MINUTES – REGULAR MEETING BOONE TOWN COUNCIL
March 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, Councilmember Adrian Tait, and Councilmember Anne Pruitt. 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 Major Jon Houck, and Parking Manager Reta Jackson. Town Attorney Allison Meade was also in attendance.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

Mayor George asked for a brief moment of silence.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Announcement of Board Vacancies

Mayor George read the following board vacancies:

BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT
Two alternate positions

HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION
Two regular positions

PLANNING COMMISSION
Two regular positions

Council Member Announcement

Mayor George asked Councilmember Plaag to begin. Councilmember Plaag thanked Mayor George, and asked to read the letter he submitted to the agenda packet into the record. Councilmember Plaag read the following:

As I have informally and privately expressed to many of you in the past few weeks, for a variety of personal and family reasons, my wife Teresa and I have determined that it is no longer tenable for us to reside year-round in Boone. When we moved to Boone in 2011, we believed wholeheartedly that this community would be our "forever home," the place where we would one day retire. Almost from the moment that we arrived, I became involved in local organizations and government boards that help support this tremendous community. I was proud to be a member of the Appalachian Theatre Task Force beginning in 2011, then to transition in 2012 to service on the board of the Appalachian Theatre. As a professional historian, I delighted in serving on the Historic Preservation Commission, first from 2012 to 2014 as a member, then from 2014 to 2023 as the HPC Chair, overseeing countless preservation projects for our downtown area and surrounding resources. | firmly believe that my service on the Downtown Boone Development Association from 2013 to 2016 and as Vice Chair of the Planning Commission from 2018 to 2023 helped me build key relationships and learn more about our local government so that I could serve responsibly on Town Council beginning in 2023. And of course, J am so grateful to have met Bettie Bond and worked with her to resurrect the Watauga County Historical Society and co-found the Digital Watauga Project in 2014. I have learned so much about Boone and Watauga County through the generosity of our collection donors and the stories about our past that they have so graciously shared with me and the project more broadly over the years.

Now, though, it is time to step aside as Teresa and I prepare to pursue new adventures outside of this amazing community. While we are keeping our house in Boone and plan to return annually (if not more often) to see friends, colleagues, and our found family here, I will not be able to continue my ongoing service to Boone in the form of elected office. My resignation from my position on Town Council will be effective at 11:59pm on March 29, 2026. It has been an honor and a pleasure to serve with all of you. 1 am so grateful for the friendships I have made and relationships | have built with all of you and so many members of the Town staff over the years. I have learned so much from you and deeply appreciate your commitment to making Boone an outstanding place to live, work, and play, and a community worthy of calling one's "forever home."

Mayor George stated that he had enjoyed working alongside Councilmember Plaag and noted the effort he had put into helping the Boone community. Councilmember Tait acknowledged Councilmember Plaag's thoughtful approach to issues affecting the Boone community and explained that he had inspired him to run for elected office. Attorney Meade noted Councilmember Plaag's comprehensive approach to difficult issues and thanked him for his open-mindedness while serving on the Boone Town Council. Mayor Pro-Tem Carter stated that he respected Councilmember Plaag's perspective on multiple issues affecting the Boone community and wished him well in his next endeavor. Councilmember Roseman thanked Councilmember Plaag for his ability to relate to all councilmembers and for his ability to lighten the mood when conversations became tense. Councilmember Pruitt wished Councilmember Plaag well in his next adventure. Mr. Presnell thanked Councilmember Plaag for his service on the Boone Town Council. Councilmember Plaag thanked everyone for allowing him to serve.

TENTATIVE AGENDA ADOPTION

Mayor George asked for a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Councilmember Roseman made the motion, which was seconded by Councilmember Tait, to approve the agenda as presented.

VOTE:

Aye: Todd Carter, Virginia Roseman, Eric Plaag, Adrian Tait, Anne Pruitt
Nay: None
Absent: None

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor George opened the public comment period and invited Mr. David Jackson to speak.

