

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE RURAL RETREAT TOWN
COUNCIL HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS ON
TUESDAY FEBRUARY 24, 2026- 7:00 P.M.**

Mayor and Council Members Present: Dale Yontz, Vice-Mayor, Geary Jonas, James P. “Sean” Viars, Bob Lewis, Alma Dunford

Council Members Absent: Tim Litz, Mayor, James Lloyd

Administration Present: Jason Childers, Town Manager
Monica H. Patton, Clerk/Treasurer
Derek Breedlove, Police Chief
Carolyn Mooney, Clerk

Administration Absent: None

Others Present: Vaughn Barker, Mike Jones

DETERMINATION OF A QUORUM

Vice-Mayor Yontz called the meeting to order and determined a quorum was present.

INVOCATION

Councilmember Jonas gave the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Vice-Mayor Yontz led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made by Councilmember Viars seconded by Councilmember Dunford to approve the minutes of the February 10, 2026, meeting. The motion passed by a vote of five (5) for: Viars, Jonas, Dunford, Lewis, Yontz; zero (0) against.

CITIZEN’S TIME – None

CORRESPONDENCE – Town Manager Childers stated that he appreciates council for allowing him to miss the previous meeting to attend his son’s Senior night basketball game.

POLICE REPORT - Town Manager Childers reported for Chief Breedlove: twenty-three incidents, four vehicle accidents, two assaults, one search warrant to assist animal control, one

assist rescue, one business alarm, one civil property dispute, and he patrolled one thousand three hundred sixty-eight miles in February.

7:15 pm. Chief Breedlove entered the meeting

Chief Breedlove reported that he had distributed a memo from the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) to all relevant personnel regarding the use of engine brakes (also known as Jake brakes) and the placement of related signage. He stated that the Police Chief from the Town of Independence, Virginia, had informed him that VDOT previously advised that signs prohibiting or restricting engine brake use could not be posted.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION -See the Town Manager's report.

HERITAGE DAYS FESTIVAL – Vice-Mayor Yontz reported that he has been in touch with the main act. He is currently trying to get the artwork from the main act and get the posters printed. He would like to have the posters printed and out in May. Front Row Music will take care of set-up for the band and sound. We will not need volunteers for loading and unloading the band.

Treasurer Patton stated that the town office will begin sending vendor applications next week. She asked if the times for this year's event will be the same. Vice-Mayor Yontz stated that the festival can begin at Heritage Park at noon with gospel music, playground, and splash pad. Then the performances at Pepper Stage begin at 3pm. Councilmember Lewis is concerned that the vendors may not like the event taking place at the park when they are at the Pepper Stage. Vice-Mayor Yontz mentioned that the events at Heritage Park will be more for families with kids. Town Manager Childers stated that he agrees to utilize Heritage Park, but he is concerned about the parking situation. Councilmember Viars stated that perhaps we should just mention that Heritage Park is open to people during the day. Town Manager Childers stated that maybe the town could have a Heritage Park Day annually for kids. Vice-Mayor Yontz stated that the time should be changed until 1pm with the inflatables set up longer than in the past.

UPGRADES TO WATER PLANT – See the Town Manager's report.

DERELICT PROPERTY – Town Manager Childers reported that he needs to contact the town attorney regarding this issue.

WATER ACCOUNTABILITY – See the Town Manager's report.

NEW BUSINESS

Reaffirm 2nd Amendment Resolution – A motion was made by Vice-Mayor Yontz and seconded by Councilmember Jonas to reaffirm the 2nd amendment resolution supporting the 2nd amendment sanctuary in support Sheriff Cline and his stance of the 2nd amendment.

