

Onley Town Council Minutes of May 4, 2015

VIRGINIA: At a Special Meeting of the Onley Town Council held at the VVA Building, 25534 East Main Street, on the 4th day of May, A.D., 2015:

Members Present: Jack Pierson, Mayor
Ned Finney, Vice-Mayor
John Dennis
Dawn Dize
Matt Hart
Susan Rillo
Don Strautz

Staff Present: John Spivey, Chief of Police
Jamy Salazar, Treasurer
Officer Joel Addison, OPD

Call to Order

Mayor Pierson called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

Invocation & Pledge of Allegiance

The invocation was given by Susan Rillo and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Ned Finney.

Adoption of Agenda

Mr. Finney asked to reverse items (5) and (6) on the agenda.

Motion: To adopt the agenda with the change by Don Strautz and seconded by Susan Rillo.

Roll Call Vote: Dize-yes; Rillo-yes; Finney-yes; Strautz-yes; Hart-yes; Dennis-yes. MOTION PASSED

Reading of the Rules of Public Participation

Mayor Pierson read the Rules of Participation.

Public Comments

Ms. Salazar stated that no one signed up to speak. Dawn White stated that she would be happy to speak. She stated that the improvements made by the fire company have not been unnoticed and she thanked them for improving on all of the concerns that she spoke about at a previous meeting. She added that she does not normally come to Council meetings with concerns but she felt that it was warranted with the particular concerns with the fire department. She stated that there was an excessive amount of trash at the fire house which appeared to be drawing feral cats. Excessive noise and extreme speeding up and down the street are also issues for her.

Discussion with the Onley Volunteer Fire Department Board of Directors

Dannehl Strautz, OVFD President, introduced the members of the OVFD Board of Directors in attendance: John Roache, Ted Bliss and Chris Davis, OVFD Fire Chief. Ms. Strautz gave some background on the fire company explaining that there was a need for the re-establishment of a Board of Directors in 2013. The previous Board was in-house and there was a need for an "outside" Board due to some major occurrences in the fire company, such as the embezzlement charges, losing the 501c(3) status, and the Accomack County arsonists. They were also carrying an extreme amount of debt due to the purchase of 18-4. She stated that they re-applied for 501c(3) status in October 2013 and a new ambulance was purchased with the understanding that 18-4 would be sold. She stated that the previous Chief was not keeping up with things – bills were not being paid, mail was not picked up or opened, a large amount of calls were being missed and there were numerous other problems. Chief Ferguson resigned, and for a

short while, Jamie Coulbourne was appointed as the new Chief. At the same time, Chris Davis was voted into membership. In September of 2014, Jamie Coulbourne resigned and Chris Davis was appointed to the position of Chief. At that time, Chief Davis asked the Board if he could use any profits from the sale of 18-4 or the ambulances for the improvement of the conditions of the fire house. Chief Davis sold 18-4 for a profit of \$14,000.00 and two ambulances for a profit of \$7,000.00. The Board approved. In January 2015, the Board approved the purchase of the Command vehicle. They are not trained and ready to use it yet but Chief Davis is working on that. Ms. Strautz acknowledged that there have been some concerns posed by the Town Council such as the controlled burns at the fire house. As soon as the Council was made aware of the issue, they asked Chief Davis to stop the burning. Basketball being played late at night was also an issue and that matter has also been addressed. She stated that she was told that Council and residents did not know where to voice their concerns. Her feeling is that Chief Davis should be the first point of contact, but the Board is willing to speak with Council about concerns as well. She does not want a bad relationship with the town. In the matter of loss of membership, only one member has been dismissed from the company after being given numerous chances to correct problems. One year ago, there were only seven active members. There are now 29 active members. All members are compliant and must pass background checks, physicals and drug screenings. There have been numerous complaints about Chief Davis living in the camper on the grounds. The Board has approved this and will only re-address the matter if it is a violation of a town ordinance. Ms. Strautz stated that she has heard concerns about the ethnicity of the membership. She feels that this is 2015 and we should not be concerned with such matters. It is great that we have such diversity in the company as we do in our community. The Board is aware that the fire company vehicles are being used to run errands and they are okay with that since it allows them to respond immediately to a call. She added that this is not a new practice – it has been going on for years. There are concerns that the OVFD is going to handle only rescue calls and not fire. She denied this and stated that while rescue calls bring in more money, OVFD is a fire and rescue company. She feels that the company is moving in the right direction. She gave some statistics on the number of calls being answered, adding that there is a lack of DPS staffing right now about which they are concerned.

Council Comments

Mr. Dennis asked if any members of the fire company are being paid. Ms. Strautz stated that a stipend (not pay) in the amount of \$50.00 was set up in July but it is being phased out.

Mr. Hart thanked the OVFD and the Board for coming tonight and for their quick response to a fire at his rental home this weekend.

Mr. Strautz stated that these are people who live in our community and if we have a concern, we need to ask questions and work together.

Mr. Finney thanked everyone for coming. He stated that his concern with the fire at the fire house was that creosote posts were being burned and the fact that the guy tending the fire appeared to be sleeping with two gas cans only a foot from the flames. He further stated that we have been asking for two months, with no response, for a membership roster and a list of who has the town's pagers. Ms. Strautz will get the roster to the office and look into the matter of the pagers. Mr. Finney stated that the OVFD Board has done an excellent job of turning things around and he is very pleased. He did state that he feels the camper is a code violation.

Ms. Rillo thanked everyone. She added that she thinks everyone's frustrations have been growing and that communication is the answer, she suggested that maybe our two Boards should meet more often. She is happy with the improvements being made and she thinks the fire station looks great.

Ms. Dize thanked Ms. Strautz for her presentation and addressing so many of our concerns. She agreed that communication is the answer. She would like to stop some of the rumors.

Motion: To adjourn by Ned Finney and seconded by Don Strautz.

There was no vote because at this time because Chief Davis asked to speak. Ms. Salazar stated that there is a motion and a second on the floor. Mr. Finney rescinded his motion and Mr. Strautz seconded. Chief Davis apologized adding that they obviously haven't been the best neighbors. He stated that a lot of the debris outside was due to the renovations and he should have communicated that better. They have just gotten some new trash cans which will hopefully help with the cat population/problem. In the matter of the roster and the pagers, he stated that he should have responded but he has been trying to track down the pagers. He will get that information to the town this week. In the matter of speeding on the street, he stated that he does have a lot of young guys so he will address it with them. He concluded that he is living in the camper since he has had some plumbing issues at his house but expects to have them resolved this week. He added that he lives there, also, so that he can be close when the residents of Onley need him and his family members. He concluded by saying that the Town of Onley now has a very capable fire department and they should be proud of that fact.

Mr. Bliss stated that he is new to the community and does not have any reason to take sides in this matter or any others. He further added that he is very impressed with what he sees so far from the OVFD.

Adjourn/Recess

Motion: To adjourn at 7:53pm by Ned Finney and seconded by Don Strautz. Roll Call Vote: Dize-yes; Rillo-yes; Finney-yes; Strautz-yes; Hart-yes; Dennis-yes. MOTION PASSED

Respectfully Submitted,

Jamye Salazar
Clerk/Treasurer

Jack Pierson
Mayor