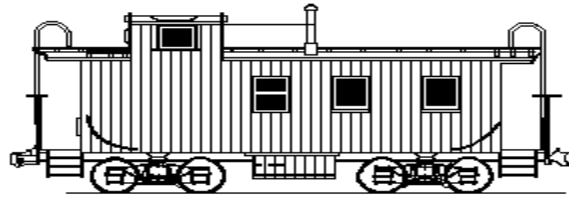


Wayne H. Nickum Town Hall
12641 Chapel Road
Clifton, VA 20124

Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 309
Clifton, VA 20124



**CLIFTON TOWN COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING
MONDAY, JUNE 15, 2026, 7:30 PM
WAYNE H. NICKUM COMMUNITY MEETING HALL
12641 CHAPEL ROAD
CLIFTON, VIRGINIA 20124**

Present: Mayor Lynn Screen; Vice Mayor Jay Davis; Councilmember JP Hess;
Councilmember Darrell Poe; Councilmember Amanda Hencken; Councilmember
Steve Effros
Staff: Laura Jane Cohen, Town Administrator; Kerrie Gogoel, Town Clerk; Suzy
Murphy, Town Treasurer

Public Hearing Regarding the Proposed Meals Tax

The Public Hearing regarding the proposed Meals Tax was called to order by Mayor Screen at 7:30 PM.

1. Mayor Screen welcomed those in attendance and thanked the public for their continued engagement on the matter of the meals tax over the past several years, and particularly over the past several months. She noted that this meeting was a special opportunity for the Council and the community to be in conversation specifically regarding the meals tax, and she expressed hope for a productive discussion.
2. Mayor Screen noted that the proposal currently under consideration is to raise the meals tax to 3%, and she welcomed reactions and feedback from the public. She clarified that it was not the Council's intention to make any decisions at this meeting, but rather to be in conversation, and that a vote on the matter is currently scheduled for the June 25, 2026 Town Council Meeting.

Public Comments:

- Four written comments were submitted and circulated to the Council in advance of the meeting. The comments were not read aloud but were noted for the record and taken into consideration.
- Citizen Greg Young thanked the Council for holding the open session with members of the public and stated that he wished to characterize verbally the written comments he had submitted, which he summarized as follows:
 - He recognized that the Town has needs and noted that the success of both the Town and its restaurants is important. He posed the question of how both the Town and the restaurants can benefit, and asked that the Town partner with the restaurant community.

- He noted that a thriving restaurant community brings people who love the Town, which in turn supports improved property values, strengthens Clifton's identity, and funds the majority of the Town's operations. He stated that if the restaurants support approximately two-thirds of the Town's operating revenue, then supporting the Town's restaurants should be the highest priority.
- Mayor Screen thanked Mr. Young for outlining the different ways in which the Town and the restaurants can partner, noting that he has been outlining these ideas over the years. She noted that, as half of the Council is new, these may be new ideas to some members, which presents new possibility.
- VM Davis offered a point of clarification, noting that while Mr. Young's written comments indicated that there were no line items for the playground equipment, streetscape, or Pink House in the budget, those items are in fact included in the budget. He noted that the Council intends to follow through on those projects this year, which is more attractive to everyone.
- Mr. Young replied that the items are not reflected in the total expense line of the FY2027 budget, but rather appear at the bottom under capital projects.
- VM Davis highlighted that another project not reflected in the budget but currently being worked on is the expansion of parking along the railroad tracks to improve that situation. He noted that the Council fully understands the need to increase public parking, and that while it is not shown in the budget, more progress should be seen as the Town works with the railroad and through the parking committee. He noted that the meals tax is a direct driver of how the Town can pursue these efforts.
- CM Effros noted that the Council is also addressing the Pink House, which would add parking adjacent to Main Street. He noted that virtually all the projects currently under consideration relate to Main Street, including the streetscape, increased parking by the railroad tracks, and the Pink House. He stated that nearly all projects in Clifton, other than the playground, impact parking or the improvement of the street.
- Mr. Young noted that, as Mr. Yantis had mentioned, street parking following the streetscape would be reduced from what it is today, and that parking is not being added through this effort.
- VM Davis noted that while there would be one fewer parking space, the parking spaces in front of the café and pub would be better defined, which would allow people to park more effectively. He noted that the streetscape would also more clearly define the sidewalks and crosswalks, encouraging people to cross the street and arrive at that section of Main Street. He noted that the increased walkability and accessibility should result in a net positive, particularly in combination with the increased parking being pursued.
- The Town Administrator noted that she, and Geri and Susan Yantis had met with Mr. Young and Mr. McNamara the previous week regarding the streetscape, and that some concerns were raised following the meeting which she would summarize and send to the Council, specifically concerning flexibility during the streetscape process. She noted that at present, because of the number of parking spaces allotted, the restaurants are limited in the number of customers they can