- Mr. Jackson thanked Council and wished Councilmember Plaag well in his future endeavors. He then provided a brief overview of newly released information regarding the Blue Ridge Parkway road project, which could begin as early as March 13, 2026. Councilmember Plaag asked whether work on Wilson Ridge Road would occur during the same timeframe, and Mr. Jackson stated that he had been assured it would not.
- Ms. Nancy LaPlaca provided an overview of a recent rate increase implemented by Appalachian State University's New River Light and Power. She noted that no public hearing had been held and requested that Council ask New River Light and Power to conduct one. Councilmember Plaag shared that he had raised the issue during the previous week's budget retreat and expressed concern that a 30% increase would negatively impact Boone households. Mayor George indicated support for a public hearing, and Councilmember Roseman confirmed that the rate increase had not yet exceeded the 45-day period, which Mayor George also affirmed. Ms. LaPlaca stated that she would return at the next meeting to continue the discussion.

Mayor George then asked if anyone else wished to provide public comment. Hearing none, he thanked those who spoke and moved to the next item on the agenda.

REQUESTED APPEARANCES

Informal Discussion of Proposed Multi-Family Development at 1505-/1525-/1545 US Highway 421 S

Mr. Wise opened the discussion and explained that he, Ms. Shook, and Attorney Meade had conferred and determined that, since the applicant would be presenting at the public hearing later in the month, the informal discussion was not appropriate at this time. He added that there were no changes to the plans and noted that the applicant was present in the audience to observe. Attorney Meade clarified that informal discussions are intended to allow applicants to be heard by Council prior to submitting an application, not afterward, and that the current situation resulted from a miscommunication. Mayor George asked if Council had any questions for Mr. Wise, and Mayor Pro Tem Carter stated that he looked forward to discussing the project further at the upcoming public hearing. Mayor George thanked the applicant for attending and moved to the next requested appearance.

New River Conservancy

Mr. Jack Reeves began by introducing himself as the attorney for New River Conservancy and explained that he was providing a brief overview of a project in Boone Creek, as the organization's staff member was unable to attend. He stated that the project is a partnership with Appalachian Cookie Company, the Temple of the High Country, and Watauga County, and identified the project location. He noted that construction is anticipated to begin next month and raised concerns about increasing traffic along Poplar Grove Road, which is within the project area. He asked whether Council would consider working with NCDOT and New River Conservancy to install a sidewalk alongside the restoration project and Poplar Grove Road. He then opened the floor for questions. Councilmember Plaag noted the presence of abutments in the creek from a previous structure, possibly predating a tobacco warehouse that once spanned the creek, and suggested that a pocket park near the restoration site could provide an opportunity to display the Town's historic tobacco scale. Councilmember Roseman stated her understanding that the Rivers Walk development had committed to an easement for a trail behind the property and asked whether a sidewalk could be designed to connect to that trail rather than run directly along Poplar Grove Road, allowing for a more natural and continuous pedestrian route. Mr. Moody explained that while a portion of trail exists behind Rivers Walk, there are challenges related to steep slope changes on property owned by Watauga County. He added that they are currently working to secure an encroachment agreement from NCDOT to allow for sidewalk installation in that area. Mayor George expressed support for the project and stated that the Town would assist however possible. Councilmember Roseman then asked Mr. Santucci whether extending a path behind the Watauga County Agricultural Center to connect with the Temple of the High Country would be feasible. Mr. Santucci responded that he would defer to Mr. Moody for a more definitive answer, but suggested that extending a sidewalk along Poplar Grove Road may be the more straightforward option. He acknowledged that challenges remain with that approach but emphasized its value as a piece of community infrastructure. Hearing no further questions, Mayor George moved to the next requested appearance.

