

**MINUTES – REGULAR MEETING
BOONE TOWN COUNCIL
MARCH 12, 2025**

CALL TO ORDER

A regular meeting of the Boone Town Council was called to order at 9:02 a.m. on Wednesday, March 12, 2025, in the Town Council Chambers at 1500 Blowing Rock Road in Boone. Mayor Pro-Tem Dalton George presided. Council members in attendance were Todd Carter, Virginia Roseman, Edie Tugman, and Eric Plaag. Town staff present included Town Manager Amy Davis, Town Clerk Nicole Harmon-Church, Planning Director Jane Shook, Public Works Director Todd Moody, Finance Director Guy Miller (remote), Interim Police Chief Daniel Duckworth, Cultural Resources Director Mark Freed, Sustainability and Special Projects Coordinator George Santucci, and Human Resources Director Dale Presnell (remote).

MOMENT OF SILENCE

A moment of silence was observed.

BOARD VACANCIES

The following board vacancies were announced:

TENTATIVE AGENDA ADOPTION

Upon a motion by Council member Plaag, seconded by Council member Carter, the agenda was amended to move public comment before proclamations and resolutions and add a second public comment period after board liaison reports. The amended agenda was approved unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comments were made.

APPROVAL OF PROCLAMATIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

Upon a motion by Council member Carter, seconded by Council member Plaag, Council voted unanimously to approve the following proclamations and resolutions:

Council member Carter read the Leola Gardens proclamation into the record, and Council member Plaag inquired whether funds had been set aside for the initiative. Council member Carter responded that he and Mr. Santucci had secured a \$1,000

donation and met with volunteers, with plans to begin fundraising now that the effort was official. Council member Plaag noted that the project might be eligible for Outside Agency Funding, but Council member Carter clarified that the property was Town-owned, making it ineligible. Mr. Santucci added that funds from the sustainability budget could be used as a starting point.

Mayor Pro-Tem George read the proclamation for Small Business Week.

Council member Plaag read the Earth Day proclamation.

REQUESTED APPEARANCES

Joe Johnson - New River Conservancy

Joe Johnson with New River Conservancy gave a presentation update on the Hardin Creek project and the confluence of the Middle, East, and South Forks project. He also requested Council support for a new project on lower Winkler Creek from State Farm Road to the South Fork of the New River. Discussion was held regarding a conservation easement with Watauga County at the Armory property. Town Manager Amy Davis clarified that once the Department of Justice's lease was up, the Town and County would jointly retain ownership of the property. Mr. Santucci noted that some of Appalachian State University's property might be affected, but the University had already expressed support for the project. He further indicated that a portion near the baseball field may require relocation, but the goal was to minimize movement to avoid additional costs.

Council member Tugman asked about remediation efforts regarding bank erosion on the Bolick property during the recent hurricane. Mr. Santucci explained that the damage would have been worse without boulders in place. Mr. Johnson added that ongoing efforts on Winkler Creek and the Confluence project aimed to mitigate future flood events. Ms. Roseman questioned whether this commitment would create a financial obligation. Mr. Santucci clarified that the land dedication served as a matching contribution and would assist in securing grants. Upon a motion by Council member Plaag, seconded by Council member Tugman, Council voted unanimously to move forward with the project and approve the letter of support.

Watauga County Library – Monica Caruso

Ms. Caruso presented an end-of-year report. A complete copy of the presentation can be viewed online [here](#).

Work Session – Social District

Mayor Pro-Tem George requested a discussion regarding a proposed social district on Howard Street, noting that the Town operated as a social district during football games.

He aimed to encourage visitors to patronize businesses on Howard Street instead of purchasing mass-produced alcohol elsewhere. He planned to work with the Downtown Boone Development Association (DBDA) and Interim Police Chief Duckworth on enforcement and Public Works regarding bollards.

Council member Carter stated that parking was the most common question he heard regarding a Howard Street social district. Council member Carter suggested that the downtown area operated as a social district during the Boonerang festival. He proposed experimenting with the concept, emphasizing that it could be discontinued if unsuccessful. Mayor Pro-Tem George agreed and suggested a one-year trial. Council member Roseman expressed enthusiasm, explaining that she had envisioned a pedestrian-friendly district on Howard Street for decades.

