

**Town of Bluefield
Town Council
Minutes
June 23, 2020**

The Bluefield, Virginia Town Council held a regularly scheduled Town Council Meeting on Tuesday, June 23, 2020 at 7:30 p.m. at Fincastle located at 1000 Country Club Drive Bluefield, Virginia.

PRESENT

Don Harris, Mayor
Anglis Trigg Jr., Vice-Mayor
Jarrod Bailey, Councilmember
Chuck Presley, Councilmember
Ron Holt, Councilmember

ALSO PRESENT

Mike Watson, Town Manager
Alan McGraw, Interim Town Attorney
Rachel Looney, Administrative Asst.
Shane Gunter, Police Chief
Kris Williams, Zoning Administrator
1 Member of Media
7 Members of Public

OTHERS PRESENT

Brian Heatt, Tazewell County Sheriff
Randy Davis, Dir. of 911 & Emergency Comm.
Don Scott, Planning Commission
Harry Kammer, Planning Commission
Don Whitt, Planning Commission

ABSENT

Jimmy Jones, Councilmember
Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk
Billie Roberts, Comm. Dev. Coordinator

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Harris called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE

Steve Branch led the Invocation. Mayor Harris led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Councilmember Holt made a motion to approve the agenda. Councilmember Bailey seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

Vice-Mayor Trigg:	Yes
Councilmember Presley:	Yes
Mayor Harris:	Yes
Councilmember Bailey:	Yes
Councilmember Holt:	Yes
Councilmember Jones:	Absent

CONSENT AGENDA

Councilmember Holt made a motion to approve the consent agenda. Councilmember Presley seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

Vice-Mayor Trigg:	Yes
Councilmember Presley:	Yes
Mayor Harris:	Yes
Councilmember Bailey:	Yes
Councilmember Holt:	Yes
Councilmember Jones:	Absent

CITIZEN REQUESTS AND SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

911 Media Release- Tazewell County Sheriff's Office and Bluefield, VA PD

Sheriff Hieatt thanked the Mayor and Council for the opportunity to speak. He stated that a few months back Mr. Watson, Councilmember Bailey, Chief Gunter and himself sat down to discuss the pros and cons of directly dispatching calls to the Town Police Officers, rather than having the residents sit on hold and wait to be transferred to Bluefield, VA. He stated that since that conversation they had been working on this transition. He stated that Bluefield, VA Police Dept. had never failed to assist the Sheriff's Office anytime they were needed or asked of. He stated he thought this transition would help the communication between the two departments. He stated that they had worked on the radios together and when asked for help down in the county they were there and vice versa. He stated that Chief Gunter and he had worked on several boards and task forces together and that he hoped this would help with the communication for the safety of the public. He stated that Chief Gunter would have a say so on how he wanted the dispatchers to dispatch calls out to his department and what he thought was best for his citizens and the Town. He stated they were there to do what was best for the Police Department and its citizens and that he appreciated all the work and cooperation. He stated he would like to introduce Randy Davis the 911 Director and that she had been the 911 Director for 15 years and had a total of 26 years of experience in Fire and EMS as well as previous experience with the local search and rescue teams.

He stated she had been working closely with Bluefield, VA Police Department to switch over the warrants and other things. He stated that so far everything was going great and again thanked council for the opportunity to work so closely together.

Chief Gunter added to what the Sheriff said and that this had been a very smooth transition thus far. He stated that Tazewell County was always there when Bluefield, VA Police Department needed them. He stated they (Tazewell County Sheriff's Office and Bluefield, VA Police Department) had a great relationship and this would further their relationship.

Mayor Harris asked council if they had any comments and/or questions.

Vice-Mayor Trigg stated that everything sounded great.

Councilmember Holt stated that council really appreciated the work the departments had done to form this great partnership.

