MINUTES – SPECIAL MEETING
BOONE TOWN COUNCIL
June 4, 2020

CALL TO ORDER

A special meeting of the Boone Town Council was called to order electronically on Thursday, June 4, 2020 at 9"00 a.m. Mayor Rennie Brantz presided. Council members present included Mayor Pro-Tem Loretta Clawson, Connie Ulmer, Sam Furgiuele, Dustin Hicks and Nancy LaPlaca. Staff present included Town Manager John Ward, Town Clerk Nicole Harmon, Finance Director Amy Davis, Public Works Director Rick Miller, Planning Director Jane Shook, and Human Resources Director Dale Presnell. Town Attorney Allison Meade was present for the first part of the meeting.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mayor Brantz welcomed all who were participating in the meeting, and stated that he was aware of the most recent editorial piece in the Watauga Democrat. He added that he understood the concerns of the public regarding the Town Council and how meetings were being conducted and that he shared the same concerns. Mayor Brantz indicated that at the regular June Town Council meeting he planned to place an item on the agenda so that Council members as a team could discuss how agenda items were submitted, develop an outline for how discussion should proceed under Roberts Rules of Order, and how Council could refocus efforts on supporting the community that members were elected to represent. He added that he did not have all the answers, but that he was confident that by working together, Council could develop a plan with input from all members that would clearly outline agreed upon expectations and a path forward.

Ms. Ulmer thanked all who participated in the Black Lives Matter events in Town recently. Mr. Ward indicated there was a "community connections/Black Lives Matter" event being advertised on Facebook. He added that the event was a virtual meeting beginning at 6:00 p.m. and that pre-registration was required. In addition, Mr. Ward stated that Interim Police Chief Andy Le Beau had started reviewing the Town's Standard Operating Procedure policies well before protests began in an effort to make adjustments as needed before issues arise. He complimented Town of Boone Police staff for taking the steps needed to protect the First Amendment rights of protesters, and thanked demonstrators for keeping local events peaceful. Mr. Ward indicated that staff would be issuing press releases and providing additional information as staff moved through the review process. Mr. Furgiuele noted that he planned to add an agenda item later in the month to reschedule the police forum. All were in agreement that the police forum should be rescheduled. Mr. Ward felt that it was important to remind everyone that the area was still amidst the COVID19 pandemic, and that while is was important for people to demonstrate their beliefs, it was also crucial that they practice social distancing, wear a mask and to wash their hands. He indicated that in many of the protests that had occurred in other areas, social distancing was not taking place, and that the area's ability to limit the transmission of COVID19 relied on everyone remaining hypervigilant in terms of COVID19.

Upon a motion by Mayor Pro-Tem Clawson, seconded by Ms. Ulmer, Council voted to approve the agenda as presented.

VOTE:	Aye:	All
	Nay:	None

COUNCIL MATTERS

CONSIDERATION OF DELEGATING AUTHORITY FOR THE TOWN TO ACCEPT & THE MAYOR TO SIGN UTILITY EASEMENTS

Ms. Meade presented Council with a recommendation that not every utility easement given to the Town have to go before Council for approval, and instead could be accepted and signed by the Mayor. Ms. Meade indicated that there were many different types of easements, and suggested that easements given to the Town at its request, such as sidewalk, stormwater or sewer line easements be approved and signed by the Mayor without going before Council as a matter of policy. She stated that she did not believe there was any legal reason that such easements needed to come before Council for approval, and added that she would review and sign off on them before they would be signed by the Mayor. Ms. Meade indicated that this request did not include any easements that the Town granted, and that those would still come before Council for approval. Likewise, she stated that for any request that the Town accept private infrastructure, such as private streets or utilities for

Town maintenance, those easements would also come before Council for approval pursuant to state law. Ms. Meade further added that occasionally, requiring these easements to come before Council caused unnecessary delays to projects. Mr. Ward noted that this request was in line with other requests for policy adjustments made over time. He also added that there were a large number of utility easements from years prior which were not recorded, and that staff was working to get easements re-signed and recorded. Ms. Meade stated that rules overseeing these matters could be set by each governing board, and it was her suggestion that this be added to a Town policy book so that it was clear moving forward. Mr. Furgiuele expressed his support for the request and stated that he could not think of an instance when Council did not endorse an easement under these circumstances. He asked that as part of the Town Attorney or Town Manager's report each month that Council be advised as to who has given the Town easements, since he believed it to be helpful to know who was cooperating with the Town. He then made a motion, which was seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Clawson to approve the request as submitted.

