

**Town of Bluefield  
Town Council  
Work Session  
Minutes  
June 28, 2016**

The Bluefield, Virginia Town Council held a Work Session on Tuesday, June 28, 2016 at 6:30 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  
Kim Hernandez, Executive Assistant  
Billie Roberts, Comm. Dev. Coordinator

**ABSENT**

Shane Gunter, Police Chief

**CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Harris opened the Work Session at 6:31 p.m.

***Budget***

Mr. Watson stated that the budget had been advertised as required in the newspaper and included the increase in water and meals tax. He stated that a couple of people had come in to speak in opposition on the meals tax. He stated that the budget was on the agenda for a vote.

Mr. Danko stated that everyone around us had a meals tax that was higher than ours excluding Bluefield, WV who did not have one. He stated that he did not see that it would be a big burden on anyone and that a lot of people came from outside of Town to eat. He stated that if we did not move forward now then we would be moving backwards and asked how much it would generate.

Mr. Watson stated around \$168k.

Mr. Danko asked if it was not put in, would it go up and double the next year.

Mr. Riffe stated that this fund could be deleted in one disaster and stated that we were the lowest in meals tax around us. He stated that they needed to try and get another restaurant in to play off of the tourism and if they did not jump on it then they would be stagnant and that he would like to see them move forward.

Mr. Jones stated that it was a bad time for people and was the wrong time to raise taxes and he was not for it.

Mr. Linkous agreed that it was not a good time but that you would still find people eating in the restaurants and that this was the only fair tax we had. He stated that the owners did not have to charge the meals tax to their customers but would still have to pay it and that we would need a new fire truck in the next year or so which would cost around \$500k and that the meals tax was what was paying for this stuff. He stated that Eric Workman stated that the way you got your money was #1-restaurants and #2-motels which we did not have one yet. He stated that it was never a good time to raise anything but they could give a good reason for it.

Mr. Trigg stated that he stood by what he had already said previously and at first he was for it but now he was not because there were a lot of people laid off right now.

Mayor Harris stated that he had never seen as many displaced with no jobs as he had now and that Social Security would only be increasing .02% which would be around \$2.40 more per month and with the increase in Medicare they would be going in the hole. He stated that he was concerned and did not think they should do it and was not in favor of it especially with the additional funds not being specified for anything. He encouraged council not to increase it.

Mr. Jones stated that there was a strong rumor that Fincastle on the Mountain was for sale.

Mr. Trigg stated that he had people asking him what the money would be used for. He stated that he heard from a woman that Golden Corral would be going into the old Ryan's building.

Mr. Watson stated that he had heard the same thing and that staff had contacted them but they would not tell us.

Mayor Harris stated that he had been asked several times as well.

Mr. Trigg stated that the woman who told him was in a position that would know.

Mr. Danko asked if the Town would be in the red this year.

Mr. Watson stated that it would be close.

Mr. Danko asked if we did not have any additional income then where would we be next year.

Mr. Watson stated that he had cut things in the past and found efficient ways to do stuff. He stated that better police service and our garbage and water rates attracted people in.

Mr. Trigg asked if there was a way to form our own natural gas company.

Mr. Watson stated that we would have to buy an infrastructure and put it in. He stated that he would look into it.

Mr. Linkous stated that everyone went on vacation and asked them to look at what they paid for meals and hotel tax. He stated that they did have projects they could use the money for such as the lights at the Little League Field, etc. He stated that attracted people to the Town and if we did not want to raise meals tax and the bottom fell out then they would have to raise real estate taxes and personal property taxes that directly affected the citizens. He stated that meals tax did not affect them unless they ate out.

Mr. Jones suggested possibly doing it next year because right now the timing was bad.

Mr. Linkous stated that they were going to be hurting if they did not do the one thing that would not hurt the taxpayers.

Mr. Jones asked if the budget was balanced with the increase and without it.

Mr. Watson stated yes.

Mayor Harris stated that in four years everything would be paid off except for Town Hall which would be paid off in 2034 which was from good management at the current rate they were going. He stated that they had accomplished a lot and would prefer that the 2 new councilmember's be involved in this decision.

Mr. Linkous asked about the water.

Mr. Watson recommended leaving it in.

Mr. Linkous asked why.

Mr. Watson stated so that they could move forward because they would need the money to replace things and increase the system upgrade.

Mayor Harris stated that if it was for a capital improvement, he would be in favor of a meals tax increase. He asked Mr. Watson to move on with the next item.

***Plum Creek Festival***

Mr. Watson stated that an individual with the Plum Creek Festival wanted to do an event downtown on July 30<sup>th</sup> and that it had not been done before and wanted to ask council first. He stated that he would not be in favor of it as Town Manager having another group to come in and do an event.

Mrs. Roberts stated that they had done the event in Tazewell once and had attended our Field Fest. She stated that in 2014 they had the event at the Tazewell County Fairgrounds but did not know how it turned out but wanted to do the same type of thing in the downtown.

Mayor Harris asked where they were from.

Mrs. Roberts stated it was Brian Allison from Thompson Valley.

Mayor Harris asked where the money would go.

Mrs. Roberts stated that she assumed it would go to them since it was their event.

Mr. Watson stated that the Town would end up putting some work into it as well.

Mrs. Roberts stated that it would be on a Saturday and would be from 4–9 p.m.

Mayor Harris stated that if they started opening it up to them then who knows what would follow. He stated that he would understand if it were a Bluefield, VA organization.

Mr. Riffe stated that a movie was already scheduled for that night.

Mrs. Roberts stated that they were looking at it as bringing people to the downtown area.

Mayor Harris stated that the stores would be closed and he was not for it.

Mr. Riffe stated that it would take away from Field Fest and we would not benefit from it.

Mayor Harris asked if anyone was in favor of it.

Mr. Riffe stated if it were used for Bluefield, VA.

Mrs. Roberts stated that she could ask them to revisit the idea and bring it back to council.

Mr. Trigg stated that it would be a huge undertaking.

Mr. Riffe asked if the downtown lighting was paid for.

Mr. Watson stated that he had paid for the lights out of this year's budget and that we received \$40k in revenue sharing money for concrete but did not get the revenue sharing maintenance money for paving the streets.

***Welcome Center***

Mr. Watson stated that they were putting up the ice barriers on the Welcome Center and were at \$18k as of now.

Mr. Linkous asked him how they could save 25% on the budget.

Mr. Watson stated by shutting down a department. He stated that there was no way to shave off anymore.

Mr. Linkous stated that was his point exactly and that they were barely able to provide the services they had and had to grow somewhere.

**ADJOURN**

Mayor Harris adjourned the Work Session at 7:31 p.m.

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Don Harris, Mayor

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Lesley Catron, Town Clerk