Mayor Harris stated that they would take a short break until 8:00 p.m.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Fincastle Committee Update- Jarrod Bailey

Councilmember Bailey stated that the Fincastle Committee met the week before and it was the first time meeting since before Covid-19. He stated they talked about some of the big projects that were going on like the roofing project. He stated that this project was the biggest and was going to be done with the money received through the C-Prop Grant. He stated that Mr. Watson informed the committee that the bids for the project would be received by July 9th. He stated that the bid packet dictated that the project would be completed in 30-45 days and was contingent upon weather constraints. He stated that hopefully we would get this project started in the next 6-8 weeks. He stated another thing that was discussed was plans for long-term needs and that it was no secret that the equipment would start to wear out and need to be upgraded. He stated that Mr. O'Neal was going to start getting those plans together and the different life expectancy of each piece of equipment such as golf carts, maintenance equipment, etc. He stated that there were a lot of different pieces needed for the long-term future. He stated that they showed the committee the new website and that it went live on June 23rd and invited everyone to go and check it out. He stated that golfers could go to the site and book their own tee times and that the website looked very professional and clean. He stated that they also got the new POS system up and running and it would be used for inventory management, point of sales for the restaurant and the pro shop sales as well as the tee time reservations. He stated that he was able to sit down with Mr. O'Neal and Jessima Frye and explore the new system with them and that it was able to track food sales and also what was and was not selling, where the money was being made and what they could improve on. He stated that it was no secret that Covid-19 did not help anyone in the area and Fincastle was not immune to the same hardships. He stated that just in special events the facility lost over \$70,000.00 and that did not include any food or beverage sales from those events. He stated that

loss was a major setback for Fincastle. He stated that there was nothing we could do about it now that it was in the past. He stated that also during the meeting the committee discussed increasing advertising to try and move forward to get the restaurant business picked back up. He stated that as the virus disappeared that event scheduling would hopefully pick back up. He stated that even though it was terrible that we lost that much potential revenue, we had to work harder to overcome it.

Mayor Harris stated that before Covid-19 hit, John and Jess had over 100 events scheduled between Christmas and summer and all those events were scheduled with very little advertisement. He stated as Councilmember Bailey had already said, we took a big hit but we were on the road to recovery.

Hospital Committee Update- Chuck Presley

Mr. Presley stated that the Hospital Committee met about 2 weeks ago and started to gather ideas. He stated that prior to that Council had held a Special Called Meeting where there were over 30 people in attendance. He stated that he had met with the chairman of VCOM (Edward Vis College of Osteopathic Medicine) on June 22nd and also with the president of PCH the prior week. He stated that there was another meeting with PCH scheduled for July 2nd. He stated there was a lot of things we could do ourselves but that the best line of action was to work with PCH to get BRMC back on its feet. He stated that VCOM didn't even know that the hospital was closing and they had 20 residents there in the program. He stated that would be a lot of money that would come through Bluefield for the hospital. He stated that they could get all of these meetings set up and meet with the entire PCH board on the 2nd then they would be able to see what direction PCH had planned to take and then we would know what direction we would need to go in. He stated that it was places like VCOM who had worked with these hospitals that would be able to bring back what we had and possibly more to the area. He stated that a lot of the problem was lack of communication and people still fighting over things from past years. He stated he would give more information on his councilman page and keep everyone posted and after these two meetings that Bluefield, VA would know what direction to take.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS AND REPORTS

None.

NEW BUSINESS AND REPORTS

None.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

David Wohlford from Bluefield, Virginia stated that he wanted to address the situation with the hospital. He stated there was a long term history between the two hospitals and wanted to advise council to be very careful when dealing with Bluefield, West Virginia. He stated that

every time we had dealt with them that they had a great idea but we ended up paying for it. He suggested that we give this time before we took any serious action and suggested at least 6-7 months. He stated that one thing we should consider when working with the County was that the other end of the County did not want us to have anything and if we entered into a long-term agreement then things could change drastically. He stated we should consider Charlottesville, Roanoke or any other larger area because they all had hospitals within a few miles but they also had bigger EMS services for transports. He stated that we should get with the County and see if they could upgrade our EMS services with more trained personnel and more equipment to be able to deal with transports to Princeton. He stated that the Town had already spent a lot of money on many different things including Fincastle and who knew what the next few months would hold for us.

Mr. Presley stated that there was a lady from BRMC working with Charlie Stacy to bring those additional training courses to train our EMS. He stated that it would be discussed further at the new Hospital Committee Meeting.

Mr. Wohlford stated that Princeton would run its hospital like a business and that they did not care about the community.

