

The Richlands Town Council held a "Public Hearing" in the Richlands Council Chambers on August 10, 2021 at 5:30 pm, with the following present:

Mayor: Rodney D. Cury
Town Manager: John O'Daniel
Town Clerk: Connie Allen
Council Members: Mary Ann, Jeff Hurst, Mike Street, Doug Ratliff
Richard Brown
Council Member Absent: Logan Plaster
Town Attorney :

Mayor Cury opened the meeting.

Mayor Cury –Receive public comment regarding the adoption of the Town's Rate Schedule and Utility Rate Ordinances. At this time I would like to ask Town Manager John O'Daniel to give a brief explanation.

John - Rate Schedules – Electric, Water and Sewer rate proposals, we have talked about it before but this is the first time to get public comment on the ordinances.

Mayor Cury - At this time we can receive public comment, do we have anyone who wants to speak? Laura Mollo would like to speak. Anyone else who would like to speak on the adoption of the Town's Rate Schedule and the Utility Rate Ordinances?

Mayor Cury – Laura Mollo

Laura – 262 Linwood Drive – We actually passed these ordinances in June, my question is this a second increase or are you increasing with a second ordinance since the ordinances were passed in June. If that is the case since you passed the ordinances in June maybe incorrectly. I don't understand why we are having another utility increase. Either way I don't believe these are necessary, you have heard businesses stand at this podium and tell you how they don't agree with these and we have other ways of funding these things. The big debate has been how much we are receiving from Covid money, which puts us at around four million dollars to receive. On the government website it actually says you can use that money to cover water and sewer investments. There is a frequently asked question, can my city decrease taxes after receiving the funds, local government section of the bill, no prohibition on lowering taxes. Why not use the four million dollar Covid money to put into the water and sewer for upgrades and not raise these rates right now. We live in a Town with a poverty rate of over 23% and that is astronomical compared to other areas. Our citizens and our businesses can't handle it. What do you think you will be getting by an increase; all the businesses that are leaving have stood here and told you they are going to leave. It is actually going to get a lot worse. You guys should consider that before passing a second increase since we just did one in June.

Mayor Cury – No one else wanted to speak, since no more public comments I will close the Public Hearing.

Doug - Can Council speak?

Mayor Cury – You can speak, we are just hear to hear what the public has to say. Feel free to speak.

Doug – I want to voice my opinion to the raises, we have had several business to leave it is a bad time to raise rates especially the electric rates. We are the highest in Virginia and you are highest by raising it. I think AEP is average of 10 ½ cent a kilowatt, we are paying 13 cents as high as 14 cents a kilowatt. That doesn't sound like very much. A scenario in Abingdon I have the same laundromat the same machines and everything I have in Richlands; it costs me around \$200 a month more in Richlands to operate on the electric alone. That is just a comparison, so if I am having problems with my business, I know everyone else is. If we don't remain competitive and open up for businesses, Richlands is already slowly

dying. I think we can do better especially with what Ms. Mollo brought up about the four million dollars, what are we going to do with that? Put in the bank and save it or spend it on things we don't need to. Let's spend it on things like she suggested, let's not raise these rates and stay competitive and draw businesses to Richlands.

Mayor Cury – Since no members of the audience has asked to speak I will close the public comment period and ask for a motion to close the public comment period.

Richard - I make a motion to adjourn the Public Hearing, Mary Ann second 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, Mike, Yes, Doug-Yes, Mary Ann-Yes, Richard – Yes, Jeff – Yes Motion carries – 5/0.

We will resume our regular Town Council meeting at 6:00pm at the Richlands Town Hall.



Connie Allen, Town Clerk



Rodney D. Cury, Mayor