

**Town of Bluefield
 Town Council
 Public Hearing
 May 22, 2018**

The Bluefield, Virginia Town Council held a Public Hearing on Tuesday, May 22, 2018 at 7:00 p.m. to receive input on the proposed 2018/2019 Fiscal Year Budget.

TOWN COUNCIL PRESENT

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

ALSO PRESENT

Mike Watson, Town Manager
 Matt Freedman, Town Attorney
 Billie Roberts, Comm. Dev. Coordinator
 8 Members of Public

ABSENT

Shane Gunter, Police Chief
 Lesley Compton, Town Clerk

Mayor Harris opened the Public Hearing at 7:00 p.m.

Mr. Watson read the following Legal Notice that appeared in the Bluefield Daily Telegraph on Monday May 14, 2018.

Pursuant to the provisions of Section 15.2-2506 of the Code of Virginia, the Bluefield, Virginia Town Council will hold a Public Hearing on the Proposed 2018 / 2019 Budget on Tuesday, May 22, 2018 at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building at 112 Huffard Drive, Bluefield, Virginia. A brief summary of the budget, which is for information and fiscal planning purposes only, follows:

GENERAL FUND	
REVENUE	
General Property Taxes	\$ 996,153
Other Local Taxes	3,138,492
Permits (Misc. Permits & Fees)	22,750
Fines & Forfeitures	47,500
Use of Money & Property	38,000
Charges for Services	464,000
Miscellaneous Revenue	305,120
Revenue from the Commonwealth – Non Categorical	108,477
Revenue from the Commonwealth – Categorical	1,414,544
Revenue from the Federal Government	0
Other Financing Sources	960,000
Transfers to General Fund	206,350

TOTAL REVENUE	\$ 7,789,586
EXPENDITURES	
Town Council	62,782
Town Manager	466,019
Legal	4,000
Independent Audit	39,000
Treasurer	201,908
Bookkeeping	125,457
Vehicle Maintenance	494,384
Police Department	1,589,746
Fire Department	161,922
Building Inspection	119,985
Street Department	1,080,445
Refuse Collection	279,808
Town Hall Buildings & Grounds	107,479
Recreation Department	347,318
Cemetery	79,202
HMGP Planning Project	0
Planning Commission	6,990
Community Development	68,000
Donations	27,200
Zoning Administrator	90,267
Non-Departmental	124,640
Transfer	349,546
Capital Projects	1,415,000
Debt Service – Active	548,488
Debt Service - Retired	0
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 7,789,586
WATER FUND	
REVENUE	\$1,159,042
EXPENDITURES	\$1,159,042
CEMETERY	
REVENUE	\$34,550
EXPENDITURES	\$34,550
TRANSIT	
REVENUE	\$528,710
EXPENDITURES	\$528,710

The proposed FY 2018 / 2019 Water Fund includes an increase of \$3.50 per month to water rates and an additional 6% on any usage exceeding 2,000 gallons per month, as well as an increase of \$1.00 per month to trash rates.

Jim Justice stated that he came for this part of the meeting and not the cigarette tax but was thrown into the cigarette tax because he was wealthy too. He stated that a comment coming from Town Council like that was total abort. He stated that wealth had nothing to do with anyone who came before the board and shame on him. He stated that he came because he was concerned and being out of town 3-4 months a year, it made it difficult to stay up on everything. He stated that one of the things that hit him when he got back was when he turned his TV on and the Mayor and Town Manager were telling everyone we were building a \$6 million dollar sports facility next to the middle school. He stated that he started wondering and we had such a tremendous facility for Graham to play ball at why we would want to start spending Town money to put forth a \$6 million facility. He stated that he started wondering what this would do to the rest of our Town and where the \$6 million was coming from. He stated that we always fell back on meals tax so he thought some of it was coming from there. He stated that they had finally quit taking money out of the General Fund to pay the Water Bill. He asked if the people of Bluefield knew that they had been taking tax money to fund the overuse of water, he asked how silly was that and they needed to raise, raise, raise the water. He stated it was \$3.50 per month.

Mr. Watson stated plus 6%, not a huge amount.

