

**MINUTES – REGULAR MEETING
BOONE TOWN COUNCIL
October 23, 2024**

CALL TO ORDER

A regular meeting of the Boone Town Council was called to order at 9:04 a.m. on Wednesday, October 23, 2024 at Boone Town Council Chambers located at 1500 Blowing Rock Road in Boone. Mayor Tim Futrelle presided. Councilmembers present included Mayor Pro-Tem Dalton George, Virginia Roseman, Edie Tugman, Todd Carter, and Eric Plaag. Staff members present included Town Manager Amy Davis, Grants Coordinator/Communications Laney Wise, Public Works Director Todd Moody, Deputy Director of Public Works Justin Stines, Deputy Director of Planning and Inspections Brandon Wise, Police Chief Andy Le Beau, Fire Chief Jimmy Isaacs, and Emergency Management Coordinator Matt Krause. Additional Town employees were also present, include multiple Town of Boone Firefighters and multiple Town of Boone Public Works and Public Utilities employees. Town Attorney Allison Meade was also in attendance via WebEx.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mayor Tim Futrelle commended the Boone community regarding their actions during Hurricane Helene. Councilmember Virginia Roseman echoed these statements, and added that the reason why Boone had fared the way it had was because of the work of the community.

REQUESTED APPEARANCES

FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Mayor Futrelle asked members of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to introduce themselves and provide a brief overview of their roles in the organization. Ms. Catherine Anderson began by explaining that she is part of FEMA's Intergovernmental Affairs division. She highlighted two important deadlines: for Public Assistance, the deadline is October 27th, and for Individual Assistance, it is November 27th. She encouraged attendees to visit the Disaster Recovery Center, located at 130 Poplar Grove Connector, for help with disaster-related matters.

Ms. Michelle Vivian then introduced herself and provided a brief list of currently available FEMA assistance categories, which include:

- Home Repair Assistance
- Serious Needs Assistance
- Displacement Assistance
- Assistance for Loss of Personal Property
- Transportation Assistance
- Medical and Dental Assistance
- Childcare Assistance
- Miscellaneous Needs Assistance

Ms. Vivian advised that if a resident receives a denial letter from FEMA regarding their claim, they should reapply. She reiterated Ms. Anderson's advice, explaining that the Disaster Recovery Center is the best resource for residents to learn about various types of FEMA assistance.

Councilmember Plaag asked if there were ways to improve communication regarding the application process, such as clarifying the application itself. Ms. Vivian responded that the Disaster Recovery Center is available to help, and additional centers will be set up across Watauga County on a rolling basis. Councilmember Plaag thanked Ms. Vivian and noted that the Town of Boone would assist in communicating FEMA assistance information.

John Fredricks from the Small Business Administration (SBA) gave a brief explanation of the loans available through the SBA and who is eligible. He clarified that SBA loans are not just for small businesses but also for homeowners, renters, nonprofit organizations, and small businesses. While loan forgiveness is not available unless Congress passes new legislation, Mr. Fredricks noted that the loans have a lower interest rate, with no interest charged during the first 12 months of the loan.

Councilmember Tugman mentioned that at a recent Downtown Boone Development Association meeting, many small business owners expressed frustration about having to take out another loan while still repaying loans from the COVID-19 pandemic. She asked if it was still advisable to recommend that businesses apply. Mr. Fredricks said yes, suggesting that the loan be viewed as a safety net. He also noted that SBA funds were

running low, but they continue processing applications so they can distribute funds as soon as Congress approves more.

Ms. Vivian added that for FEMA assistance related to home or property repairs, FEMA will send an inspector to assess the damage. She urged individuals to answer unknown calls, as they could be from a FEMA inspector, and to ensure their voicemail is set up and not full. Mr. Fredricks agreed.

Councilmember Tugman asked Ms. Anderson if churches and other organizations could be reimbursed for items purchased to help the community. Ms. Anderson recommended that they apply, though she was unsure if reimbursement would be granted.

