

**Town of Bluefield
Town Council
Work Session
Minutes
May 3, 2016**

The Bluefield, Virginia Town Council held a Work Session on Tuesday, May 3, 2016 at 5:30 P.M. in the Council Chambers of the Town Hall located at 112 Huffard Drive, Bluefield, Virginia.

TOWN COUNCIL PRESENT

Don Harris, Mayor
Lee Riffe, Councilmember
Donnie Linkous, Councilmember
Jimmy Jones, Vice Mayor
Anglis Trigg, Councilmember
Steve Danko, Councilmember

ALSO PRESENT

Mike Watson, Town Manager
Matt Freedman, Town Attorney
Lesley Catron, Town Clerk

ABSENT

Shane Gunter, Police Chief
Billie Roberts, Comm. Dev. Coordinator
Kim Hernandez, Executive Assistant

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Harris opened the Work Session at 5:50 p.m.

Mr. Watson stated that he would like to go over the 2016/2017 budget.

Pg. 1-he stated that meals tax and real estate tax when down a little bit. He stated that garbage rates went up \$1 last year and that there would be a 3% increase in water again this year.

Mr. Danko asked if they were going to do anything with meals tax.

Mr. Watson stated that he would like to go thru the budget first, and then discuss other expenditures afterwards. He stated that there would be a 2% increase across the board on salaries which would be about a \$40k difference in the general fund and \$15k in the water fund.

Mayor Harris stated that last year the employees insurance went up and they did not receive a raise. He stated that the employees always did a good job and this year a raise was being added in.

Pg. 2-he stated that they had increased the container rental fee.

Mr. Trigg asked about the software.

Mr. Watson stated that \$22k was spent on payroll software and that the Police Department updated their software a few years ago. He stated that around \$90k was spent on software in the last 2 years.

Pg. 3-VDOT Revenue Sharing: Hockman Pike, Concrete on Spring Street and matching paving. He stated that there was \$40k in concrete and we budgeted \$50k per year so we would have \$80k, \$160k in paving and \$250k for High Street. He stated that it showed the loan for the 2016 garbage truck. He stated that we could not get an IP address at the pool which meant there could not be a camera there because there was no internet.

Pg. 8-cut back on tires & fuel, no real big changes.

Pg. 9-biggest change was in healthcare. He stated that we had Anthem which was a very good policy.

Mr. Trigg asked if we used our time.

Mr. Watson stated yes and that it carried over. He stated that next year, they should look at starting salaries for the Police Department because the Sheriff's Office started out about \$6k more per year than we did.

Pg. 10-showed an increase in telecommunications due to more calls/pagers.

Mr. Trigg asked about the salaries in the Fire Department.

Mr. Watson stated that the Chief, Asst. Chief and 3 other officers were considered part time. He stated that they would give the Fire Chief a 2% raise but not the other officers. He stated that they received between \$250-\$350 per month and \$15 per call.

Pg. 12-paving and concrete

Mr. Riffe asked what the \$2k for heating services was on page 14.

Mr. Watson stated that he dropped their budget on heating service for heating the pool.

Mr. Riffe asked about the hotspot at the pool.

Mr. Watson stated that it was really telecommunications for cameras and that there used to be a hotspot downtown.

Mr. Trigg asked if the tower would have anything to do with this.

Mr. Watson stated that they put up new antennas for the fire and police department which seemed to be better now that it was moved to the new tower. He stated that Chief Gunter told him that he picked up his radio in Tazewell and could hear it clearly. He stated that by changing to digital had also helped.

Pg. 20-he stated that he did not feel comfortable paying the utility truck/water department vehicles out of the general fund.

Water Fund-

Pg. 1-did have an increase in water sales (\$0.60 minimum and 3% across the board) increasing the revenue \$17k.

Pg. 2-added the utility truck of \$16k per year for 4 years. He stated that the last utility truck payment they had was FY 2011/2012.

Cemetery Fund-

Pg. 1-expenditures pretty much the same. Cemetery salaries were paid out of the general fund, no changes to the operating of the cemetery.

Transit Fund-

He stated that the budget was sent into the state for approval and that we got 3 buses last year and had 1 coming this year. He stated that we will be buying a new air compressor and diagnostic computer for the garage costing around \$20k but we would only have to pay 3% of that.

Mr. Trigg stated that he had received a call from a gentleman who lived on Baptist Hollow Road who wanted to know how to get to it because he owned some property there.

Mr. Watson stated that there was a house there that had burnt down and one that the Town had recently condemned. Mr. Watson stated that he was approached by the City of Bluefield asking that we give the Bluefield Blue Jays more than what we normally give them of \$2,500. He stated that he was a member of the board and that the management was run by the Bluefield Baseball League who operated the facility. He stated that the Toronto's gave them money to pay towards the insurance expenses and that they leased the property from the City of Bluefield. He stated that the City gave them \$36k to operate the organization and asked that the Town give an additional \$12k per year. He stated that it left the opportunity for the Blue Jays to pull out and leave and that any organization that used the batting cages, fields, etc. had to pay for it. He stated that the Blue Jays did not pay to use it and that we assisted a little here and there with labor type cost. He stated that the Baseball league requested money from the City of Bluefield and they approached us to see if we could put in \$12k. He stated that the last 2 years, they had lost money.