Mac McKnight stated that he had come back with the same issue and did not want to beat an already dead horse but he wanted to get the road in decent condition. He stated the gravel road as you go up to the top of the mountain was the responsibility of the Town of Bluefield and when he first started talking with Mr. Watson about it that he realized a few things. He stated that Bland County came up on their side of the mountain 3 times a year to grade and gravel it. He stated that he and Mr. Watson basically got into a heated discussion about it and was told he should talk to Tazewell County about taking the road back. He stated that he tried that and Tazewell County informed him that a judge made the Town of Bluefield take responsibility of that road when the Town was going through annexing Brierwood. He stated that he drove on that road every single day and would try and explain his experience to Mr. Watson about how the road conditions were. He stated he had asked Mr. Watson if he had rode on that road before and Mr. Watson replied that he had. He stated that Mr. Watson also told him that he went up and over the mountain onto the Bland side and the conditions were not any better on the Bland side. He stated that technically Mr. Watson was right, but that he had visited the Bland side when they were in the middle of grading it. He stated that if he would have returned 3 days later, that the conditions were much better. He stated that Mr. Watson would give him his view of the road and Mr. McKnight would tell Mr. Watson that it was not true and would name off the different things wrong with the road. He stated that Mr. Watson said that he was not going to argue with him. He stated that he had decided to come speak to Council about the road condition and that he would get blamed for simply asking for the road to be fixed. He stated he was not going to talk with that kind of a person that made him out to be the villain and that the road needed some work. He stated that leaves had filled up the drains and had not been cleaned out in two years, there were tons of potholes, the water cut across the road and the turns were in terrible condition. He stated that passing someone in a turn was hard and it would make the truck rock back and forth. He stated that he would have to reposition his tools in his truck after riding the road and that he never went over 5 MPH. He stated

that he never went fast on that road or around the curves, that the road did not have a center line and when people came around those curves you could not see them. He stated that in the last few years he had tried to get Mr. Watson to have some of the potholes fixed but Mr. Watson had told him that he did not believe there were potholes on that road. He stated that he had invited Mr. Watson to come and look at the conditions and even invited him to ride with him in his truck. He also invited any of Council to come and ride that road with him in his truck so that they could feel what he felt every single day. He stated that he would keep it under 5 MPH in the straight ways and the curves. He stated then council would be able to see the problems with the road. He stated that there were ruts where water had washed out the road and we did not put gravel down worth anything and that when we did that it was a thin layer of gravel and not properly laid. He stated he was not the only one that rode on that road and that everyone from Rt. 61 came over the mountain on that road and that they were the Town's customers. He stated that he spent tons of money at Lowes as well as on fuel and groceries and that he had asked the DOV numerous times for a traffic camera to be installed to see the amount of traffic on that road. He stated that he had also asked about how the Town could receive more money for the maintenance of that road. He stated they asked if there were any houses on that road, but he told them no and there would probably never be any houses on that road. He stated that if they had a traffic count, then there would be a set amount based on that count. He stated that he had mentioned that to Mr. Watson and at one point he thought he had him sold on the idea, then he backed out. He stated that he already had one truck destroyed and had to purchase another one and he also had to have a box from under his truck re-fabbed and re-welded because it had been ripped off on that road. He stated that the road needed to be fixed and not his vehicles. He once again asked council to ride up there and see the road and also offered for them to ride with him in his truck. He stated the last time the road was dealt with was in the fall when some gravel was laid down and graded. He stated that when they graded it, there was not enough gravels there to properly grade it and all of the potholes he had mentioned were still there and that you could not grade the road until the potholes were filled. He stated it would be nice to have the ditches cleaned out and that the Town could use the vacuum cleaner to suck up the leaves. He stated that the mower with the side arms could be used as well to clear up the edges of the road and stated that the trees were starting to encroach on the road as well. He stated that the road was being neglected and asked Council to encourage the proper maintenance.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

Town Attorney Position, ROLL CALL VOTE

Mr. Watson stated that he needed a formal vote from Council accepting Cassell and Crewe to be appointed as our new Town Attorney.

Mr. Holt made a motion to approve appointing Cassell and Crewe as the new Town Attorney. Mr. Presley seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL VOTE

Vice-Mayor Trigg:	Yes
Councilmember Presley:	Yes
Mayor Harris:	Yes
Councilmember Bailey:	Yes
Councilmember Holt:	Yes
Councilmember Jones:	Absent

The motion passed unanimously by Roll Call Vote.