Mr. Justice stated that was absolutely incredible that we would work in the red and pull the money out of General Fund rather than asking the people who were using the water to pay for it. The next thing he stated was they had relied heavily on the name Leatherwood. He stated that he thought maybe Leatherwood was coming up with land or money to help with that \$6 million. He stated that he started thinking about his friend John Shott and maybe the Shott Foundation that everyone looked to for everything in this area. He stated that last year if he was not mistaken, they passed the \$100 million mark of gifts into our communities. He stated that maybe they were going to help with the \$6 million but then thought this was a Tazewell County issue and Tazewell County Schools so he was sure that Tazewell County would help with \$6 million to build our stadium. He stated that he went through the cigarette tax, water taxes, etc. and still could not come out anyway close to where we were coming up with \$6 million. He stated then he could not come up with the fact that if the City of Bluefield, WV could not afford the stadium then he was not for sure that we could afford a stadium. He stated that we would not have the overhead as WV but at the same time what he looked at more than anything else was he looked at Mercer County Schools and he stated that today was the first reading of the ordinance and he spent some time talking to the City Attorney about any ramifications of Mercer County Schools to handle or take care of that stadium and there were already provisions installed for this and that it would come back to the City of Bluefield. He stated that he was just looking for answers from his governing body as to where \$6 million came from when the announcement was made on TV and we did not have funds other than the meals tax. He stated that if he was wrong on it to tell him but he was looking to where \$6 million came from instead of where it was going. He stated that he was at a loss and they could handle it during their comments if they wanted too or he could stand there and they could "wail on him" whatever they wanted but he was very much perturbed as a member of this Town that they would follow in the footsteps of Bluefield, WV and unless they were going to ask for a tremendous amount of money and he knew that Graham would be playing there, the Middle School, Bluefield College and asked if there was anyone else playing football there. He stated that he looked at that and \$50k would have gone a long ways towards that stadium and they could pay \$50k out for 120 years and still play at Mitchell Stadium if it was still with the City of Bluefield and the fact that this project was not something that was brand new. He stated that from what he had been told the whole concept of this facility was 2-3 years old and asked if that was correct.

Mr. Watson stated that there were a lot of answers to the questions he had and they were not at the point right now to expose how they would pay for these things because as he was aware in the many years he had been associated with foundations and organizations depending on how you pay for as determining the actual costs of it and the procedure you had to go through such as engineering which we were going forward with because they felt like there was a need. He stated that this was not light-hearted, it was not something that they did not look at budgeting, did not look at future, and did not look at the need. He stated that they looked at everything they needed to do in order to go forward and he hoped that the community would stand behind this project. He stated that it was a community project for the region and was never put forward as something to compete. He stated that Mr. Justice was correct and they had spent some time working on this and it was not a competing project with anyone that it was a project for the region, an additional facility.

Mr. Justice asked what the region was and if it included Tazewell then they would probably support them in this would they not.

Mr. Watson stated that if you were considering regions you would look at the studies in which we did an economic study on this based on the increase of traffic and other things that will be in our community. He stated that if he was looking at region it would include Mercer, Tazewell, Bland and McDowell County. He stated that we pulled from a large region and he felt this project with the support of the community would more than easily go forward and as an asset that the community wanted and if they did not then that might be an issue as well. He asked Mr. Justice if he thought this was good project and if he was for it or against it.

Mr. Justice stated that he was for the proper financing of it and when he is watching TV and seeing the Mayor and Town Manager announcing this without having a nickel to go forward he was worrisome.

Mr. Watson stated that they had budgeted money for this and had taken the steps to move forward with this project and that was why they were determined it was moving forward as far as engineering. He stated that they had looked forward as far as the meals tax was raised in order to go towards this project and part of that would go towards this and looking at financing that we had coming due. He stated that the financing depending on the term and the size of the project would determine the length and the type of project so as they move forward...

Mr. Justice asked if Leatherwood or the Shott Foundation had even given them a glimpse of hope.

Mr. Watson stated that they had property owners in the area that were looking at donating the property and we did not plan to have any costs in the acquisition of the land.

Mr. Justice stated that was not a part of the \$6 million and if they did get the land gifted to them, they would still spend \$6 million.

Mr. Watson stated that this was something they were moving forward with and this was a difficult conversation because they would be looking at funding from agencies and would approach funding agencies and state agencies. He stated that it was a process and that Mr. Justice had been involved in many multi-million dollar projects.

Mr. Justice asked if they put the cart before the horse by going on TV and announcing it and starting a fire storm on the internet.

Mr. Watson stated that this was no different than any other project that any other organization did as far as the plans to move forward by securing engineering firms. He stated that he would question anyone that did a project before spending any money on engineering or studies if they could write the check and write it then or was it a process to move forward. He stated if you were going to build a \$20 million facility which this did not cost \$20 million would they have all of the cash in hand before they presented plans or move forward with financing. He stated when you announced a project as far as securing engineering and he was sure that if this council fully supported it and voted for it to move forward, that it was a project that could be funded in time.