RESULT:	**APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]**
MOVER:	Sam Furgiuele, Council Member
SECONDER:	Loretta Clawson, Mayor Pro-Tem
AYES:	Clawson, Furgiuele, Ulmer, LaPlaca, Hicks

CONSIDERATION OF CHANGES TO CODE OF ETHICS REGARDING GIFTS

Ms. Meade indicated that the original request made by Council last year was to make the gift policy more clear and to make it more of a blanket policy prohibiting gifts. She noted that there had to be some exceptions in the policy, and asked whether Council believed the policy should explicitly include Town committee members. Ms. Meade indicated that the current policy was unclear as to whether it applied to both Council and committee members, though she felt it did apply to both in most cases in the policy. She stated that she knew of no reason that the policy should not apply to both Council and committee members in all instances, and noted that if a problem arose in the future, the policy could be revisited. Ms. Meade believed that committee members should behave like Council membersas a way to make sure that both the appearance and reality of no gift acceptance is maintained by all persons involved in Town governance. Mr. Furgiuele felt that the policy should apply to committee members, or in the alternative, if committee members accepted gifts from someone who would have an interest in the item at issue, and then voted on a recommendation that would go before Council, that those gifts should be disclosed at the meeting and reflected in the minutes. He stated that he preferred that the policy apply to committee members as well as Council members, but if so, he felt that there should be two different effective dates. Mr. Furgiuele believed that the effective date for Town Council members should be immediately, and the effective date for committee members should be later, since he believed that some committee members were not aware of the Code of Ethics. With a later effective date, Mr. Furgiuele felt that this would allow staff time to educate committee members about the Code of Ethics, and to ensure they were aware what their responsibilities were in terms of the Code of Ethics. In response to a question raised by Mayor Pro-Tem Clawson, Ms. Meade indicated that gifts in exchange for the award of a contract were prohibited in the Code of Ethics, and recommended that committee members be included in the Code of Ethics. Ms. Ulmer was in agreement with the policy being all inclusive, and believed that the effective date should be postponed to allow for necessary education. Ms. Meade noted that she did not prepare the submitted language as she normally did with ordinance language, so she believed it would be best to bring back to the regular June meeting in the proper format. She added that Council could make the policy effective then, since there would be a little over a month to educate committee members. Ms. Meade pointed out other proposed changes including exceptions made for certain circumstances. Mr. Furgiuele believed the policy should be adopted and applied to both Council and committee members, though he disagreed with Ms. Ulmer in that the policy should be made effective upon adoption for Council members. Council Member Hicks was in agreement with Mr. Furgiuele's suggestions. Mr. Ward added that, depending on the final adoption time period, he believed that staff could begin distributing copies of the Code of Ethics to committee members, as well as placing it on the next agenda for each committee so that it could be reviewed. Mr. Furgiuele felt that it was important for the document to be distributed, but noted that he had attended committee meetings where some members were prepared in terms of reading the materials and some were not, and believed it was important for discussion to take place at the actual committee meetings as well. He suggested that the implementation of the policy could be on a rolling basis so that each committee (especially ad-hoc committees) would be made subject to the policy once they have been advised of the terms of the policy. Ms. Meade stated that she would be preparing training materials for certain committees, and suggested that she could speak on the materials during the meetings. She added that she would work with the Town Manager and appropriate department heads regarding effective dates for each committee. Ms. Meade stated that she found the Code of Ethics difficult to navigate and found the format to be unhelpful, and asked whether there was interest in her working to clarify the language. She also questioned whether or not the Code of Ethics was properly included in the Town's Code of Ordinances. Ms. Meade indicated that State law required a municipality to adopt a policy or resolution regarding its Code of Ethics, not that it be included within the municipalities Code of Ordinances such as the Town's currently was. She stated that most municipalities had adopted their Code of Ethics by resolution or policy for different reasons, including the fact that it did not require the same effort to make changes to the policy, as well as the fact that the Code of Ethics was only aspirational and was a set of guidelines, not something that could be punishable criminally. She did note that some items within the policy were redundant to State law, such as bribery, which would be punishable criminally. Mr. Furgiuele commented as the author of the Code of Ethics, he did not disagree with simplifying the language. He added that many of the components of the language were specific to Boone's history and the functioning of its Town Council and committees. Mr. Furgiuele stated that he would be reluctant to support the removal of some of the principals or mandates. He believed that the idea of a Code of Ethics policy versus the Code of Ethics being included in the Town Code made no difference, but felt that if the Code of Ethics was removed from the Town Code and became a policy, it should be included on the homepage of the Town of Boone website so that the public could see it and determine whether members were complying with the Code of Ethics. He finished by adding that he did not believe this to be the year to make this change due to budget constraints, since there had not been a censure since the Code of Ethics was adopted. Mr. Furgiuele felt that in the future, if the money was available to pay for attorney fees, then he would support the change. Ms. LaPlaca was in agreement. Ms. Meade stated that she would bring the Code of Ethics back to Council in ordinance form at the regular June meeting.