Craig Hughes - AppalCART

Mr. Craig Hughes thanked Council for their time and provided a brief overview of AppalCART's role in Boone. He explained that, according to Boone's Community Climate Action Plan, transportation is the leading source of greenhouse gas emissions, and emphasized that AppalCART plays a significant role in reducing vehicular traffic in the community. He then reviewed AppalCART's current fleet, system map, and financials, including revenues and expenditures. Mr. Hughes noted that the Town currently contributes $115,000 annually to AppalCART and asked Council to consider increasing that contribution to $120,000 per year. He then invited questions from Council. Mayor Pro Tem Carter thanked Mr. Hughes and shared that he had greatly enjoyed serving on the AppalCART Board. He commended Mr. Hughes for his leadership and noted that the organization is operated very efficiently. Councilmember Roseman asked whether other communities offer fare-free transit systems, and Mr. Hughes responded that, within North Carolina, Chapel Hill is the only example he was aware of. He added that there are both tangible and intangible costs associated with charging fares and emphasized the importance of maintaining free transit. Councilmember Plaag referenced a potential development at the Fun and Wheels property that included a park-and-ride component with AppalCART and asked about other strategies communities use to support local transit agencies. Mr. Hughes explained that AppalCART benefits from strong public support and noted that he continues to learn about new approaches through professional conferences. Councilmember Plaag also asked whether any communities have implemented a fee-in-lieu structure for transit, similar to those used for sidewalks. Mr. Hughes cautioned that such approaches must be considered carefully and noted that he had worked out an agreement with the potential developer of the Fun and Wheels property to help cover the cost of installing an additional AppalCART stop. Mayor George concluded by expressing his appreciation for AppalCART, thanking Mr. Hughes for his time and leadership.

CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor George asked Council if they had any questions regarding the items on the consent agenda. Mayor George thanked Ms. Wise for her work on securing funding for Hurricane Helene repairs, and thanked Mr. Moody for his continual work on the repairs on Hunting Hills Lane. Hearing no further comments,, Mayor George asked for a motion to approve the consent agenda.

Councilmember Plaag made a motion, which was seconded by Councilmember Roseman, to approve the consent agenda as presented .

VOTE:

Aye: Todd Carter, Virginia Roseman, Eric Plaag, Adrian Tait, Anne Pruitt
Nay: None
Absent: None

The following items were approved:

1. Approval of Change Order - Horn in the West Site Improvements
2. Approval of Ordinance - Town of Boone July 4th Parade
3. Approval of Contracts Between the Town of Boone and the Office of State Budget Management for the Helene Local Government Capital Grants Program
4. Approval of Budget Amendments
5. Approval of Minutes
   a. February 11, 2026 Regular Town Council Meeting
   b. February 25, 2026 Regular Town Council Meeting

PLANNING MATTERS

Consideration for Scheduling a Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony for the Stoneman's Raid Interpretative Panel

Ms. Mitchell reported that installation of the Stoneman's Raid interpretive panel is anticipated in late April and shared that the Historic Preservation Commission had recommended two potential dates for a ribbon-cutting ceremony: Tuesday, May 19 at 3:00 p.m. and Thursday, May 21 at 2:30 p.m. She noted that she is coordinating with Civil War Trails on event communications and has invited the Chair of the Historic Preservation Commission to provide remarks. She added that she has also reached out to project funding partners to see if representatives would like to speak and asked whether a member of Council would be interested in offering remarks. Councilmember Roseman expressed support for the May 21 date and indicated her interest in speaking. Mayor Pro Tem Carter agreed with selecting May 21 and suggested that it would be appropriate for Mayor George to provide remarks as well, if available. Mayor George stated that he expected to be able to attend and asked Ms. Mitchell if she needed any additional direction from Council. Ms. Mitchell indicated that no further guidance was needed, and Mayor George thanked her for her work on the project.

Mayor George then called for a brief recess at 10:20 a.m.

COUNCIL MATTERS

Town Manager Job Posting Finalization

Mayor George called the meeting back to order at 10:30 a.m..

