

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

Intro 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. Twice each month, on the second and fourth Thursday, we're going to be exploring City services programs and events and discussing the information you need to know so we hope you'll join us. Up first is our Council BLUF, that's Bottom Line Up Front, recap of the May 12, 2020 Council meetings. Council adopted an ordinance to approve the City's FY21 budget beginning July 1, 2020 and ending June 30, 2021. At the regular meeting, Council held the first reading of an ordinance to delay the final three utility rate increases one year each due to the pandemic. In 2017, Council approved the series of five rate increases over a five year period that started on July 1, 2018. These rate increases were needed to pay for the significant amount of capital improvements that are in progress. The next rate increase, which was scheduled to go into effect on July 1, 2020, is now delayed until July 1, 2021. The ordinance will be included on the May 26, 2020 regular meeting for a public hearing and official vote. Council further discuss proposed changes to a publicly sponsored zoning ordinance text amendment that was introduced at the April 28, 2020 work session. The proposed text amendment will amend the planned unit development provisions to include density bonuses if proposed projects meet certain desire development criteria. Zoning staff believes that the bonus density amendment would help the City attract desirable development that includes sought after amenities. The item will be included on the May 26, 2020 regular Council meeting for a public hearing and official vote. Council voted to deny the real estate tax exemption or relief requests for property owned by the Retired Clergy Housing Corporation, Shenandoah Valley Community Residences, Aids Response Effort, and Winchester Little Theater. At the work session, Public Services Director Perry Eisenach and representatives from the VDOT's consultant, Kimley-Horn, presented an overview of 11 proposed improvement concepts for South pleasant Valley road between Cork and Tevis Streets. Whether or not these improvement concepts are implemented and when will be up to City Council and the availability of funding. We'll discuss the proposed concepts and upcoming public input opportunities with Mr. Eisenach in the next segment of this broadcast. One public input opportunity is a virtual town hall on May 27, 2020 at 6:00 PM so stick around for the next segment for details. Mr Eisenach will return to the June 23, 2020 Council work session to provide the results of the public input period and to discuss funding applications. The Federal Transit Administration and the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation require all transit agencies that receive federal and state funds to have a written safety plan approved by the governing body. A consultant, paid for by the FTA and the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, has prepared a safety plan for multiple transit agencies in Virginia, including Winchester Transit. Council reviewed the proposed safety plan and forwarded the associated resolution to the May 26, 2020 regular Council 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](http://www.winchesterva.gov)] and click "Council Meeting Agendas" under the Government tab.

Barry Lee ([03:30](#)):

As I mentioned in the Council BLUF, City Council reviewed 11 VDOT-recommended improvement concepts for South Pleasant Valley Road during the May 12, 2020 work session. To give us an overview of those improvements and next steps is the City's Public Services Director Perry Eisenach. Perry, welcome back to the show.

Perry Eisenach ([03:47](#)):

Thank you Barry. It's always great to be here.

Barry Lee (03:50):

So Perry, I would imagine that most local residents and visitors are very familiar with South Pleasant Valley Road as it is a major hub in the city for dining and shopping. So why did VDOT conduct the STARS study?

Perry Eisenach (04:03):

You're right, South Pleasant Valley Road between Cork and Tevis is a very busy commercial route, but there are operational and safety issues. The safety issues are caused by heavy traffic volumes and numerous turning movements during peak times. VDOT Initiated this STARS study period last summer. STARS actually stands for Strategically Targeted Affordable Roadway Solutions. The focus of the study is to make recommendations to improve safety and traffic flow. Earlier this year VDOT launched a public input survey to gather feedback about safety and congestion concerns. Following the survey period, VDOT and their consultant Kimley-Horn, along with City staff and partners, came up with 11 potential improvement opportunities along this 2.2 mile stretch of roadway.

Barry Lee (04:59):

Wow. 11 improvements in a little over two miles. So let's talk about some of the major improvements. What's being recommended to improve the intersection at Cork Street and South Pleasant Valley Road?

Perry Eisenach (05:11):

At the Cork Street intersection, the recommendation is to add a northbound right turn lane. So traffic going north on Pleasant Valley that are turning right to go east onto Cork Street and also a westbound dual left turn from Cork Street for the cars that are turning left onto Pleasant Valley. These improvements would help improve the flow of traffic.

