

**MINUTES – WORKSHOP/RETREAT
BOONE TOWN COUNCIL
May 18, 2023**

CALL TO ORDER

A special meeting of the Boone Town Council was called to order at 9:11 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, and Councilmember Virginia Roseman. Councilmember Dalton George and Councilmember Becca Nenow were absent. Staff present included Town Manager Amy Davis, Communications Specialist Laney Pilkington, Public Works Director Rick Miller, Public Works Deputy Director Todd Moody, Planning Director Jane Shook, Cultural Resources Director Mark Shook, Finance Director Guy Miller, Police Chief Andy Le Beau, Police Major Shane Robbins, Fire Chief Jimmy Isaacs, and Sustainability and Special Projects Manager George Santucci.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor Futrelle asked if anyone in attendance would like to provide public comment. Ms. Donna Bayer thanked the Council for their time, and gave a brief overview on why she was there. She explained that the new connector road, which will be connecting New Market Boulevard and Chestnut Drive, was requested by her and her family to be named Norman Cheek Avenue after her late father, Mr. Norman Cheek. She went on to say that Mr. Cheek was a prominent community member who gave back to those in need, especially with Toys for Tots and care packages for veterans. She asked Council to please reconsider the naming of the connector from Cheek Avenue to Norman Cheek Avenue. Mayor-Pro Tem Tugman noted that two councilmembers were absent, and asked if they could postpone the naming until the next meeting. Mrs. Amy Davis said that because this was for emergency services purposes, it could not be delayed any longer. Mayor Futrelle asked for a motion to amend the agenda to include discussion in regards to the naming of the connector road. Upon the motion of Councilmember Roseman, seconded by Councilmember Carter, the agenda was amended to include discussion in regards to naming the connector road. Councilmember Roseman explained to Ms. Bayer that Cheek Avenue was the name given because it brings honor to the Cheek family. Ms. Bayer understood the sentiment, but would prefer the road to be dedicated to her late father. She went on to say that a scholarship had been founded in his honor, the Norman Cheek Scholarship, which benefits community members perusing a degree at Appalachian State University. Mayor Pro-Tem Tugman explained that currently, town roads that are named after individuals use their last names. Examples given were Council Street and Hunting Road. Councilmember Carter agreed, and said that naming roads after individual's last names was precedent. Mayor Futrelle disagreed, and asked Council to reconsider in order to honor the family's wishes. Mayor Pro-Tem Tugman made the motion to rename Cheek Street to Cheek Avenue. Upon the motion of Mayor Pro-Tem Tugman, Council unanimously approved the renaming.

COUNCIL MATTERS

Mrs. Davis began by explaining the highlights for the proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2023/2024 (FY23/24). She explained that for this FY, a proposed increase in property taxes of \$0.01, which would increase the tax rate to \$0.37 per \$100 valuation. The extra cent of taxes collected would go towards affordable housing. She went on to note that sales tax collection from Watauga County was 18.3% above what it was during this time last year. In addition, the North Carolina League of Municipalities projected an 11% increase, which the Town of Boone exceeded. However, Mrs. Davis explained that this was not abnormal for the Town of Boone.

She went on explain the proposed Solid Waste Fee for the Town of Boone. Currently, the Town of Boone does not collect a solid waste fee from single family and duplex residences. With the rising costs of contracts for solid waste removal, Mr. Todd Moody proposed a solid waste fee, which would help mitigate those costs. The fee proposed would be \$8 a month for single family and duplex residences. Councilmember Roseman asked if this fee would be added onto current water bills. Mrs. Davis said yes. Mayor Pro-Tem Tugman asked how the public would be educated if this is passed. Mrs. Davis explained that Ms. Laney Pilkington would create an educational campaign, as well as notify the media through a press release. Additionally, a notice would be sent out in the water bills a month before the fee would take place. No increase in water and sewer rates were proposed.