RESULT:	**CONSENSUS**

CONSIDERATION OF MODIFIED TAKE HOME CAR POLICY

Mr. Ward presented changes made to the current take-home car policy that resulted from a previous budget discussion. The change was made to include a provision that allowed employees to take home police vehicles when they lived no further than thirty minutes away. Mr. Ward stated that there would be a reduction in emissions, as well as wear and tear on vehicles if the change was accepted. Mr. Furgiuele expressed his support for the change, but hoped that Council and staff would continue to look at ways to encourage staff to live inside Town limits. He stated that Town operations was not a business, but that Town employees were hired by Boone taxpayers and felt that it was best if employees had a stake in the policies they were charged with enforcing. Mr. Furgiuele made a motion, which was seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Clawson to approve the modifications as presented.

RESULT:	**APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]**
MOVER:	Sam Furgiuele, Council Member
SECONDER:	Loretta Clawson, Mayor Pro-Tem
AYES:	Clawson, Furgiuele, Ulmer, LaPlaca, Hicks

CONSIDERATION OF BUDGET AMENDMENT

Upon a motion by Mr. Furgiuele seconded by Ms. LaPlaca, Council approved the following budget amendment:

Police Department - Building Maintenance $8,000 (Sale of Surplus Property $8,000)

RESULT:	**APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]**
MOVER:	Sam Furgiuele, Council Member
SECONDER:	Nancy LaPlaca, Councilwoman
AYES:	Clawson, Furgiuele, Ulmer, LaPlaca, Hicks

CONSIDERATION OF APPROVAL OF FINANCING PACKAGE

Ms. Davis presented Council with a financing package using First National Bank. She indicated that First National Bank offered the most attractive rates to the Town at 1.47% with no origination fees. Mr. Ward noted that the Town continued to monitor interest rates throughout the year, and had been able to accelerate vehicle replacements through the payment plan as opposed to a purchase, which also helped to save money in repair and maintenance costs. Mayor Brantz asked whether the approval of this item would result in the reduction of the number of mechanics needed in the Town garage. Mr. Ward replied that that was not necessarily the case due to the amount equipment owned and operated Town-wide. Upon a motion by Council member Ulmer, seconded by Council member LaPlaca, Council voted unanimously to approve the financing package as presented.

RESULT:	**APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]**
MOVER:	Connie Ulmer, Council Member
SECONDER:	Nancy LaPlaca, Councilwoman
AYES:	Clawson, Furgiuele, Ulmer, LaPlaca, Hicks

