

MINUTES – REGULAR
MEETING BOONE TOWN COUNCIL
February 11th, 2026

CALL TO ORDER

A regular meeting of the Boone Town Council was called to order at 9:00 a.m. on Wednesday, February 11, 2026 in the Town Council Chambers located at 1500 Blowing Rock Road in Boone. Mayor Dalton George presided. Councilmembers present included Mayor Pro-Tem Todd Carter, Councilmember Virginia Roseman, Councilmember Eric Plaag, and Councilmember Adrian Tait. Staff present included Interim Town Manager Dale Presnell, Grants Coordinator Laney Wise, Public Works Director Todd Moody, Planning Director Jane Shook, Deputy Planning Director Brandon Wise, Cultural Resources Director Mark Freed, Finance Director Guy Miller, Police Chief Daniel Duckworth, and Downtown Boone Development Coordinator Lane Moody (Virtual). Town Attorney Allison Meade was also in attendance.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

Mayor George asked for a brief moment of silence.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mayor George read the following board vacancies:

BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT

Three alternate positions

HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

Two regular positions

TOWN COUNCIL

One position

After asking if any councilmember had any additional announcements, Mayor George moved to the next item on the agenda.

TENTATIVE AGENDA ADOPTION

Mayor George asked for a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Mayor Pro-Tem Carter made the motion, seconded by Councilmember Roseman, to approve the agenda as presented.

VOTE:

Aye: Todd Carter, Virginia Roseman, Eric Plaag, Adrian Tait

Nay: None

Absent: None

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor George provided a brief overview of the guidelines for public comment and then opened the public comment period.

- Donna Lisenby of Indivisible High Country provided public comment regarding the consideration of the special event permit for the No Kings Day Parade in Boone. Ms. Lisenby began by giving a brief overview of prior Indivisible High Country events, explaining that previous No Kings Day events were held in West Jefferson and Lenoir due to other events planned in the Town of Boone. She went on to explain why March 28 was chosen as the date for this event and noted the timing. Ms. Lisenby also provided an overview of the No Kings Day event in West Jefferson and explained that the road was closed for the event due to safety concerns. She further stated that no food would be provided at the No Kings Day event, allowing attendees to purchase food in Downtown Boone after the event and support local businesses in the downtown business district. She concluded by noting that this was the first time a group not affiliated with the Town of Boone had requested a road closure of King Street and urged the Boone Town Council to approve the special event permit and to choose love in Boone.
- Diane Nilan of Indivisible High Country also provided public comment regarding the consideration of the special event permit for the No Kings Day Parade in Boone. Ms. Nilan explained that, while she was relatively new to the area, she helped form Indivisible Watauga and has watched the group grow. She went on to say that she expected this upcoming event to be the largest No Kings Day event hosted by Indivisible High Country and expressed hope that the Boone Town Council would approve the road closure request.
- Joan Braunun of Indivisible High Country also provided public comment in support of the No Kings Day event. She explained that standing up for democracy can come with inconvenience but noted that it is extremely important for the Boone community to peacefully protest, given the current federal administration. She then urged Council to approve the permit under consideration.

Mayor George asked if anyone else in attendance wished to speak.

- Dustin Hofsess requested to speak and discussed his experience living on the unpaved portion of Junaluska Road. He noted that, while he is a Town of Boone resident, his road is not plowed because it is an NCDOT road, and he asked the Boone Town Council to submit a request to NCDOT to take over maintenance of the entire Junaluska Road.

Mayor George thanked everyone who provided public comment and moved to the next item on the agenda.

REQUESTED APPEARANCES

Southern Appalachian Historical Association - Marrena Greer

Mayor George invited Ms. Marrena Greer of the Southern Appalachian Historical Association (SAHA) to present. Ms. Greer thanked Council and provided an operational update regarding Horn in the West and the Hickory Ridge Museum. After providing the update, Ms. Greer asked the Town of Boone to consider assisting Horn in the West, noting that America 250 was in full swing.

