

STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA, COUNTY OF UPSHUR, CITY OF BUCKHANNON, TO WIT:

A Public Meeting of the City of Buckhannon and the Community was held on September 13, 2023 at 6:00 pm in the Stockert Youth and Community Center Gymnasium. The following individuals were in attendance:

Mayor	Robbie Skinner	Present
City Recorder	Randy Sanders	Present
Council Member	Pam Bucklew	Present
Council Member	David McCauley	Present
Council Member	Jack Reger	Present
Council Member	CJ Rylands	Present
Council Member	David Thomas	Present
Assistant Recorder & Director of Finance	Amberle Jenkins	Present
Director of Public Works	Jerry Arnold	Present
City Attorney	Tom O'Neill	Present
City Engineer	Jay Hollen	Present
SYCC Board Member	Nancy Shobe	Present
SYCC Board Member	Pam Martin	Present
SYCC Board Member	Don Nestor	Present
SYCC Executive Director	Debora Brockleman	Present
Mills Group	Michael Mills	Present
United States Department of Agriculture	Stacy Karickhoff	Present-Telephone
MyBuckhannon	Monica Zalaznik	Present

Also in attendance: Several members of the public. (note that our sign in guest list was not located after the meeting ended.

*Public Meeting of City Council of Buckhannon
6:00 p.m. at the Stockert Youth & Community Center located at 79 East Main St, Buckhannon, WV 26201
Meeting Agenda for Wednesday, September 13, 2023*

- A. Call to Order
 - A.1 Moment of Silence
 - A.2 Pledge to the Flag of the United States of America
- B. Public Comments
 - B.1 Public Meeting for comments: To review the City of Buckhannon’s plan to file an application for Federal Assistance for construction of an approximately 12,800 sq ft, multi-purpose community building that will also expand the operations of the Stockert Youth and Community Center programs with the USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Loan or Grant program
- C. Adjournment

POSTED 08/15/2023

Notice of Public Meeting:

CITY OF BUCKHANNON PUBLIC MEETING

Notice that a public meeting for comments will be held to review the City of Buckhannon’s plan to file an application for Federal Assistance for construction of an approximately 12,800 sq ft, multi-purpose community building that will also expand the operations of the Stockert Youth and Community Center programs with the USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Loan or Grant program. The public meeting will be held at the Stockert Youth and Community Center located at 79 East Main Street, Buckhannon, WV, 26201, on September 13, 2023 at 6:00 PM.

CITY OF BUCKHANNON

Notice is hereby given that the USDA Rural Development as required by the National Environmental Policy Act, is issuing an environmental assessment (EA) in connection with possible impacts related to a project proposed by City of Buckhannon, of Upshur County, WV. The proposed project is located at physical address 65 East Main Street in Buckhannon, Upshur County, West Virginia. The City of Buckhannon has purchased three parcels totaling 0.47 acre. The SYCC is an existing community center, and the Proposed Action involves the construction of a new proposed facility that will be connected to the existing SYCC facility via a partially covered breezeway. Preliminary plans for Proposed Action include construction of a new 12,800 square foot multi-use building on the 0.47-acre tract of property owned by the City. The new building will be a two-story facility with a multi-use space and a gymnasium. See support documentation in Section 6.0 for coordination, consultation and correspondence for the project. All proposed work will take place within previously disturbed areas. City of Buckhannon has submitted an application to USDA Rural Development for funding of the proposal.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: USDA Rural Development, Stacy Karickhoff, Area Specialist, 24 Gateway Drive, Weston, WV 26452, 304-635-4342 or stacy.karickhoff@usda.gov. Or: Potesta & Associates, Inc., 7012 MacCorkle Avenue, SE Charleston, WV 25304, 1-304-342-1400, Tim Ferguson, P.M.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Potesta & Associates, Inc., an environmental consultant, prepared an environmental assessment for City of Buckhannon that describes the project, assesses the proposed project’s environmental impacts, and summarizes as applicable any mitigation measures used to minimize environmental effects. USDA Rural Development has conducted an independent evaluation of the environmental assessment and believes that it accurately assesses the impacts of the proposed project. A “No Effect” determination was made by USDA-RD for the following species which are listed as having Critical Habitat that may be present in the Action Area: Indiana Bat (*Myotis sodalist*), Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), Tricolored Bat (*Perimyotis subflavus*), Virginia Spiraea (*Spiraea virginiana*). No significant impacts are expected as a result of the construction of the project.

Questions and comments should be sent to USDA – RD or Potesta & Associates, Inc. at the address provided. Questions and comments on the environmental assessment will be accepted for 15 days from the date of publication of this notice.

Any final action by USDA RD (RUS) related to the proposed project will be subject to, and contingent upon, compliance with all relevant Federal environmental laws and regulations and completion of environmental review procedures as prescribed by 7 CFR Part 1970, Environmental Policies and Procedures.