serve, and posed the question to the Council of whether the restaurants could claim some of the spaces by the Pink House, which would give them the opportunity to serve more customers and provide additional flexibility.

- Mr. Young noted that when the restaurant initially took over the café, it was allocated six seats per parking space, and that this was later changed to four seats per space, the reason for which he is unaware of other than to constrain the restaurants.
- CM Effros noted that the change was likely intended to constrain parking, and that should the restaurants wish to pursue code changes, whether regarding music, parking, or any other matter, it would not be a quid pro quo for the matter under discussion, but rather would go before the Planning Commission by way of a proposal.
- Mr. Young noted that it ultimately comes down to the Council to decide what it wishes to do, and that if the Council does not wish to enter into a partnership, that is acceptable, but he does not see how the desired outcome can be achieved without working together.
- CM Effros noted that the Town also has a partnership with its citizens, who need to park in front of their homes, and that the Council has tried over the years to balance these needs.
- CM Poe noted that CM Effros was pointing out the process, and that the Planning Commission makes the recommendation on such matters.
- Mayor Screen inquired how it would play out should the Council expand the definition of how parking spaces are handled, and what it would look like physically within the restaurant should the restaurants be able to take advantage of such a change. She also invited Mr. Young to share more of his ideas.
- Mr. Young replied that the restaurants would have more seating, both indoor and outdoor. He also suggested better promotion, including a map of the area identifying the different restaurants, and greater collaboration among the restaurants.
- CM Effros noted that the Council has been discussing some of the things that could be done with the visitors' center, office, and Pink House, and that maps were among the items discussed, including a walking guide that would identify the restaurants and the trails.
- The Town Clerk noted that the Town need not wait for a physical space in order to put together a brochure, and that one could be made available at the post office, the Town Hall, and in the restaurants and retail spaces.
 - Discussion ensued regarding improvements to the Town's website and related matters.
- Mr. Young referenced situations such as Wolf Trap, which manages a significant parking demand by making use of grass areas for parking and has developed effective methods for identifying and managing such spaces.
 - CM Poe noted that the Town may run into issues with the floodplain.
 - CM Effros noted that there is a limitation on the floodplain.

