

**MINUTES – WORKSHOP/RETREAT
BOONE TOWN COUNCIL
January 23, 2019**

CALL TO ORDER

A special meeting of the Boone Town Council was called to order at 9:00 a.m. on Wednesday, January 23, 2019 at the Council Chambers located at 1500 Blowing Rock Road. Mayor Rennie Brantz presided. Council Members present included Mayor Pro-Tem Loretta Clawson, Lynne Mason, Sam Furgiuele, Connie Ulmer and Marshall Ashcraft. Staff present included Town Manager John Ward, Assistant Town Manager Jim Byrne, Finance Director Amy Davis, Town Clerk Nicole Worley and Town Intern Autumn Gosheen. The meeting was facilitated by Phil Trew with the High Country Council of Governments. The purpose of the meeting was to hold the Town's annual budget retreat.

TOWN-WIDE DISCUSSION ITEMS

Mr. Ward began discussion by saying that the Town was on a decline turnover wise compared to last year and added that since 2014, employees had been given a cost of living adjustment, noting that the goal was to tie the amount of the potential adjustment to the Consumer Price Index. He stated that he would like to receive input from Council on moving toward a minimum salary rate of \$15 per hour. Mr. Ward continued by updating Council on discrepancies on Police and Fire employees' scheduled hours, specifically meal-time compensation. He asked if there was any objection to moving forward with the increased minimum salary rate. Mayor Pro-Tem Clawson stated that she believed the NCDOT had recently moved to a \$15 per hour minimum, and that she believed raising the minimum would be a step in the right direction. Mr. Furgiuele inquired as to what the total cost would be to increase the salary minimum to \$15 per hour, with Mr. Ward replying that it would cost less than \$15,000. Mr. Ashcraft questioned whether it would raise any compression issues that would need to be addressed. Mr. Ward responded that there was always that potential, but that issue was town-wide. Mr. Ward noted that the CPI was between 2-3% this year and that Council would have to prioritize raises. Mr. Ashcraft noted that Social Security was awarding a 2.8% increase this year. Mr. Ward then asked Council for Town-wide discussion items. Mayor Brantz mentioned the website, while Mr. Furgiuele stated that he would like to explore a stipend to Town employees who lived within the Town limits. He added that there may be some offset to the cost in what would be saved with the employee vehicle take-home policy. Mr. Furgiuele continued by saying that although Boone was more expensive to live in, he would like to give employees a stipend for living in Town, and that much smaller communities were able to do the same successfully. Mr. Furgiuele asked that the discussion about sustainable vehicles continue. Mr. Ward noted that staff had discussed with Ford the new Police Interceptor Hybrid and suggested that the Police Department acquire a 2-wheel drive interceptor with the plan to move toward all-wheel drive interceptors as soon as technology allowed. He added that if a hybrid, 2-wheel drive police car was used by the Downtown Officer, he or she would still have to have a back-up to drive in inclement weather. Mr. Furgiuele stated that he would guess a 4-wheel drive vehicle was needed only about 10-15 times per year and that having a whole fleet of 4-wheel drive/all-wheel drive vehicles made no sense to him. He stated that he did not mind waiting for police vehicles to catch up to technology, but suggested that the switch could start in other departments. Mr. Ward suggested having an electric vehicle which could be used on a check-out basis for employees and Council Members who had to go out of town for training events. Ms. Mason stated that the most important thing was to move forward and to consider the practicality. Mr. Ward suggested that existing technology be used across other departments and to look into a phase-in plan. Mr. Ashcraft stated that while he was not in favor of an "all in" approach to replacing vehicles, he did not want to give up on the idea of putting one or two hybrid vehicles in the police fleet and to keep 4-wheel drive back-ups. He added that the Town needed to make headway on the matter and put electric vehicles to use where they would do the most good. Mr. Furgiuele continued by saying that the movement of discussion within the Sustainability, Economics and Environment committee was to task staff with coming back to Council with proposals on making real reductions on the use of fossil fuels and stated that department heads needed to embrace that goal. Mr. Ward stated that water meter replacement needed to be discussed, since utilities were the Town's largest consumer of energy.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Human Resources director Dale Presnell stated that the department had implemented online training on safety and human resources matters and had gotten email addresses assigned to all Town employees. He continued by noting that the overall turn over rate had decreased. After a question by Mr. Furgiuele, Mr. Presnell stated that most job openings came with a large amount of applications. He added that police applicants were mostly entry-level applicants, and that police positions did not get as many applications. Mr. Ward noted that the Town was seeing more dependency on cadets, since Boone was a university Town. The employee wellness card was discussed briefly,

