

The Richlands Town Council held a "Public Hearing" in the Richlands Council Chambers on June 8, 2021 at 5:30pm with the following present:

Mayor: Rodney D. Cury
Town Manager: John O'Daniel
Town Clerk: Connie Allen
Council Members: Mike Street, Jeff Hurst
Richard Brown, Mary Ann Strong
Council Members Absent: Logan Plaster, Doug Ratliff
Town Attorney : No Attorney

Mayor Cury opened the meeting.

Mayor Cury - We are here to receive public comment to consider the following:

1. Budget for fiscal year 2021-2022 – Town of Richlands proposes to adopt a real estate tax rate of \$0.2175 per \$100.00 of assessed valuation, which is an increase on the rate of 40.0575 per \$100 of assessed valuation.
2. Budget for fiscal year 2021-2022 – Meals tax rate will remain at the current rate of 6%.
3. Budget for fiscal year 2021-2022 – Motor vehicle license fee will remain at the current rate of \$10 annually.
4. Budget for fiscal year 2021-2022 – Mobile home license fee will remain at the current rate of \$20 annually.
5. Budget for fiscal year 2021-2022 – Proposed garbage rate increase of 15% for residential and commercial garbage collection Richlands Code of Ordinances.
6. Budget for fiscal year 2021-2022 – Proposed cigarette tax rate increase to \$0.20 per pack from current rate of \$0.10 per pack. Rate increase equal to \$0.10 per pack.
7. Budget for fiscal year 2021-2022 – Town of Richlands proposes to adopt a personal property tax rate of \$0.2175/\$100 of assessed property value, which is a new proposed tax.
8. Budget for fiscal year 2021-2022 – White goods/leaf/limb collection service will not have an added fee for the proposed budget.
9. Budget for fiscal year 2021-2022 – Town of Richlands proposes to adopt a water rate increase to generate an additional \$74,512 of water fund revenue.
10. Budget for fiscal year 2021-2022 – Town of Richlands proposes to adopt a sewer rate increase to generate an additional \$288,098 of sewer fund revenue.
11. Budget for fiscal year 2021-2022 – Town of Richlands proposes to adopt an electric rate increase based on the Electric Cost of Service Study Report presented at the May 5, 2021 budget workshop.

Mayor Cury - Those are the items the Council will hear public input, at this time I would ask if anyone would like to speak, please raise your hand. Please keep your comments to three (3) minutes.

John O'Daniel - We have a signup sheet.

Mayor Cury – Names on the list are Laura Mollo, Keith Jahnke, Sherrie Belcher, Grace Stuart, El Chi Colley One, is there anyone else that did not sign up.

Mayor Cury - Ms. Mollo please come forward and state your name and address for the record.

Laura Mollo – 262 Linwood Drive, you guys have spoken about what the county is doing in various times and almost each time the county has been tossed under the bus in the wrong context or completely inaccurate information one being the cigarette tax that you are posing to increase. The other discussed in regular scheduled meeting does not directly relate to the agenda items during the public hearing. We don't know for sure if the county is passing a \$0.40 increase, a local business person who attended the last meeting in regard to such a high increase and now the Board of Supervisors are renegotiation on that amount, if it will be \$0.40 or any increase at all. It is not a good idea to hedge increases on the county if we increase our tax if county doesn't; all it is doing is further hurting Richlands businesses that

sell cigarettes. While I don't believe any of the taxes should be increase until the unnecessary spending is removed from the budget, one that absolutely should not be consider now is the personal property tax now we will be double taxed from the county and the town. This will only hurt the citizens and once again attacking small business in Richlands. Again, the same can be said about the water and the electric increases. I urge you to go back to the drawing board and remove the irresponsible spending before passing the burden on the citizens and businesses. It looks nice on paper but when you come down all you are doing is pushing more and more citizens and businesses out of the Town limits and that will hurt us more in the long run. We also have a provision in the Charter that states no measure increasing a tax or license, or providing for any new form of tax, shall be adopted until notice has been published 30 days previous to its passage in a paper of general circulation in the Town. I don't believe the increases can be voted on tonight as it has not been 30 days since its original publication. I have not seen the re-publications with the new proposed increases that have taken place at the last meeting. I urge Council to do the right thing not to vote on these increases tonight, we need a Town Attorney before we potentially go against our Town Charter on voting yes to these increases tonight.

Mayor Cury - Keith Jahnke

Keith Jahnke- I thought we were not required to give our address privacy issue.

Mayor Cury – It is personal not privacy, if you prefer not to you do not have to.