Skewes Property Donation Discussion, POSSIBLE ROLL CALL VOTE

Mr. Watson stated he had received an offer on some property located within the Town known as the Skewes Property across from PEMCO. He stated that it was a grassy area and had a small wooden bridge. He stated that he was asked to bring it before Council to see if they would like to accept the donation.

Mr. Presley asked what we as a Town would use it for.

Mr. Watson stated at one time a few years ago that we looked at the possibility of putting some kind of field in there like a multi-purpose field or possibly a shelter that would allow water to go through it since the property was in a flood plain. He stated there would be some costs that would have to happen to safely get people across the road and to create some sort of parking. He stated that the bad part would be having to mow it because the Town was already having a hard time finding employees to mow what we had now and that every opportunity we had to mow that it would rain. He stated at one time we also looked into putting some kind of park area on that property and if we decided to take this donation that Council needed to have some latitude on time it would take to develop it.

Mr. Holt asked what it was currently zoned.

Mr. Watson stated he was not sure off of the top of his head but he believed it was R2, but that he could look it up.

Mr. Bailey stated that this property was posted for sale online but it showed another parcel on 460 that was landlocked. He asked if that was connected to this piece of property.

Mr. Watson stated he had not gotten that far into the conversation.

Mr. Bailey stated that the map shown online had that and he had briefly spoken with Mr. Watson about it.

Mr. Watson stated that they had talked about it and that it was currently posted on Zillow and the property that Mr. Bailey was referring to was landlocked due to the off ramp coming off of 460 at the Hockman Pike exit.

Mayor Harris stated that a gentleman at one time wanted to turn this property into a trailer park and the residents of Fincastle Estates did not like that. He stated that Mr. Skewes purchased the property 7-8 years ago and the Town had negotiated to buy the property from the Skewes to make a park that we would have named after him but they were not interested. He stated that now years later they were offering it to us free of charge. He stated that it had potential.

David Wohlford stated that he used to have family that lived across the street from the bridge that accessed that property and over the years he had seen the water rise up almost to the road on several occasions. He stated that doing something with it would be difficult and did not see anything that could be done with it.

Mr. Bailey asked if we would have to maintain it or could we let it be a natural wooded area.

Mr. Watson stated that we could possibly get away with mowing along the road side of it and that Mr. Wohlford was right that the last time it flooded in Bluefield the water was up almost 20 feet. He stated that we would not be able to build a structure but could possibly build a shelter. He stated that at one time the boosters used to have a fishing tournament and it was stocked all the way to Pine Hill Park. He stated the water level did get up and that the existing bridge would have to be for foot traffic only and no cars.

Mr. Wohlford stated vehicles going in and out would be a problem especially around 4 p.m. when the Bluestone Park started to close.

Mayor Harris stated that the property had potential and would not create a huge expense except for mowing.

Mr. Bailey stated that he would be in favor as long as it would not add to the grass crews work load that much. He stated that he would like it to be more of a natural wooded area and to allow fishing.

Mr. Watson stated half of the property (between Bullet Bill and Bluestone Drive) was zoned R1 to the right and M1 to the left. He stated that you could change the zoning to something with open space and apply for grants but the only thing about getting money for a park was that it would have to be kept as a park. He stated that he was not sure of the elevation change or the right of way but it would be difficult to create parking and you would eventually have to create some kind of access but that would be a few years before it was needed.

Mr. Holt asked about the timeframe it would take to mow the property.

Mr. Watson stated to cut it, he would contract out the guys that normally cut the dilapidated properties and would probably take about half a day with a full crew. He stated we only had 4 people right now and normally ran a crew of 6-7 depending on the season. He stated that the Skewes contracted out and it was mowed like a normal yard and that a few years ago he was at the property with Pete when the Game Warden came through to shock the water and counted and measured the fish.

Mr. Trigg made a motion to accept the Skewes Property Donation. Mr. Holt seconded the motion.

Vice-Mayor Trigg:	Yes
Councilmember Presley:	Yes
Mayor Harris:	Yes
Councilmember Bailey:	Yes
Councilmember Holt:	Yes
Councilmember Jones:	Absent

The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

Town Offices Closed

Mr. Watson stated that Town offices would be closed on Friday, July 3rd in observance of Independence Day.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Mr. Holt stated that he appreciated all of the work that the Police Department had put into the transfer. He stated that it had been a labor intensive project especially over the past several weeks and months preparing for this transfer. He stated that all we normally heard about was the gloom and doom during the Covid-19 crisis and for collections for the County compared to this time last year for the month of April we were \$7,000.00 to the good. He stated that he knew meals tax was down but that sales tax was up as a result of the stimulus spending especially at Walmart and the big box stores. He stated that we were not as financially impacted as we had thought we were and Fincastle was impacted in a bigger way with events being cancelled but that golf was doing well. He stated that he just wanted to mention some of the positives. He also stated that we would begin Phase 3 on July 1st and that would be good for Fincastle because it increased the groups up to 250.

