

**Town of Bluefield  
Town Council  
Work Session  
February 27, 2018**

The Bluefield, Virginia Town Council held a Work Session on Tuesday, February 27, 2018 at 6:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Town Hall located at 112 Huffard Drive, Bluefield, Virginia.

**TOWN COUNCIL PRESENT**

Don Harris, Mayor  
Anglis Trigg, Jr., Councilmember  
Chuck Presley, Councilmember  
Jimmy Jones, Councilmember  
Ron Holt, Councilmember  
Lee Riffe, Vice-Mayor

**ALSO PRESENT**

Mike Watson, Town Manager  
Matt Freedman, Town Attorney  
Shane Gunter, Chief of Police  
Lesley Catron, Town Clerk  
Kim Hernandez, Executive Assistant  
Billie Roberts, Comm. Dev. Coordinator  
3 Members of Public

**CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Harris opened the Work Session at 6:34 p.m.

***Budget-Insurance***

Mr. Watson stated that the insurance would be going up 15% and to keep a \$250 deductible it would cost the Town an \$87k increase and \$21,750 to the employees. He stated that it had increased due to claims submitted last year. He stated that by increasing it to a \$500 deductible would cost the Town \$24,259 and the employee \$6,064 and would only change the deductible, the ER visits co-pay and the overall out of pocket expense to \$4k. He stated that it would not change the current co-pays, medicines, dental or vision. He stated that Richlands and Tazewell had a \$500 deductible and Tazewell County was self-pay.

Mr. Holt asked Mr. Watson to explain what he was talking about with the \$6,064.

Mr. Watson stated that was the total payment for all employees for the Town.

Mr. Riffe stated that it was not per person.

Mr. Watson stated no, that with a \$250 deductible it would increase a single-\$17.20, dual-\$31.80 and family-\$46.40 per month.

Mr. Presley asked him to email council the information.

Mr. Watson stated that he would. He stated that a \$500 deductible would increase a single-\$4.80, dual-\$8.80 and family-\$13 per month. He stated that currently the Town had 29-single, 19-dual and 19-family insurance plans. He stated that council talked during the last meeting about the cigarette tax paying for the increase. He suggested doing a 2% raise increase to help offset the increase in insurance. He stated that if they raised the cost of cigarettes by \$0.05 per pack it would generate an additional \$95k.

Mr. Jones stated that we would be losing in the beginning.

Mr. Watson stated that was correct that we would see a small decline so we would need to use a more conservative number.

Mr. Holt asked if the 2% pay raise across the board would offset it.

Mr. Riffe asked if they were talking about giving another pay increase.

Mr. Holt stated yes they were going to try too.

Mr. Riffe asked off of a 4% raise last year.

Mr. Holt stated that the insurance was going up.

Mr. Riffe stated his insurance was going up and he did not get a raise.

Mr. Holt stated that he was not a town employee and they were talking about their people.

Mr. Riffe asked if all of the Town employees lived in the Town.

Mr. Holt stated that he was not following him.

Mr. Riffe asked if all of the employees lived in the Town.

Mr. Holt asked what that mattered that it was people who worked for them.

Mr. Riffe stated that they may not have another opportunity to work anywhere else and come here.

Mr. Watson stated to do a 2% increase would cost around \$50k. He stated that we had 67 employees who used the Town's insurance and 90 that could.

Mayor Harris asked Mr. Watson to send out the numbers so that council could look at them and understand.

Mr. Presley agreed so that they could actually see the numbers.

Mr. Trigg asked what Tazewell County Schools had.

Mr. Watson stated that Tazewell County Schools had an Anthem card but it was self-pay.

Mr. Presley asked if this was the best insurance we could get.

Mr. Watson stated that the increase was from the million dollars in claims that was turned in last year.

Mr. Presley asked what those claims were for, ER visits?

Mr. Watson stated that ER and doctor visits did not affect it and that it was for something like cancer, stroke, etc. He stated that the Town paid \$731k in health insurance premiums and the employees paid \$182,872 for a total of \$914,364.

Mr. Presley suggested asking the employees that may not go to the doctor as often if they would want to do a catastrophic plan instead.

Mr. Holt stated that they could do that on their own if they wanted and that a lot did not work for the pay but for the insurance and this was council's way to show the employees that they appreciated them.

Mr. Watson stated that a \$500 annual increase across the board would mean more to those making \$8.25 per hour.

Mr. Holt stated that 2% on a \$30k median would be \$600 which was reasonable and that he would support something like that.

Mr. Riffe asked how many employees the Town had.

Mr. Watson stated 90 FT employees that could take the insurance.

Mr. Riffe asked when the last cigarette tax was.