Mayor Futrelle introduced Mr. Jacob Kwiatkowski, the Division Supervisor for FEMA in Watauga County. After a brief overview of his background and role, Mr. Kwiatkowski commended Watauga County and the Town of Boone for their excellent disaster response. He explained that both areas are now in the process of transitioning into the recovery phase. FEMA is working with Watauga County to find a suitable location for temporary housing for displaced individuals.

Councilmember Roseman asked how individuals are selected for FEMA's temporary housing units. Mr. Kwiatkowski said he didn't know the process in-depth but noted that a matrix is used to determine eligibility. Councilmember Todd Carter asked how to help displaced individuals currently seeking refuge at the Hospitality House. Mr. Kwiatkowski explained that staff at the Hospitality House could refer patrons to the Disaster Recovery Center for assistance, or patrons could seek housing assistance directly and then return to the Hospitality House for further support.

Councilmember Plaag expressed concern that many affected properties are located in the 100-year floodplain, making it unwise to recommend rebuilding in areas that frequently flood. He mentioned a previous FEMA grant used to relocate buildings located in the floodway and asked if a similar grant could be used again. Mr. Kwiatkowski suggested that the BRIC grant might assist with this. Ms. Vivian added that individuals in the floodplain could apply to FEMA for three years of free flood insurance.

Councilmember Tugman inquired about the duration of the Disaster Recovery Centers' availability. Mr. Kwiatkowski explained that they would remain open as long as needed. She then asked if FEMA's temporary housing units would need access to water and sewer. Mr. Kwiatkowski said that while having access to water, sewer, and power would be ideal, it may not always be an option.

Mr. Kwiatkowski concluded his presentation by stating that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would assist with debris removal from waterways and private properties in Watauga County. Property owners must provide a Right of Entry document for the Corps to assist. He clarified that signing this document only allows the government access to remove debris, not full access to the property. He asked if the Town of Boone could help disseminate this information, to which the Council agreed.

With no further questions, Mayor Futrelle thanked the FEMA representatives and moved to the next agenda item.

TENTATIVE AGENDA ADOPTION

Mayor Futrelle asked for a motion to adopt the agenda as presented. Upon the motion of Mayor Pro-Tem George, seconded by Councilmember Carter, the agenda for the October 23, 2024 Boone Town Council Meeting was adopted unanimously.

RESULT: APPROVED (UNANIMOUS)

AYES: GEORGE, TUGMAN, ROSEMAN, CARTER, PLAAG

APPROVAL OF PROCLAMATIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

Mayor Pro-Tem George asked Mayor Futrelle if he could speak before the proclamation was adopted. Mayor Futrelle agreed. Mayor Pro-Tem George then expressed his desire to acknowledge the exceptional efforts of the Town of Boone employees during Hurricane Helene. He emphasized that the employees rose to the occasion, demonstrating hard work and dedication throughout the disaster. He stated that their commitment to the Town of Boone was truly inspiring. While the proclamation may seem small in comparison to the employees' efforts, he wanted to ensure that all staff knew how proud the town was of their work.

Mayor Futrelle thanked Mayor Pro-Tem George and then read the following proclamation:



Proclamation

WHEREAS, Hurricane Helene brought unprecedented challenges and hardships to our community, testing the resilience and unity of the High Country; and

WHEREAS, in the midst of this disaster, dedicated Town of Boone employees stepped forward with unwavering courage and commitment, embodying the spirit of compassion and solidarity; and

WHEREAS, these employees worked a combined total of 2,775 hours during the storm and continue to work tirelessly to ensure the recovery of our community; and

WHEREAS, these dedicated individuals provided essential support, including emergency response, debris removal, utility line repair, shelter assistance, and resource distribution, ensuring that our neighbors were safe and cared for during this difficult time; and

WHEREAS, their selfless acts of service not only helped to mitigate the effects of the hurricane but also strengthened the bonds within our community,

NOW, THEREFORE, be it proclaimed that we, the Town Council of the Town of Boone, North Carolina, extend our deepest gratitude to all Town of Boone employees who dedicated their time, energy, and resources during Hurricane Helene. Your efforts have made a profound difference in the lives of many and have showcased the power of community in times of crisis. We honor and celebrate these remarkable individuals whose actions remind us that we can overcome any challenge together.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I, Tim Futrelle, Mayor of the Town of Boone, hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the Town of Boone to be affixed this 23rd day of October, 2024.