Mr. Trigg asked why Bluefield College had to pay to use the field and why Bluefield State College did not play there instead of playing at Concord.

Mr. Watson stated that he did not know and that he thought Bluefield State College had their own field but he would find out.

Mr. Linkous stated that Toronto did not have to pay much to stay here.

Mr. Watson stated that it was normal for the pro teams not to put much money in to stay in an area.

Mr. Danko asked how much money the Blue Jays received.

Mr. Watson stated that he did not know but that they were not making any money.

Mr. Linkous asked how much the tickets were.

Mr. Watson stated \$5/adults and \$4/kids and seniors and you got in for free if you were wearing a baseball jersey. He stated in his opinion, people did not understand the value of it and that they had a lot of issues with concessions and did not have the ability to do a lot. He stated that the home and visitor dressing rooms were in bad shape.

Mayor Harris stated that the pitcher from Tazewell was getting out of baseball because last year he only made \$20k which was not much. He stated that it was very refreshing to go to the games because it was a clean atmosphere and had security. He stated for \$5, there was no place you could go to see the entertainment like that around here.

Mr. Jones stated at Fincastle near hole #8 that he was asked if the Town could put in a couple of speed bumps due to the cars racing down the hill.

Mayor Harris stated that was not anything related to what they were talking about but that it was private property.

Mr. Watson asked if council wanted to look at helping the Blue Jays or not.

Mr. Riffe asked if they received sponsorship money.

Mr. Watson stated that they sold box seats, advertisements, etc. to help with costs and that their insurance had gone up and that the minor league baseball had quit using interns. He stated that the City of Bluefield offered if the Town would give \$12k then they would give \$12k.

Mr. Linkous stated that he would rather see that \$12k be used for our school kids instead.

Mr. Watson stated that they played a short season which is why they did not generate enough income.

Mr. Danko asked if they received donations.

Mr. Watson stated that they did ask and did get some money from the foundations.

Mayor Harris stated that it was an asset and would like to see the Town come up with money to help them.

Mr. Danko asked if any money could be switched around in donations.

Mr. Watson stated that he had already taken out the money for the 2nd Chance Concert.

Mr. Trigg asked that Mr. Watson look and see where he could get the money from.

Mr. Linkous suggested increasing the meals tax ½% which would generate around \$50k.

Mr. Watson stated that 1% would be around \$200k.

Mr. Linkous suggested raising it .25% then using it towards donations and to put in a line item for it and add it to the donations. He stated that the biggest thing they had going for them was that we had good people and it was a good area that had good kids and good schools. He stated that schools were always the first to get cut and that it was a disgrace when parents were asked to fund student athlete expenses for sports. He stated that the baseball at the ballpark was a great thing too and that they needed to find a way to come up with money to help with this stuff.

Mr. Riffe stated that it needed to be pin-pointed to things in our area and to set an amount and have it on first come-first serve basis.

Mr. Trigg asked if the money that was cut from the 2nd Chance Concert could be used to go towards it.

Mr. Watson stated that he had already taken it out and that Middle School Baseball/Little League Baseball had turned in a request wanting bathrooms, bleachers, press box, another scoreboard, etc. He stated that it all needed to be open for discussion and that his concern for it being first come-first serve would be that they would all come wanting the full amount.

Mayor Harris asked that a Work Session be scheduled for the next meeting and asked that Mr. Watson look at the donations and see what we could do about making this donation. He stated that he and Mr. Watson had been “chewed up and spit out” over increasing the meals tax.

Mr. Danko asked where the extra money would come from.

Mayor Harris stated that they would have to cut back.

Mr. Linkous stated that meals tax did not cost the business any money and all they did was collect it for the Town. He stated that he had a problem raising things that would cost everybody but that this did not cost the businesses anything. He suggested not spending the whole amount of what the meals tax would bring in and if we brought in \$100k, then putting \$50k into a contingency to be used later towards a community/recreation center.

Mr. Jones stated that they need to be careful if they did not do their donations just right because everyone would be asking.

Mr. Linkous stated that they would continue to do what they were doing but would give a percentage of the meals tax to the schools to cover sports, athletics, etc.

Mr. Danko asked if the school board had their budget ready yet.

Mr. Jones stated that they had another meeting scheduled for Monday and a Budget Session on Wednesday. He stated that the Board of Supervisors told them that they could not give them any more money because they were \$2 million short in their own money. He stated that they were going to have to cut more now than they had already cut. Mr. Jones stated that he did not know how they were going to do it and may have to close a school.