Mr. Bailey stated that he wanted to reiterate what Mr. Holt said. He thanked Chief Gunter, Sheriff Hieatt and both of their departments on all of their work that they had put into this project. He stated that it would be a great benefit with all of the new technology to cover our area.

Mayor Harris expressed his gratitude to the Police Department and was thankful this was a safe process.

Mr. Presley stated that he appreciated everyone coming out to the meeting. He stated that we had an awesome Town with awesome employees who did a great job. He stated we had a long road ahead of us but that we would get there.

Mr. Trigg stated that he liked to see the Chief and Sheriff get along and work together and to keep up the good work.

ATTORNEY’S REPORT

Mr. McGraw stated on behalf of the firm and himself that he would like to thank them for the opportunity to provide interim services and should the Town ever need assistance in the future to let them know.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Mayor Harris asked Ms. Looney to read the Executive Session.

MOTION FOR CLOSED MEETING

It is hereby moved that the Council of the Town of Bluefield, Virginia enter into a closed meeting pursuant to Section 2.2-3711 (A) (1, 29) of the Code of Virginia as amended, The specific purpose for this motion is to discuss the following matter(s):

Discussion, consideration, or interviews of prospective candidates for employment; assignment, appointment, promotion, performance, demotion, salaries, disciplining, or resignation of specific public officers, appointees, or employees of any public body

Discussion of the award of a public contract involving the expenditure of public funds, including interviews of bidders or offerors, and discussion of the terms or scope of such contract, where discussion in an open session would adversely affect the bargaining position or negotiating strategy of the public body with such closed meeting being confined to the following subjects: regarding the Town Manager’s Contract, the discussion and consideration of concerns regarding the performance of a specific public officer and the discussion of the fire contract.

Councilmember Holt made a motion to enter into Executive Session as described above. Councilmember Presley seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

Vice-Mayor Trigg:	Yes
Councilmember Presley:	Yes
Mayor Harris:	Yes
Councilmember Bailey:	Yes
Councilmember Holt:	Yes
Councilmember Jones:	Absent

Councilmember Presley made a motion to enter back into regular session. Councilmember Bailey seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

Vice-Mayor Trigg:	Yes
Councilmember Presley:	Yes
Mayor Harris:	Yes
Councilmember Bailey:	Yes
Councilmember Holt:	Yes
Councilmember Jones:	Absent

CERTIFICATION OF EXECUTIVE SESSION

WHEREAS, the Town Council of Bluefield, Virginia convened a closed meeting on June 23, 2020, pursuant to a duly adopted motion, attached hereto, and such closed meeting was convened in accordance with the provisions of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act; and

WHEREAS, the Town Council of Bluefield, Virginia returned to its open meeting held on June 23, 2020.

NOW, THEREFORE, THE COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF BLUEFIELD, VIRGINIA HEREBY CERTIFIES that to the best of each member's knowledge (i) only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act were discussed in the closed meeting held on June 23, 2020, to which this certification applies and (ii) only such public business matters as were identified in the motion convening such closed meeting were heard, discussed, or considered by the Council of the Town of Bluefield, Virginia in such closed meeting.

ROLL CALL VOTE

Vice-Mayor Trigg:	Yes
Councilmember Presley:	Yes
Mayor Harris:	Yes
Councilmember Bailey:	Yes
Councilmember Holt:	Yes
Councilmember Jones:	Absent

The motion passed unanimously by Roll Call Vote.

ADJOURN

Councilmember Bailey made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:28 p.m. Councilmember Presley seconded that motion. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

Vice-Mayor Trigg:	Yes
Councilmember Presley:	Yes
Mayor Harris:	Yes
Councilmember Bailey:	Yes
Councilmember Holt:	Yes
Councilmember Jones:	Absent

Don Harris, Mayor

Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk