

## **Old Town Council Minute Books: A Snapshot of the Past**

By Carol Bruce

There's a host of interesting—and sometimes amusing—information to be found when reviewing the old Town Council minute books.

One of the most important of the many duties carried out by the Town Clerk's office is keeping the minutes of the Town Council meetings. Those minutes, going back to the first Town Council meeting on January 14, 1879, are archived on the Town website ([www.herndon-va.gov](http://www.herndon-va.gov)), and anyone can access them.

While most folks I know look to the minutes to document or verify something that took place at a recent meeting, skimming through the old records is a great way to get some insight into Herndon life in days past, and to find out how much things have (or haven't, in some cases) changed.

Following is just a sampling of what can be found in those archives. (Thank you to Town Clerk Viki Wellershaus and her staff for their assistance with this column.)

Speaking of the Clerk, the first Town Clerk, H.W. Blanchard, didn't seem to garner much support from his bosses. On February 22, 1879, just slightly more than one month into office, that first Council voted to allow Blanchard to “borrow five dollars on six months time to pay for expenses such as stationery.” And it was not until the meeting of June 14, 1879, that the Council finally got around to fixing his salary at \$25 a year. But at least he didn't have to use part of that grand amount to purchase a book in which to record the minutes. At the very next meeting, on June 28, the Council voted to pay someone by the name of General William Urich \$1.25 for the minute book that he provided. (I can't help but wonder why Urich was reimbursed for the minute book when the best they could do for the poor Clerk was extend him a loan to cover the cost of office supplies!)

Today, when I think of tree protection ordinances I think of Councilmember John DeNoyer, who served from 1988-2004 and who worked tirelessly to preserve and protect the natural environment. But there must have been a few environmentalists on that first Council as well. On April 12, 1879, they passed a General Ordinance for the Preservation of Order and Property that, among other things, protected trees. According to that ordinance, it was “unlawful for any persons to girdle, break, bend, wound or in any manner injure any trees planted or set in the streets, highways or private lots within the Town.” The amount of the fine would be “not less than one dollar and not to exceed more than twenty dollars.”

The Town confronted some personnel issues—several of them quite serious—during my years as a member of Council. But such things are nothing new, as reflected in the minutes of March 22, 1884, when the Council moved to elect a new Town Sergeant (who was, by the way, the sole member of the Town law enforcement community): “Whereas the sergeant elect having failed to qualify and the present sergeant refusing to act any

longer that therefore this council now declare the office of sergeant vacant and proceed to elect a sergeant.”

Public safety was a concern a century ago, just as it is today. For example, on August 22, 1910, the Council passed an ordinance that said it was unlawful to use a bean shooter or slingshot or to throw any missile in any street or public place. It also said it was unlawful, “unless in self defense or defense of property, to fire a gun or cannon within one hundred yards of any building.”

August 22 was a busy day. Also at that meeting, the Council adopted an ordinance that would be unthinkable today. The law made it illegal to sell any type of intoxicating drink unless it was prescribed by a physician.

There’s so much more of interest in those old minute books. But I’ve used up my space for this week. So I’ll end by saying, “To be continued...”