Run dates RD August 23 & 30, 2023

A. Call to Order: The meeting was called to order by Mayor Skinner.

B. Public Comments:

B.1 Public Meeting for comments: To review the City of Buckhannon’s plan to file an application for Federal Assistance for construction of an approximately 12,800 sq ft, multi-purpose community building that will also expand the operations of the Stockert Youth and Community Center programs with the USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Loan or Grant program

Mayor Skinner went over the how the meeting would proceed. Comments about financing first, then the architectural overview.

The Director of Finance and Administration reported on the following items:

There has been an ongoing Capital Campaign to improve the Stockert facility for several years. Currently there is a Capitol Campaign fund with a balance of \$443,267.00

In addition, there is also a pledge of \$12,000.

If the City finances part of the cost of the Stockert Youth and Community Center multi-purpose facility project, it would be through the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture), for a period of 30 years.

The City did look at some other avenues to finance or to acquire grants.

There were attempts made to apply for Abandoned Mine Land Grant, in which a new building would be used as a trail head. Those were denied.

We could not find any other grants to build this type of facility except for the USDA.

For the long-term financing, the interest rates are currently higher in banks, which is another reason why the City was interested in applying to the USDA.

The USDA has a Community Facilities, Direct Loan and Grant program. The grant funds, however, are no longer available this year. If the federal funds are appropriated again, they will not be available until next year. If the City would qualify, it would only be for a portion of the total project. We cannot guarantee we would be approved.

So far, the City has already, or will contribute toward the costs of the following items for this project:

The acquisition of the property was \$295,000 for 3 separate tracts of property. (\$150,000 Cuppari; \$145,000 Pythias).

Demolition of the buildings on the acquired properties, which include asbestos inspection and removal, dump fees, use of equipment and labor is approximately \$100,000.

The costs for Engineering, surveying, geotechnical evaluation, and architecture fees will be approximately \$374,287. The City has already paid for this so far.

Costs toward a financial feasibility study required for USDA financing was \$11,250.

Costs toward an environmental study required for the USDA financing was \$8,000.

The City has budgeted for those expenses.

The estimated Project Costs for Building construction is \$4,500,000

Bond Counsel fees, will be approximately \$60,000

The estimated Project Costs for Building equipment is \$550,000

Estimating that the City would borrow \$5 to \$5.5 million dollars, the annual payment would be about \$300,000.

The estimated costs for maintenance, utilities, insurance and miscellaneous expenses are about \$47,000 annually.

We won't know the exact numbers until the City goes through the bidding process.

Michael Mills, Architect for the Mills Group displayed and explained the rendition of the proposed building to be constructed. It would house a regulation size basketball court, a walking path around the parameter, bleachers, restrooms and storage.

The following persons spoke in favor of the project.

Willie Parker, Don Nestor, David McCauley, Rhonda Suder, April Small, Alexis Sears, Zack Karickhoff, Ron Pugh.

Mitch Shaw also spoke to clarify his position on the project. Some comments have been circulating and he wanted to make sure everyone knew that he does not want to see the Stockert Youth Center closed.

There being no further business to be transacted, Motion Sanders/Bucklew to adjourn at 6:55 pm. Motion carried.

Mayor Robert N. Skinner III

Recorder Randall H. Sanders

*****The following MyBuckhannon news article came out after the meeting with more details of comments that were made.

Few — but passionate — residents express opinions on proposed Stockert Youth & Community Center multipurpose addition

- Monica Zalaznik
- September 14, 2023

BUCKHANNON – Members of the Buckhannon-Upshur community on Wednesday were given the chance to voice their opinion on the proposed new Stockert Youth and Community Center multipurpose building/gymnasium.

Buckhannon City Council organized a public meeting on Wednesday, Sept. 13, to discuss the project because the U.S. Department of Agriculture requires a public comment period to receive a USDA loan. The meeting took place at the current Stockert Youth and Community Center on East Main Street.

The meeting began with Amberle Jenkins, director of finance and administration for the City of Buckhannon, laying out the financials of the project. SYCC is funded by and operates as a department of the city under its General Fund.

Amberle Jenkins, director of finance and administration for the City of Buckhannon

Jenkins said the capital campaign currently has a balance of \$443,000, with an additional pledge of \$12,000. The city is applying for a USDA loan, which would last for a period of 30 years. Jenkins said although the city investigated other funding options, such as grants, none of them were successful or feasible.

“We could not find any other grants to build this type of facility except for USDA with the long-term financing, and their interest rate was much lower than the rates from other financial institutions,” Jenkins said. “Other than that, USDA has a Community Facilities Direct Line grant program; however, those funds are no longer available for this year. If the federal funds are appropriated, again, that wouldn’t be available until next year, and then the city wouldn’t qualify. It would be only for a portion of this project, so we can’t guarantee that.”

The city has also purchased three tracts of land next to the existing Stockert building for an estimated \$295,500. The demolition and asbestos inspections conducted on the buildings existing on the land at the time totaled \$100,000.