DISCUSSION OF FY 2020/2021 PROPOSED BUDGET

Mr. Ward encouraged members to ask questions throughout the meeting and noted that some adjustments had to be made due to the pandemic. He noted that any time tax increases were made by the County, such as the recent one to fund the recreation center, the Town saw a reduction in revenue due to the tax formulation. Mr. Ward noted that spending was down in the area and that construction levels had remained steady. He added that Powell Bill funding will remain at historical levels, but reductions could be expected with the turn to more efficient vehicles and asked members to keep in mind that changes would have to be made in the future to the way the Town funded road repairs. Mr. Ward indicated that due to revenue reductions, the balanced budget did not include a cost of living adjustment for employees. He stated that adjustments were made to health insurance, which was predicted to increase by 25% due to claims caused in part by COVID19 and the overall volume of claims. Mr. Ward indicated that staff was able to change to a product that was very similar to the current health insurance package while keeping the same deductible with only a 7% increase in cost. Mr. Furgiuele asked whether the wellness program would be dropped. Mr. Ward indicated that the wellness program was included in the balanced budget. Mr. Ward continued by noting that a 50% reduction in travel and training spending was made across all departments, but noted that some adjustments may have to be made to allow for funding of mandated training. He stated that the proposed budget would eliminate capital outlay almost entirely in an effort to focus on core operation funding, and that additional meetings would potentially have to be held to address capital needs throughout the year. Mr. Ward reminded members of the scheduled increase to water and sewer rates pursuant to a study prepared last year by Raftelis. He stated that he believed the increase could be delayed due to the grant funding received for the Deck Hill water tank replacement project in the amount of $2 million, which would in turn take these funds off of the capital improvement list. Mr. Ward then presented the FY 20/21 budget message which included the following highlights:

- Maintains the current property tax rate at $0.41.
- Maintains current service levels.
- Recommends no Water & Sewer rate increases
- Recommends use of $1,190,000 from Fund Balance to offset COVDI19 related revenue losses.
- Delays the majority of capital outlay involving vehicle and equipment replacement.
- Does not include cost of living adjustments for staff.