Mrs. Davis explained that due to the change of sales tax distribution from Watauga County, the Town of Boone

would have to adopt an increase of \$0.188 cents for property taxes to make up for the loss of sales tax revenue. Additionally, the following expenses for the Town of Boone were projected to raise by the following percentages: Gas/Fuel: 18.3%, Electricity and Allocation for the Green Power Program: 5.76% and \$150,000, Telecommunication Services: 5.40%, Medical and Dental Insurance: 3%, and General Liability, Auto, Property, and Workers Compensation: 9.5%.

Mrs. Davis then asked Chief LeBeau and Chief Isaacs to discuss their need for vehicles. Chief LeBeau thanked Mrs. Davis, and explained to Council that the hybrid vehicles ordered for FY 22/23 have yet to be scheduled for production, and the chance of these orders being cancelled is high. After a discussion regarding the need for vehicles within the Police Department, Chief LeBeau offered Council two options. Option one was to cancel the five Ford Police Interceptor Hybrids ordered in FY 22/23, immediately order five Dodge Durango V6 SUVs, in FY 23/24 on July 1, evaluate the feasibility of Ford Police Interceptor Hybrids and if unavailable, purchase two Dodge Durango V6 SUVs, and in FY 23/24 on July 1, evaluate the feasibility of a Ford F150 hybrid and if unavailable, purchase one RAM 1500 SSV pickup truck. Option two was to cancel the five Ford Police Interceptor Hybrids ordered in FY 22/23, immediately order five Dodge Durango V6 SUVs, and in FY 23/24 order two Dodge Durango V6 SUVs and one Ram 1500 SSV pickup truck. After a brief deliberation by Council, Upon the motion of Councilmember Roseman, seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Tugman, Council voted unanimously to follow option one that was proposed, with the addition that all town departments had the ability to modify their orders for vehicles in order to fulfill their needs as long as there was no additional cost.

Mrs. Davis thanked Council, and gave a brief overview of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and inflation. According to the CPI, inflation has grown exponentially since April 2021. She went on to say that \$31,200 in April 2021 now has the buying power of \$40,703.93 in April 2023. Mrs. Davis then explained that staff turnover for YTD FY22/23 was 10.7%, and that many employees had left the Town of Boone to work for other agencies and Watauga County. Mrs. Davis noted that a step-pay plan had been implemented for the Police Department and Fire Department, however, the proposal for Public Works to implement a step-pay plan will be proposed in December 2023. She went on to say that in July 2021, the Town of Boone was 14.1% behind Watauga County in regards to pay. With the 15% raise across the board, the Town of Boone was 0.83% behind Watauga County in pay. Mrs. Davis thanked the Council for approving this raise, however, Watauga County is now 10.17% ahead of the Town in regards to pay. A 10% pay increase is included in the proposed budget in order to become competitive with Watauga County again. Chief LeBeau explained that during the last year, the Police Department had lost 37% of their patrol staff to agencies with higher pay. Chief Isaacs explained that they are losing knowledge in the field, with a big portion of the Fire Department having less than two years of training and many employees nearing the age of retirement. Mr. Rick Miller explained that in Public Works, employees who have worked for the Town for seven years are making the same amount as employees hired into the same position because there is no step-pay plan. Mrs. Davis proposed a \$0.005 cent increase to the proposed tax rate of \$0.037, which would total \$0.0375 in order to fund the proposed step-pay plan for Public Works.

Moving forwards, Mrs. Davis explained Article 6 Section 3 of the Town of Boone Personnel Policy. This section of the personnel policy covers health insurance for retirees. Mrs. Davis explained that in order to increase retention of long time employees, she and Mr. Dale Presnell, proposed a change in the retiree health insurance. The proposed change would be as follows: After 20 years of service, the employee's health insurance would be covered by 50% by the Town, after 25 years of service coverage would increase to 75%, and at 30+ years, coverage would increase to 100%. Mrs. Davis proposed this option be implemented by June 1st, 2023. Upon the motion of Councilmember Roseman, seconded by Councilmember Carter, Council voted unanimously to approve the proposed change to Article 6 Section 3 of the Town of Boone Personnel Policy, and that it be enacted on June 1st, 2023.

BREAK

A break was called at 10:45 a.m. by Mayor Futrelle. The workshop resumed at 10:55 a.m..