Discussions included the use of designated cups in the social district, concerns about loss of parking, business owner reactions, and logistics for deliveries. Council member Plaag pointed out that the Ale House already functioned as an informal social district, sometimes leading to noise complaints. He cautioned that parameters, including noise issues, must be in place with any social district. Interim Police Chief Duckworth highlighted public safety concerns such as crowd control, drug and alcohol use, noise complaints, vandalism, and policing challenges. He emphasized the need to balance economic benefits with enforcement measures and agreed to consult other communities with similar programs.

Council member Carter referenced North Wilkesboro's model, which did not require street closures and operated six days a week. Council member Tugman voiced strong opposition, citing concerns over police burden and public disorder. Mayor Pro-Tem George noted that most businesses supported the initiative. Council member Plaag stressed the need to align the social district hours with the Town's noise ordinance to minimize disruptions. Mayor Pro-Tem George agreed to continue engaging staff and to research further and bring back to Council at a later date for further discussion and vote. Council member Plaag agreed to assist.

APPROVAL OF ITEMS ON CONSENT AGENDA

Council member Plaag moved to approve the consent agenda with the exception of Chapter 70, which he wished to discuss separately. Council member Tugman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

In response to a question raised by Mayor Pro-Tem George regarding donated art, Cultural Resources Director Freed envisioned that staff would circulate artwork recommendations via email, similar to the process for special events. Mayor Pro-Tem George expressed skepticism about the need for an additional committee to offer protections to staff. Council member Tugman agreed with the need for a structured

committee with authority under the Town. Mr. Freed suggested that the Cultural Resources Advisory Board (CRAB) could have a subcommittee to provide liability protections. The Council supported this approach.

Regarding the proposed revisions to Chapter 70, Council member Plaag noted a discrepancy in the penalty fine listed as \$12, while the Council had previously amended it to \$25. He moved to approve the proposed revisions with the changes to the penalty fine to \$25 as approved last May. Council member Roseman seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. Attorney Meade suggested for clarity that she instead bring the text back for consideration at a later date.

APPROVAL OF RESOLUTION – COUNTY-TOWN BRIDGE

Dalton George presented a resolution and plans for a bridge located on the Bolick property dedicated to Town and County employees who served during Hurricane Florence. Council members discussed potential funding sources, including grant applications and TDA contributions. Upon a motion by Council member Carter, seconded by Council member Plaag, Council unanimously approved the resolution.

REQUEST FOR DISCUSSION AND POTENTIAL ACTION REGARDING WAYS TO BETTER UTILIZE EVENING TOWN COUNCIL MEETINGS

Mayor Pro-Tem George presented a request to potentially adjust meeting times to improve efficiency. He suggested shifting evening meetings to begin at 4 p.m. to allow more substantive discussions. Town Manager Davis explained the impact on staff, particularly exempt employees who were not eligible for comp time. Council member Plaag argued that if department heads were consistently working 80-hour weeks, additional staffing might be necessary. Manager Davis and Human Resources Director Dale Presnell highlighted the financial liability of offering comp time to exempt employees.

Council members Roseman and Tugman favored starting meetings at 4 p.m. but emphasized the need for public comment to occur after 5 p.m. Mayor Pro-Tem George agreed, suggesting a structured schedule to avoid major decisions being made before the public could participate. Council member Plaag recommended reserving evening meetings for agenda items likely to generate public interest. Manager Davis cautioned that while some items could be predicted, others could not. Council agreed to seek staff feedback before making a final decision.

LAND USE MAP MEETING

Planning Director Jane Shook requested members schedule a special meeting to finish up the land use map portion of the Boone Next project. Council member Roseman

requested that Webex be incorporated as a component of the land use map meeting due to her new work schedule. A special meeting was scheduled for March 31 at 2:00 p.m. in the Planning and Inspections Conference Room.

TOWN MANAGER REPORT

Manager Davis provided updates on the following topics:

1. Town Clerk Nicole Harmon-Church received her Master Municipal Clerk this week
2. FEMA update: It was reported that more than \$18 million had been distributed to Watauga County, with over 6,000 registrations recorded.
3. The New River Conservancy organized 39 volunteers who planted 6,000 shrubs and collected 400 pounds of trash.
4. The Sustainability Committee/Sustainability and Special Projects Manager Santucci has begun transitioning the Public Works department from gas to electric vehicles.
5. The annual litter sweep was scheduled for April 12. Council member Carter noted a strong social media push by the Hospitality House to prepare Boone for a "camera-ready" initiative.