Mr. Furgiuele asked how much a 1% cost of living adjustment in employee salaries would total. Mr. Ward stated that he was not against a cost of living adjustment for staff, but that adjustments had to be made due to the pandemic. He attributed much of the Town's success during the pandemic to staff, but added that raises could not be included in the balanced budget he was required to present to Council. Ms. Davis stated that a 1% cost of living adjustment would total approximately $97,000 from the General Fund and $28,000 from the Water & Sewer Fund. Mayor Pro-Tem Clawson thanked staff for their work on the budget, and added that she felt comfortable with what had been presented. Ms. LaPlaca agreed with this statement. Mr. Ward felt that it was important to note that even with the use of $1,190,000 from the Fund Balance to offset COVID19 related losses, the balanced budget did still include the $500 wellness card for each employee, and the $100,000 per year funding commitment toward the Grove Street greenway connector project. He noted that new projects could always be funded if revenues were greater than projected. Mr. Ward stated that staff was in the application process for the Howard Street project, and believed that hotel/motel tax revenue would continue to be a viable source to ensure that the project was able to keep moving forward. He added that funds had already been obtained from the Appalachian Regional Commission, and believed other federal funding sources for the project may become available which could offset costs. Mr. Ward stated that in the application process for the Howard Street project, it was very important that goals be met in terms of auditing and reserves that were required for loan applications. He added that the Town would remain in compliance with LGC recommendations of 35% reserves even with the $1,190,000 fund balance allocation to offset COVID19 related revenue losses. Mr. Ward stated that funds would still be available to make adjustments within the current budget year if needed. Mr. Furgiuele asked how much was reserved for the Howard Street project, and what percentage of the $350,000 set aside for the project was allocated from General Fund and what percentage was allocated from Water and Sewer. Mr. Ward answered that the $350,000 was projected hotel/motel tax revenue and that no further funds were associated with those funds. He added that there was approximately $1.2 million set aside for the project already, all of it from hotel/motel tax. Mr. Furgiuele felt that the idea that hotel/motel tax revenue would be back to normal sooner than later to be optimistic. He also asked how confident staff felt that the TDA would adopt the resolution to set aside $400,000 per year as they had previously indicated. Mr. Ward added that the intent of the TDA per the verbal agreement was not to adopt the resolution until the loan was approved. Mr. Furgiuele asked whether he was correct that $282,000 was not allocated at this time out of the $1.472 million above operating reserves. Mr. Ward stated that this was correct since he would need the funds for the current budget year. Mr. Furgiuele stated that he was reluctant to support a budget that did not include a cost of living adjustment of 1 or 2 percent for staff to recognize that their food, housing and utility costs were going up. Mayor Brantz asked whether the Town was obligated to help fund any projects with the County. Mr. Ward answered that currently the only obligation with the County was the exploration of the Queen Street parking deck analysis that was already underway, but noted that costs had not yet been finalized. He noted that he would like to see options remain open on this project, since most of the parking spaces downtown were full on a regular basis. Mr. Ward added that the Governor had extended the order prohibiting water and sewer service disconnections, and noted that this would factor into funding in terms of when the Town would receive what was due it. Mr. Furgiuele asked whether the disconnect threat was still being included on outgoing water bills. Mr. Ward answered that the reason it was still included on the bill was that it was a pre-printed bill. He noted that staff was working to answer phone calls 8-5 and sometimes on weekends concerning services, but that it was not being enforced. Ms. LaPlaca asked for Mr. Ward's opinion as to whether or not restaurants who offered take-out could continue using dedicated parking spots near their business even after parking enforcement returned to normal. Mr. Ward felt that this should be evaluated, and wondered about the impact on retail business. Mr. Furgiuele indicated that he planned to submit an agenda item to amend the state of emergency resolution which would allow restaurants to utilize their parking areas and sidewalks for tables to the extent they did not interfere with sidewalk passage. Mr. Ward noted that this had already been implemented to some extent, in that restaurants to allow the 50% capacity of a restaurant to move outside onto private property upon the issuance of a permit at no cost to the applicant. Mr. Furgiuele requested that Mr. Ward recite the specific numbers tied to tax information listed on page two of the budget message so that those who were watching the meeting or listening via phone could hear. Mr. Ward indicated that the Town continued to be subject to the County's decision to utilize the ad-valorem versus per-capita tax distribution. He added that historically, nearly 70% of the sales tax collected yearly in the County had been collected in the Town of Boone. Under the current method, Mr. Ward indicated that Boone received just 12.30% of the distribution versus 25.18% the Town would receive under per-capita distribution. He added that sales tax revenue made up 17.79% of the Town's General Fund budget and staff anticipated collecting $2,885,100 in sales tax for FY 20/21. Mr. Ward stated that this amount would be more if the distribution was per capita, and listed the services the Town provided in exchange for this funding, including, police, fire, parking water and sewer. Mr. Furgiuele asked whether staff had ever tried to calculate how much money was spent out of the General Fund to support the businesses who brought in sale tax revenue. Mr. Ward felt that it had never been done since it would be difficult to differentiate these numbers. Mr. Furgiuele asked whether Mr. Ward felt that the Town spent more on supporting businesses on an annual basis than it collected in sales tax revenue. Mr. Ward answered that he felt this was an accurate statement. Mayor Brantz asked if there were any funds provided by the State to the Town other than Powell Bill funding. Mr. Ward noted that the ABC store was owned by the Town and brought in approximately $532,000 per year in revenue. He indicated that the revenue was then allocated for things such as police protection. Mr. Ward stated that there was the potential for a second ABC store at the Bolick Farm site, which he believed would increase revenue. He pointed out revenue which was scheduled to horizon within the next five years in the amount of $129,000 received to offset the loss of tax revenue from ASU for housing which was originally built as a private development on Highway 105. Mr. Furgiuele asked when the County was scheduled to perform a revaluation of property values. Mr. Ward answered that revaluations took place