

**Town of Bluefield
Town Council
Special Called Meeting
Minutes
June 4, 2020**

The Bluefield, Virginia Town Council held a Special Called Town Council Meeting on Thursday, June 4, 2020 at 6:00 in p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Town Hall located at 112 Huffard Drive, Bluefield, Virginia.

PRESENT

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

ALSO PRESENT

Mike Watson, Town Manager
Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk
Alan McGraw, Interim Town Attorney
Billie Roberts, Comm. Dev. Coordinator
Rachel Looney, Administrative Asst.
Shane Gunter, Police Chief
Lt. Rex Bradshaw
Charlie Stacy, Board of Supervisors
2 Members of Media
30 Members of Public

ABSENT

Don Harris, Mayor
Jimmy Jones, Councilmember

CALL TO ORDER

Vice-Mayor Trigg called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE

Dr. Rev. Jay Ferguson, First United Methodist Church led the Invocation. Vice-Mayor Trigg led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

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

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Bluefield Regional Medical Center

Mr. Presley stated that he had put out a message on Tuesday concerning the closing of BRMC and they needed to come up with a solution for public safety. He stated that they needed to work with Princeton or someone and not sit back and invited the public to speak.

Mr. Bailey stated that he would like to hear what the community had to say.

Mr. Holt stated that it hurt the community when you lost health care, schools, etc. He stated that he could not say something would happen but that they would fight for it. He stated that there were options on the table and they needed to talk with the Town Attorney and possibly this could be litigation. He thanked everyone for coming out.

Mr. Trigg invited anyone to speak.

Dr. Frank Britton, 603 Ashley Way, Bluefield, VA asked what the Town Attorney had to say. He stated that you would think with 15,000 or more people that could support a hospital.

Mr. McGraw stated that this was the first time he had been asked concerning this issue and he would have to look into it which would take some time. He stated that he did not know what was available for a legal mechanism and that he had heard they were going to be putting dorm spaces in for Bluefield State College.

Mr. Presley stated that Princeton Hospital bought it saying that it would stay open and there were a lot of rumors.

Mr. Holt stated that they had Charlie Stacy there who was an attorney and the Eastern District Board of Supervisors. He stated that they needed to have an Executive Session and talk with their Interim Attorney concerning this. He asked if this was some type of anti-trust violation and that they had saw calculated maneuvers over the past decade or so such as St. Luke's. He stated that community members, etc. suffered as a result of this and asked that it be added into the Executive Session.

Mr. McGraw stated that they would not be able find someone highly specialized in that area here locally.

Mr. Watson agreed that it was a complicated situation and thought it would be a Federal Case. He stated that he had reached out and contacted a few people but unfortunately not all information was good. He stated that he did not want to see it closed but no one had given him any answers as to why it was happening other than it was financially. He stated that he had suggested to Mr. Presley to form a committee task force to investigate a solution. He stated that it would take years to go thru litigation and the last litigation that the Town and County went through cost \$400k. He stated that he hoped Princeton Hospital could handle the capacity of all of this and that this board would be happy to partner in a workforce to see what the reasons for the closure were. He stated that he also reached out to Bluefield, WV and they did not know the answers either.

Charlie Stacy, Board of Supervisors stated that this was a gut punch for Economic Development purposes and would ultimately be the end to it. He stated that in reality we all knew the problem was money because hospitals could not survive when 90% of the patients received Medicare/Medicaid. He stated that no physician could survive under that as well. He stated that they needed to unite and go after the Federal Legislators to fix the problem. He stated that they could build their own hospital so that no one could take it away from the community and they would have a lot of people behind them to do so but the first day they sent out bills that they would be in the same boat of losing money from Medicare/Medicaid reimbursements. He stated that it was a Federal problem and the Senators and Congressmen needed to fix it. He stated that a community hospital was funded with tax money and they expected to lose money but provided services. He stated that may need to be the conversation they had. He stated that an immediate fix would be the ability to enhance the EMS Services for paramedics so that they were highly trained EMS Personnel ready to deal with a heart attack, etc. He stated that the immediate problem was what scared him the most. He stated that they may even have to utilize law enforcement for CPR, defibrillators, etc. to have time to stabilize them to make it to Princeton. He stated that he understood that the ER would stay open so it may not be as severe but if they were closing the whole thing then we would need the best Emergency Responders qualified in such life threatening conditions. He stated that a facility fix would be long term but that time was critical. He stated that he would pledge on the County Side to help with EMS and put people in place for emergency situations.