Barry Lee (05:38):

Okay. What about the Jubal Early Drive intersection? That's a high traffic area with many lanes traveling in a variety of directions.

Perry Eisenach (05:46):

Yes, congestion is always a concern in this area to help improve traffic flow. The recommendation is to add dual lefts on both westbound and eastbound Jubal Early turning left onto Pleasant Valley. These additional lanes will accommodate the high turning volumes from both the east and the west.

Barry Lee (06:05):

Next intersection of concern may be Wingate Drive and Featherbed Lane. Now there's not a lot of room between Featherbed and Jubal Early, but there's a lot going on in that area. Any improvements recommended there?

Perry Eisenach (06:17):

Yes, there is. There are improvements that are recommended there. Basically it would consist of installing a raised concrete median on Pleasant Valley to restrict the left turn lanes to and from the commercial entrances. This would also allow us to extend both the southbound and northbound left

turn lanes on Pleasant Valley at this location. These improvements would greatly improve the safety there because there are numerous accidents and many near accidents almost every day at this location.

Barry Lee ([06:53](#)):

Accessing the Martin's commercial entrance can also be interesting during busy times. So what's being proposed there?

Perry Eisenach ([07:00](#)):

Yes, turning left at that intersection coming out of the Martin's onto Pleasant Valley, especially during high traffic times is very difficult. So to help improve the safety and flow in that area, the recommended improvement involves installing a raised Island at the commercial entrance and exit to remove the option to be able to turn left onto Pleasant Valley coming out there. Anyone looking to turn left would need to go down to the Apple Blossom Corner intersection where there's a traffic signal light.

Barry Lee ([07:33](#)):

Another difficult left turn during peak traffic times is at the Walmart entrance. Is the same improvement recommended there?

Perry Eisenach ([07:40](#)):

Yes. The raised Island at the entrance is recommended to allow right turns only coming out of the Walmart onto Pleasant Valley. Those traveling south on Pleasant Valley would still be able to turn left into the Walmart.

Barry Lee ([07:55](#)):

That's all of the major intersections. I know there were a few others that we didn't cover. Where are the other areas that are being considered that we did not discuss?

Perry Eisenach ([08:04](#)):

The other areas that are being discussed include adding a possible roundabout and connection to lease Leicester Street; improving the safety at the intersection of Pleasant Valley and Parkview; removing a redundant crosswalk and extending the existing raised center median just north of Jubal Early, making improvements to the Patsy Cline and Adams Drive intersections; and also aligning the Nolan property access with Winchester Station [entrance] if the area is redeveloped.

Barry Lee ([08:41](#)):

Wow. This is a lot to take in. So where can people go to get more information about the improvement recommendations?

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

I'll take that one, Perry. This is Amy Simmons, the Communications Director with the City. We have information about each of the 11 improvement areas on the City's website on the City Projects webpage. We also will be creating a few videos to better illustrate the recommendations and those will be posted soon on the website. Also, on May 27, 2020 at 6:00 PM we will be hosting a virtual town hall to go over the proposed improvements and to answer any questions residents may have. There will also be an online survey that we'll be asking for feedback on the recommendations from the public. In

addition, the presentation and video from the May 12th Council meeting is available on the City's agenda portal plus VDOT has offered to take any questions that couldn't be answered with the provided materials.

Barry Lee ([09:30](#)):

Awesome. So there's lots of options for people to get more information.

Perry Eisenach ([09:33](#)):

Exactly. And after this public education and feedback period, we will be returning to City Council at the Work Session on June 23, 2020 to discuss the 11 potential improvement projects in more detail as well as possible VDOT funding applications to help pay for some of the more pressing improvements.

Barry Lee ([09:53](#)):

If Council approves the funding applications, what then? I mean, how long until you know if they are approved and then how long until we could see work being done on Pleasant Valley

Perry Eisenach ([10:03](#)):

For any of the new funding applications, we will not hear back if they are approved until sometime in 2021. Depending on the project and the type of VDOT funding, construction on some improvements could begin as soon as a few years, while others may take five years or longer before construction begins. Certainly we want to proceed as quickly as we can, but some of the VDOT funding, especially Smart Scale funds may not be available for another five years.

Barry Lee ([10:35](#)):

Thanks a lot, Perry. Good luck. Doesn't sound like this is going to be a quick fix.