Keith Jahnke – I prefer not to, to begin with I am a new resident to Richlands, we just moved here in November, a lot of information I have received has come from other people. One of the things I was told was that the Town has not had any tax increases in over ten (10) years, I don't know if that is true or not, but seems to me it is a long time not to have any increases. We know that inflation is always in place and cost go up, surprised that not only a lot of the taxes are going up but new taxes are being proposed. To address some of the specific items, the property tax, I ran some numbers and for me personally amounts to \$82.00 a year less than \$7.00 a month which I can certainly absorb but when I look at it on a percentage bases it is an increase of 36% at the same time you have elected not to raise the meals tax. The meals tax going from 6% to 7% means a \$10 bill goes from \$0.60 to \$0.70 for taxes. If someone can't afford that extra \$0.10 they should not be eating out to begin with. It would be a lot cheaper for them to buy some food and prepare it themselves. Motor vehicle tax not increase that again the original proposal was to double for \$10 to \$20 why not go from \$10 to \$11 or \$12 same thing with the mobile home increase, originally talking about doubling now scaling back to nothing, again why not just \$1.00 or \$2.00 instead of making a big jump. Cigarette tax – personally I don't smoke so it is not that big of thing to me, but I think people who do smoke continually put up with rate increases from the cigarette companies themselves, they cigarette tax should not necessarily keep them from smoking and reducing revenue. If they stop smoking would improve their health. Item number 8 – White goods/leaf collection I thought someone proposed at the last meeting that should be a tax for individuals that actually use the service. For things relating to utilities, it does say how much the increase will generate but does not tell how much it will costing the individuals.

Mayor Cury - Sherrie Belcher

Sherrie Belcher – 805 East 2nd Street – According to Census.gov in July 2019, I am sure the numbers did not improve the population of Richlands was 5234, 21.2% of that population was younger than 18 and 22.2% was 65 or older, the medium household income \$30,600, 23.1% of our population was in poverty. Our population cannot afford the increases that you are putting on us. I am a senior citizen and a widow and I live on a tight strict budget. When my expenses increase I have to make cuts elsewhere with the budget you are voting on my garbage goes up by \$1.67, water \$10.00, sewer \$14.00, roughly my electric will go up estimated \$31.67 that does not include the real estate and the personal property. If you look at each one of these individual you are thinking it is not too bad but when I look at the total number that comes over \$100 a month for me. I get upset when I look at the total number to my budget. An average social security check for a citizen in Virginia is \$1574 that was in 2020, not many people that I know that live on social security can afford a hit like that to their monthly budget. Perhaps a group of citizens could live on a tight budget, maybe could get a committee look at the budget and maybe give ideas on how to

cut the budget or use other vendors to make some cuts. You are forcing us to make painful cuts to our lifestyles so I think Council should do the same to the Town budget. I would like to know if you have any plans for the \$4.3 million dollar grant we got from the Covid Relief.

Mayor Cury – Grace Stuart

Grace Stuart – I don't want to speak on the budget one; I want to speak at the other one.


El Chi Colley One- I am new to the Town, and the operation of the budget of the Town itself. People who lives on SSI barely make enough to buy a loaf of bread. My point is raise the taxes, separate the water and the sewer on one system components, my lifestyle as well as anybody else that is on SSI, the problem that I have what management and the benefit that the public has on a return on benefits, what have we gained from it, if we increase the tax what do we get back. Nothing, we do more we have a double standard when it comes to the electric bill, we pay our bill in the beginning of the month and fined in middle of the month and we have 15 days left, I think 30 days of electricity, in a 15 day period we are in violation for a 30 day period I pay you from I am restricted, fined and penalized for being late. If going to propose an increase in tax I feel the Town of Richlands should show us where our money was spent and how it actually benefits our lifestyle. I appreciate the opportunity to speak.

Mayor Cury – At this time I will close the public comment period and I will ask for a motion to adjourn this public hearing.

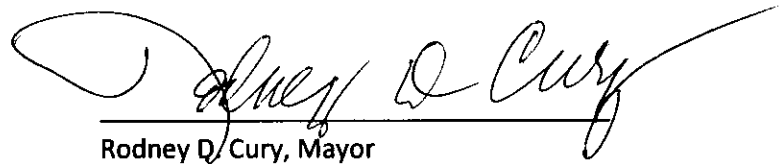
Richard - I make a motion to adjourn the public hearing, Mike seconded the motion.

Mayor Cury- We have a motion and a second, any further discussion? All those in favor of the motion say yes. All those that oppose say no. Roll Call –Mike, Yes, Mary Ann – Yes, Richard- Yes, Jeff-Yes Motion carries – 4/0.

Mayor Cury - This meeting is closed.



Connie Allen, Town Clerk



Rodney D. Cury, Mayor