Patsy Murphy, 1805 Lee Avenue, Bluefield, VA stated that when the hospital was Bluefield Community that she thought Bluefield, WV had the option to buy it.

Mr. Stacy stated that he did not know the history behind it but that the viable solution would be a community hospital because they would never make enough money.

Ms. Murphy stated that they had to worry about trauma.

Mr. Stacy stated that 3-5 times per week our EMS was setting up landing zones to fly people out because of specialized care needed.

Ms. Murphy stated that they were automatically flown out for certain issues and we had cut our own throats on that. She stated that she felt sorry for the employees and that Tazewell, Richlands, Wytheville and Abingdon all had their own hospitals.

Mr. Stacy stated that Tazewell almost closed until they had Carillion to back them and help with the loss. He stated that Bluefield did not have that backing.

Ms. Murphy stated that she knew when Princeton bought it that we would lose it.

Mr. Stacy stated that the local boards did not have control on that level and that it was controlled through a private market transaction. He stated that he did not know how to get ahold of the certificate of need if Princeton was not willing to cooperate and give it to them. He stated that it could be given to someone else to use.

Ms. Murphy stated that our EMS needed to have better training and be qualified to save someone who could not make the trip.

Myra Yates, Springville stated that she currently worked at BRMC and that they were told that 340 employees would be let go before the end of July. She stated that she had worked in radiation and oncology for 18 years and they had a certificate of need. She stated that she was the only RN and there were 2 techs who worked alongside of Dr. Charles Onstead. She stated that she was told by Charleston that to obtain a certificate of need would cost \$1 million. She stated that they have had theirs since the 80's. She stated that there was a national corporation company called 21st Century in Princeton who received 80% of Mercer Medical Groups cancer patients. She stated that Princeton now owned the radiation center at Bluefield and if they would send Bluefield some of those patients that they could be profitable with only 8 patients. She stated that they were open Monday – Friday and that radiation, heart cath, etc. was where you made the money. She stated that the expense of vendors did not go down and that BRMC had the best state of the art equipment that would set idle if Princeton did not use it. She stated that they paid to have Alliance bring a truck in to do theirs. She stated that when doctors were recruited that the two hospitals were against each other and there was no loyalty. She stated that another issue was that West Virginia did not put a cap on malpractice suits and it was hard to get OBGYN's into the area because of that. She stated that doctors look at BRMC sitting idle while Princeton was overbooked. She stated that another problem with recruiting doctors was their families did not want to come to this area because the schools were old, they did not offer enough and there was nothing to do here. She stated that we needed hospitals in our area. She stated that she did not wish ill will towards Princeton but they had a lot of debt. She stated that she would have to disagree with a community hospital because doctors would not come unless they had a stake in the hospital. She stated that it would be great if they could partner up with Carillion.

Mike Harris, 325 Brierwood Drive, Bluefield, VA stated that he was a town resident and was the Walmart Pharmacy Manager. He stated that oncology and outpatient surgeries/services was where your money was. He suggested that they look at Richlands and see how they have such a viable hospital and how they recruited doctors there and to also look at Tazewell. He stated that

the Bluestone would be a good facility for a hospital and without healthcare we would not have what we needed. He stated that the Residency Clinic had also closed and that something needed to be done quickly.

Brittany Six, 155 Hidden Hills Way, Princeton, WV stated that she was part of the Residency Clinic and that the doctor population was aging out and retiring and the Residency Clinic brought in new doctors to our area with a lot of them staying after their residency. She stated that McDowell, Tazewell and all over would suffer because of no new doctors. She stated that specialist would be leaving as well and the opportunity was massive for new doctors with different backgrounds, etc. She stated that they had some in the program from the Mayo Clinic who finished out their residency in this program. She stated that they had to come up with something or the patients would suffer.