He stated that it was funny that he mentioned \$20 million that it was an interesting thing because he was involved in a project to help raise \$20 million and he thought he told them what happened. He stated that once they got the initial commitments to get to the \$20 million, the organization changed and now they needed more stuff and all of a sudden the project became \$40 million.

Mayor Harris stated that they had other entities willing to partner with the Town and had spoken with one prominent foundation and there were several other foundations in the area that the Town was encouraged to speak too. He stated that like Mr. Watson said they did not put the cart before the horse and had been looking at this for 1 ½ - 2 years and felt comfortable with it. He stated that he had not had one individual to speak negative about this project.

Mr. Justice stated that he did not have a negative as far as the project but a negative towards the financing of it and the commitments to these various channels that they were talking too and working with because he knew known of the ones he had mentioned would be coming through.

Mayor Harris asked if he knew that to be a fact.

Mr. Justice stated that time would tell on one of them.

Mayor Harris stated it certainly would.

Mr. Justice thanked them.

Mr. Holt encourage him to stick around for council comments.

Donnie Linkous stated that he had a question on the budget under expenditures for the line item legal for \$4k. He stated if that was all he made he would hire him to cut grass.

Mr. Watson stated that the salary was included under the Town Manager and the \$4k was for outside use.

Mr. Linkous asked how much money was carried over from last year to this year.

Mr. Watson stated \$30k.

Mr. Linkous stated that in years past it was a lot more than that and some years a couple hundred thousand. He stated that as bad as things were last year financially, they still saved \$30k. He stated that the point he was making was they had always had a carryover that went into the LGIP which was a good thing and the reason they were able to buy things. He stated that during the budget process they may fight and argue because it was tough to do no matter what they had to raise. He stated that finally the water fund would be able to stand on its own, he stated that he argued it, he and the mayor argued it and if they were spending \$100k on water and only bringing in \$50k then they were losing money but finally an organization came in and said if you do not put it on an equal pace then we will not give you any money and he was glad to see that. He stated that he agreed and thought that those using water in the Town would agree if they used it then they would pay for it. He stated that he felt the same way about garbage and the people appreciated our guys to go out and pick up their garbage. He stated that it kept coming back to the same ole same old and they kept giving raises and raising things to do that. He asked for clarification where meals tax was because he did not see a line item for Meals Tax.

Mr. Watson stated other local taxes.

Mr. Linkous stated when the meals tax was raised last year it was supposed to have been raised to produce an additional \$300k in revenue, \$100k to one thing and \$200k as he understood it went to Special Projects which is the "football field". He stated that everyone was talking about the football field and he would give his two cents and what he had heard from the general public was that it was a fabulous idea and they were for education and Mr. Trigg helped to get the new gyms built but they spent a tremendous amount of money to have an organization to come and tell them what they needed, a Community Center/Recreation type atmosphere and every single one of them came back and said they could not afford to do it so this football stadium was going to be one of those things when they hired that company that would tell them they cannot afford to do it because they only had \$200k budgeted for this project out of a \$6 million debt which would be 40 years of financing. He stated that you never finance something for 40 years that had to do with Recreation and if they looked at it and just built a nice facility and not think about it being a home facility for Graham because that was just Ludacris to even think about. He stated that Mitchell Stadium was one of the best anywhere around and the tradition was there. He stated that Mr. Holt had young kids, he had grandkids that would be playing and cheering and a nice facility was a fabulous idea but he did not think it would take \$6 million to build and they would find out that they could do it for a whole lot less but if they tried to build something that was the home of the G-Men...they have had it. He stated that the \$200k that was budgeted today may not be there 15 years from now. He stated that it was usually 10-15 years financing and asked how much longer was owed on Town Hall.

Mr. Watson stated that there was about 16 years left.

Mr. Linkous stated that 16 years was a long time and now they were talking about doubling that debt but he was not saying to wait 16 years to build this project and as they built the gyms, Mr. Riffe could probably tell them the best but it stayed full all of the time with young kids from Bluefield, VA and if they did a multi-use facility for those kids he believed it would be a wonderful thing. He stated that even one of the biggest boosters who played for the G-Men and played college football said this was stupid that one of the top 10 rivalries in the United States was played at Mitchell Stadium and if it were taken away it would kill that. He stated that he hoped that was not their intentions and would like to see them use some of that \$200k and what was left of the \$100k that went to the employees to help cover insurance. He thanked them.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:28 p.m.

Don Harris, Mayor

Lesley Catron, Town Clerk