every eight years and that he believed one would take place in one to two years. Ms. Davis confirmed that a revaluation would take place in 2022 and would affect the FY 2022/23 budget. Mr. Ward was asked to review the budget on a departmental basis. To a question raised by Mr. Furgiuele, Mr. Ward answered that part-time salary funds in the amount of $27,000 were removed from the budget due to constraints, but that he would like to have been able to retain that in the budget, and enhance it, to replace former Assistant Town Manager Jim Byrne’s position. He noted that the position was originally funded at nearly $100,000 when Mr. Byrne was employed full time, but explained that when Mr. Byrne retired and came back part time, the funds were reduced. Mr. Ward indicated that he would like to fund the position geared toward projects and sustainability, but that it could not be included within a balanced budget. Mr. Furgiuele questioned whether this potential position was more important than funding the Town’s lobbyists at $160,000. He continued by adding that Mr. Byrne operated as a funding coordinator in obtaining grants for the Town. Mr. Ward felt that the return of funding lobbyists had far outweighed the costs in years past. Ms. LaPlaca wondered if this topic would be best suited for a separate discussion. Mr. Ward answered that it should be tied to the budget. A brief overview of the Finance department budget was given, before legal fees were discussed. Mr. Ward anticipated an increase in legal costs in the upcoming year due to increased Council directives and increased meeting hours. He noted that measures were taken when possible to reduce the attorney’s time at meetings, such as was done at the budget meeting where Ms. Meade was allowed to leave after discussion requiring her input concluded. Mr. Furgiuele asked whether this measure to adjust meeting agendas could be taken during regular meetings as well. Mr. Ward answered that this could be explored, but believed that since attorney input was often needed at different times during meetings, that measure could be shortening one meeting only to lengthen another. Ms. LaPlaca stated that she was not in favor of the idea of having the attorney on-call during meetings, and felt that once Council implemented Roberts Rules meeting times would shorten. Mr. Furgiuele noted that Roberts Rules were already incorporated within the Town’s municipal code. Ms. LaPlaca felt that Mr. Furgiuele had spoken the majority of the time during the meeting. Mr. Furgiuele stated that he would like to be able to speak without Ms. LaPlaca attempting to shut him down, and felt that Ms. LaPlaca had plenty of opportunities to speak during meetings. He believed that from the beginning of Ms. LaPlaca’s term on Council, she had viewed it as her mission to shut down Mr. Furgiuele and keep him from speaking during meetings. Ms. LaPlaca stated that she would like to implement a policy that would address the issues brought up in the op-ed recently published in the Watauga Democrat. She added that in the interest of keeping meetings short, she tried to speak as little as possible. Ms. LaPlaca indicated that it was also a part of the Code of Ethics that members should not attack other members, and felt that Mr. Furgiuele had attacked her by calling her unqualified, by yelling at her and being disrespectful. She added that she was grateful to read the op-ed. Mr. Furgiuele stated that if he remembered correctly, Ms. LaPlaca had accused Mr. Furgiuele of misconduct when she was running for Town Council, and believed that she had done nothing but attack him since being elected. Mayor Brantz reminded members that there would be an item on the June agenda to discuss how to organize meetings in a more effective way, and asked that this discussion be held until that time. Discussion of the budget continued, with Mr. Ward indicating that, although a request had been made to increase funding to AppalCART, he was not able to include an increase due to budget constraints. Mayor Brantz asked whether there had been an increase in routes, which Ms. Ulmer confirmed. Mr. Ward went on to confirm that funds had been set aside in the amount of $100,000 for the future Grove Street connector project as required by NCDOT. Mr. Ward stated that $115,000 remained in the budget for Outside Agency Funding, and reminded members of the recent change to the Outside Agency Funding review process that will allow applicants to make presentations to Council. Council Member Hicks asked whether funds could be saved in the uniforms line item across the board. Mr. Ward noted that these funds covered everything from Public Works, Police and Fire uniforms, to shirt and jacket purchases for other staff who needed to be quickly identified during a special event. He stated that costs in this line were kept to a bare minimum, and did not recommend any decreases in funding. Clarification was given on several items in the Police Department budget, with Council Member Hicks suggesting that more events such as “Coffee with a Cop” take place in the future. Mayor Pro-Tem Clawson asked whether Interim Chief Le Beau was comfortable with no additional officers being hired this budget year. Mr. Ward asked Interim Chief Le Beau to speak to that himself, but added that funding additional officers would require a tax increase. Interim Chief Le Beau stated that the department understood that revenues were down and that it was a tough year to add additional officers. He believed that additional officers were necessary, but that employees would do whatever was required, such as working extra hours. Mr. Ward noted that he anticipated an increase in overtime hours and funding due in part to the pandemic, as well as protests. He added that staff recommended an increase in funding for reserve officers in order to allow staff to call in certified former Town officers for certain events and functions. Ms. LaPlaca asked whether the Town was in line with numbers from other jurisdictions. Mr. Ward felt that the Town was comparable to other jurisdictions, but felt that it would be difficult to give an accurate comparison due to many factors, including ASU Police Department being located within the Town. Interim Chief Le Beau referred to information presented during the budget retreat by former Chief Crawford which indicated that the Town should have 29 officers assigned to patrol, and that the Town currently had 23. Percentage wise, Interim Chief Le Beau added that the data indicated that approximately 60% of the force should be dedicated to patrol, and that the Town had about 62% assigned to patrol. Interim Le Beau stated that Boone had approximately 1 officer for every 520 residents or every 620 residents including students. He indicated that Hickory had 1 officer for every 320 residents, and that in every jurisdiction he had compared the Town to, the Town had fewer officers per capita. Mr. Furgiuele asked about crime rates of the Town compared to Hickory. Interim Chief Le Beau answered that these numbers would take some direct analysis, but believed Hickory to have higher crime levels and a force of 150 officers for a town of 40,000 residents. Mr. Furgiuele asked whether there had been reduced traffic and accidents in Town due to the pandemic. Interim Chief Le Beau answered that for the month of April there was a 29% reduction, but believed traffic numbers were starting to climb.

