

**Town of Bluefield
Town Council
Minutes
January 11, 2022**

The Bluefield, Virginia Town Council held a regularly scheduled Town Council Meeting on Tuesday, January 11, 2022 at 7:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Town Hall located at 112 Huffard Drive, Bluefield, Virginia.

PRESENT

Donnie Linkous, Mayor
Rick Holman, Councilmember
Chuck Presley, Councilmember
Cathy Payne, Councilmember
Ron Holt, Vice-Mayor

ALSO PRESENT

Trent Crewe, Manager/Town Attorney
Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk
James Hampton, Asst. Mgr./Treasurer/Transit Dir.
Kris Williams, Zoning & Property Maint. Official
15 members of public

ABSENT

Jarrod Bailey, Councilmember
Anglis Trigg, Councilmember
Shane Gunter, Police Chief

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Linkous called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE

Brad McMillion, Highlands Fellowship led the Invocation. Mayor Linkous led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mayor Linkous moved up the two items for Kris Williams to after the Special Presentation for Brody Meadows.

Vice-Mayor Holt made a motion to approve the amended agenda. Councilmember Holman seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

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

CITIZEN REQUESTS & SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

Special Presentation: Brody Meadows – Mayor Linkous

Mayor Linkous stated that he had watched Brody since he had been born and that he was an influencer. He stated that he would be going to Virginia Tech. He asked him to come forward and read the plaque and presented it to him. He asked council if they had any comments.

Mrs. Payne congratulated him and stated that she remembered when he was little.

Peg Scott stated on behalf of GHS that they were all proud of Brody.

Mr. Presley stated that he had been on the sidelines watching him and was excited to see him play at VT.

Mr. Holt congratulated him and stated that nothing was given and he had earned it. He stated that it meant a lot that he rode on the Little League football float with them during the Christmas parade.

Mr. Holman stated that it was just once in a while that someone in the Town has such accomplishments and the Town was proud of him. He congratulated him and stated that he had enjoyed watching him.

Mayor Linkous stated that the reason they presented Brody with this plaque tonight was due to the fact that he started at VT on Friday. He stated that he could tell Kevin was a proud dad. He stated that Brody showed up for his signing in a tux making the town look good and that he looked forward to seeing him at VT. He wished him good luck.

NEW BUSINESS AND REPORTS

Conditional Use Permit (714 VA Ave), ROLL CALL VOTE – Kris Williams

Mr. Williams stated that a proposed business plan by Thomas Wimmer was included for the old rescue squad building for an indoor sports training and recreation facility. He stated that one recommendation received by the Planning Commission was that he fix the fence at the tracks. He stated that they would be voting on whether or not to approve the Conditional Use Permit.

Mr. Presley made a motion to approve the Conditional Use Permit (714 VA Ave). Mr. Holman seconded the motion.

Mr. Holt stated his only concern was the condition of the building and if they would be fixing it.

Mr. Williams stated yes and they were working with an architect.

Mr. Holman asked if they would be making all necessary improvements.

Mr. Williams stated yes.

Mayor Linkous asked the Clerk to do roll call and report.

ROLL CALL VOTE

Councilmember Bailey:	Absent
Councilmember Holman:	Yes
Vice-Mayor Holt:	Yes
Councilmember Presley:	Yes
Councilmember Payne:	Yes
Councilmember Trigg:	Absent
Mayor Linkous:	No Vote Permitted

Mrs. Hernandez stated that it was 4-0 in favor.

Simple Subdivision (2135 College Ave), ROLL CALL VOTE – Kris Williams

Mr. Williams stated that he had received a Simple Subdivision from Rajeev Chopra for 2135 College Ave. He stated that it would establish new lot lines to help with the current property owners parking situation. He stated that it would be his recommendation to approve.

Mr. Holt made a motion to approve the Simple Subdivision (2135 College Ave). Mr. Presley seconded the motion.

Mayor Linkous asked the Clerk to do roll call and report.

ROLL CALL VOTE

Councilmember Bailey:	Absent
Councilmember Holman:	Yes
Vice-Mayor Holt:	Yes
Councilmember Presley:	Yes
Councilmember Payne:	Yes
Councilmember Trigg:	Absent
Mayor Linkous:	No Vote Permitted

Mrs. Hernandez stated that it was 4-0 in favor.

CITIZEN REQUESTS & SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

Audit Report – Scott Wickham, Robinson, Farmer, Cox Associates

Scott Wickham stated that it had been a challenging year for them for auditing because of the federal funds. He thanked town staff for their help. Referring to the thicker handout:

Pg. 2 – unmodified opinion which was the best.