Mr. Linkous stated that the Town was blessed to have a good amount of income coming in and that our water and garbage rates were the cheapest around which was because of good management and the way things were done.

Mr. Riffe asked if the e-cigarettes were taxed yet.

Mr. Watson stated that he did not think so but would check.

Mr. Linkous asked if we got money back from taking the prisoners to jail.

Mr. Watson stated that we had to pay so much for them staying there.

Mr. Linkous asked if there was some way to have that money reimbursed to the Town.

Mr. Watson stated that we use to write everything under Town Code and the judge would give them 30 days in jail and a \$200 fine then would waive the jail time so we would collect the \$200 fine. He stated if the person were picked up again for a similar offense in Richlands, etc. and the judge gave them another 30 day jail time and fine but waived the current 30 day jail time and were to send them to jail on the first 30

day jail sentence that we would get the bill for it. He stated that the judge determined the jail time and fine.

Mr. Linkous stated that he understood that but asked if there was a way to recoup any of that money for someone going to jail.

Mr. Freedman stated that a lot of it was "small count" stuff that ended up in court and he waived the jail time on it. He stated then there would only be a fine and if it was coded under a Town Code, then that money would go to the Town minus the court costs. He stated that if it were under a State Code Section, then that money would go to the State as far as he understood. He stated that as far as recouping money from those in jail, he would look into it but he did not think anything like that existed.

Mr. Linkous asked if we could add a municipal fee.

Mr. Freedman stated that he would look into it.

Mr. Watson stated that he had received a request from the Little League and did not know if there was anything else that council may like to add. He stated that some Fire Departments billed for going to accidents. He stated that they did not go after the individual but their insurance. He stated that the Fire Department would have to get the insurance information from the police report.

Mayor Harris stated that he thought most car insurance companies had a fee for that.

Mr. Watson stated that this was brought up to him about a week ago and that he had not had time to really look into it yet but that this would be a good way to recoup some of the cost for the Fire Department.

Mr. Linkous stated that the gas company had put something in their lines which in turn generated a lot of phone calls from residents thinking there was gas in their homes. He stated that the Fire Department went to all of these calls because they did not know for sure if it was a gas leak or not. He stated that he knew of one instance where they went 7 or 8 times. He stated that 7 calls X \$15 per call X 8-10 people going out on the call was expensive and asked if there was a way to go back on the gas company and get that money back. He stated that they brought in contractors from all over to address these problems and that they did find several with gas leaks.

Mayor Harris asked when this happened.

Mr. Linkous stated that he was down there last Wednesday when they went out on some calls for this. He stated that Yvonne Evans called him and said she was sick and that her house smelled like gas and asked what she should do. Her told her that she needed to have someone to come in and check like the Fire Department and gave her their number. He stated that they did come and check it.

Mr. Watson stated that he had found out about it the next morning and what had happened from what he was told was when you have natural gas, they inject an agent in it to smell so if you were to have a gas leak, then you could smell it. He stated that their machine broke and it injected a lot more than it should have so if you had any leaks at all, then you would smell it really bad.

Mr. Linkous stated that it normally put out the pilot light but where they put so much into it, that it bypassed the pilot light and made a lot of people sick.

Mr. Riffe asked if the Town was still giving \$14k to the Rescue Squad.

Mr. Watson stated that there was an issue with that and that they needed to spend a Work Session to go over some things. He stated that there was a problem with the call volume and we did not have enough of an area to support it by just running emergency calls.

Mr. Linkous stated that they had a new person in charge of it but he left.

Mr. Watson stated yes that he took another position.

Mr. Linkous asked if they had someone else in charge now.

Mr. Watson stated yes but the issue was to keep 24 hour emergency service here, we were not able to receive the transport calls and that is where you make your money. He stated that the problem was, we were doing all of the emergency calls and other agencies were coming in and doing the transport calls. He stated that we could do emergency calls all month and still not make as much as doing one transport call per week. He stated that some changes had to be made.

Mr. Linkous asked if his mom needed to be transported, could another service other than Bluefield, VA transport her.

Mr. Watson stated yes that she could get anyone that she wanted. He stated that when his dad was transported from BRMC to UVA, that they never asked him who he wanted and a company out of Tazewell showed up to transport him.

Mayor Harris stated that there were several issues that needed to be discussed at another time. He stated that the current board including himself, Mr. Watson and Charlie Stacy had been hitting "every avenue" to get some money coming in.

Mr. Freedman asked: to be clear concerning the court cases when he started to research it was (1) council was interested to see if we could recoup what would be a municipality court cost and (2) for violation of Town Ordinances if there was a way to recoup expenses from those people who were incarcerated on Town Ordinances.

Mr. Watson stated yes, if there was some type of municipal tax that we could add onto it that the court could collect for us.

ADJOURN

Mayor Harris adjourned the Work Session at 7:32 p.m.

Don Harris, Mayor

Lesley Catron, Town Clerk