Mayor George introduced Ms. Linda Councill and asked Council for feedback on the proposed job description. Councilmember Plaag expressed concern that during Hurricane

Helene, the Town Manager was unable to report to Boone due to not residing within Town limits, noting that while residency had not been required at the time, a similar issue could arise in future emergencies. He also raised concerns about a Town Manager making decisions on taxation or ordinances without being directly affected, emphasizing that Councilmembers are required to live within Town limits for that reason. Mayor Pro Tem Carter referenced earlier comments regarding residency and stated that, as the Town Manager functions similarly to a chief executive officer, it is important for the individual to live within the community. He acknowledged Boone's housing challenges but noted that the position's compensation should allow for in-town residency. Councilmember Roseman asked whether language could be included to allow residency on property that could potentially be annexed into Boone. Mayor George responded that requiring residency within one year of hire would provide flexibility, while Councilmember Plaag suggested that annexation could be discussed informally with candidates but may not always be feasible. Councilmember Pruitt added that such a provision did not need to be written into the job description, as annexation could not be guaranteed. Councilmember Tait expressed support for requiring the Town Manager to reside within Town limits within one year of hire. At Councilmember Plaag's request, Mr. Presnell shared that the previous Town Manager had delegated emergency responsibilities during Hurricane Helene due to being unable to access Town, and he emphasized the importance of community connection while agreeing that a one-year residency requirement was reasonable. Mayor George asked Ms. Councill if this direction was sufficient, and she confirmed that it was. Mr. Presnell noted that the Town of Blowing Rock requires its Town Manager to live within the fire district, though Council reiterated their preference for in-town residency.

Council reached consensus to include the requirement that the Town Manager must live within the corporate limits of the Town of Boone within one year of the date of hire in the job description.

Mayor George then turned to the benefits and compensation section, stating that the listed benefits were sufficient and asking whether a salary range should be included. Ms. Councill noted that salary ranges had not previously been included, and Councilmember Pruitt stated that qualified candidates would have a general understanding of expected compensation and could access public salary records. Ms. Councill noted that some applicants had inquired about salary range. Councilmember Plaag observed that health insurance was not explicitly listed, and Attorney Meade stated that she would work with Ms. Councill and Dr. Mitchell to refine the benefits language. Ms. Councill clarified that the comprehensive benefits package includes health, dental, and vision coverage, and Mayor Pro Tem Carter requested that all three be explicitly listed. Councilmember Plaag asked whether a medical examination requirement was necessary. Ms. Councill explained that such requirements apply to certain positions but could be removed for this role, while confirming that background checks and controlled substance testing would remain standard for all employees. Councilmember Pruitt asked about relocation assistance, and Ms. Councill stated that she would review prior agreements for reference. Attorney Meade suggested including relocation assistance as a negotiable benefit, which Council supported, and noted that she would revise the language accordingly. Attorney Meade also raised questions about including a preference for ICMA-credentialed managers. Dr. Mitchell provided a brief overview of the organization, and Attorney Meade suggested adding broader language to account for comparable credentials. Mayor George summarized the discussion, noting that the job description would require in-town residency within one year, omit a salary range, and clarify the benefits section to note that health, dental, and vision coverage were provided, as well as relocation assistance and other refinements. Councilmember Plaag asked about including language clarifying that the Town operates under a Council-Manager form of government and that the Town Manager serves at the pleasure of Council. Attorney Meade stated that appropriate language could be added. Mayor George indicated he was comfortable with Attorney Meade making the discussed revisions and minor grammatical edits, and direct staff to post the position once the discussed revisions and minor grammatical edits were complete.

With no further discussion, Mayor George called for a motion.

Mayor Pro Tem Carter made a motion, seconded by Councilmember Pruitt, to approve the Town Manager job advertisement with the discussed amendments and to direct Attorney Meade to finalize the revisions and direct staff to post the position once the discussed revisions and minor grammatical edits were complete.

VOTE:

Aye: Todd Carter, Virginia Roseman, Eric Plaag, Adrian Tait, Anne Pruitt
Nay: None
Absent: None.