After reading the proclamation, Mayor Futrelle asked for a motion to adopt the Proclamation of Appreciation for Town of Boone Employees as presented. Upon the motion of Councilmember Tugman, seconded by Councilmember Roseman, the proclamation was approved unanimously.

RESULT: APPROVED (UNANIMOUS)
AYES: GEORGE, TUGMAN, ROSEMAN, CARTER, PLAAG

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor Futrelle asked if anyone in the audience had signed up for public comment. He noted that Nick Hammock had signed up but was not currently present. He then asked if anyone attending online wished to provide public comment. Hearing none, Mayor Futrelle moved on to the next agenda item.

APPROVAL OF ITEMS ON CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor Futrelle asked Ms. Amy Davis to briefly explain the purpose of the budget amendment. Ms. Davis explained that the amendment would allow the Fire Department to transfer funds received from the State of North Carolina to the appropriate budget line. These funds would cover the cost of overtime pay for the Boone Fire Department, which was deployed to assist with operations on the North Carolina coast during Hurricane Debby.

Mayor Futrelle thanked Ms. Davis and requested a motion to approve all items on the consent agenda as presented.

RESULT: APPROVED (UNANIMOUS)
AYES: GEORGE, TUGMAN, ROSEMAN, CARTER, PLAAG

PLANNING MATTERS

CONSIDERATION OF CASES HEARD AT THE SEPTEMBER 23, 2024

Mayor Futrelle asked Mr. Brandon Wise to present on Planning Matters. Mr. Wise explained that due to Hurricane Helene, only Case A24-0595 (174 S Depot St - Conditional District Zoning Map Amendment) would be presented to the Council at this time. He noted that the Town of Boone Planning Commission had recommended the Boone Town Council approve the case.

Councilmember Plaag expressed concerns, stating that during Hurricane Helene, floodwaters had risen above the base flood level at that property. He explained that the project's current flood-proofing plan required elevation of two feet above the base flood level, but the floodwaters had risen three feet during the hurricane. For this reason, he could not recommend approval of the project as it was presented. Councilmember Plaag then asked Mr. Wise if the applicant had submitted any additional flood-proofing measures after the hurricane. Mr. Wise responded that they had not.

Councilmember Roseman inquired if adding additional restrictions to the project was part of the Council's due diligence. Councilmember Plaag clarified that while the Council couldn't force the applicant to adopt those restrictions, they could negotiate them. Councilmember Tugman asked if flood-proofing the building might negatively impact nearby structures due to runoff. Mr. Wise said he could not definitively say whether it would affect neighboring buildings.

A discussion followed about base flood levels, flood-proofing methods, and the floor levels of the proposed project. Mayor Pro-Tem George requested input from the applicant.

Mr. Bill Dixon, representing the applicant, stated that he believed his client would be willing to table the case to consider additional flood-proofing measures. The applicant, Mr. Michael Thaler, then asked Councilmember Plaag how he had observed the waterline in the building. Councilmember Plaag explained that he had assisted the Planning and Inspections Department with damage assessments in Downtown Boone and had entered the property during the cleanup. Mr. Thaler thanked Councilmember Plaag for the explanation and agreed with Mr. Dixon's suggestion to table the case for further discussions on flood-proofing. However, he also mentioned that certain areas of the Town Code, such as roof height restrictions, might need to be amended to allow for higher floor levels.

With no further discussion, Mayor Futrelle asked for a motion regarding the case. Councilmember Plaag made the motion to table Case A24-0595 174 S Depot St - Conditional District Zoning Map Amendment. Upon the motion of Councilmember Plaag, seconded by Councilmember Tugman, the motion passed unanimously.