- Mr. Young expressed that it is frustrating that when the restaurants bring forward suggestions, they are often presented with the various reasons why something cannot be done.
 - CM Effros replied that the Council has looked into these matters, and that Mr. Young simply may not have been aware.
- VM Davis provided an update regarding the Clifton Elementary School property. He noted that funding has been obtained to demolish the building, with demolition anticipated in FY2027–2028, and that no determination has yet been made as to the future use of the land. He noted that the land was originally to be exchanged with the parks department, that the Town has submitted a letter to the school board outlining what Clifton would like to see done, and that the Town has incorporated its wishes into its plan. He noted that there is only so much the Town can do, that the parking lot is currently unused, and that once the building is demolished the Town has suggested to the school board that the lot be filled in with gravel or similar material for parking. He noted that the biggest hurdle is the path down the hill, which discourages people from parking there and which ends before reaching Town, and that while this was included in the Council’s strategy session, it was agreed that other walkability projects ranked higher as they provide more immediate access to more heavily utilized pathways.
 - Mayor Screen noted that she did speak with a superintendent of Fairfax County Public Schools regarding the path, who passed the matter along to her maintenance staff, though that individual has not yet reached out to the Town Administrator. She noted that part of the conversation involved the superintendent’s lack of enthusiasm to spend money tearing the school down, and asked for the Town’s partnership on how to fund the building’s demolition; Mayor Screen believes this could lead to greater leverage in what happens with the property.
 - CM Effros noted that there is also a problem with asbestos in the building, and that its demolition would require remediation.
- Citizen Kevin Hutto noted that approximately 80% of the restaurants’ patrons come from outside of Town, and suggested that advertising be targeted outside of Town, which would help the other businesses as well.
 - CM Poe noted that this revenue source is appealing to residents, as it is paid in large part by people who have an outsized impact on the Town.
 - CM Effros noted that the Town conducted a study years ago regarding how many cars were passing through Town each night, which is when speed bumps were installed, and that the streetscape would slow traffic down further. Discussion ensued regarding the topic of a speed camera.
- The Town Administrator noted that Mr. Young and the restaurants had submitted a letter a year or more ago, and suggested that it would be worth recirculating it to the new Council members. She noted that she would locate the letter and provide it to everyone.
- CM Hencken noted that she first met Mr. Young at her first meeting, at which he shared his presentation, and that it opened her eyes to the perspective of the restaurants. She stated that, as someone new to the Council, she wishes to keep the needs and requests of the restaurants top of mind, and she thanked Mr. Young for sharing that perspective.

Wayne H. Nickum Town Hall
12641 Chapel Road
Clifton, VA 20124

Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 309
Clifton, VA 20124

- **VM Davis made a motion to approve payment to Dwayne Nitz in the amount of \$1,950.00. The motion was seconded by CM Poe and approved by roll call:**
CM Hess: Aye
CM Hencken: Aye
CM Poe: Aye
VM Davis: Aye
Mayor Screen: Aye
CM Effros: Aye
- Mayor Screen thanked all in attendance for their time and comments.
- **CM Effros made a motion to adjourn the meeting; the motion was seconded by CM Poe and approved by poll, 6-0. The meeting was adjourned at 8:25 PM.**

Clifton Meals Tax Increase – Public Meeting

Our Restaurant's Dilemma

June 15, 2026

Clifton's Meals Tax increased from 0% to 2% in May 2024 when it was approved by the Town Council. This tax of 2% additional cost to restaurant guests is applied to all food and beverage sales in a restaurant and represented the first regular source of income for the Town in its recent history. At the time it was implemented, a member of the Town Council championed 2% since, *"We would be substantially below the Fairfax County proposed 4% Meals Tax if it were implemented."* (which it was in January of this year). The restaurants shared a common view of this tax, *"That if this could be developed as a Win-Win for both the residents and the restaurants with both benefiting, we would view it as a positive step forward."*

Prior to the Meals Tax implementation, the Town relied on fund-raising events like the Haunted Trail and the Clifton Gala for support of Town expenses. The Clifton Betterment Association (CBA) also sponsors events like the Clifton 5K and Clifton Day to raise funds, but these are not included in the Town of Clifton budget.

Most other Northern Virginia municipalities charge meals taxes ranging from 0% (Loudoun County) to 5% (City of Alexandria) with most charging 4% (Fairfax County included). The towns of Herndon and Vienna charge 4.5% & 4% respectively and also levy a town-level real estate tax on top of the Fairfax County base property tax rate which adds an additional 24% and 17% respectively to the real estate base tax rate charged by Fairfax County in these municipalities.

Impact of the Meals Tax on the Town Budget:

The Town of Clifton for its FY-27 budget (July 1 start) has proposed a 3% Meals Tax (contributing ~\$350,000 per year) that, if implemented as of July 1st, will pay for **64%** of the total expenses in the Town's annual budget of ~\$542,000. When you add the additional business and professional license taxes the Town charges restaurants (some ~\$20,000), together these two taxes pay for **68%** of the Town's annual expenses!