A break was declared at 12:01 p.m. The meeting was reconvened at 12:56 p.m.

Discussion resumed with Mr. Ward announcing the use of a new mass notification system as a part of the new E911 agreement with Blowing Rock. Mr. Ward indicated that no major changes were expected in the Planning and Inspections budget, other than the reduction of part time salary funding due to certifications received by Planning staff which would not require them to rely as much on part time employees. He added that applications were being taken for the recently vacated planning position. Public Works was discussed next, with Mr. Ward stating that 100 LED street lights had been installed along NC Highway 105 with funds returned by NRLP for previous overpayment by the Town. Discussion moved to the Boone Skate Park, with Mr. Ward indicating that $75,000 was currently on hand for the project, which could be used for a grant match program. Mr. Ward pointed out increases in the Parking budget, which included leased equipment and credit card fees. Fleet and Facilities Maintenance were discussed next, with Mr. Ward indicating that a vehicle scanner purchase would be deferred due to budget constraints. Mr. Furgiuele asked whether part of this purchase could be funded out of Water and Sewer funds since the scanner would service Public Utilities vehicles. Mr. Ward indicated that staff would look into that possibility. He added that the purchase of a street sweeper was also being deferred, and noted that this piece of equipment helped to keep Boone’s bike lanes safe and clear of debris, as well as keeping debris out of the storm water system. Clarification was then given on the narcotics line item, with Council Member Hicks indicating that he had questions regarding prioritization that would be directed to the police forum. Mr. Ward went over the budget approval schedule and State requirements, and reiterated that Council would need to have additional meetings in the future to address capital projects and revenue trends. Mr. Furgiuele asked whether Outside Agency Funding applicants would come before Council before or after the budget was adopted, and asked for clarification on when these funds would be allocated. Mr. Ward responded that the total amount of $115,000 was in the proposed budget, and that Council could choose to hold a virtual meeting, or hold off for an in-person meeting to hear presentations by applicants. Mr. Furgiuele felt that the meeting should take place virtually, with presentations being limited to no more than 5 minutes each. Mr. Ward indicated that he would work with staff to ensure the presentations and allocations were on the agenda at the July regular meeting. Electricity usage at the WWTP was briefly explained, with Mr. Ward indicating that this was the Town's highest user of electricity. In the Utility Billing line, Mr. Ward stated that staff was looking into digitizing the water/sewer sign up service in an effort to limit coronavirus exposure to employees and customers. Mr. Furgiuele stated that he would like to see at least a 2% cost of living increase to employees, excluding Council members. Ms. Ulmer asked whether it would be possible to fund this request without going below the recommended 35% threshold. Mr. Ward answered that he believed it could be done and noted that he would rather reward staff as opposed to funding a project out of reserve funds. Mayor Pro-Tem Clawson stated that she felt 2% to be too much given the situation and the unknowns with COVID19 and was not in favor of Mr. Furgiuele's suggestion. Ms. LaPlaca agreed with Mayor Pro-Tem Clawson. Ms. Ulmer felt that even a 1% cost of living increase would let staff know they were appreciated and suggested it be revisited once the pandemic situation eased. Council Member Hicks agreed with Ms. Ulmer. Mr. Ward explained that a 1% increase would not make a significant increase and was unsure whether it was worth the staff time that went into calculating changes in pay rates for such a small amount. Mr. Furgiuele acknowledged that the Town offered a good benefits package, and felt that some employees were paid fairly well, but that when one compared the level of expertise, for example at the WWTP, many employees had salaries were inadequate given their level of expertise. He added that he believed an increase would be at least symbolic to show that Town employees were appreciated and justified as an effort to retain experienced employees. Mr. Furgiuele then made a motion to include a 2% cost of living pay increase across the board excluding Council members. Council Member Hicks seconded the motion after confirmed with Mr. Ward that funds were available to do so. Mr. Ward reiterated that a 1% adjustment would only amount to approximately a $10 per check difference for many employees, and was unsure it was worth the effort to make the necessary changes in the payroll system. Mayor Pro-Tem Clawson asked why this was not included in the budget initially. Mr. Ward answered that it was not included since he was required to present a balanced budget to Council. He added that if Council authorized the additional use of revenue, then the budget would still be balanced, even after this potential change. Mayor Pro-Tem Clawson expressed her concerns with the funds being used since they may be needed for COVID19 related expenses. Mr. Furgiuele felt that if COVID19 hit Boone as hard as it might and revenue continued to be lost, that a reduction in force may have to be discussed. He reiterated that he believed that employees should be paid as fairly as possible. Ms. Ulmer felt that that was already being done, but believed it would be nice to help employees with an increase if possible while keeping COVID19 effects in mind. Mayor Pro-Tem Clawson agreed with Mr. Ward that the Town had the best staff, but believed 1% to be a sufficient increase, and noted that many places were laying employees off and that NCDOT employees had been furloughed. Brief discussion ensued, with Council Member Hicks suggesting that staff input should be received on the matter. Ms. LaPlaca added that if it was the will of the Council to approve a 2% increase, she would vote in favor, and suggested that since staff had been required to work so much overtime due to the pandemic, that they be awarded with comp time if possible. Ms. LaPlaca asked if staff had a sense of how much revenue sources would be reduced in total. Mr. Ward indicated that staff used the projections made by the NCLM for many things, as well as past trends. He then stated that he felt Council should be cautious in this decision because of the uncertainty of the future. When asked by Ms. LaPlaca, Mayor Brantz stated that his position would not be to allocate funds for a raise at all due to cut backs. Mr. Furgiuele called the question and a vote was taken on the motion.

