

**Town of Bluefield
Town Council
Work Session
Minutes
May 24, 2016**

The Bluefield, Virginia Town Council held a Work Session on Tuesday, May 24, 2016 at 6:00 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
Kim Hernandez, Executive Assistant
Billie Roberts, Comm. Dev. Coordinator
Shane Gunter, Police Chief
Kris Williams, Zoning Administrator
2 Members of Public
1 Member of Media

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Harris opened the Work Session at 6:14 p.m.

Mr. Watson stated that the budget showed a \$7,500 total contribution for the Blue Jays and that it was a balanced budget. He stated that Page 19 showed where the dump truck was paid off and they would be buying a Bobcat and a utility truck. He stated that they would be purchasing it in September and that he would bring the quotes back.

Mr. Linkous asked what the interest rates were.

Mr. Watson stated that he had not looked at them yet. He stated that he had put in a 2% increase for salaries.

Water-

He stated that Page 21 showed the \$0.60 minimum water raise to \$19.80 & 3% across the board which would be about a \$26k per year increase. He stated that we were still lower than most places.

Mr. Linkous asked about increasing the water taxes.

Mr. Watson stated that they could to talk about it and that it could still be put in after July 1st. He stated that he would also like to increase the water tap to \$650 in town and \$750 out of town.

Mr. Linkous asked if that would include labor and the meter.

Mr. Watson stated no and that he would bring back a breakdown for them.

Mr. Linkous asked if we would be losing money.

Mr. Watson stated not during working hours but after hours there would be labor.

Mr. Linkous asked what the Sanitary Board charged.

Mr. Danko stated \$350.

Mr. Linkous asked if a bill was generated when it was put in.

Mr. Watson stated that he did not think so.

Mr. Linkous stated it should not be generated until a meter was installed and that they should not receive a bill until they were issued a Certificate of Occupancy. He stated that there should be a \$5 or \$10 minimum a month charge on rental properties and suggested that they look at a \$50 fee.

Mr. Watson suggested charging a \$70 deposit on rental property and if they left in good standing then they would get it back.

Mr. Linkous suggested a \$50 fee and a \$70 deposit and put it in an account that way if someone left and did not pay their bill, then it would come out of this account.

Mr. Watson stated that we would be penalizing those who did pay with a \$50 fee. He stated that with the new software, they were looking at the average loss and would go to a more stringent policy for those who had past dues accounts. He stated that they needed to look at what a good deposit would be and he would bring something back.

Mayor Harris asked how many water taps were done per year.

Mr. Watson stated maybe 10 per year which would be those wanting to separate properties, wanting to move it or any new properties.

Mr. Linkous asked about Rajeev's apartments if there was one 1 tap.

Mr. Watson stated that what we did was run the water line, etc. up to the meter then charged \$150 to \$200 to put the meter in.

Mr. Linkous asked if each individual apartment had their own meter.

Mr. Watson stated yes and they were made to go thru Virginia Department of Health. He continued on and stated that they would be buying a utility truck after July. He stated that there were some minor adjustments on the Water Plant and stated that we should have our preliminary study soon to do upgrades to the plant. He stated that it would be separated out so that we knew what we could do and would be putting up areas around the pumps. He stated that over the next 4-5 years we would be absorbing it into the budget instead of having to finance it. He stated on Page 26 it showed where we would be purchasing diagnostic equipment and an air compressor.

He went over the agenda and stated that he was looking at doing a Public Hearing for the upcoming budget at the next council meeting if everyone was ok with it. He stated that if they had any concerns that he would like to discuss them.

Mr. Riffe asked if they had ever voted on giving the Blue Jays more money.

Mr. Watson stated that it could not be voted on during a Work Session but if they had any concerns then they could talk about it.

Mr. Riffe stated that there were rumors about the Blue Jays not being here in the next couple of years and that the Little Leagues needed the money.

Mr. Linkous asked if any of them had heard that someone had made a huge donation to do some renovations and that it was supposed to be a turnkey and would look like Pulaski.

Mr. Watson stated that he had heard a similar rumor but that it was not discussed in the last board meeting.

Mr. Linkous stated that we did not ask the City for money to help operate our swimming pool. He stated that they owned the ball field and if \$36k was not enough to operate it, then they needed to raise the amount they gave. He stated that their citizens come and used our pools and paid like we did when we went to their fields but we were not asking them for funds to help with the pool. He stated that if we had our fields in top shape then the tournaments that were coming in would bring us money.

Mayor Harris stated that they did not have to decide then and asked Mr. Watson to look into the rumors and bring it back.

Mr. Linkous asked about the meals tax.

Mr. Danko stated that if it were raised .007 that it would bring up the total tax on meals to 11% with an increase of about \$83,300 per year. He stated that he would like to see \$41,500 of it put into Economic Development.

Mr. Riffe asked where the other \$41k would go.

Mr. Danko stated that it could go wherever they wanted it too.

Mr. Riffe stated that they needed to focus on the academic side of the school system.

Mr. Watson asked how much they wanted to raise it and what they wanted to do with it.

Mr. Riffe stated that these kids went to different competitions, etc.

Mr. Watson asked how it was funded.

Mr. Riffe stated thru donations.

Mr. Trigg asked about cigarette taxes.

Mr. Watson stated that it was 6% to 10% per pack but that cigarette sales were going down and they were purchasing e-cigarettes now.

Mr. Trigg asked if we taxed on them yet.

Mr. Watson stated that legislation did not allow Town's to tax on them yet.

Mr. Trigg stated that gas was going up and down.

Mr. Watson stated that the State of Virginia had to give permission to add on a tax and that when fuel went up; the gallons that people purchased went down.

Mr. Trigg stated that if we could get 1 or 2% that would be good. He stated that we never knew until we asked.

Mr. Linkous stated that we only had Real Estate and meals tax to raise in Bluefield. He stated that meals tax was the only way to raise revenue and that the only way it would affect the citizens was if they chose to eat out. He stated that the downtown needed to be fixed and done right and the only way to do it was with sometime of increase which Mr. Danko suggested 7/10 of a percent on meals tax.

Mr. Watson suggested that they go ahead and advertise the budget and have another Work Session.

Mr. Linkous asked why they needed to have another Work Session because they have talked about this forever. He stated that they needed a consensus if they were going to do it or not.

Mayor Harris stated that they would be in for a fight.

Mr. Danko asked by whom.

Mayor Harris stated by the people who owned the restaurants.

Mr. Danko asked why.

Mayor Harris stated that one restaurant had previously put up a sign concerning our meals tax.

Mr. Danko stated that the ones around us were increasing and matching everyone else.

Mr. Jones stated that it reduced their bargaining with other areas.

Mr. Riffe asked if we were still the lowest around.

Mr. Linkous stated that any restaurant owner could come in and state their case but it would not cost them a dime because they would only be collecting the money for us. He stated that the restaurants were always full.

Mayor Harris asked what they wanted to do.

Mr. Linkous stated that if they had a Public Hearing before that it would be incorporated into the July 1st budget but if they waited, then they would have to have 2 separate Public Hearings.

Mr. Danko stated that he was for it.

Mr. Linkous stated that he was for it.

Mr. Riffe stated that he was for it if they knew what they would use the money for.

Mr. Trigg stated that he could go either way.

Mr. Jones stated that he would not be for it unless it was used for a capital project.

Mayor Harris stated that he was against it. He stated that he would like to see more specifications on what it would be used for.

Mr. Watson stated that he would bring it back.

ADJOURN

Mayor Harris adjourned the Work Session at 7:30 p.m.

Don Harris, Mayor

Lesley Catron, Town Clerk