TOWN ATTORNEY UPDATE

Attorney Meade shared an update on SDF legislation and indicated that the matter had expanded statewide. Town Lobbyist Nathan Honaker sent a draft that retained the gallon window originally proposed for Boone. However, Attorney Meade noted that concerns were raised that this approach would not be effective on a statewide level. She suggested a more flexible system, such as allowing local governments to determine appropriate fee ranges, would be preferable. She added the legislation also left installment interest decisions to local governments. Members thanked Attorney Meade for her efforts on this bill.

BOARD LIAISON REPORTS

Council Member Plaag

Economic Development Council (EDC) Report

Council member Plaag provided an update on the Helene Recovery small business initiative, noting that 60 applicants from Watauga County had applied. The Chamber Foundation opened a third round of funding for three counties, having previously assisted 162 businesses. Discussion on HB 47 continued

Downtown Boone Development Association (DBDA) Report

Council member Plaag gave an update on the recent parking changes shared during the most recent DBDA meeting, where attendees raised questions and provided feedback on remaining concerns. Overall, Council member Plaag indicated that the announcement was well-received. He then announced that he recently completed his site visit needed for local landmark designation to Horn in the West/Hickory Ridge Homestead, with additional visits scheduled for Daniel Boone Native Gardens and Strawberry Hill.

Council Member Tugman

Downtown Boone Development Association (DBDA) Report

Council member Tugman reported that the DBDA was receptive to recent parking discussions, with no significant concerns raised. The Tourism Development Authority (TDA) expressed support for trolley service but acknowledged the cost restraints noted by AppalCart representatives. She added that Jon Schallert was scheduled to visit Boone on March 25. Council member Tugman reported that staff was continuing their work on the Mainstreet work plan and planned to attend an Appalachian State University Board of Trustees meeting. Downtown Restaurant Week preparations were also underway. She noted that the library requested financial contributions for a shred event scheduled for April 25, and the association agreed to contribute. Additionally, she announced that the Main Street Conference was set for August in Boone. Final updates included a 40-team baseball tournament, a new Main Street contact, the installation of a Stoneman's Raid marker, public art for the Melanie's space, plans for children's art downtown, and progress on Howard Street improvements.

Mayor Pro-Tem George

Mayor Pro-Tem George indicated that he was absent from the ABC Board meeting.

Sustainability Committee Report

Mayor Pro-Tem George stated that the committee had recently discussed the Earth First Film Festival and First Friday events.

Council Member Roseman

Historic Preservation Commission Report

Council member Roseman reported on the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) meeting, where Attorney Meade suggested reviewing past cases for lessons learned in hopes that this review might result in regulatory adjustments.

Southern Appalachian Historical Association Report

The Southern Appalachian Housing Authority (SAHA) received recognition when Congresswoman Foxx spoke on its behalf on the congressional floor.

Watauga County Parks and Recreation

Council member Roseman announced Parks and Recreation's Spring Break Camp and the upcoming baseball tournament.

Council member Roseman indicated that questions arose at the recent Parks and Recreation board meeting regarding jurisdictional policies between the Town and County. Interim Police Chief Duckworth clarified that if an incident took place within County facilities, including the Rec Center, the Watauga County Sheriff's Department handled the incidents unless external aid was requested. The Boone Police Department managed the parking lot area. In the event of a true emergency, he indicated that multiple agencies would respond. Council member Tugman asked whether a 911 dispatcher would direct responders accordingly, and Chief Duckworth confirmed that dispatch would route the call to the appropriate agency.

Council Member Carter

Council member Carter reported missing the recent AppalCart meeting but attended the Human Relations Commission (HRC) meeting. He announced that the HRC was actively recruiting members but lacked a quorum, preventing officer elections. Webex was being used to record meeting minutes. He noted that Pride Parade planning was also taking place.

Adjournment

Upon a motion by Council member Plaag, seconded by Council member Tugman, Council voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 11:51 a.m.