Branding Boone Presentation

Ms. Wise presented the final branding package for Council approval. Councilmember Tait asked whether the branding guide would include guidance on the use of the seal, logo, and story badges, and Ms. Wise confirmed that it would. He also inquired about a deployment plan, and Ms. Wise explained that the consultant would provide an implementation plan following approval of the branding package. She noted, however, that funding for large-scale implementation, such as vehicle wraps and signage replacement, was not included in the current fiscal year budget. Councilmember Plaag suggested removing one of the mountains from the seal, and Attorney Meade agreed, referencing the "rule of three" in design. Councilmember Pruitt asked whether the branding package could be approved with modifications, and Ms. Wise confirmed that it could. Mayor George noted that the mountain range in the seal reflects the actual view of Boone, and Councilmember Roseman agreed. Mayor George added that he would support removing one of the mountains if it allowed the package to move forward. He also expressed a preference for the circular logo over the square version, which Council supported. Mayor George summarized the proposed direction, including approval of the seal with the modification, adoption of the circular logo, and recognition that story badges may evolve as Town programs change. Mayor Pro Tem Carter asked whether a comprehensive style guide would be included, and Ms. Wise confirmed that it would.

Councilmember Pruitt made a motion, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Carter, to approve the official seal with the discussed modification, the circular logo, and the story badges as presented.

Mayor George asked for further discussion. Councilmember Plaag reiterated his concerns with the "3,333" story badge based on prior comments. Councilmember Tait asked whether staff supported the new branding, and Ms. Wise confirmed that they did. Hearing no additional comments, Mayor George called for a vote.

VOTE:
Aye: Todd Carter, Virginia Roseman, Eric Plaag, Adrian Tait, Anne Pruitt
Nay: None
Absent: None.

Request to Allow Open Containers at Rivers Park for Earth Third Friday Celebration

Mr. Freed provided a brief overview of the upcoming ribbon cutting and Earth Third Friday event scheduled for April 17 at 3:30 p.m. He explained that he, Mr. Jordan Sellers of Blue Ridge Conservancy, and Town staff had met to discuss event details, and that Mr. Sellers had inquired about allowing open containers, with beer donated by local breweries. Mr. Freed stated that he was comfortable with either allowing or prohibiting open containers and requested Council's input. Councilmember Roseman asked whether any revenue would be generated from alcohol at the event, and Mr. Freed clarified that no sales would occur. Any donations collected during the event would go to Blue Ridge Conservancy. Attorney Meade noted that, under Town Code, events involving alcohol service typically require approval only from the Town Manager, but stated that she understood why the request had been brought before Council. Council also discussed the condition of the parking lot at the Rivers House property. Mayor Pro Tem Carter expressed support for allowing open containers, noting that doing so could help inform future discussions about establishing a social district in downtown Boone. Hearing no further discussion, Mayor George called for a motion.

Mayor Pro Tem Carter made a motion, seconded by Councilmember Roseman, to allow open containers during Earth Third Friday from 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. in conjunction with the ribbon cutting event at Rivers Park.

VOTE:

Aye: Todd Carter, Virginia Roseman, Eric Plaag, Adrian Tait, Anne Pruitt
Nay: None
Absent: None

Update and Request for Direction Regarding Downtown Employee Parking Meters

Ms. Reta Jackson requested direction from Council regarding the pilot program for Downtown Boone employee parking at designated meters. Mayor George stated that he supported the program overall but shared that a business owner had expressed concerns about the group of spaces on Burrell Street, noting that those spaces reduced accessible parking for nearby businesses. Councilmember Plaag responded that the spaces were not directly in front of the business, while Mayor George clarified that they were the most accessible options for that location. Councilmember Plaag asked about feedback from the approximately 30 program participants, and Ms. Jackson reported that participants had responded positively. She added that demand exceeded availability, requiring the Parking Department to turn away applicants. Ms. Jackson noted that the spaces in front of First Baptist were often underutilized and asked whether Council would consider reallocating some of those spaces to other locations. Councilmember Plaag suggested that the jury parking spaces on King Street could be a viable alternative and expressed concern that Watauga County continues to use those spaces despite the construction of its parking deck. He also recommended expanding the program to 40 or 45 permits to ensure that designated spaces are consistently used. Councilmember Pruitt cautioned that expanding the program too much could lead to frustration among permit holders if spaces are unavailable, and Ms. Jackson clarified that participants are informed that parking is not guaranteed. Councilmember Plaag proposed relocating half of the spaces from Burrell Street and half from the First Baptist area to King Street. Mayor George asked whether the Town could revisit its agreement with Watauga County to regain spaces on Queen Street currently designated for County employees. Ms. Jackson explained that those spaces are part of an arrangement allowing the Town to use spaces at the Watauga County Library. Mayor George indicated interest in revisiting that agreement at a later date. Attorney Meade asked about the term lengths for Town parking permits, and Ms. Jackson stated that they range from quarterly to annual. Councilmember Plaag noted his understanding that the agreement with Watauga County may have expired in 2008, and Ms. Jackson indicated that could be the case. Attorney Meade asked how Council would like to initiate further discussion with the County, and Mayor George suggested that the Town Manager send a letter to the County Manager outlining the agreement as a starting point. Mayor Pro Tem Carter recalled that the Town had anticipated regaining King Street spaces after construction of the Watauga County parking deck and noted that this would be an appropriate time to revisit the arrangement before permit renewals. Council also discussed signage and current parking permit fees. Councilmember Roseman asked about revenue impacts, and Ms. Jackson explained that while the program reduced revenue from parking fees, it generated additional revenue through citations issued to unauthorized vehicles. Attorney Meade noted that only a portion of citations issued had been paid and asked whether staff had reviewed a debt collection program she had previously shared; Mr. Presnell stated that they had not yet done so. Council also discussed the impact of student parking in downtown Boone. Mayor George concluded by noting that the Town maintains a positive relationship with Watauga County but that it may be an appropriate time to revisit parking arrangements and consider potential adjustments.