COUNCIL MATTERS: CONTINUED

Mrs. Davis resumed the discussion with the note that there is only one proposed position found in the proposed budget, which would be an Accountant 1 position in the Finance Department. She went on to say that many

departments needed positions, however, they did not have the funding for additional positions. Mrs. Davis noted that Chief Isaacs had been proposing the position of Emergency Manager for the Town of Boone for multiple years. Chief Isaacs gave a brief overview of the position, and why it is important. This position would help create a resilient community, and that currently the Town is able to handle the emergencies when they happen, however, they do not have preparation for all disasters or emergencies. Councilmember Carter asked Chief Isaacs if there was a current employee in mind for the position, and Chief Isaacs said yes. Councilmember Roseman asked what the proposed salary would be for that position, and Chief Isaacs said that it would need in pay grade 17. Mrs. Davis noted that with an increase to \$0.0375 cents for property taxes, the step-pay plan for Public Works would be funded, as well as the Emergency Manager position. Councilmember Roseman voiced support for the proposed \$0.0375 cents per \$100. She noted that she was in support for an additional half cent be added to the proposed tax rate, to make the total proposed tax rate equal \$0.038 cents per \$100, adding that she would like the additional half cent be dedicated towards nonprofits. Mayor Pro-Tem Tugman voiced disagreement to the \$0.038 cent proposed rate.

Discussion ensued about the process of gathering Outside Agency Funding applications, and what needed to change for the next fiscal year. Councilmember Carter noted that agencies which submitted late should not be considered for funding, explaining that in the world of nonprofits if an application is not submitted in time the portal closes. Mayor Pro-Tem Tugman agreed. Councilmember Roseman reiterated her reasoning for proposing an increase to \$0.038 cents per \$100, and wanted to be able to help support the local nonprofits more. Mrs. Davis asked if Council would like to take a portion of the funds set for affordable housing to go to Outside Agency Funding, in which Council disagreed. Mayor Pro-Tem Tugman said that she was comfortable with a 1.5 cent increase, however, she was not certain about a 1.75 cent increase. Mayor Pro-Tem Tugman said she is willing to discuss it further, however, does not want a decision made right now.

Mayor Futrelle announced that he had to leave the meeting at 12:03 p.m. due to a prior engagement. Mrs. Davis noted that because there would be no quorum, the meeting would need to be discussion only with no actions being taken. Council agreed.

DISCUSSION

Councilmember Carter asked Mrs. Jane Shook what she would like to see in the Planning and Inspections Department. Mrs. Shook stated that eventually, she would like to add a Planning Supervisor position to the Planning and Inspections Department, however, it is not a necessity only a consideration. Councilmember Carter noted they should plan for disaster, then growth, in which Council and staff agreed. Councilmember Carter then asked Mr. Rick Miller if he had anything else to add.

Mr. Rick Miller said that alongside affordable housing, Council would need to begin to commit funds to the relocation of the Public Works Department. He noted that within two to three years, the Town would be losing money on the rent of the Brown Building. Councilmember Roseman asked Mr. Guy Miller if he has anything to add. Mr. Guy Miller thanked Council, and said that for this process he would listen and learn as it is his first budget retreat. Councilmember Carter asked Mr. Santucci if he needed anything. Mr. Santucci said that he was applying for the Charging and Fueling Infrastructure (CFI) grant from USDOT. This grant needed \$100,000 from the Town in order to receive \$500,000. However, Mr. Santucci added, that most of this funding will come from in-kind work. Appalachian State's New River Light and Power has also hired a fundraising team in order to help gain the \$100,000 needed for the grant. He explained that this grant would be used to look into alternative fuel sources, like electric vehicles. Finally, Mayor Pro-Tem Tugman asked Mr. Freed if he has anything to add. Mr. Freed thanked Council, and that in the next fiscal year he may be asking for an increase in the amount of part-time staff they hire. With no further discussion, the May 18th 2023 Budget Retreat of the Boone Town Council adjourned at 12:13pm.

Nicole Harmon, Town Clerk

Tim Futrelle, Mayor