Councilmember Plaag asked Ms. Greer whether they had received grants to assist with the production of Horn in the West, noting that the State of South Carolina had granted organizations such as SAHA funds to help increase productions for America 250. Ms. Greer stated that they had received \$10,000 from Watauga County as part of its allocation of America 250 funds; however, those funds were used in October to support George Washington Day. She then provided a brief overview of additional grant sources for which SAHA had applied and explained that they had not received any awards.

Mayor George recognized Councilmember Roseman. Councilmember Roseman began by providing a brief overview of the history between SAHA and the Town of Boone and explained that the Town should increase its support for SAHA, as this year is America 250. She noted that during a previous Council meeting, Council had allocated \$20,000 for a Boonerang stage and asked Council to consider finding \$12,000 within the budget to help cover the opening costs for the 74th season of Horn in the West. Councilmember Plaag noted that Boonerang is a Town of Boone event, not an outside agency event, and that Digital Watauga may be a better comparison. He added that Digital Watauga provides a direct service to Town of Boone employees, whereas SAHA does not. Councilmember Roseman noted the economic boost SAHA provides to Boone, and Mayor Pro Tem Carter stated that he would prefer the Town of Boone match donations, citing that if SAHA raised \$12,000, the Town would match it. Mayor Pro Tem Carter then provided examples of tangible items for which SAHA could raise funds and explained that when donors have a concrete item to fund, they are more likely to contribute than they are to an intangible cause.

A discussion was held regarding fundraising techniques. Councilmember Plaag asked Attorney Meade and Mr. Presnell to review the downstream implications of allocating funds to an outside agency outside of its funding cycle. Mayor George clarified that the discussion to fund a stage for Boonerang had been discussed with staff prior to the meeting to ensure that the funds were available and noted that this discussion could be continued during the Daniel Boone Summit scheduled for March. Attorney Meade explained that the Town of Boone has the legal authority to support art programs without specific limits and noted that the only restriction on the Town would be the availability of funds to support the program.

Councilmember Plaag asked that the conversation be placed on hold until the Daniel Boone Summit, and Council agreed. Ms. Greer thanked Council for their time.

CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor George asked Council if they had any questions regarding the items on the consent agenda. Councilmember Plaag asked Mr. Presnell to provide additional information regarding the 7% increase in parking facility costs for the Public Works office. Mr. Moody provided a brief overview of the price increase, noting that the parking lot located next to the facility is owned by a different entity than the Public Works office.

Mayor George asked Council if they had any other comments regarding the proposed items on the consent agenda. Attorney Meade noted that Mr. Matt Dull from Appalachian State University was present to answer any questions Council may have regarding the item entitled “MOU with App State Regarding Consultation as to Development.” Attorney Meade provided a brief overview of why the MOU was developed and explained that it was created in collaboration with Appalachian State.

Hearing no further comments, Mayor George asked for a motion to approve the consent agenda.

Mayor Pro-Tem Carter made a motion, which was seconded by Councilmember Plaag, to approve the consent agenda as presented .

VOTE:

Aye: Todd Carter, Virginia Roseman, Eric Plaag, Adrian Tait

Nay: None

Absent: None

The following items were approved:

1. Consideration and Approval - MOU with AppState Regarding Consultation as to Development
2. Approval of Lease Agreement - McCreary (Public Works Employee Parking)
3. Approval of Budget Amendments
4. Approval of Minutes
 - a. January 14, 2026 Regular Town Council Meeting
 - b. January 28, 2026 Regular Town Council Meeting
5. Approval of Proclamation - Black History Month

COUNCIL MATTERS

Consideration of Special Event Permit - No Kings Boone Parade

Councilmember Plaag began by noting that, while public comment is not meant to be conversational, he wanted it on record that he fully supports the work of Indivisible High Country. He went on to say that there is currently a false claim that free speech rights were restricted in the Town of Boone and explained that he has attended many rallies held on public sidewalks. He voiced concern about changing an existing policy regarding road closures for non-Town of Boone-sanctioned events, explaining that he was concerned that changing the policy could open the door to unsavory parades, such as KKK rallies. A discussion was held regarding previous road closures in the Town of Boone and Ms. Meade discussed First Amendment considerations at length.