It is important to note that the total Town expenses do not include funds for any pay increases in FY 2027 for Town staff, or the costs for refurbishment of the

proposed playground equipment in Harris Park, or costs to cover the Town's portion of the proposed Pink House refurbishment, or any potential cost growth in the StreetScape project along Main Street and Chapel. These Capital projects add at least an additional \$450,000 and possibly much more. Such projects, however, need to be evaluated to determine where multi-year funding may be possible or where other sources of revenue (grants, loans or bonds) may be used to pick up reasonable portions of these programs.

Impact of the Meals Tax on the Restaurants:

One might think that since the proposed 3% Meals Tax is applied to our **restaurant guests**, that the restaurants themselves are not impacted, but this is a false assumption. Increased costs to our restaurant guests through the Meals Tax, places a serious constraint on how much we can adjust our own menu pricing to remain profitable and stay in business while experiencing escalating operating costs. Increasing menu prices on top of applying an increased Meals Tax will drive guests away.

A recent 2026 nation-wide restaurant assessment found, *“That while revenues are higher due to menu price increases, customer traffic and guest counts are actually down. Restaurant operators face tightened profit margins due to surging labor, food and other costs, and **consumers are increasingly becoming price sensitive.**”*

Pre-tax margins in restaurants remain razor-thin at 3% to 5%. Labor costs are taking up roughly 34% to 36% of sales, while food costs have risen significantly over the last five years. Clifton Café's electricity costs have risen 40% over the past 12 months. And this is not increased usage of electricity; this is the increase in the raw cost per KWH. Similarly, our propane costs have escalated by more than 14% per gallon. Our insurance costs have increased by more than 24% (with no insurance claims!) and we are looking at inflation (CPI) impacting most other costs by at least 5% this year. We are already seeing more than this level of increase in the cost of our wholesale food costs from last year.

Growth has a larger impact on restaurant profits than other retail businesses due to a higher percentage of fixed costs and is paramount to our survival. Unlike retail stores that can increase the quantity of goods they sell, restaurants in Clifton are constrained by the number of seats we are allowed by the Town. If our restaurant

business declines by 10% because of fewer people eating out or eating out less often, or purchasing less expensive meals and drinks, the result would cost the Town \$37,000 in lost annual income from reduced taxes. If our restaurants were able to increase sales by 10% through more seats, the Town's revenue would increase by \$37,000 annually. This is more annual income than any other single source of revenue in the current Town budget for 2027!

Benefits of our 3% Meals Tax to the Restaurants:

The restaurants in Clifton are hard pressed to identify any tangible value—creating a Win-Win for our restaurants and the Town—from the previous 2% Meals Tax that began two years ago, nor from the proposed 3% Meals Tax planned for FY-27.

We continue to advocate for elements of measurable value in attracting and serving more guests to overcome the financial limits the Town's Meals Tax creates for us. In addition to our own internal efforts to ensure delivery of a diversity of desirable food and drink, excellent quality and consistency, great service, as well as the ambiance in each of our establishments, we continue to seek the following accommodations from the Town:

- Easing of the tight constraint on “seats” allowed in our restaurants, based on parking spaces we own or can lease.

- More public parking,

- Use of comfortable music in our outside seating areas, and

- Improved advertising and promotion within the Town for our restaurants through permanent signage, the Town's website, and the creation of Town maps

In conclusion, we seek a well-defined “WIN-WIN” outcome with the Town to ensure our Restaurants thrive. You would think such an outcome would be eminently desirable for the Town and its Residents, considering that the Restaurant's taxes contribute **68%** of the total Town operating expenses!

Respectfully,

Greg Young
Clifton Cafe



Clifton Clerk <clerk@cliftonva.gov>

Re: Join the Public Hearing on Meals Tax Increase

dbaciocco@verizon.net <dbaciocco@verizon.net>
To: clerk@cliftonva.gov

Mon, Jun 15, 2026 at 5:25 PM

Good afternoon

I will be unable to attend tonight's public hearing on raising the town's meal tax.