Scott Holland, 116 Lake Street, Bluefield, WV stated that he was the manager for Med Express and they shared in the sentiments and not only felt for themselves, but for the children, parents, grandparents, etc. He stated that he had talked to the Senior Leadership of Med Express and they were recently acquired by Optimum Care which is owned by United Health Group and they were now a part of the largest health care organization in the nation and had deep resources that could possibly be tapped into. He stated that he had also talked to the COO of Med Express and they had over 200 Med Express centers across the country. He stated right now they were piloting a primary care option in Arkansas that was on the table for Virginia. He stated that Virginia was #2 on that list and they had also looked at West Virginia but because it was primarily Medicaid/Medicare and Highmark that the reimbursement rates were really poor. He stated that he revisited this issue again today with Virginia being second on the list. He stated that he did not know if he had any solid solutions but wanted everyone to know that they cared about the community and that the COO and Regional Vice President were willing to come and have that conversation with council.

Mr. Presley stated that he would get in contact with him tomorrow.

Mr. Holland stated that they would see more patients in their facility once the doors closed and he would make sure they were staffed appropriately and ready to help the local EMS to stabilize for transport. He stated that they would also add more training and be ready.

Mr. Presley stated that other rural hospitals had started out small with nuclear, CT, etc. and then built massive hospitals. He stated that they took what made money and started out small and suggested we try something like that. He stated that if we did not do anything then we were done.

Mr. Stacy stated that when COVID occurred they all watched the economy and what had taken years to build was gone. He stated that this will devastate Economic Development and it may already be gone but they needed to figure something out. He stated that they had to put things in place for doctors and their families to come and that was what Community Development did. He stated that it may not be something that this board would ever see but that they could say it

would never happen again. He stated that the biggest drivers for employers were hospitals and schools and when those were taken off the table you had checkmate.

Mr. Presley stated that Princeton Community Hospital could not handle the load and their ER was horrible. He stated that he would like to start Monday with a committee and go hard.

Tina Nickelson, PO Box 5853, Princeton, WV stated that she was a former employee of Princeton Community Hospital of 20 years and had worked with some that had come out. She asked what would happen if Princeton were on diversion.

Mr. Stacy stated that our EMS called in advanced and knew whether or not to Med Flight out. He stated that they were flown out to Bristol, Charleston and Roanoke and that they would see more and more of it.

A citizen stated that a lot of insurance companies did not cover Med Flight.

Ms. Nickelson asked if it were on the WV side would they have to go to Beckley.

Mr. Stacy stated that here after our patients were triaged then they would decide where they needed to go based on the services provided. He stated that the services were just not available locally and that they would see more and more of these expensive rides.

Ms. Nickelson stated as a second form of the immediate solution to incorporate some RN's trained with paddles, ACLS, etc. to help stabilize and help with transport.

Mr. Presley stated that was the problem with EMS that if we could get some transports then we could fund the other stuff.

Mr. Stacy stated that they transported a lot of their patients out of the area. He stated that EMS in both states had the goal to be available to make those transports some of which require very specialized care. He stated that they could put paramedics on buses and enhance some of those things.

Ms. Nickelson stated the place to start would be the assessment of the managers, physicians with key data and information, attorneys, etc. to see what could and could not be done.

Mr. Holt stated that we had a nice surgical center located in the Town of Bluefield. He stated that we were uniquely positioned to do something very real to affect some change there. He stated that if it were a business issue and they were going broke and had to shut down a hospital and not to drive competition out that they should jump at the chance to offload at that facility there. He stated that he had talked to some medical professionals this week who were willing to offer and provide some specialty care there which was what was needed. He stated that we were unique in the fact that we had that facility there and could do something real there.

Mr. Stacy stated that money was what it always came back too and the hospital would much rather not have a surgical center opened because the same procedure that could be done there would cost an additional \$3,000 if done in a hospital. He stated that if that were accurate that Princeton's model would be the exact same thing. He stated that when they obtained the certificate of need it was as if they just kept it in their back pocket.

Nancy Bogle, 200 Schenley Avenue, Bluefield, VA stated that she worked at BRMC for 11 years before they "let her go". She encouraged the Town to use its local resources such as Med Express and Bluefield College's new School of Osteopathic and their added Masters RN program. She also encouraged them to reach out to Community Radiology as well. She stated that the Town had plans but when they said they were going to build a new Rescue Squad to do it and not to let it fade into the sunset because something else had come up.