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, in acknowledgment of its deep commitment to the rights of all citizens of, and visitors to, the Town of Rural Retreat to keep and bear arms, the Rural Retreat Town Council reaffirms the previously declared Resolution of the Town of Rural Retreat to be a “Second Amendment Sanctuary”, and

WHEREAS, certain legislation has been passed in the Virginia General Assembly that allows localities to, by ordinance, ban otherwise lawfully possessed and transported firearms from certain public spaces, causing law-abiding citizens to be exposed to a patchwork of local ordinances as they travel throughout the Commonwealth, and

WHEREAS, the Rural Retreat Town Council acknowledges the significant economic contribution made to our community by tourists and visitors and does not wish to discourage travel to the Town of Rural Retreat, and

WHEREAS, the Town of Rural Retreat wishes to welcome all law-abiding citizens who wish to live in, visit, or otherwise participate in the economy of our community, including those citizens and visitors who choose to legally carry a firearm for personal protection, and

WHEREAS, the Rural Retreat Council does not wish to infringe on the rights of the citizens of, or visitors to, the Town of Rural Retreat to keep and bear arms, and

WHEREAS, the Rural Retreat Town Council wishes to express its continued opposition to any law that would unconstitutionally restrict the rights of the citizens of, and visitors to, the Town of Rural Retreat to keep and bear arms.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Town of Rural Retreat, Virginia:

That the Rural Retreat Town Council hereby declares the Town of Rural Retreat, Virginia shall not exercise any authority granted to it by § 15.2-915(E) of the Code of Virginia to regulate or prohibit the otherwise legal purchase, possession, or transfer of firearms or ammunition.

That the Rural Retreat Town Council hereby certifies that the resolution set forth above was adopted during an open meeting on 24th day of February 2026.

Signed:

Dale T. Yontz, Vice-Mayor

Attest:

Monica H. Patton

COMMITTEE REPORTS

FINANCE & APPROPRIATIONS – Budget amendment: Treasurer Patton explained that in order to process the grant payment for Duchess Dairy the Council will need to make an amendment to the budget. A motion was made by Councilmember Lewis and seconded by

Councilmember Jonas to amend the budget to appropriate funds for the grant awarded to Duchess Dairy from the general fund's undesignated line item to the industry incentive line item in the amount of \$6,000. The motion passed by a vote of five (5) for: Lewis, Dunford, Viars, Yontz, Jonas; zero (0) against.

TACS PROPERTY SALES – Treasurer Patton reported that she spoke with TACS and some of the properties with delinquent real estate taxes will be sold later in the summer. Some of the taxpayers are attempting to pay their outstanding taxes.

DELINQUENT BUSINESS LICENSE - Treasurer Patton reported that there are still two businesses that have outstanding business licenses. One business paid a portion of their license tax due with a balance still due. The other business has not complied at all. Councilmember Viars stated that the town needs to do whatever it takes to get the business in compliance. It is unfair to other businesses that purchase their license. Treasurer Patton stated that the renewals were hand delivered by Chief Breedlove and Mr. Sobey sent letters. The next step is to take legal action.

PERSONNEL, ORDINANCES & LEGAL MATTERS – Town Manager Childers reported that the committee met and went over employee schedules and time keeping.

The committee went through a new ordinance regarding people living in campers. This will eliminate people parking campers on their property and living in them permanently.

MURAL PLANNING- None

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- **Downtown Revitalization:** The contractor has been in the downtown building and has framed up the walls for the bathrooms as requested. These will include bathrooms for use inside and from the outside.

Councilmember Lewis stated that he has had questions regarding pickle ball courts. Town Manager Childers stated that he has talked to several people regarding the surface of the courts. He will obtain the cost for each type and report back to Council.

- **Water Plant:** The Town has had some issues in the past few weeks with the amount of water being produced to the water tanks. The Town employees have worked trying to find leaks or come to a conclusion as to why this is occurring. The Town has had conference calls with Giles because they have an identical plant to ours to try to come up with a solution. We have also had Memcor remote into our computer system and try to troubleshoot our problems. The Town had switched from the well to spring pump and switched high service pumps and had gained gradually in our tanks, but last night the pump kicked off and is now having to be controlled manually. The tanks are now gradually climbing again.
- **High Service Pumps for the Water Plant:** I have received a quote to replace the 2 high service pumps at the water plant. This cost would be around \$25k to replace both pumps. One of the pumps has a bad seal, and the Water plant operators think this will help with our production for many years to come. Council will need to vote to approve or deny this

purchase. I also feel that the Town can ask for reimbursement through grants under an emergency event because of the lack of water distribution.