Discussion of Possible Use of Wyn Property as Temporary Emergency Shelter

Mayor George explained that the Red Cross had contacted him regarding the potential use of the Wyn Property as an emergency shelter, noting that they currently lack a suitable facility for that purpose. Ms. Shook stated that using the building as an emergency shelter would require compliance with both building and zoning codes and explained that the structure does not currently meet the requirements for overnight occupancy. She added that the building is presently better suited for use as a community center or office space and that significant modifications would be necessary to make it safe for sleeping accommodations. Council discussed the scope of improvements that would be required. Councilmember Plaag noted the historical significance of the Wyn Property as the first upgraded consolidated school for Black students and emphasized that any substantial changes should involve consultation with the Junaluska community. Mayor George added that a sprinkler system would be required for such a use and acknowledged the scale of the undertaking, which prompted him to bring the matter forward for discussion. Ms. Shook recommended that Council hold a work session with Fire Marshal Amy Flieg and Mr. Stacey Miller to review what upgrades would be necessary. Councilmember Tait asked whether there was an established long-term vision for the property and stressed that any interim use should not conflict with that vision. Mayor Pro Tem Carter noted that the property had been purchased using affordable housing funds, with the understanding that it and the surrounding land would ultimately be used for affordable housing. Mayor George agreed with the recommendation to hold a work session and reiterated the importance of establishing a clear vision for the property moving forward.

Mayor George called for a brief recess at 12:10 p.m..

Discussion Regarding Digital Watauga's Possible Move Into the Records Storage Room in the Planning & Inspections Office

Mayor George resumed the meeting at 12:20 p.m..

Mayor George provided a brief overview of the proposal and opened the floor for discussion. Mayor Pro Tem Carter noted that the Records Storage Room is currently filled with old records and asked whether a decision had been made to either rent off-site storage or contract with a firm to digitize the records. Ms. Shook explained that if Council approved relocating Digital Watauga into the Records Storage Room, one wall would need to remain dedicated to storage for the Planning and Inspections department. She stated that she was not comfortable outsourcing the digitization of records to an external vendor and instead recommended hiring a temporary employee to assist with scanning. Ms. Shook clarified that the discussion was specifically about relocating Digital Watauga's operations into the space, not about establishing Digital Watauga as a Town entity, which would be a separate matter. Councilmember Plaag provided an overview of Digital Watauga's current structure and explained that grant-funded positions through the Watauga County Library would remain with the Library through the end of the calendar year. Mr. Presnell reiterated that the discussion was not related to creating a Town Historian position. Ms. Shook added that access to the space would be limited to business hours and noted that interns would not be provided building access codes, consistent with current Town policy. Councilmember Tait asked whether the arrangement would be temporary or permanent, and Councilmember Plaag clarified that it would be permanent. Mayor George asked whether Council was comfortable directing staff to proceed with relocating Digital Watauga into the space and beginning the process of clearing the Records Storage Room. Ms. Shook requested that Council also consider funding a temporary part-time position to assist with document scanning. Mr. Presnell asked Mr. Miller to determine whether funding was available within the administration internship budget line, but Mr. Miller reported that no funds were currently available. Councilmember Plaag noted that Digital Watauga would require some furnishings and asked whether furniture from the Wyn Property was still available. Ms. Shook confirmed that usable furniture should still be on-site. She also noted that while there is currently a memorandum of understanding between Digital Watauga and the Watauga County Library, a similar MOU would be needed between Digital Watauga and the Town of Boone to formalize the arrangement.