with Ms. Davis noting that the cards were paid for out of the Town's health insurance fund, was given with a list of health-related restrictions and that since money for raises had been limited, she believed the cards to have been well received by employees. Mr. Presnell outlined a typical compensation memo for Council, which was sent to each employee to outline the extra benefits they receive and the monetary value of the same. Mr. Furgiuele suggested that the value of staff training, take-home vehicles and uniforms be added to the memo where applicable. When asked to explain the decrease in turn over, Mr. Ward stated that staff tried to learn from previous issues with high turn over and that he believed employees felt supported with the wellness cards, cost of living adjustments, birthdays off and overall flexibility. Mr. Presnell stated that he believed most non-emergency applicants to have the opinion that the Town was a good place to work. Mr. Ward noted that staff was in the final stages of completing an in-house salary study and that it may carry recommendations within existing revenue streams.

Mayor Brantz declared a break at 10:07 a.m. Council reconvened at 10:17 a.m.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Pilar Fotta, director of Cultural Resources presented Council with the department's past accomplishments and goals for the upcoming year. She stated that she would like to add music at the July 4th event and that in the next 5-10 years, would like to see the fireworks computerized and synchronized to music. Ms. Fotta stated that though she invited several food trucks to set up at the event, that there were many competing events in the area on this date. Ms. Fotta announced that the 18th annual Boone BOO! was the largest ever and that she hoped to expand the boundary to mirror parade routes. She added that since the amount of people attending the event had grown exponentially, she believed expanding the event to be the best way to go for safety and enjoyment of attendees. Discussion turned to the Jones House's outdoor concert series, with Ms. Fotta stating that the recent trend had shifted toward a younger audience, and that staff would be attempting to bring in new performers. Ms. Mason stated that it was critical to appeal to the 20-40 year age group. Mr. Furgiuele asked if Ms. Fotta knew whether the Appalachian Theatre would open on schedule and asked if she saw any potential challenges with the theatre. Ms. Fotta stated that she believed the Theatre would benefit the department and carried a lot of potential. The HOW space on Howard Street was discussed briefly before discussion turned to the Christmas parade. Ms. Fotta stated that due to new insurance requirements, the Safety and Risk Management Officer had started requiring waivers for each participant in the parade. Ms. Fotta indicated that at between 700-800 waivers, this policy was becoming cumbersome and that she would speak to the Town Attorney about this requirement, as there had never been a claim arising from a parade that she knew of. Ms. Mason expressed concern with the amount of confetti left over after the Christmas parade. Ms. Fotta said that she was in the process of working on changing the parade application to include a fine associated with clean-up for matters such as this. Mr. Furgiuele stated that he had traveled to Pennsylvania for Christmas and noticed decorations in a number of towns. He stated that Boone's street decorations were pathetic in comparison, and that the town was a resort destination and current decorations were sad looking. Mr. Furgiuele asked whether it was a money issue and if decorations should be moved from the DBDA back to Cultural Resources. Mr. Ward stated that staff was directed to go to energy efficient LED Christmas lights and that the color of bulbs was an ongoing argument. Mayor Pro-Tem Clawson stated that she would like to see real wreaths downtown. Mr. Ward suggested that the DBDA and Cultural Resources department partner together to come up with different options for consideration. Ms. Mason stated that the DBDA had a meeting to look at integrating more colorful Christmas decorations but that funding became an issue. Ms. Fotta noted that the snowflakes were new and that swags were used Downtown in the past, but there were complaints about them. Ms. Mason suggested keeping the snowflakes, since they added extra street lighting. Ms. Fotta noted that if live greenery was hung before Christmas with the rest of the decorations, it would most likely be dead by Christmas. Mr. Ward stated that staff would come back January 31 with proposals for Council's review. Ms. Fotta suggested adding new decorations incrementally over a 2-3 year period. Ms. Mason asked that the new decorations not cover just King Street, but Howard and other side streets as well. Music lessons and Jones House hours were briefly discussed, which led Ms. Fotta to ask that when the cleaning contract was up, to increase cleaning days at the property. Ms. Fotta briefly discussed uses and upgrades at Daniel Boone Park due in part to the partnership with We Can So You Can. Ms. Fotta proposed having staff build shelving at the Post Office to hold mailing materials that would fit in with the look and feel of the post office. She added that repairs needed to be made to drywall in the building and that mats needed to be replaced. Ms. Fotta announced plans to expand Doc Watson Days, the addition of summer and fall movies on the Jones House lawn and the expansion of July 4th and St. Patrick's Day parade activities. She added that the sidewalk at the Jones House