Mayor Pro Tem Carter noted that he would vote yes on this parade, and Councilmember Roseman agreed. Attorney Meade reminded Council that demonstrations on sidewalks may take place as a matter of First Amendment right and noted that this discussion was not about whether the Boone Town Council was voting to approve the event per se; rather, Council’s role was to determine whether the event would take place on the sidewalk only or on the roadway, depending

on whether Council approved the proposed road closure. Mayor Pro Tem Carter explained that in the past he had attended multiple marches and protests on the sidewalks of downtown Boone; however, he stated that this event was planned to have more than 1,000 attendees and that the road should be closed. Mayor George asked Town staff to provide an overview of how events such as these affect Town of Boone resources.

Chief Duckworth began by explaining that during his time with the Town of Boone, he had not experienced a similar event proposal that was not a Town of Boone event. He stated that Ms. Lisenby had been easy to work with and that, of the events organized by Ms. Lisenby, no major incidents had occurred. He noted that for this particular event, he recommended a rolling one-lane closure with bike patrol and cones to increase safety and reduce costs for the Town of Boone. Councilmember Roseman expressed concern that drivers might intentionally swerve into the closed lane, and Councilmember Plaag agreed, noting that something similar had happened during a previous march in which he participated. He asked Chief Duckworth whether it would be safer to close the entire road, and Chief Duckworth stated that it would.

Attorney Meade asked Ms. Lisenby whether she had an estimate of attendees. Ms. Lisenby stated that she estimated between 2,000 and 4,000 attendees, noting that while approximately 1,000 people may register to attend, additional participants often join, significantly increasing the total. Attorney Meade recommended that Council not waive the special event permit fee for sake of treating applicants uniformly. Councilmember Roseman asked Attorney Meade what the fee would be, and Attorney Meade stated that she believed the fee was approximately \$1,500 but that staff would need to confirm. Mr. Moody voiced concerns regarding Public Works staff, explaining that staff had already worked significant overtime this year due to winter weather and that winter was not yet over. Mr. Freed explained that the Town of Boone typically submits road closure resolutions to NCDOT 60 days in advance of an event and noted that if Council were to approve the road closure for this event, a signed resolution would need to be passed that day. Councilmember Plaag reiterated that a road closure was necessary for public safety.

Councilmember Plaag made a motion, which was seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Carter, to approve the request submitted by Indivisible High Country and to issue the special event permit for the No Kings Day Parade, set to take place on March 28, 2026, at 10:30 a.m., and to direct Town staff to prepare the required ordinance for submission to NCDOT to close a section of King Street, to be approved at the end of the agenda.

Mayor George asked for discussion. Councilmember Tait asked whether staff could provide additional information regarding how road closures are handled for other events. Mr. Moody explained that road closures are typically handled internally by Town staff. Attorney Meade asked why this event was not handled internally, and Mr. Moody clarified that all new events requiring a road closure are presented to Council. Council discussed past events and noted that they would like to revisit the fee structure for special event permits at a later date.

Hearing no additional comments, Mayor George asked for a vote on the presented motion.

VOTE:

Aye: Todd Carter, Virginia Roseman, Eric Plaag, Adrian Tait

Nay: None

Absent: None

Mayor George called for a break at 10:30 a.m..

Discussion Regarding Town Maintenance Options for Certain NCDOT Roads

Mayor George resumed the meeting at 10:38 a.m.

Councilmember Plaag began by reiterating Mr. Hofsess' comments during the public comment period and explained that both he and Councilmember Tait have had very similar experiences, as they both live off Junaluska Road. He went on to say that NCDOT often does not service Junaluska Road and provided a brief overview of the road conditions during and after Hurricane Helene, as well as the typical maintenance issues the road experiences during a normal year. Councilmember Plaag explained that Junaluska Road is not the only neighborhood experiencing such issues and noted that the Fairway Drive community has expressed similar concerns. He concluded by stating that road maintenance and clearing issues are not merely an inconvenience for community members but pose serious public safety concerns, noting that when roads are not clear, the Fire Department may be unable to reach homes during an emergency. He asked how Council or Town staff could begin a conversation with NCDOT regarding maintenance of NCDOT-maintained secondary roads within the Town of Boone.