VOTE: Aye: All
Nay: None

Mr. Ward asked whether there was any need to discuss the addition of any positions, including an Assistant Town Manager and Police Officer positions. Ms. LaPlaca indicated that at some point she would like to discuss an assistant for him and also a sustainability position, but believed that would have to wait until a later time. Mayor Pro-tem Clawson expressed her support for the Police Department, with Mr. Ward noting that the increase in officers could be attributed to the reserve program. He noted that because of the ties to sustainability, water and sewer and storm water, some salaries of Finance, Human Resources and Administration staff were paid from the Water and Sewer enterprise fund. He suggested that Council consider funding the Assistant Town Manager position from the Water and Sewer fund. Mr. Furgiuele expressed his support, as did Council Member Hicks. Mr. Ward stated that staff would do further research before bringing back additional information. Parking was discussed next, with Mr. Ward noting that some spaces had been blocked off by businesses for curbside delivery. He added that there had been overuse of spaces by non-customers and noted a revenue loss of approximately $35,000 per month during the pandemic. Mr. Ward stated that expenses continued even with that revenue loss and asked Council to consider returning downtown parking to the fee based system and phase in parking enforcement as businesses returned to operations. Mayor Pro-tem Clawson was in favor of this approach. Mr. Furgiuele stated that while he was not unsympathetic to the views of local business owner John Mena, from whom Council received an email recently asking that parking remain free indefinitely, he agreed with Mr. Ward and Mayor Pro-Tem Clawson. He asked why parking enforcement employees were not furloughed at the beginning of the pandemic so that they could take advantage of enhanced unemployment benefits. Mr. Ward answered that it was his goal to not furlough any Town employee during the pandemic, though it could have been a possibility. Mr. Furgiuele stated that moving forward if faced with the same situation, the possibility should be examined. In terms of designating parking spaces downtown, Mr. Ward recommended that Council treat all businesses who rent or own property downtown equally. Mr. Furgiuele suggested that instead of a business designating particular three spots in front of their business, the Town instead designating one space as a pick-up space for the entire block with a three minute time limit for use by restaurants and retail shop pick-up. It was the consensus of Council to move forward in this manner.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon a motion by Mayor Pro-tem Clawson, seconded by Ms. Ulmer, Council voted unanimously to adjourn at 2:49 p.m.

Nicole Harmon, Town Clerk

Rennie Brantz, Mayor