needed to be replaced in order to make the house and lawn more accessible. Ms. Fotta stated that she currently had the funds to hire an engineer or architect for the project and that she had obtained permission from the Garden Club to relocate the gazebo. Mr. Furgiuele was of the opinion that if funds were already identified, then staff should consider this project a priority. Ms. Fotta noted that the kitchen inside the house needed to be upgraded in order to make it adequate for the functions held. Mr. Furgiuele asked whether staff had explored cooperative event booking with the Daniel Boone Gardens. Ms. Fotta reported that the garden club has expressed that they want to maintain event booking in an effort to increase their revenue. Mr. Furgiuele stated that he believed the Town to be wasting a resource with the gardens and that he believed it to be unfortunate that the Town's hands were tied with the long lease. Marketing strategies were discussed, along with the potential for office space or a museum at the Rivers House.

POLICE

Police Department discussions began with Mr. Ward explaining that the communications center was operated out of the Police Department, and noted that it also served in a customer service capacity as well. Police Chief Crawford stated that the department had answered more than 52,000 in the last year and that the non-emergency calls were often a waste of important staff time. Mr. Furgiuele asked whether the non-emergency calls could be redirected, to which Chief Crawford suggested the use of a phone tree, and Mr. Ward suggesting the utilization of a 311 service. Chief Crawford went on to say that the department had been spending more on the repair and maintenance of the building, and noted that almost every room encountered leaks. Mayor Brantz inquired about connectivity issues with the Sheriff's office and other entities. Chief Crawford stated that the department had the necessary equipment and that funding was recently moved to allow for the installation of radios into patrol cars. He added that in-field radios were already in use. Chief Crawford listed the departments needs for the upcoming fiscal year, which included three full-time patrol positions, noting that five employees had been lost to other departments recently. He stated that he believed low starting pay to be one of the reasons the department has had trouble recruiting officers, even though the Town offered good benefits. Chief Crawford expressed concern with the Town investing in training many newly hired officers, only to lose them to competing agencies for better pay. Discussion turned to the new municipal complex, with Chief Crawford stating that there was a grant that could be applied for that would help fund a new joint facility with another area agency. Mr. Furgiuele asked whether the County had mentioned consolidating E-911 services with the Town, with Chief Crawford noting that the County Manager had communicated to him that all options were on the table. Hybrid police vehicles were discussed and it was noted that hybrid vehicles with police equipment packages were not yet available. Chief Crawford suggested that Council consider purchasing one hybrid police vehicle for the Downtown Officer, with Mr. Ward adding that a second could be purchased as a pool vehicle to be parked at the Town Hall lot. He further recommended that this idea be taken to the Sustainability, Economics and Environment Committee for their consideration, and proposed that part of the \$100,000 formerly allocated toward sustainability go toward the funding of these two vehicles. Mr. Ward further noted that he hoped to be able to purchase the vehicles locally by way of a state contract price match in order to support local business and to have a mechanic nearby certified to work on these specific vehicles. Ms. Mason suggested that the vehicles be acquired before the sustainability event in April. The educational aspect of the hybrid vehicles was discussed briefly before discussion returned to the consolidation of the E-911 dispatch centers in the Town and County. Ms. Mason stated that she believed with the aging infrastructure and equipment at the Town's current dispatch center, a consolidated system was worth exploring. Mr. Furgiuele felt that the Town should move forward with discussions on this subject, but that he believed the County should pay their fair share for the consolidation. Chief Crawford noted that the department would potentially have to do an expansion of the dispatch center if the partnership with the County did not work out. Other needs included a mobile stakeout camera system, radio control base replacement, patrol portable radio replacements, two electric battery assistance bicycles, and an employee retention plan. Mr. Ashcraft suggested that an additional pay classification could be created for officers who had more experience in an effort to address this concern.