Councilmember Tait reiterated Councilmember Plaag's comments and noted that he could understand how this situation developed over time with increased annexations into the Town of Boone. Councilmember Tait asked Attorney Meade what the process would be to enter into an agreement with NCDOT to assume maintenance responsibility for overlooked roads. Attorney Meade explained that this is a general issue with NCDOT and stated that, from a policy perspective, taking over a service that residents already pay for through state taxes without requiring NCDOT to fulfill its responsibilities would be difficult to justify. Councilmember Plaag acknowledged that perspective but reiterated that the problems residents are experiencing on specific streets have not been addressed by NCDOT and continue to pose safety risks.

Mr. Moody explained that five or six years ago, the Town asked NCDOT whether it could assume maintenance of Junaluska Road and North Water Street, but NCDOT denied the request. He added that some of the listed roads extend beyond Town of Boone limits, which places the Town in a difficult position. Mr. Moody also discussed the current strain on Town staff regarding maintenance of existing Town streets, especially during the winter season when storms frequently occur on weekends or after hours, as they have this winter. Councilmember Roseman asked about maintenance on Tall Timber Trail, and Mr. Moody explained that within the Town of Boone there are more than 15 miles of private and state-maintained roads, which can make it difficult for residents to determine who is responsible for maintenance. Mayor Pro Tem Carter asked Mr. Moody whether it would be possible to resubmit the request to NCDOT given staff turnover at the agency over the years, and Mr. Moody stated that it could be possible.

Mayor George noted that no representative from NCDOT has attended a Boone Town Council meeting during his tenure and stated that having an NCDOT representative speak with Council could be beneficial. Mr. Moody recommended engaging with an NCDOT representative at the RPO meeting as a good starting point, and Mayor George agreed. Councilmember Roseman asked that the media present note that the Town of Boone's hands are tied in some of these decisions but that Council is working to find the best solution. Hearing no further comments, Mayor George moved to the next item.

Discussion Regarding Town Manager Hiring Process

Mayor George introduced Dr. Patricia Mitchell to Council and provided a brief overview of their prior discussions regarding the Town Manager hiring process. Dr. Mitchell thanked Council for their time and provided a brief overview of her work with local governments, the State of North Carolina, and her current role as the MPA Program Director at Appalachian State University. Mayor George explained that during the previous Town Manager hiring process, Mr. Presnell led the search. However, because he is currently serving as Interim Town Manager, he would be unable to conduct or assist with the search.

Councilmember Plaag asked Attorney Meade what the Town's threshold was for contracting personnel services, and Attorney Meade stated that the State does not dictate a threshold for personnel services. Councilmember Plaag then asked Council for input. Mayor George noted that working with an individual rooted in the community could help ensure that candidates selected for interviews align with Boone's needs and mentioned that Ms. Wise is a graduate of the MPA program. Councilmember Roseman asked about the anticipated time frame and consulting rate for Dr. Mitchell's services, and Mr. Presnell explained that when he previously led the search, he received a temporary 30% salary increase.

A discussion was held regarding Dr. Mitchell's professional network through MPA graduates and her prior positions with the State of North Carolina. Councilmember Tait asked Dr. Mitchell whether she would be acting as a headhunter for the search. Dr. Mitchell stated that she could serve in that role and recommended that the position also be posted on regional and national sites targeting potential town managers. Mayor George explained that a key role for Dr. Mitchell would be helping to distinguish qualified from unqualified candidates. Mayor George asked Mr. Presnell whether Ms. Council, the Town's Human Resources Specialist, would have the capacity to assist Dr. Mitchell with the process, and Mr. Presnell stated that she would. Attorney Meade noted that Ms. Council and Mr. Presnell would need to have no contact regarding this process due to Mr. Presnell's intent to apply for the permanent Town Manager position, and Dr. Mitchell and Mr. Presnell agreed.