Pg. 5 – was a great summary.

Pg. 15 – net position of all debts, assets, buildings, infrastructure, etc. and included water and Fincastle.

Pg. 17 – \$3.9 million in the General Fund.

Pg. 100 – Government Auditing Standards (GAS) showed two items: 2021-001 which was similar to the past and due to limited staffing and 2021-002 related to Fincastle transfers.

He stated that the end result was a good report and there was nothing concerning. Referring to the thinner handout:

Pg. 2 – green boxes showed 2.38% total revenues with a big increase in donations for the Little League Lights and the Fire Department, and 2.07% total expenditures and advised to expect an increase with rising costs.

Mr. Presley asked his recommendation as to what the Town should increase.

Mr. Wickham stated that it varied between Towns, Counties, etc. and some had increased their local tax. He stated that the town's general fund was strong and it would be up to us as what to increase. He stated that an increase in salaries and increase in cost would be passed to the consumer. He stated that the general fund was strong and the \$3.9 million was what the town had to work with to offset costs.

Mr. Holt asked if that \$3.9 million included the ARPA funding.

Mr. Wickham stated no.

Pg. 4 – trend data showed good growth

Pg. 5 – debt summary (all financial debt including VRS) was in line with the state average but would like to see it a little lower.

Mr. Presley asked how to fix that.

Mr. Wickham stated that the town had taken on a lot of debt lately and that VRS had increased across the state.

Pg. 6 – showed 10 year trend

Pg. 7 – revenue was in line with last year, state and federal grants were considered intergovernmental, increase in public safety and community development was business grants.

Mr. Presley asked what was included in other local taxes.

Mr. Wickham stated meals tax, retail, etc.

Pg. 9 – water fund showed improvement because of the rate increase.

Pg. 23 of thicker book (Exhibit 9) showed the actual assets and that water did increase its cash and had a strong year. He stated that Fincastle increased from grants and was hard to access with COVID.

Mr. Holt asked without the grants what the amount for Fincastle would have been.

Mr. Crewe stated that we lost \$213k.

Mr. Wickham stated that was concerning but we were in a pandemic.

Mr. Holman asked the total of grants received for Fincastle.

Mr. Crewe stated \$400k (2-\$200k grants from the Shott Foundation).

Mr. Presley stated that the water fund helped to carry it.

Mr. Wickham stated that was unusual but yes.

Pg. 11 – net pension liability increased \$800k this year but was expected to come down in the next few years and was nothing on the town.

Mr. Holman asked if it were based on their performance.

Mr. Wickham stated yes amongst other things.

Pg. 12 – retirees and group health insurance.

Pg. 13 – upcoming GASB leases on buildings in the future were now liabilities.

Mr. Holman asked if it moved over.

Mr. Wickham stated yes and suggested the town get a list of leases. He stated that a lot of GASB was coming in fast.

Pg. 23/24 – VRS testing was accurate but did have some issues where our accounting system did not update but had since been fixed.

Mr. Presley asked if we needed software to do this.

Mr. Holman asked if it scheduled notifications.

Mr. Wickham stated yes. He stated that there were a lot of transfers and that one bank account would help with that. He stated that there was an invoice that did not get paid for several months during the time of an employee leaving.

Mr. Crewe stated that there were several miscommunications and it had gone to a former employee but once we found out it was immediately corrected.

Mr. Holman asked if they did not question it.

Mr. Crewe stated no that they had other issues going on.

Mr. Wickham stated that a summary was on pages 27-29.

Mr. Presley asked about the purchases of software.

Mr. Wickham stated that previously there were open purchase orders but it had gotten a lot better.

Mr. Hampton stated that we had accounting software through FMS Southern Software that smaller towns used.

Mr. Wickham stated that it was great software. He stated that the general fund was in great shape and it was good to see the water fund improving. He stated that Fincastle was newer and would hopefully correct itself. He stated that overall it was a good audit.

Mr. Holman stated that there was nothing to compare it too.

Mr. Crewe stated that with COVID it was an oddball year and there were some issues of staff not being able to find items and a computer being wiped clean with things missing in the middle of an employee leaving. He stated that COVID money was not reported Tazewell County, etc. but we were able to find what was needed as late as last week. He stated that they were very lenient to wait on us. He stated another issue was the single source for the golf course renovations but it was a Better Billy Bunker System and only one company could do the work. He stated that staff found where council had passed a resolution to approve this. He stated that he would like to see some changes made including not paying AEP 6 different checks but rather one and dividing it internally. He stated that it could be done with our software and he was pushing it into that direction. He stated that James was the cleanup guy fixing it all. He stated that on Friday he received more information on the ARPA funding which would be much more beneficial to the town. He suggested taking that one line item out of the budget and dividing it into individual line entries to show where the money was going.