Mayor Brantz declared a break at 12:21 p.m. Council reconvened at 12:34 p.m.

FIRE

Fire Department discussions began with false fire alarms, with Chief Isaacs saying that he was reluctant to charge people for false alarms. He stated that the department had been working to identify problem areas and ways to work with people to remedy the problem. Mr. Furguele stated that he felt that by not charging for false alarms, the Town was missing out on a significant amount of money. Ms. Mason offered her perspective as a business owner, stating that her business took measures to keep alarms from going off and that it was an issue that was taken very seriously by her business. Mr. Furguele stated that he took issue with those who did not take the matter seriously and that did not try to remedy malfunctions in their systems. He added that the cost of responding to these alarms should be taxed back to them. Chief Isaacs continued by informing Council that the department had responded to 2,100 incidents last year, and added that over the past five years, the department had seen a 29% increase in costs related to population increase. Chief Isaacs stated that the Town had an insurance rating coming up soon and noted that the distribution model had changed since the Town's last rating in that ratings were now based on road miles. Mr. Furguele suggested that a water bill insert should be prepared notifying people of insurance ratings and how this affected them. Chief Isaacs noted the future need for a fifth fire station, potentially on the 105 Bypass, with a fourth station being planned for the new municipal complex. Chief Isaacs suggested that due to the increasing severity of emergency events, the need was increasing for the Town to begin emergency preparedness planning in terms of flooding. Mr. Furguele stated that the Town needed to be working toward mitigating damages caused by flooding and added that the County needed to step up to implement stormwater controls within the former ETJ. He further stated that the County should be engaged in recognizing the effects stormwater runoff from former ETJ properties. Discussion then moved to the fact that fire personnel work more hours per year than a typical employee. Chief Isaacs explained that kelly days were given to fire employees to bring their hours worked per week down to an appropriate number, and that it had been increasingly difficult to give fire personnel their kelly day off, since the department was down one person for every shift. He stated that he had been working with Human Resources to come up with a solution to alleviate some of the issues staff was running into, such as escalating overtime. Chief Isaacs stated that options included 1) continuing without any changes 2) requiring staff to work through their meal breaks without changing their rate of compensation, which would result in a reduction in their hourly pay rate, and would bring morale down 3) shifting fire employees two pay grades behind police employees and require them to take time off for meal breaks. Fee schedules were discussed at length, with Chief Isaacs noting that the department had collected approximately \$32,000 in permit fees. Mr. Ward stated that the goal was to have planning and fire permit fees reflect employee time associated with those inspections. He suggested that the revenue generated from fire permit fees could cover the cost of mitigating the overtime issue. Chief Isaacs passed out a draft fee schedule for fire permit fees and stated that he felt comfortable that those numbers were reflective of the work done by staff. Mr. Furguele suggested an amendment to reflect that for every increase of fifty units, permit costs increased by \$40. Mayor Pro-Tem Clawson asked what could be done about people who choose not to pay for fire permits. Mr. Ward stated that he supported taking collection action against the party, but that past direction had been not to pursue this avenue.

GIS

Chief Isaacs stated that GIS would be looking at increasing automation behind the scenes in the upcoming fiscal year, and anticipated the purchase of a new server and no new hardware costs.