I am not opposed to this, but would suggest that it ONLY be raised to match a level of need for the town. In other words, if the projected expenditures for FY26-27 can be covered by a 1% increase, that is all that it should be raised. Further increases can be addressed as the town's needs change. It's been my experience that once taxes are raised, they are rarely decreased.

Thanks, and all the best
Dave Baciocco
7241 Dell Ave

[Sent from the all new AOL app for iOS](#)

On Saturday, June 13, 2026, 11:11 AM, Clifton Clerk <clerk-cliftonva.gov@shared1.ccsend.com> wrote:



Good afternoon Residents and Friends of Clifton,

Please note that as advertised and pursuant to Va Code Section 58.1-3007, the Town of Clifton will be holding a Public Hearing at **7:30PM on Monday, June 15, 2026**, at the Town Hall located at 12641 Chapel Rd. The Hearing is regarding a change to the Town Code, Chapter 16, Section 16-03 (Levy) to increase the Town Meals Tax by 1% or greater, beginning in Fiscal Year 2027. This would be an increase from the current 2% tax in place.

Written comments may be submitted via email to clerk@cliftonva.gov and via regular U.S. mail to P.O. Box 309, Clifton, VA, 20124 no later June 14, 2026. Written comments will be entered into the record but may not be read aloud.

The Town Council will then meet at **8PM on Thursday, June 25, 2026** at the aforementioned Town Hall to vote on the Meals Tax potential increases. This meeting will be held right after the Streetscape bid opening meeting at 7:30PM.

We hope to see you at these upcoming special meetings!

Sincerely,
Kerrie Gogoel (she/her)
Town Clerk, Clifton, VA

6/15/26, 5:36 PM

cliftonva.gov Mail - Re: Join the Public Hearing on Meals Tax Increase

Clifton Clerk | PO Box 309 | Clifton, VA 20124 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email & social marketing for free!



Clifton Clerk <clerk@cliftonva.gov>

Meals Tax increase

1 message

villagetimesaver@aol.com <villagetimesaver@aol.com>
To: clerk@cliftonva.gov

Sat, Jun 13, 2026 at 11:23 AM

Dear Mayor and Council Members,

I am writing to express my support for the 1 per cent increase on the current meals tax for the Town of Clifton.

I have never avoided eating in any restaurant because of a meals tax the same as I don't avoid toll roads if it's the fastest way to get where I want to go.

Sincerely yours,
Donna Netschert

[Sent from the all new AOL app for iOS](#)



Clifton Clerk <clerk@cliftonva.gov>

Re: Join the Public Hearing on Meals Tax Increase

1 message

James Chesley <jcchesley@aol.com>
To: "clerk@cliftonva.gov" <clerk@cliftonva.gov>

Sat, Jun 13, 2026 at 11:56 AM

I support the meals tax increase.

On Saturday, June 13, 2026 at 11:11:29 AM EDT, Clifton Clerk <clerk-cliftonva.gov@shared1.ccsend.com> wrote:



Good afternoon Residents and Friends of Clifton,

Please note that as advertised and pursuant to Va Code Section 58.1-3007, the Town of Clifton will be holding a Public Hearing at **7:30PM on Monday, June 15, 2026**, at the Town Hall located at 12641 Chapel Rd. The Hearing is regarding a change to the Town Code, Chapter 16, Section 16-03 (Levy) to increase the Town Meals Tax by 1% or greater, beginning in Fiscal Year 2027. This would be an increase from the current 2% tax in place.

Written comments may be submitted via email to clerk@cliftonva.gov and via regular U.S. mail to P.O. Box 309, Clifton, VA, 20124 no later June 14, 2026. Written comments will be entered into the record but may not be read aloud.

The Town Council will then meet at **8PM on Thursday, June 25, 2026** at the aforementioned Town Hall to vote on the Meals Tax potential increases. This meeting will be held right after the Streetscape bid opening meeting at 7:30PM.

We hope to see you at these upcoming special meetings!

Sincerely,
Kerrie Gogoel (she/her)
Town Clerk, Clifton, VA

Clifton Clerk | PO Box 309 | Clifton, VA 20124 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email & social marketing for free!