Mayor George proposed that initial interviews be conducted virtually, with final candidates interviewed in person. He also proposed appointing specific stakeholders throughout the Town to a task force for the process. Councilmember Plaag asked about allowing public feedback during the final interview stage. Mayor George explained that fully public interviews could create issues for candidates currently employed by other municipalities. Dr. Mitchell agreed. Mr. Presnell

explained that during the previous Town Manager search, final candidates each presented to a stakeholder group; however, he noted that candidates did not fully grasp the expectations and were unprepared. Mayor George asked whether Council would feel comfortable directing Mr. Presnell to share prior Town Manager search information with Dr. Mitchell. Attorney Meade reiterated that while Mr. Presnell could and should share historical information with Dr. Mitchell, he should not otherwise participate in the process.

Mayor George discussed the residency requirement with Council. Dr. Mitchell noted that, while not her decision, requiring residency within the Town's jurisdiction could be beneficial. Mr. Presnell noted that Blowing Rock had listed its residency requirement as either within town limits or within the fire district. Dr. Mitchell added that including detailed information about the Town of Boone in the job description would be important, as some candidates may not be familiar with the community. Council discussed residency requirements for the future Town Manager, and no final decision was made. Attorney Meade asked Dr. Mitchell about her consulting rate. Dr. Mitchell provided a brief overview of her fees. Attorney Meade suggested that a "not-to-exceed" clause could be included in the contract, and Dr. Mitchell agreed. Dr. Mitchell requested payment at the end of the contract period but agreed to submit monthly invoices for hour and process tracking.

Councilmember Plaag asked Dr. Mitchell about her estimated timeline, and Dr. Mitchell stated that the early timeline would remain fluid depending on the number of applications received. Councilmember Roseman suggested offering Dr. Mitchell a rate of \$100 per hour with a cap of \$35,000. Dr. Mitchell agreed to these terms and noted that at the conclusion of the consulting period she intends to donate any funds received to the MPA program to further enhance the program. Mayor George asked Attorney Meade to draft a contract for approval at the next Boone Town Council meeting, and Attorney Meade agreed.

Council provided consensus to proceed with Dr. Mitchell's consulting services at a rate of \$100 per hour, not to exceed \$35,000, to assist with the Town of Boone Town Manager search process.

Appointment to Board of Adjustment

Councilmember Roseman nominated Owen Larsen to the open alternate seat on the Board of Adjustment, with the term expiring in June 2027.

Council provided consensus appointing Mr. Larson to the open alternate seat with the term ending in 2027.

Appointment to Town Council

Mayor George noted that the application from Mr. Abee listed an address that was not within the Boone Town limits, disqualifying him from the position. Councilmember Plaag nominated Ms. Anne Pruitt, noting her service on the Town of Boone Planning Commission and her background. Councilmember Roseman and Mayor Pro Tem Carter agreed.

With no other nominations being made, the Mayor put the nomination to ballot and all Council members cast their ballots in favor of Ms. Pruitt.

Approval of the Road Closure Ordinance for No Kings Day Parade

Attorney Meade informed Council that a draft ordinance had been reduced to writing and emailed to Council for approval of the request to close King Street for the No Kings Day Parade as was discussed early in the meeting.

Mayor Pro-Tem Carter made a motion, which was seconded by Councilmember Plaag, to adopt the ordinance as presented.

VOTE:

Aye: Todd Carter, Virginia Roseman, Eric Plaag, Adrian Tait

Nay: None

Absent: None

MAYOR REPORT

Mayor George provided an update regarding the Downtown Boone Development Association's budget retreat and noted the strong engagement from the Downtown Boone community. He then provided a brief overview of a housing-focused meeting held by the High Country Council of Governments in Ashe County and explained that mayors from Ashe County are experiencing a housing crisis similar to Boone's. He stated that the meeting was productive and demonstrated that the issues affecting Boone are also impacting the region as a whole. He concluded by noting that the first event of the Mayor's Environmental Task Force would be held on February 27 at Strawberry Hill in partnership with Transition Blue Ridge.