Mr. Holman asked if he was planning on a session to determine this.

Mr. Crewe stated that he would give it to council before a public meeting.

Mr. Wickham suggested one line per department.

Mr. Holman asked if it hurt us by having that money sitting in the general fund.

Mr. Crewe stated not now. He stated that it had to be reported by April 30th, obligated by December 31, 2024 and spent by December 31, 2026.

Mr. Holman asked that he send out the information to them.

Mr. Crewe stated that it was available online and that VML had hired a consultant and it would be much more flexible to pay employees. He stated that he would send it out.

Mr. Wickham encouraged the town to double check reporting.

Mr. Crewe stated that the number one challenge would be tracking and labeling to match uses allowed.

Mr. Wickham suggested noting the uses on the general ledger and having invoices with cover sheets of the uses with 3 signatures.

Mr. Holman stated that they would need to stay on top of it.

Mr. Wickham stated that it would require a single audit for the town and the last one he thought was 25 years ago when money was received from FEMA. He stated that it would require additional testing to the normal process.

Mr. Crewe stated that they could enhance the salary of employees for government essential work. He stated that the county had already given money for the Police Department so he would like to use this for Public Works, Trash, etc. since they had not received anything. He stated that it could not be a one-time thing nor a bonus and could be done using ARPA money for three years and it would not be the town funding it.

Mr. Holman asked if this would help address if minimum wage went to \$15.

Mr. Crewe stated that the ARPA money could be used to add to basic wages. He stated that the current governor had proposed an increase for Sheriff's Departments, Game Wardens, etc. but not local Police Departments and if that were done then our gap would shrink. He stated that he was looking to increase wages across the board except for the Police Department since they had already got a piece of it. He stated that this would make the pressure on the budget less with this money.

Mr. Wickham stated that it would be a lot easier for smaller localities but cautioned them to be ready for the ongoing expense at the end.

Mayor Linkous asked if there was a way to simplify direct deposit paychecks that right now they were given a voided check.

Mr. Wickham asked if it included the paystub information.

Mr. Hampton stated that they could not require direct deposit.

Mr. Wickham stated that they may could email the information.

Mr. Holman stated that it may be offered through our current software.

Mr. Wickham stated that he appreciated what Trent had said and was glad to see the town improving.

Council thanked him for his presentation.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

None.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS AND REPORTS

None.

NEW BUSINESS AND REPORTS

Budget Amendment, ROLL CALL VOTE – Kim Hernandez

Mrs. Hernandez went over the following Budget Amendment:

PURPOSE: Security Services -Walmart

Revenue

Line Item		Original Budget	Amended Budget	Change
0400-0413	Misc. State	<u>\$152,916.15</u>	<u>\$157,811.15</u>	<u>\$4,895.00</u>
	Law Enforcement	<u>\$152,916.15</u>	<u>\$157,811.15</u>	<u>\$4,895.00</u>

Expenditure

Line Item		Original Budget	Amended Budget	Change
3110-1600	Investigative	<u>\$48,000.00</u>	<u>\$52,895.00</u>	<u>\$4,895.00</u>
	Overtime	<u>\$48,000.00</u>	<u>\$52,895.00</u>	<u>\$4,895.00</u>

Mr. Presley made a motion to approve the Budget Amendment. Mrs. Payne seconded the motion.

Mayor Linkous asked the Clerk to do roll call and report.

ROLL CALL VOTE

Councilmember Bailey: Absent
 Councilmember Holman: Yes
 Vice-Mayor Holt: Yes
 Councilmember Presley: Yes
 Councilmember Payne: Yes
 Councilmember Trigg: Absent
 Mayor Linkous: No Vote Permitted

Mrs. Hernandez stated that it was 4-0 in favor.

ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING

Mayor Linkous stated that if any changes were wanting to be made that now was the time.

Mr. Crewe read the following who were up for reappointment:

Industrial Development Authority appointed by Circuit Court/recommendation of Council:

- Greg Degray
- Brad Ayers

Board of Zoning Appeals appointed by Circuit Court/recommendation of Council:

- Justin Douthat
- Harry Kammer

Board of Building Code Appeals:

- Richard Sexton
- Junior Crockett

Cemetery Commission:

- Gail Cook
- Bill Marrs
- Harold Pruet
- Ben Muncy
- Nancy Buchanan

Enterprise Zone Committee:

- Chuck Presley

Bluefield Baseball League:

- Ron Holt

Cumberland Plateau Planning District:

- Donnie Linkous

Mr. Holt made a motion to reappoint all of the above names to their committees/boards.
Mr. Presley seconded the motion.