PLANNING AND INSPECTIONS

Planning Director Jane Shook noted that there would be no budgetary changes in the upcoming fiscal year. Needs included a new vehicle and an updated fee schedule, since the department was only collecting 22% of what it was spending. Mr. Ward suggested taking a phase-in approach to work toward cost recovery over time. The utilization of different fee schedules was discussed, as was an a la carte option. Mr. Furguele asked why not immediately implement fee schedule changes instead of taking a phase-in approach. Mr. Ward suggested that it could have a negative affect on affordable housing and that a phase-in approach could soften the blow. Mr. Furguele felt a fee waiver program may be a better approach to assist low income applicants. Mr. Ward stated that staff was not necessarily set up to do that sort of assessment. Ms. Mason felt that increases to planning fees could be viewed as singling out one department, when citizens pay property taxes for a variety of services, and added that zoning ordinances were about quality of life and should be a shared responsibility to achieve a greater community good. She added that the Town should be sensitive to the extra cost this would put on homeowners, and that fees should be more equitable in terms of the impact they had on neighborhoods. Ms. Mason expressed concern that higher fees

could result in people taking chances on construction in order to avoid paying the fees. After brief discussion, Mr. Furgiuele stated that he was in favor of 100% recovery in terms of fees. Ms. Mason added that she felt increasing fees, as well as the recent increase to system development fees, created an affordability issue, and asked members to be mindful of this. Mr. Ashcraft suggested that staff bring back a proposal that would bring in 100% recovery, excluding single-family and duplex permits. Mr. Furgiuele felt that the Town should focus on passing along increases to the cost of operating the Town to the people who benefit from the services, either by way of increasing fees or raising taxes, and that consideration should be made for affordable housing initiatives which would include incentives or fee waivers for certain projects or people.

FINANCE

Finance Director Amy Davis noted that the Town had received a clean audit and that staff had been able to negotiate a different structure between IPS meters and Visa/Master Card which resulted in savings for the Town. Mr. Furgiuele asked whether an option could be added to add time to meters remotely. Mr. Ward answered that the system was capable of this option, but there had been hesitation in the past because of the ability this would give students to sit in class and increase time on their meters. He suggested that if Council wished, this option could be implemented on a trial basis, but reminded Council that he believed the Queen, Depot and King Street lots had been successful with the eight hour pre-pay option. Ms. Mason noted that the Queen Street lot was heavily used by students, and asked if staff could prepare a report on credit card fees to date. Ms. Davis stated that the department was almost ready to accept donations from the round-up program on water bills and hoped to be able to start by March 1. Ms. Davis expressed the need for one new staff person, and noted that the department had not had a new staff person in almost twenty years, though volume had increased.

Mayor Brantz declared a break at 3:05 p.m. Council reconvened at 3:14 p.m.

PUBLIC WORKS/PUBLIC UTILITIES

Public Works Director Rick Miller presented a departmental update for the previous fiscal year and noted the need for a new a new truck in the Street Department, a new snow plow and a new excavator. He noted that approximately \$500,000 needed to be set aside for work on Hunting Hills Road, and noted slope issues on the road required a long-term fix. Mr. Miller noted that the Town was the recipient of a \$15,000 donation that would go toward a replanting project Town wide. Ms. Mason noted the progress being made on the stream bank at the municipal complex site and encouraged others to go out and see the impact that had been made so far. Mr. Ward noted that Hollar and Greene had expressed that they would be open to providing an easement for a Greenway Trail extension project. Brief discussion was held regarding the maintenance of rights-of-way, with Mr. Miller stating that his department did much of the right-of-way maintenance in Town, adding that if the Town did not mow rights-of-way, they would rarely get mowed. Mr. Miller continued with his list of needs, which included a long-arm tractor and street sweeper, and noted that the 421/Grove Street side path finished first on the STIP list. He indicated that right-of-way acquisitions would begin in 2024, and suggested that Council set aside \$100,000 for the next five years in order to fund the Town's portion of the project. Mr. Miller explained the new ADA Transition Plan which is required by the State, and suggested that an engineer be hired to evaluate sidewalks, public thoroughfares and Town buildings to make sure they were ADA compliant. Mr. Miller noted that his department continued to operate under limited staff, and that there was a possibility that he would be approaching Council to request a new position due to unfunded mandates. The need for a new Public Works facility was discussed and was noted to be the top priority of the department. Mr. Miller noted that special appropriations would have to be made for improvements on New Market that included an island and crosswalk at the Methodist Church, and also noted a paving need from New Market Hills back to 421. Mr. Miller stated that succession planning was underway for water and sewer operations. Needs on the Public Utilities side included a small and large truck, and a sewer vacuum truck, which Mr. Miller suggested Council set aside \$150,000 a year for the next four years for the purchase of this truck. Mr. Miller stated that the next project in the Capital Improvements Plan was Green Street, which crews were currently working on. He noted that there were issues with shifting and collapsing in this area, and that when projects such as this were initiated, an engineer verified that lines were able to handle the flow before the project proceeded to Planning and Inspections. Mr. Miller stated additional pumps for the new intake and pump station would need to be purchased, and that the Waste Water Treatment Plant was in need of a large truck. He added that future discussion would need to be held regarding staff for the new intake.