A motion was made by Vice-Mayor Yontz and seconded by Councilmember Jonas to amend the budget \$30,000 from reserve funds to water plant maintenance to purchase two high service pumps to replace the current ones at the water plant. The motion passed by a vote of five (5) for: Lewis, Dunford, Viars, Jonas, Yontz; zero (0) against.

- **Water Accountability:** The Town's water accountability has dropped from 45% to 40%, which means that we are going in the right direction with some of the things the Town has been doing to bring this number down.

Town Manager Childers asked Mike Jones to explain how the water plant software works. Mr. Jones explained that he believes there is a problem with the computer and the calibration of the meters. Town Manager Childers stated that Core and Main is scheduled to calibrate the system.

- The Town has received a quote for replacing the porches and ramps at the Community Center, The Pepper Stage, and the Caboose. This quote did include Trex decking and metal handrails. If this is acceptable to council, then this would be something we would not have to replace for some time. Town Manager Childers stated that he cannot disclose the amount because he needs to obtain two other quotes.

COMMUNITY SIGN – Town Manager Childers stated that he would like to get quotes from someone local instead of the company in Florida that the Lions Club presented to Council. He stated that there is a company in Bristol and one in Abingdon. Councilmember Viars suggested reaching out to Smyth County Chamber of Commerce about the sign they placed in Chilhowie off of the exit.

Discussion: Water Plant Project - Councilmember Viars inquired about the status of the water plant project. Town Manager Childers reported that a meeting is scheduled for this Thursday with representatives from The Lane Group and Davenport and Company to discuss the project in detail.

Discussion: Employee Bonuses and Appreciation - Councilmember Lewis inquired about the status of the finance committee meeting to discuss potential employee bonuses. Town Manager Childers recommended organizing an Employee Appreciation Day in the Spring, during which the Town would provide a meal for all employees. He expressed the view that the Town should not provide a monetary contribution or bonus at this time. Councilmember Lewis suggested that the appreciation meal be held at a local restaurant in town to support the local business community. Councilmember Viars proposed that the meal be catered instead, as an alternative option.

Discussion: Children at Play Signs and Traffic Concerns on Westfield Avenue - Town Manager Childers reported that he had forwarded an email to each Council member from a concerned citizen regarding traffic speeds and safety on Westfield Avenue. He stated that he had contacted the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) about the possibility of installing "Children at Play" signs. Town Manager Childers explained that such signs must be requested by Wythe County rather than the Town of Rural Retreat. He had assumed VDOT would follow up directly with the County regarding the request. Town Manager Childers recommended that Police Chief

Breedlove deploy the mobile speed display sign on Westfield Avenue to help monitor and reduce vehicle speeds in the area.

Discussion: Street Paving and Repairs – W. Baumgardner and Other Areas -Councilmember Dunford reported that a citizen had inquired about the possibility of paving or repaving W. Baumgardner Avenue. Town Manager Childers stated that the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) had informed him that no funding would be available for repaving or patching streets within the Town this year. He explained that this was due to the significant amount of funding already expended on salt and winter maintenance operations during the current winter season. Councilmember Lewis suggested that the Town consider patching or repairing some of the streets using its own resources. Councilmember Viars asked whether the Town could rent a hotbox (asphalt hot box) to perform patching on streets in need of immediate repair. Town Manager Childers noted that the Rescue Squad building parking lot and a street in Indian Circle are among the areas currently requiring attention and repair.

TREASURER’S REPORT

The invoices for February 24, 2026, were read and approved.

ADJOURNMENT – There being no additional business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned upon a motion by Councilmember Lewis. The motion was duly seconded and approved.

Vice-Mayor

Clerk