Mr. Stacy stated that they had moved into it two weeks ago.

Ms. Bogle stated that she had not heard anything and was glad she was wrong about that.

Mr. Presley stated that it was located in the Industrial Park.

Ms. Bogle stated who knew because the communication needed to be better.

Mike Harris stated they also needed to think about if a college student were to break a leg or sprain an ankle, etc. and we did not have a facility that they would have to be taken to Blacksburg and that would be a big turn off to the parents and their kids in coming to college here. He stated that our college brought in millions of dollars to the community.

Donna Angove, Bluefield VA stated that she had worked 46 ½ years in the Bluefield Lab before retiring last year. She stated that she felt for the nurses that were still there and that they needed to do whatever that they could do for the community whether it was to work with West Virginia to buy it. She stated that she would love to see something built on our side of the line and if we did not do something now then we should hang it up because nothing would come into this area. She stated that the young people would leave and urged council to consider putting something on the VA side. She stated that they would have a whole community behind them.

Crystal Asbury, 1295 Wright Mountain Road, Rock, WV stated that each resident in the residency program brought in \$80k (that was what the hospital got paid to take in that resident) and depending upon where they came in from were paid more. She stated that even it was an even \$80k that they were not paying the resident half of that in their wages so there was all of that money. She stated that Princeton bought Bluefield to shut it down.

Mr. Presley made a motion to form a Hospital Committee. Mr. Holt seconded the motion.

Vice-Mayor Trigg: Yes
Councilmember Presley: Yes

Councilmember Bailey: Yes
Mayor Harris: Absent
Councilmember Jones: Absent
Councilmember Holt: Yes

The motion passed unanimously by Roll Call Vote.

Mr. Presley stated that Mr. Holt would join him on the committee as well. He stated that they would start on Monday and he would put something on his Facebook.

911 Media Release

Mr. Holt stated that he would like to get service rolled out to the public before the transition and would like to have a firm date where the Sheriff's Department and Tazewell County could come out for. He stated that it was not possible to do on the 9th and made a motion for a 911 Media Release to be held on June 23rd.

Mr. Presley seconded the motion.

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

The motion passed unanimously by Roll Call Vote.

Mr. Holt asked Chief or Mike if there was anything else that they could do to help.

Chief Gunter stated no.

Mr. Trigg asked about the contract information.

Mr. Watson stated that after looking into other communities that they did not have contracts. He stated that he was working with Chief to get the items they needed such as a call box which was not ready and an entry system for the officers.

Chief Gunter stated that all of the radios needed to be tested to make sure they were not missing anything.

Mr. Holt stated that he would like to form a Public Safety Committee which would be made up of 2 councilmembers, both the Police and Fire Chief, and Charlie Stacy. He stated that Mr. Bailey stated that he would be willing to serve on it along with himself.

Mr. Stacy asked that Barry Brooks, EMS Coordinator also be added to the committee.

Mr. Holt made a motion to form the Public Safety Committee. Mr. Presley seconded the motion.

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

The motion passed unanimously by Roll Call Vote.

Mr. Trigg thanked everyone for coming out.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Mr. Holt made a motion to allow Charlie Stacy to enter into Executive Session. Mr. Presley seconded the motion.

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

The motion passed unanimously by Roll Call Vote.

Mrs. Hernandez 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, 5, 6) 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 concerning a prospective business or industry or the expansion of an existing business or industry where no previous announcement has been made of the business' or industry's interest in locating or expanding its facilities in the community.

Discussion or consideration of the investment of public funds where competition or bargaining is involved, where, if made public initially, the financial interest of the governmental unit would be adversely affected with such closed meeting being confined to the following subject (s): interviews with prospective candidates for Town Attorney and contract for local services.

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

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

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

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

CERTIFICATION OF EXECUTIVE SESSION

WHEREAS, the Town Council of Bluefield, Virginia convened a closed meeting on June 4, 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 4, 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 4, 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
Councilmember Bailey:	Yes
Mayor Harris:	Absent
Councilmember Jones:	Absent
Councilmember Holt:	Yes

The motion passed unanimously by Roll Call Vote.

ADJOURN

Mr. Holt made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:26 p.m. Mr. Presley seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

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

Don Harris, Mayor

Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk