

**MINUTES – WORKSHOP/RETREAT
BOONE TOWN COUNCIL
February 10, 2023**

CALL TO ORDER

A regular meeting of the Boone Town Council was called to order on Friday, February 10, 2023 at 9:15 a.m. in the Council Chambers located at 1500 Blowing Rock Road in Boone. Mayor Tim Futrelle presided. Council members present included Mayor Pro-Tem Edie Tugman, Councilmember Todd Carter, Councilmember Virginia Roseman, Councilmember Dalton George and Councilmember Becca Nenow. Staff present included Town Manager Amy Davis, Communications Specialist Laney Pilkington, Cultural Resources Director Mark Freed, Human Resources Director Dale Presnell, Police Chief Andy Le Beau, Public Works Director Rick Miller, Deputy Public Works Director Todd Moody, Planning and Inspections Director Jane Shook and Interim Finance Director Guy Miller.

Mayor Futrelle called the meeting to order at 9:14am.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor Futrelle asked those in attendance if they would like to provide public comment. Ms. Monica Caruso, County Librarian for the Watauga County Public Library, discussed the need for a library expansion. After presenting the history of the library and the reason for the expansion, Ms. Caruso asked the Boone Town Council to consider waiving building and inspections fees for the expansion, waiving water and sewer tap fees, and asked if the Town would consider contributing the thirty town owned parking spaces located behind the library to the library. After a brief discussion, Mayor Futrelle thanked Ms. Caruso and asked if there were others in attendance who would like to give public comment.

Mr. Bill Dixon with Appalachian Architecture gave a brief overview of the proposed expansion of the Watauga County Library. Councilmember Carter asked if the library had identified potential grant funding for the expansion. Mr. Dixon and Ms. Caruso said that they were working with the High Country Council of Governments in order to begin the process of identifying and securing grants. With no further questions, Mayor Futrelle thanked Mr. Dixon and Ms. Caruso for their time, and moved to the first item of discussion in regards to the budget retreat.

TOWN MANAGER/ADMINISTRATION

Ms. Amy Davis handed out a six-month financial guide, which included the following highlights:

- The sales tax revenue from the first four months is up by 11%
- Tax collections from the county Tax Office are at a 96% collection rate, which is 3% higher than the previous year
- Under the current distribution of sales tax, the Town of Boone lost \$4.1 million in potential revenue. To recoup this amount, the Town of Boone would need to increase the current tax rate by 18.6 cents.

Discussion ensued in regards to the current sales tax distribution from Watauga County. Ms. Davis then gave the following information in regards to the Administration Department and Finance Department:

- Town revenues have increased by roughly \$24 million since FY 03/04; however, the Finance Department has worked with the current staffing level with no increase in staff numbers since 1999.
- Contribution from the rural fire district funds fifteen staff positions for the Fire Department.
- Administration and Human Resources are working on developing and implementing a step pay plan for the Fire Department and Police Department, with the hopes of implementing a similar plan in the Public Works Department.

Councilmember Carter asked Council if they would consider adding another position to the Finance Department, in which Council agreed. Ms. Davis thanked Council for listening. With no further discussion, Chief Isaacs began discussing budgetary needs for the Fire Department.

FIRE DEPARTMENT

Chief Isaacs expressed support for the step pay plan proposed. He went on to explain that within the last twenty years, the Fire Department has grown from answering 143 calls to 10,881 calls. Incident reports are a portion of what the Fire Department does. After a brief description of what the Fire Department is tasked with, Chief Isaacs asked Council to consider the following:

- Continued need for Station 4. With certain times of the year being extremely busy, Station 4 would be a priority to reduce response times and continued service to the rural fire district.

Councilmember Carter asked Chief Isaacs if there was need to renovate the current Fire Station 1. Chief Isaacs said that there was, however Fire Station 4 and the Public Works building are more of a priority. With no further comments, Chief LeBeau discussed the budgetary needs for the Police Department.

POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief LeBeau thanked Council, and outlined the following needs of the department:

- Retention and recruitment is a point of contention for the Police Department. Agencies within the High Country offer either higher pay or a step pay plan to allow qualified employees grow and be rewarded for their time. He expressed support for the continued efforts to develop a step pay plan.
- The Police Department are developing a Community Care Plan. Chief LeBeau mentioned that if the department implements the program in partnership with the Mediation and Restorative Justice Center, it would cost roughly \$78,000.

Chief LeBeau also asked for four additional positions in the future in order to continue to provide services to the residents of Boone in a safe and timely manner, however for FY 23/24 he asked that Council considered implementing budgetary decisions which promote retention and to look at adding extra positions during FY 24/25.

With no further discussion, Mayor Futrelle called for a break at 11:08am.

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

The meeting resumed at 11:28am.

Mayor Futrelle asked Mr. Miller to begin discussing budgetary needs for Public Works. Mr. Miller listed the following needs:

- Additional funding towards Public Works infrastructure, namely the stockyard building which holds the salt for the roads during winter weather. Mr. Miller added that currently the building is collapsing, and that by following the current Town of Boone community appearance procedures it would be more expensive.
- Additional funding towards the Hunting Hills bridge rehabilitation project due to the price of materials increasing.
- Additional mechanic position. The staffing level of the fleet staff has not increased since 2005, and the amount of vehicles in the Town's fleet has increased.
- Additional funding to the facilities and street fund in order to continue to provide adequate services. Mr. Miller added that the fund was reduced years back, and that it has come time to increase it again.
- Finally, Mr. Miller asked for increased funding for fuel and chemicals at the Wastewater Treatment Plant facility.

Mayor Pro-Tem Tugman asked if the salt building would move to the new Public Works facility proposed at the Bolick Property. Mr. Miller said no, because salt needs to be in a centralized location. Mayor Futrelle asked about the Bolick Property. Mr. Miller said that they should have an estimate for price in regards to moving Planning and Inspections and Public Works to the property by the budget retreat next year. Councilmember Nenow asked about grading costs, and Ms. Davis answered that they were looking at a different portion of the property to help reduce the cost of grading. Mr. Miller reminded Council that the Town would most likely be receiving a letter from the State of North Carolina regarding the MS4 permit within the next two years, and that Council would need to consider of what they would like to do in regards to stormwater. Council agreed, and with no further questions, Ms. Shook began discussing budgetary needs for the Planning and Inspections Department.

PLANNING & INSPECTIONS DEPARTMENT

Ms. Shook began by saying that the Planning and Inspections Department had been working hard on growing and maintaining their relationship with Appalachian State University. She went on to say that within the last two years, the Planning and Inspections Department had lost two positions, which were merged with other positions. However, she went on to say that, the office mirrors the economy and that the positions held currently were the right size in regards to work load. Ms. Shook mentioned that she would like more layers to the department. Currently, seven of

the ten employees directly reported to her. Ms. Shook laid out the following items for Council to consider in regards to budgetary needs:

- Not for this budget cycle, but for a budgetary cycle in the future she would like Council to consider adding an additional position of Planning Supervisor or a similar title to reduce the amount of direct reporting.
- Pay increases for planners for receiving certifications. Currently, building inspectors receive pay increases for increasing their levels of building inspector certifications, but planners do not. She would also like to see employees evaluated and rewarded for their merit and drive, not just years of service.

Councilmember George asked Ms. Shook's opinion on hiring a Housing and Neighborhood Officer position would be beneficial. He went on to explain that he felt it would be good for the town to "put money where their mouth is" and fund a position that would support affordable housing initiatives. Ms. Shook agreed that she would like a position similar to the one proposed in the future, however the current space Planning and Inspections is in would not be able to accommodate extra employees. She mentioned to Council she would need to discuss with Mr. Presnell and Ms. Davis to figure out the structure of the department. Councilmember George agreed. Mayor Pro-Tem then asked if Ms. Shook could lay out what she needed for this budget cycle. Ms. Shook laid out the following:

- Increased funding towards technology. With Planning and Inspection's permitting process moving to digital, increased funding is necessary.
- Need funding for the Comprehensive Plan update. Ms. Shook estimated the cost of the update would be roughly \$83,000.
- Increased funding towards travel and training for staff, increased funding for dues and subscriptions.

Ms. Shook ended by agreeing with Council that she would appreciate more positions, however currently they were not the priority. Council agreed, and thanked Ms. Shook. With no further questions, Mr. Guy Miller gave a brief overview of the Finance Department's budgetary needs.

FINANCE DEPARTMENT

Mayor Futrelle left the meeting at 1:00pm.

Mr. Miller began by explaining that Ms. Davis has covered a majority of what he would ask for. He reiterated the following budgetary needs:

- One additional finance position added. He explained that a senior staff member was close to retirement, and that as the current interim if he were to get the Finance Director position, staff would have to help cover his previous position. He added that for the new position, the Finance Department would need roughly \$62,000 (which would include benefits).

Council thanked Mr. Miller for taking on the role of Interim Finance Director, and wished him luck in the interview process. With no further questions, Mr. Presnell began discussing the budgetary needs of the Human Resources Department.

HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

Mr. Presnell began by giving a brief overview of what the Human Resources Department does to serve the Town. He went on to explain that the Human Resources Department covers the Safety and Risk duties as well, which includes insurance claims. Mr. Presnell explained that he and Ms. Davis were working on implementing a mentorship program for employees wanting to grow in their position. By identifying employees who show promise or drive, Mr. Presnell explained that it is a strategy to improve employee retention. Mr. Presnell then asked for additional funding for wellness benefits. With no additional questions, Mr. Freed began discussing the budgetary needs for the Cultural Resources Department.

CULTURAL RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

Mr. Freed began by saying that they currently have no major requests. Council asked if he needed funding towards Boonerang and he said that with the sponsorships they have received and the budget they already have they would be okay. Mr. Freed then discussed the budgetary asks for the Cultural Resources Department:

- Additional funding to the maintenance budget. A recent purchase of a new heating system due to the previous system breaking in the Jones House had depleted the budget majorly.
- Funding to resod the Jones House lawn would be appreciated due to increased use of the area.

With no further discussion, Council moved to final discussion.

FINAL DISCUSSION

Mayor Pro-Tem Tugman asked Council if they had anything else to add. With no further questions, Mayor Pro-Tem Tugman asked for a motion to adjourn.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon the motion made by Councilmember George, seconded by Councilmember Roseman, the Special Meeting of the Boone Town Council was adjourned at 2:00pm.

Nicole Harmon, Town Clerk

Tim Futrelle, Mayor