.gov/parks](http://WinchesterVA.gov/parks) [and] click on recreation programs or visit the Jim Barnett Park Facebook page. Each week, Winchester Parks and Recreation will post a fun Quarantine Quiz Quest or Triple Q for short. That's until the stay at home directive has been lifted. Test your knowledge about sports and programs that can be played at city parks by completing the weekly quiz before 9:00 AM on Monday. Provide your contact information to be entered into a drawing for some great park prizes. The quizzes will be posted on the Jim Barnett Park Facebook page and on the Park's website every Thursday at 9:00 AM. The second episode of Winchester Police Department's true crime podcast, Defrost, was released on April the 11th. Find the podcast on [anchor.com](http://anchor.com) and on the defrost Facebook group.

Barry Lee ([15:34](#)):

Thanks for joining us on this edition of the Rouss Review. I'm Barry Lee with 92.5 WINC FM. We'll be back on the fourth Thursday in April at 5:00 PM. Bye for now and stay safe.