RESULT: APPROVED (UNANIMOUS)
AYES: GEORGE, TUGMAN, ROSEMAN, CARTER, PLAAG

CONSIDERATION OF PARTNERSHIP WITH HCCOG - OUR STATE, OUR HOMES INITIATIVE

Mr. Wise provided a brief overview of the "Our State, Our Homes" Initiative, explaining that the purpose of the discussion was to gauge whether the Town of Boone would be interested in participating. He added that if the Council expressed interest, the Planning and Inspections Department would then reach out to the High Country

Council of Governments to confirm their interest. The High Country Council of Governments would later inform them if Boone was selected for the initiative.

Mayor Futrelle stated that if the board was in agreement, he would be willing to serve as a representative. Councilmember Carter pointed out that the agenda listed October 18th as the deadline to express interest. Mr. Wise responded that he had spoken with Ms. Jane Shook and was confident that the deadline had been extended.

Mayor Pro-Tem George asked Mr. Wise if the Planning and Inspections Department had the capacity to take on a project like this. Mayor Futrelle emphasized that the High Country Council of Governments had significant influence in programs supporting affordable housing and remarked that this was a great opportunity. Mr. Wise confirmed that both he and Ms. Shook believed the Planning and Inspections Department currently had the capacity to manage the project.

Councilmember Carter expressed support, saying this initiative was a positive step forward. Councilmember Roseman agreed and suggested that if the project moved forward, she would like Councilmember Carter to be involved. The Boone Town Council unanimously agreed to express interest in participating in the initiative.

COUNCIL MATTERS

TOWN OF BOONE FLOOD RESPONSE PRESENTATION

Chief Jimmy Isaacs began by updating the Council on the Town of Boone's response to Hurricane Helene and the challenges faced during the event. After his presentation, Chief Isaacs apologized for the lack of communication during the first 48 hours but emphasized that the staff did their best under the circumstances.

Mayor Futrelle thanked Chief Isaacs for the presentation and suggested holding a special meeting to discuss any necessary operational adjustments. Councilmember Plaag also thanked Chief Isaacs for his leadership during the crisis and throughout the event. He expressed appreciation for Chief Isaacs' detailed explanation of which Town of Boone systems held up well during the storm and which ones might need improvement.

Chief Isaacs explained that he wanted to give this presentation to encourage the Council to continue thinking ahead, ensuring that Boone remains resilient to future storms like Hurricane Helene. Councilmember Roseman thanked Chief Isaacs, calling him the community's lifeline during the storm. Chief Isaacs, however, noted that the success of the response was not due to just one person or department but was a collective effort by everyone in the Town of Boone.

Chief Andy LeBeau echoed the praise for Chief Isaacs' leadership during the storm and personally thanked him for his service. He also thanked the Council for approving the creation of the Emergency Coordinator position, which Mr. Matt Krause now holds, and commended Mr. Krause for his hard work during the storm.

With no further discussion, Mayor Futrelle moved on to the next agenda item.

MAYOR REPORT

Mayor Futrelle began by asking the Council to discuss three to five priority needs for the community post-Hurricane Helene. He planned to present these priorities to the High Country Council of Governments at their next regular meeting, aiming to guide discussions with the North Carolina General Assembly on what the High Country requires for rebuilding efforts.

Mayor Futrelle suggested infrastructure as the first priority. Councilmember Plaag agreed, adding that public health-encompassing both physical and mental health-will also become a critical area of need. Plaag explained that mental health issues, like seasonal depression, may intensify in the aftermath of the hurricane. Additionally, short-term physical health risks could arise, particularly for those exposed to contaminated soil and water. He warned that long-term health complications, such as cancer, may also emerge.

Councilmember Carter echoed the infrastructure priority and suggested that Boone should consider elevating infrastructure, rather than just replacing it. Mayor Pro Tem George highlighted environmental impacts, including eroded riverbanks and water contamination, as additional concerns. Councilmember Roseman inquired about fortifying landslide-prone areas, which Councilmember Plaag confirmed could be feasible, noting that similar federal projects have been undertaken. Plaag also proposed a forgivable loan program to support small businesses.