Mayor Harris stated that it had been around 10 years.

Mr. Watson stated that it was before him.

Mr. Holt asked staff to compare the local cigarette taxes before the next meeting.

Mr. Watson stated that Tazewell County's plan was \$625 per month for a \$0 deductible and \$413 per month for a \$200 deductible.

Mr. Holt stated that he paid \$416 per month with the county and \$300 for an ER visit.

Mayor Harris stated that most people did not realize the advantage of our insurance.

Mr. Presley asked what the reason was for those employees who did not have our insurance.

Mr. Watson stated that some could not afford it and that some got it elsewhere through another family member.

Mr. Holt stated that by increasing the deductible could mean an employee not being able to get groceries and he worried about that. He stated that he would like to see a raise across the board.

Mr. Presley asked what the difference would be.

Mr. Watson stated that the 2% and \$500 would equal out.

***Term Limits:***

Mr. Watson stated that term limits were discussed during an earlier meeting and to change term limits would mean going through a Virginia Constitutional Change and having someone to enter the bill.

Mr. Presley stated that he thought it had been interpreted wrong and that he was not trying to change it for the state but for each individual municipality.

Mr. Freedman stated that it would give local governments the option and would inform them of the exception to allow each to go through a legislative change.

Mr. Watson asked what would have to be done.

Mr. Freedman stated that they would still have to do a constitutional amendment and it would be an exception to the rule they already had.

Mr. Presley stated that it would be for each individual town.

Mr. Trigg asked why he was wanting to do this.

Mr. Presley stated that the term limits may be good for 3-4 terms but they had not discussed it all yet. He stated that it would allow them to have "x" amount of term limits for the Town of Bluefield.

Mr. Trigg asked if there was a particular reason.

Mr. Presley stated that the same people were in politics forever and there was never a change. He stated that they needed new people all of the time and that the people would vote back in those who did a good job. He stated that sometimes it was popularity.

Mr. Trigg stated that he had seen the good and the bad in his time and asked why they would want to get rid of the good ones.

Mr. Presley asked if there was something that could be put on the ballots in November asking.

Mr. Freedman stated that it would have to be a referendum.

Mr. Presley stated that it should ask if they wanted it or not.

Mr. Freedman stated that it would be up to the voter's registrar to do something like that and suggested putting something in the newsletter.

Mr. Trigg asked if they knew of any others who did this.

Mr. Watson stated that there was no one in Virginia who did.

Mr. Freedman stated that he found one that sent something it but it had sit there.

Mr. Watson stated that the Chesapeake Authority had something.

Mr. Freedman stated that the Attorney General's opinion addressed a county who wanted to do it for their Board of Supervisors and stated that the constitution set out term limits and it would be an unauthorized legislative act. He stated that was the reason we were looking into doing an amendment. He stated that he would work with Mr. Presley on the language but that if council collectively did not want to do it then it was a waste of time.

Mr. Watson stated that he did not think it could be put on a referendum.

Mr. Presley asked what another route would be.

Mr. Watson stated a survey.

Mr. Presley asked him and Mr. Freedman to look into what could be done.

Mr. Freedman stated that he would like to see what the board collectively wanted before putting in the effort.

Mr. Presley suggested to let them think about it.

Mr. Riffe stated that this was a small town and it would be hard to put term limits. He stated that he thought two terms was enough unless there was a pending issue that needed to be seen out. He stated that they had more people who wanted to run now.

Mr. Presley stated that he was trying to make Bluefield better.

Mr. Riffe suggested they do the poll and go from there.

Mr. Presley agreed.

Mr. Watson stated that it was not employee work but if council would like they could put it in the newsletter.

Mr. Riffe asked if they would need a motion in the meeting.

Mr. Freedman stated yes to propose the idea to the public seeking a constitutional amendment to permit term limits in localities.

Mr. Presley suggested they think about it and bring it back before doing so. He stated that they needed to figure out the number of years, etc.

Mayor Harris stated that they needed to look at the stability of the town and it was because of those being re-elected.

Mr. Presley stated that they needed to give other people a chance.

Mayor Harris stated that the citizens knew what they wanted.

Mr. Freedman stated that it would be to seek public feedback on the idea of term limits.

Mayor Harris stated that it could be brought up under council comments.

Mr. Watson stated that they would be asking for input without setting a number of years.

Mr. Presley suggested that they talk about it at the next meeting then make a motion to move forward.

Mr. Freedman stated that a constitutional amendment would not speak to the number of years on term limits. He stated that you would go through a constitutional amendment then a charter change.

**ADJOURN**

Mayor Harris adjourned the Work Session at 7:20 p.m.

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Don Harris, Mayor

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Lesley Catron, Town Clerk