ADMINISTRATION

Town Manager John Ward stated that there were no changes to the Governing Body line item and noted the addition of \$12,000 for special event fee waivers. He stated that in the Administration Department, staff hoped to switch to MuniCode in order to allow for in-house codification and asked for feedback on the Town website. Mr. Ward explained that staff had explored different hosting options for the website and stated that the current website cost approximately \$5,000. He added that an upgrade would cost between \$30-40,000 plus additional recurring costs. Mr. Ashcraft stated that he was not interested in spending such a large amount of money on a upgrading a website that was currently useable. Mr. Furgiuele agreed.

Downtown Boone Development Coordinator Lane Weiss highlighted the success of the previous years' events. She stated that the association held their budget retreat recently and planned to continue with a similar budget as last year. Ms. Weiss added that the DBDA hoped to focus on children's programming and bringing more families downtown, as well as increased social media marketing and moving forward with the accelerated streetscape plans. Ms. Mason suggested it would be helpful for downtown businesses to see a ten-year streetscape plan to see what upgrades were targeted in a certain year.

Discussion turned back to administration, with Mr. Ward stating that the Tourism Development Authority had expressed support of long term agreements to support Howard Street improvements with hotel/motel tax revenue. Mr. Ward gave an update on sustainability goals, stormwater regulations review and noted that in order to go above and beyond current regulations, he suggested that an expert be hired to review regulations and make suggestions based on their findings. Mr. Furgiuele stated that Council should begin concrete discussions on moving forward with the municipal complex. Ms. Mason suggested that staff look at phasing into the sell of other Town properties to potentially assist with the funding. Mr. Ward noted that old appraisals reported an approximate value of the buildings at approximately 6 million dollars, but that appraisals needed to be updated. Ms. Clawson stated that she felt the Town was not growing, but that the University was, and asked whether there was anything that could be done to cap enrollment at ASU. Mr. Ward stated that he did not believe there was anything that could be done to cap enrollment and cautioned against this due to the many partnerships that the Town had with ASU. Ms. Mason stated that ASU should be mindful of where their students were living, and suggested that staff communicate their concerns to the board of governors at ASU.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION ITEMS

It was the consensus of Council that staff come back on January 31st with additional information on the following topics:

- Budgeting increase for Downtown Christmas decorations
- MSD revenue
- Priority of Rivers House
- 6-month analysis of credit cards
- Town's total debt
- Bolick Farm/Municipal Complex update
- Howard Street update
- Sustainable goals
- Hydrological study
- Updated appraisals for Police Department and Public Works buildings

ADJOURNMENT

Upon a motion by Mayor Pro-Tem Clawson, seconded by Ms. Ulmer, Council voted to adjourn the meeting at 5:17 p.m.

VOTE:	Aye:	All
	Nay:	None

Nicole Worley, Town Clerk

Rennie Brantz, Mayor