Perry Eisenach ([10:39](#)):

Unfortunately, it will not be a quick fix as roadway improvements take time. But improving traffic flow and safety is one of the highest priority for the residents in the city as well as City Council, so we will be working diligently to make the improvements as soon as possible.

Barry Lee ([10:56](#)):

Next step on our Rouss Review 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 Phase One of the governor's Forward Virginia reopening plan. Governor Ralph Northam recently released guidelines for preparing for and implementing Phase One with the signing of Executive Order 61. Many of the restrictions put in place by Executive Order 53 will remain in place in Phase One, except the stay-at-home order. It will change to a safer-at-home strategy. The Phase One strategy, which goes into effect on May 15, 2020, continues the ban on social gatherings of more than 10 people and maintains recommendations for social distancing, teleworking, and wearing face coverings. All businesses should make modifications to maintain six feet of physical distancing for patrons, increase cleaning and sanitization of high contact surfaces, and provide workplace safety measures. Retail establishments will be allowed to operate at 50% occupancy. Restaurant and beverage establishment may offer outdoor dining at 50% occupancy. Personal grooming services may begin operating with one patron per service provider and fitness centers may offer outdoor exercise services.

Places of worship have had a 10 person limit and have been allowed to hold drive in services. In Phase One, drive in services may continue and services may be held inside at 50% capacity. Entertainment and public amusement venues will remain closed and beaches will continue to be open only for exercise and fishing. Childcare centers remain open for children of working families. Phase One guidelines for specific sectors are available at [virginia.gov/coronavirus/forwardvirginia](http://virginia.gov/coronavirus/forwardvirginia). The CDC has also provided reopening guidance for cleaning and disinfecting public spaces, businesses, workplaces, schools and homes. Visit the CDC or the City's COVID-19 websites for details. The EPA and CDC has also provided guidance on how to ensure that your building's water quality is ready for reopening after a prolonged closure. Stagnant water can be unsafe to drink or use. Turning on water for immediate use after it's been stagnant for a long period of time can pose a risk to public health if not managed properly. Visit the City's coronavirus web page for more information and links. Well, if you didn't know before, now you know.

Barry Lee ([13:30](#)):

Last but not least, here are a few resources that might be helpful to you as the state continues to practice social distancing. The City's pop-up market in partnership with Sysco is open for online orders of meat, vegetables and household supplies. Check the market's Shopify site for availability, order deadlines and pickup times. The Winchester Pop-up Market provides a convenient option for household staples with drive-through pickup in Jim Barnett Park. City Council and several boards have provided an online public comment form as an option for addressing the public body during virtual meetings. Any comments received for public hearing items on the agenda will be read aloud during the meeting. All other comments will be added to the agenda packet for review. Visit the City's online agenda portal [<https://winchesterva.civicweb.net/Portal/>] for a link to the form. This month, emergency benefits are available to Virginia Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, participants. The Virginia Department of Social Services will issue the emergency benefits to any household not already receiving the maximum benefits and who are not currently repaying a prior over issuance of SNAP benefits. Individuals seeking to apply for SNAP benefits may apply online through [commonhelp@commonhelp.virginia.gov](mailto:commonhelp@commonhelp.virginia.gov) or by calling (855) 635-4370. The Virginia Department of Social Services will now provide Pandemic EBT benefits to families of school-aged children who no longer have access to free or reduced-price school meals due to the public school closures. This program provides temporary food assistance to cover the cost of meals missed while schools are closed. In the City of Winchester, 2,637 children will receive Pandemic EBT benefits. Visit the Latest News page on the City's website for details. Get streamlined access to actionable resources including food assistance, healthcare, childcare, Virginia tax guidance, paid sick leave, and furlough obligations for businesses, and more by downloading the Virginia Department of Social Services new COVID-19 Virginia Resources app. Visit [covid.virginia.gov](http://covid.virginia.gov). That's C-O-V-I-D dot Virginia, spelled out, dot gov. Absentee voting by mail and in person is allowed for the June 23, 2020 election. Visit the Virginia Department of Elections website or [Winchesterva.gov/vote](http://Winchesterva.gov/vote) for details. And last, but not least, submit service or public records requests to City staff or search the database of frequently asked questions with the City's online 311 portal. Visit [Winchesterva.gov/knowledgebase](http://Winchesterva.gov/knowledgebase) or download the City's mobile app to use City 311. Well, that's going to do it 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 May at 5:00 PM. So long for now. Stay safe.