“All the costs for the engineering survey, technical evaluations and architectural fees are so far estimated at \$374,000,” Jenkins said. “A financial feasibility study was also done – that’s a requirement with USDA – and that was \$11,250; the environmental study was \$8,000.”

All the costs predicted for the future were determined through the feasibility study and could change when the project is officially put out for bid, city officials said.

“We received an estimate that bond counsel fees could be \$47,500 to \$60,000, and then we also have a project cost for building and equipment, which will be \$550,000,” Jenkins said. “The annual payment will be \$300,000 and then the maintenance, utilities, insurance and all the miscellaneous expenses would be about \$47,000 annually, but we don’t know the exact numbers until we go out to bid.”

Michael Mills, head of the Mills Group, also attended the meeting to discuss the design of the building. The current layout would feature a regulation-size basketball court, changing

rooms, two bathrooms, an office, a workout/community room and more. A full description of the building plans may be found in a previous [My Buckhannon story](#).

Mayor Robbie Skinner moderated the public comment period and asked participants to keep their responses to under five minutes.

Community member Willie Parker said he was formerly the Upshur County Administrator for 21-and-a-half years, and he remembered when Joyce Stockert bequeathed the funds to the County Commission to start the youth program.

Willie Parker

“We operated for a number of years, and eventually, we transferred the operations to the city,” Parker said. “I think that was an excellent move, and the city has really taken off with the project. Debora [Brockleman] and her staff are excellent; it reaches hundreds and hundreds of children, and I don’t see this as competition with other projects that may be coming over the horizon. I see it working in conjunction with other projects, so I would encourage this project and that project to move forward.”

Parker was referencing a project helmed by the Upshur County Commission to establish a recreational complex on 70 acres that was bequeathed to them by J.F. Allen [in October 2022](#).

“I think there’s a plan, a good plan in place for construction, and they have always had a programming plan,” Parker said. “When I was attending administrator, they did an excellent job on a very, very tight budget.”

“Both projects could dovetail — this very beautiful thing — it’s not a duplication of services,” he added.

SYCC employee Alexis Sears emphasized the importance of the additional space for SYCC’s programs.

“I’ve been here for three years now, so I’ve been here for summer camp, after-school programs and different programs,” Sears said. “This building needs to happen as soon as possible; we can only have 60 kids in the building at once, so having this gym would give us the opportunity to help more kids.”

“There are so many kids who want to come here,” she continued. “We have a waiting list – all these parents have no place to keep their kids because all the daycares are full, so we need more places for these kids to go — a safe place, more room, this building.”

Former SYCC employee Zack Karickhoff said the youth who attend SYCC programs would greatly benefit from a gym dedicated to SYCC services.

“These kids need this building, and no matter what the cost, we need to get this done; we have wasted so much time,” Karickhoff said. “Generations of kids are at a loss because we cannot put our foot down, and it is beyond time to do this. I, myself, growing up know how hard it was to get into a gymnasium for basketball; you have to jump through hoops to get into a gymnasium.”

Former SYCC employee Zack Karickhoff

He said the rest of the community would also benefit from the location of the new building.

“These kids need this, and adults need this right here in the center of town,” Karickhoff said. “It could be used for Strawberry Festival craft shows, dodgeball tournaments, volleyball tournaments – whatever you want. You could have it right here in the center, and all these businesses on Main Street could benefit from all that right here, not somewhere else. I am in favor of this place, and I will love and support the Stockert Youth Center until I die.”

Mitchell Shaw, president of the Board of Directors for the Upshur County Recreation Complex, addressed the room to dispel any rumors that he wanted to close SYCC.

UCRC President Mitchell Shaw

“The only reason I came up here is to settle some rumors because as we all know, in a small town, rumors slide around, and I want to be very, very, very clear that the Upshur County Recreational Complex, and Mitchell Shaw – the human being and person – does not and will not ever advocate for Stockert Youth Center being taken away or gotten rid of,” Shaw said. “I have never said the words, ‘Stockert Youth Center should be closed.’ That has never come out of my mouth; that has never been my intent.”

Shaw asked the participants of the meeting to consider supporting another future recreation project.

“I hope everyone will also consider some potential projects that may be better suited for collaboration in the near future, which would be a community effort as well,” Shaw said. “Just be on the lookout for those before Thanksgiving.”

“I love Stockert,” he added. “I just want to see the community make the right decision financially – and the fiscally responsible decision – to ensure that all considerations are right before we build or break ground.”

When contacted for comment the day after the meeting, Skinner said that the city has no plan or intent to close SYCC or shut down its programming.

“I believe it is important to note that no one on city council or on county commission wishes to close SYCC or end the programming that has taken place at SYCC for more than 30 years,” Skinner said. “We appreciate Stockert; we recognize the need and the importance of having a youth center in our community. We see what it has always been, and regardless of whether or not an addition is built, Stockert Youth Center remains, and its programming continues.”

“Its service to our community will remain intact for many generations to come,” he added. “The city is fully committed to continuing the funding of the SYCC programming element and the services it provides.”

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