Council provided consensus on approving Digital Watauga's move into the Records Storage Room in the Planning & Inspections Office.

Audio Visual Audit Presentation

Mayor George introduced Mr. Ryan Gilbert of RygidAV and invited him to present his findings. Mr. Gilbert thanked Council and asked whether they would prefer he first review his assessment or discuss Council's vision for the space. Mayor George requested that he begin with his findings. Mr. Gilbert provided an overview of the current audiovisual conditions in Council Chambers. He noted the use of OWL cameras in place of an integrated system, inadequate acoustic treatment, and a speaker system that does not sufficiently support clear audio throughout the room. He also highlighted the lack of a reliable streaming setup and stated that the space is not fully ADA compliant. He concluded that a comprehensive system overhaul would be necessary to address these issues. Mayor George invited Council comments. Councilmember Roseman noted that the monitors on the dais were cumbersome and suggested their removal. She also observed that the new stone wall is frequently obstructed by the projector screen. Mayor George asked whether televisions could be mounted on either side of the room. Councilmember Plaag emphasized the importance of ensuring the system accommodates users who do not utilize Town-issued iPads and suggested lowering the existing monitors. Mayor Pro Tem Carter stated that each seat on the dais should have a functioning screen and microphone. Attorney Meade advised that any significant equipment upgrades would require an informal bid process and that a formal scope of work should be developed. Mr. Gilbert indicated he could prepare both a quote and assist in drafting the scope of work. He also asked Council whether they preferred a system that relies on staff operation and training or a more automated solution. Councilmember Plaag suggested including both options in the scope to allow for competitive bidding. Mayor George stated that his primary priority was improving accessibility of meeting recordings. Councilmember Plaag added that remote participation is currently difficult due to audio and visual limitations. Ms. Shook encouraged Council to also consider the needs of other users of the space, including boards such as the Planning Commission. Councilmember Tait asked whether the podium microphone could be made wireless. Mayor George inquired about the possibility of implementing electronic voting, prompting further discussion on that option. Councilmember Tait asked about camera quality, and Mr. Gilbert stated that a conference-grade system would be sufficient. Mayor Pro Tem Carter asked about next steps. Attorney Meade requested permission to review RFPs from other municipalities before returning to Council with recommendations. She also asked Mr. Gilbert for an estimated cost to develop the scope, and he stated that preparing the scope of work would cost $1,500. Attorney Meade recommended engaging RygidAV for the scope development.

Mayor Pro Tem Carter made a motion, seconded by Councilmember Plaag, to contract with RygidAV to develop a scope proposal for updating the audiovisual systems in Council Chambers.

VOTE:

Aye: Todd Carter, Virginia Roseman, Eric Plaag, Adrian Tait, Anne Pruitt
Nay: None
Absent: None

Discussion of Board Liaison Appointments for New Council Member

Mayor George presented the following board liaison appointments:

- Councilmember Pruitt: Appoint to the Downtown Boone Development Association
- Councilmember Tait: Relinquish the Downtown Boone Development Association board position to Councilmember Pruitt, Appoint to the Sustainability Committee

A brief discussion followed. Councilmember Plaag requested that current Council members coordinate among themselves regarding committee assignments and upcoming vacancies, including positions currently held by him. Mayor George then called for a motion.