After considering these discussions, Mayor Futrelle outlined the following priority needs:

- Infrastructure Repairs
- Public Health, including Immediate and Long-Term Physical and Mental Health Needs
- Environmental Remediation (e.g., water quality, industrial cleanup, landslide restoration, erosion control)
- Housing Infrastructure and Assistance
- Economic Aid (e.g., forgivable loan program, local revenue replacement)

Mayor Futrelle asked if any additional needs should be added. Councilmember Tugman emphasized the importance of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the rebuilding process, particularly for engineering and environmental services. Mayor Futrelle acknowledged this and noted the challenges of the upcoming budget cycle, advising the Council to begin preparing. With no further comments, Mayor Futrelle thanked the Council and confirmed that he would present the final list to the High Country Council of Governments at their next meeting.

TOWN MANAGER REPORT

Mayor Futrelle asked Ms. Davis if she had any updates for the Manager's Report. Ms. Davis began by expressing her pride in all Town of Boone staff who worked during the storm and continue to assist with recovery efforts. She noted that for future hires, she would recommend requiring the Town Manager to live in Boone, as she was unable to get into town during the storm.

Ms. Davis then provided several updates on behalf of Ms. Shook. First, she reported that two teams from Planning and Inspections were currently assisting Ashe County with damage assessments. Second, she noted that completion of the Boone Next Comprehensive Plan Update would be delayed, as part of the consulting team was based in Asheville. New dates for a Boone Next Comprehensive Plan Update meeting would be presented to Council in November. Third, she shared that Planning and Inspections had spoken with a FEMA representative about temporary housing requirements for Boone. Finally, Ms. Davis announced that Commercial Zoning Administrator Mike James would be leaving the Town of Boone to join the Virginia Department of Transportation.

Councilmember Carter asked if the Boone BOO event was still scheduled for October 31st, and Ms. Davis confirmed that it was. With no further questions, Mayor Futrelle moved to the next item on the agenda.

TOWN ATTORNEY REPORT

Mayor Futrelle asked Attorney Allison Meade if she had any updates. Attorney Meade had no updates, so Mayor Futrelle moved to the next item on the agenda.

BOARD LIAISON REPORT

Mayor Futrelle asked the Council if there were any board liaison reports. Councilmember Tugman provided an update on the Downtown Boone Development Association meeting held on October 11, 2024. She noted that the Board would be participating in F.A.R.M. Café's "Buy Boone Lunch" program and encouraged Council members to attend. She mentioned that the meeting covered messaging to welcome tourists to Downtown Boone and included a lengthy discussion on SBA loans, with businesses expressing interest in grant opportunities to avoid additional loans.

Councilmember Tugman also reminded the Council that Boone BOO would take place in Downtown Boone on October 31, and that a First Friday Art Crawl would follow on November 1.

Councilmember Plaag then updated the Council on the Watauga Economic Development Commission meeting, reporting that Senator Hise attended to discuss state efforts to mitigate the impact of Hurricane Helene.

Councilmember Roseman shared that the Watauga County Parks and Recreation Board would be meeting that evening, and she would provide an update in the next board liaison report. She noted that the Southern Appalachian Historical Association (SAHA) asked if the Town of Boone could help them seek grants or loans to offset income losses from Hurricane Helene. SAHA also inquired if an extension had been filed with the State of North Carolina for appropriated funds the park received during last year's budget cycle. Ms. Davis confirmed that the extension is being submitted.

With no further questions, Mayor Futrelle noted that there would be no closed session and asked for a motion to adjourn.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon the motion of Mayor Pro Tem George, seconded by Councilmember Plaag, the motion to adjourn the October 23, 2024 Boone Town Council meeting carried unanimously.

RESULT: APPROVED (UNANIMOUS)
AYES: GEORGE, TUGMAN, ROSEMAN, CARTER, PLAAG

Nicole Harmon, Town Clerk

Tim Futrelle, Mayor