Mayor Linkous asked the Clerk to do roll call and report.

ROLL CALL VOTE

Councilmember Bailey:	Absent
Councilmember Holman:	Yes
Vice-Mayor Holt:	Yes
Councilmember Presley:	Yes
Councilmember Payne:	Yes
Councilmember Trigg:	Absent

Mayor Linkous: No Vote Permitted

Mrs. Hernandez stated that it was 4-0 in favor.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

None.

POLICE CHIEF'S REPORT

None.

TOWN MANAGER'S/ATTORNEY'S REPORT

New Employees

Mr. Crewe stated that Public Works had hired 4 new employees that were working out well.

Snow Events

Mr. Crewe stated that overall they were doing good with the snow and ice all though there were a couple of rookies.

Wage Compression

Mr. Crewe stated that all had been adjusted to \$11 and that he had to adjust their supervisors, etc.

Budget

Mr. Crewe stated that James had already sent a proposed budget and there were favorable guidelines with the new ARPA money.

Water Break

Mr. Crewe stated that Public Works dealt with a 6" water line break on Sunday that washed out all around it and shot the "t" intersection making it leak but had all been fixed.

July 4th Celebration

Mr. Crewe stated that planning for a July 4th Celebration at Fincastle was underway.

High Street

Mr. Crewe stated that High Street was finished and CLECO had submitted the final bill but we had some issues on paying the full amount. He stated that the gas company had been onsite for 14 days and we charged CLECO for those 14 days and the two of them were fighting it out. He stated that Thompson & Litton had agreed with the town and we paid \$150k instead of \$283k on the last bill.

School Donations

Mr. Crewe asked for guidance on school donations. He stated that \$6k was budgeted for the schools and he had received a request for \$2,500 for the traveling basketball team that had been paid in the past, \$1k for the wrestling team, \$175 for a pencil drawing of the school, a donation request for pottery and \$350 for spirit shirts. He reminded them that they had already paid \$2k for a bus.

Mr. Holt stated that he would like to look at them individually and that he did not mind investing in the kids.

Mr. Crewe stated that what he was understanding was council was ok to pay the \$2,500 for the traveling basketball, \$1,000 for the wrestling and \$350 for the spirit shirts.

Building Official

Mr. Crewe stated that John Mills would be working 2 days per week and would be doing inspections on Mondays and Thursdays. He stated that he had 25+ years of experience and was complimentary of how we did things. He stated that he had worked one 8 hour day and the others were shorter days. He stated that he was meeting all the local contractors and his contract was indefinite if Thompson & Litton were to get the contract for the fish farm then he would be working with them but felt he could still work here one day per week.

Mr. Holman asked if we were pursuing a full time position.

Mr. Crewe stated that he was legally doing what was needed to be done. He stated that if we were to declare a Building Official that they would have one year to take the test. He stated that Kris was studying for it and would like to do the job but it was not mandatory that he was encouraging him.

Water Plant

Mr. Crewe stated that we had received the certificate from the health department to produce 1.9 million gallons water per day.

Mr. Presley asked what the current loss was.

Mr. Crewe stated that it was less than 20%. He stated that ARPA money could be used to add another line downtown. He stated that the issue with Stockton Street was not town water or sewer but was two springs coming off of the mountain in multiple areas which we could not control.

Budget

Mr. Crewe stated that James had already sent a proposed budget and that he would be working with him to give it to council by March.

Employee Updates

Mr. Crewe stated that 5 employees had been exposed to COVID or had COVID. He stated that most had no symptoms and all but one was back at work. He stated that the one who was not worked in the Police Department and had blurred vision not related to COVID. He stated that the reason Jarrod was not there was he had tested positive and had just finished up his 5 days of quarantine and his wife had now tested positive.

He stated that Thompson & Litton was getting quotes for the new water projects but the problem was that the pricing was only good for two days.

He stated that Public Works was always out working and that we had an issue on Monday with a couple of the trash trucks broke down and picking up the holiday trash. He stated that we were not notified that the landfill was closed and we could not do anything but sit with the trucks full until they opened the next day. He stated that our guys were there first thing the next morning dumping and back out picking up the trash that day and had been working late in the evenings.

He stated that the Recreation Department held 3 different holiday drives and collected over 400 toys, 350 pet toys, 1000lbs of dog/cat food and over 3,600 personal hygiene products.

He stated that he had two proposals to use the old Platnick Building, one was to rent the building for two weeks in the spring/summer to film a haunted warehouse movie and the other was a greenhouse business.