Councilmember Plaag made the motion, seconded by Councilmember Tait, to reassign Councilmember Tait's position on the Downtown Boone Development Association to Councilmember Pruitt.

VOTE:

Aye: Todd Carter, Virginia Roseman, Eric Plaag, Adrian Tait, Anne Pruitt
Nay: None
Absent: None

Appointment to Human Relations Commission

Mayor George explained that there was one application, and asked for discussion. Mayor Pro Tem Carter explained that he had nothing but support for this applicant. Hearing no further discussion, Mayor George asked for a nomination. Mayor Pro Tem Carter nominated Joan Lacefield to the vacant one year term position on the Human Relations Commission. Mayor George closed the nominations, and asked if Council was in favor of the nomination.

Council provided consensus regarding appointing Joan Lacefield to the open one year term position on the Human Relations Commission.

MAYOR REPORT

Mayor George noted that the Mayor's ecological task force had completed their first workday and had removed barberry at Strawberry Hill. He explained that it was well attended, and that the next invasive species removal would take place at the Rivers House. He explained that he had missed the Downtown Boone Development Association meeting, and that the Sustainability Committee meeting would take place next month. He went on to provide a brief overview from his first meeting with the High County Council of Governments, and felt it was important that the Town continue to represent themselves in that space.

TOWN MANAGER REPORT

Mr. Presnell shared the following report:

- Ms. Moody and members of the Downtown Boone Development Association were attending the NC Main Street Conference in New Bern.
- The Boone Police Department were meeting with a representative of the Governor's Office to discuss the work of the Community Care Program.
- Ms. Councill was in the process of preparing for Open Enrollment for town employees in May.

Mr. Presnell noted that he had met with BREMCO, and that they were still offering $4.7 million for the Bolick Property. He noted that he and Mr. Miller had met with DEC Associates regarding financing opportunities for the Public Works Facility. A discussion was held to increasing the marketing efforts for the sale of the Bolick Property.

TOWN ATTORNEY REPORT

Attorney Meade did not make a report.

BOARD LIAISON REPORT

The following Councilmembers provided reports:

- Councilmember Tait provided an overview of the economic development meeting at the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce, and noted that they had discussed the incoming Blue Ridge Parkway improvements. He noted that he had also toured the Appalachian State University Hickory campus.
- Councilmember Pruitt: Nothing to report.
- Councilmember Roseman: The Cultural Resources Advisory Board did not meet in March, and asked for Mayor Pro Tem Carter to provide the overview for the Human Relations Commission. She noted that the Historic Preservation Commission was currently focused on the history of Kraut Creek and that a list of priorities was discussed. The Watauga County Parks and Recreation Board were interested in the topic of food trucks, and noted that a new app was currently being onboarded for the Parks and Recreation department for registration and payments.
- Councilmember Plaag: Nothing to report. He noted that he was almost finished with the photography for the Daniel Boone Park Local Historic Report, and that he would continue to work on the report. He went on to say that the Watauga County Historical Society was working on the Downtown Boone Historic Walking Tour, and noted that the content for the tour was about two-thirds complete. He closed by stating that he would uphold his promise of completing the report for Ice House Alley by the end of the year.
- Mayor Pro-Tem Carter: Mayor Pro Tem Carter noted that Mr. Hughes had provided a good update regarding AppalCART. The Human Relations Commission had appointed Drew Finley as Chair, Tori Rodriguez as Vice Chair, and Kristin Morgan as Secretary. The commission was finalizing the date for the Civil Rights and Fair Housing Summit, with the hope of utilizing the Watauga County Agricultural

Center. He closed by noting that the Watauga Tourism Summit would be taking place on March 31st.

CLOSED SESSION

Councilmember Roseman made the motion, seconded by Councilmember Plaag, to enter into Closed Session, as pursuant to N.C. Gen. Stat.§ 143-318.11(a)(1) and N.C. Gen. Stat.§ 143-318.11(a)(3) at 1:30 p.m.

VOTE:

Aye: Todd Carter, Virginia Roseman, Eric Plaag, Adrian Tait, Anne Pruitt
Nay: None
Absent: None

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:40 p.m..