TOWN MANAGER REPORT

Mr. Presnell began by explaining that he and Mr. Miller had met with the Local Government Commission (LGC), which provided several options to finance the Public Works building. He noted that the LGC recommended a traditional financing option as the quickest approach, though a limited obligation bond could also be feasible.

Mr. Presnell then briefed Council on a \$538,000 contribution-based cap liability resulting from a recent employee retirement. He explained that under the North Carolina retirement system, benefits are based on an employee's highest four years of salary, which can create a liability if contributions do not cover higher late-career salaries. Councilmember Plaag noted that the issue reflects a system flaw rather than any action by the Town or the employee. Mr. Presnell stated that the Town is exploring payment options, including 15- or 27-month amortization schedules or incorporating the liability into ongoing contributions. He explained that other employees hired prior to 2015 could trigger similar future liabilities, while employees hired after 2015 are treated differently. Council discussed potential policy changes to reduce future risk and the possibility of setting aside reserves in upcoming budgets. Mayor George noted that this item would need to be discussed separately, and Councilmember Tait asked that it be brought back to Council at a later meeting when more information is available.

Mr. Presnell then asked Council to reschedule the facilities tour due to conflicts. After a brief discussion, Council provided consensus to reschedule the facilities tours to March 6 and March 30.

Mr. Presnell then provided the following staff updates:

- Chief Duckworth had moved the identification process for towing and booting companies to the Police Department.
- The audio/visual audit for Council Chambers was scheduled to take place on Monday, February 16.
- Sherri Adams from the North Carolina Department of Commerce met with the Downtown Boone Development Association and had positive feedback. Mr. Presnell noted that she would be sending a report detailing recommended changes, including modifying Ms. Moody's title from Downtown Boone Development Coordinator to Downtown Boone Development Director.
- Mr. Presnell attended Fourth Amendment workplace training and will be developing a training program for employees.

TOWN ATTORNEY REPORT

Attorney Meade had nothing to report.

BOARD LIAISON REPORT

The following Councilmembers provided reports:

- Councilmember Roseman reported that the Watauga County Parks and Recreation Board would be meeting that evening and that she planned to raise the idea of food trucks at that meeting. She noted that the Historic Preservation Commission did not meet in February and that she was unable to attend the previous Human Relations Commission meeting. She also provided an update on the Cultural Resources Advisory Board, including attendance at Boone's Got Talent, the winning acts, and the date of the Boonerang Festival documentary screening.
- Mayor Pro Tem Carter reported that he attended the Boone TDA meeting as the Town of Boone representative and provided an overview of a potential project the TDA may pursue to help connect tourists with arts, culture, trails, and other attractions in Watauga County. He also provided an update on the Human Relations Commission, noting that the Commission is beginning to develop a strategic plan and highlighting two upcoming events.
- Mayor George reported that the Sustainability Committee is discussing updates to the Boone Community Climate Action Plan.
- Councilmember Plaag reported that he had nothing to report.
- Councilmember Tait discussed the quarterly partners meeting between the Town of Boone, Appalachian State University, Watauga County, and the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce. He explained that while no action was taken, there was willingness among all attendees to work together on major issues impacting the Boone community. He also reported on the Downtown Boone Development Association meeting, where the upcoming strategic planning session was discussed. He noted that communications

regarding parking in Downtown Boone were raised and that there was discussion about a communications position within the Town of Boone.

Mayor George asked if there were any other items to discuss. Hearing none, he asked for a motion to adjourn.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Pro Tem Carter made a motion, which was seconded by Councilmember Plaag, to adjourn the February 11th, 2026 Boone Town Council meeting.

VOTE:

Aye: Todd Carter, Virginia Roseman, Eric Plaag, Adrian Tait

Nay: None

Absent: None

The meeting was adjourned at 12:36 p.m..