Mr. Holt stated that he had a business on the WV side looking for a place on the VA side. He stated that he would talk to Trent after the meeting.

Mr. Crewe stated that the auditors had been gracious to us during this audit. He stated that there was no reason we should be sending out multiple AEP checks and voided checks for direct deposits. He stated that he had not pushed that issue too much as of yet. He stated that open purchase orders had been bad in the past and that Michelle was a real stickler on them and required a current purchase order. He stated that the accounting software could be tweaked to do this and it would make it a lot easier.

Mr. Holman asked if the software was specific or custom.

Mr. Hampton stated that it was already set up the way the auditors were saying.

Mr. Crewe stated that it would be easier. He stated that all departments were earning their pay and that he had established a good relationship with everyone.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Mr. Holman asked what they contributed the \$200k loss at Fincastle too.

Mr. Crewe stated it was COVID closing the restaurant and cancelling events.

Mr. Holman asked if they anticipated that this year.

Mr. Crewe stated no.

Mr. Holman stated that they were not losing that it was the inability of having events.

Mr. Crewe stated that they had been booked since March. He stated that the golf was making money and they had to take golf carts out of storage for the golfers to use during the good weather. He stated that they have had a few issues but the crowds were bigger. He stated that the golf carts were leased and in those 5 years they had to pay for the maintenance, etc. which was cheaper for us. He stated that the wait staff was making minimum wage plus tips but split parties equally so they were doing well.

Mrs. Payne stated that they were also working on a new menu.

Mr. Crewe stated that they were replacing some kitchen equipment, etc. and were hoping that the pool would do well.

Mr. Holt asked if they would have memberships.

Mr. Crewe stated that they were talking about it but there were some issues with it being a public pool.

Mr. Holt stated that they had a membership for golf.

Mr. Crewe stated yes and that were exploring the idea of allowing those with membership in early at 10 a.m. and then the public afterwards but it may fill up to capacity before the public was allowed in.

Mrs. Payne stated that she had met with Colin, The Grind and the downtown parking spaces behind the LOVE sign were filling up quick along with the bank parking lot.

Mr. Crewe stated that a cross walk was put in to allow parking in the gravel area. He stated during the December IDA Meeting that it was discussed to pay to the general contractor less than the invoice that had been sent. He stated that they had drawn down the last of the money but

were still waiting on it. He stated that the IDA had met today and understood the finances a lot better than they did. He stated that the Tap House had paid rent through January 31st and were supposed to meet us 2-3 times but it kept getting canceled which would cause the lease to be canceled soon. He stated that they were looking to rekindle the Downtown Business group. He stated that Macados was doing well other than having some trash issues and were easy to work with. He stated that the food tax was one month behind and we would not know a full month until after January 20th.

Mr. Holman thanked the town employees. He stated that it was good to have the normalcy for our holiday season events this year. He stated that a lot of the employees did not get recognition and were overlooked especially the trash guys and the ones plowing the snow.

Mr. Holt suggested putting in some crosswalks for the middle and high school students who were walking to the neighborhoods. He asked about the town properties that would be for sell.

Mr. Crewe stated that he had a list for them to look at and about 60 would be of no value to the Town. He stated that he had been working with Kris to make recommendations.

Mr. Holt asked if Kris was going to take the test. He stated that he would like to talk to Trent about some property maintenance issues in West Graham that had nothing to do with Kris's performance but that certain areas were getting worse. He asked with them working on the budget would a Work Session be scheduled before they received the budget.

Mr. Crewe stated that he would give recommendations for council to decide on and would do so an hour before or after a meeting. He stated that it would be emailed to them before it was presented.

Mrs. Payne had nothing.

Mr. Presley stated that he agreed with the crosswalks. He gave a shout out to the Police and Fire Departments, Kim and James. He asked to talk about these items at the first meeting in February.

Mayor Linkous stated that it was a busy month in December and that Eva Saunders had passed away and asked that something be done in her honor. He stated that they had hundreds of awards/recognition to be given including Bradshaw and Blevins. He suggested giving the seniors plaques and resolutions to the others.

Mr. Holt stated that he thought they would host something to do this.

Mr. Crewe stated that we could not get the information needed from the school and suggested presenting them all at one time during their annual awards ceremony.

Mayor Linkous stated that he would talk to the principal and suggested doing 1-3 sports team at a time.

Mrs. Payne stated that the GHS Foundation honored the academic teams with certificates and had a dinner for the students.

ADJOURN

Mayor Linkous adjourned the meeting at 9:49 p.m.

D.S. Linkous, Mayor

Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk