

**Town of Bluefield
Town Council
Minutes
November 9, 2021**

The Bluefield, Virginia Town Council held a regularly scheduled Town Council Meeting on Tuesday, November 9, 2021 at 7:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Town Hall located at 112 Huffard Drive, Bluefield, Virginia.

PRESENT

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

ALSO PRESENT

Trent Crewe, Manager/Town Attorney
Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk
James Hampton, Asst. Mgr./Treasurer/Transit Dir.
Shane Gunter, Police Chief
7 members of Police Department
25 members of public

ABSENT

Jarrold Bailey, Councilmember

CALL TO ORDER

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

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE

Levi Turner, Calvary's Hill Church led the Invocation. Mayor Linkous led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mayor Linkous added an update on the Sanitary Board.

Councilmember Presley made a motion to approve the amended agenda. Councilmember Trigg seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

Councilmember Holman made a motion to approve the consent agenda. Councilmember Presley seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

CITIZEN REQUESTS & SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

Oath of Office, Cathy Payne – Susie Vance, Chief Deputy

Mrs. Vance swore Cathy Payne into office for the term expiring on December 31, 2022

Police Department Ceremonial Swearing In – Mayor Linkous

Mayor Linkous swore in Officer's Ashley Lusk and Officer Jared Barger who graduated from the academy in late May but due to COVID and other factors were not able to be publicly recognized until tonight.

Mr. Crewe thanked all of the Police Department who were in attendance for their dedication and hard work.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Christmas Committee Update – Kim Hernandez

Mrs. Hernandez stated that the Tree Lighting would be held on Saturday, November 20th. She stated that the event kicked off at 4 p.m. with the Polar Express Conductor returning, Elsa & Anna and The Grinch. She stated that they were looking for more churches/organizations to participate in Little Town of Bethlehem from 4-6 p.m. She stated that Calvary's Hill Church would be doing the Story of Christmas and music and that Parkview Baptist Church would be doing hot chocolate and cookies during the Tree Lighting. She stated that also during 4-6 p.m. would be hayrides and that ice skating, carnival games and snow globe selfies would last until 8 p.m. She stated that the Honorary Tree lighters this year were the GMS Special Forces Team, the winners of the coloring contest would be announced and we would end the evening with a visit from Santa who would be giving out treat bags. She stated that the Christmas Parade would be on Saturday, December 18th at noon and the theme was "Characters of Christmas" bringing back the characters of past parades. She stated that floats wishing to be judged had to pay a \$15 entry fee and cash prizes were 1st place-\$300, 2nd place-\$200 and 3rd place-\$150. She stated that this year's lineup would be in Aaron's parking lot at 11 a.m. and it would be the same route as usual. She stated that future Christmas projects that were being looked at were replacing the pole decorations. She stated that the Employee Christmas Dinner would be held on Monday, December 6th at 6:30 p.m. and the Volunteer Christmas Dinner would be on Thursday, December 9th at 6:30 p.m. both at Fincastle. She stated that she had applied through the Community Foundation for money to replace the Christmas tree since the life expectancy was 10 years and we have had to work on bulbs, etc. the past few years. She stated that they sent us a check for \$20,000 so she then decided to apply for the remaining amount needed in the amount of \$13,719.60 through the June Oblinger Shott Foundation and was happy to report that we had received a check for that amount. She stated that we were hoping to have the new tree here this year but it could not be guaranteed before Thanksgiving but that next year we would have a brand new 34 ft. panel tree with 2,305 LED C-7 pure white lights and a 3D star that total cost was \$33,719.60 and it would be purchased all through grant money. She stated that it would replace the current 22ft panel tree with a 3ft. star which we may relocate to the fountain.

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: Paid Sponsors-Haunted Hayride

Revenue

Line Item		Original Budget	Amended Budget	Change
3108-9903	Gifts &	\$8,198.00	\$8,798.00	\$600.00
	Donations	\$8,198.00	\$8,798.00	\$600.00

Expenditure

Line Item		Original Budget	Amended Budget	Change
7130-6014	Other Operating	\$11,000.00	\$11,600.00	\$600.00
	Supplies	\$11,000.00	\$11,600.00	\$600.00

Mr. Presley made a motion to approve the Budget Amendment. Mr. Trigg 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: Yes
 Mayor Linkous: No Vote Permitted

Mrs. Hernandez stated that it was 5-0 in favor.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

Gail Cook stated that the Sanders House decorations were up thanks to Pocahontas Prison education and that personal tours were open inside the house.

Mayor Linkous asked if they were having the Holiday Bazaar.

Ms. Cook stated due to COVID it was cancelled again this year. She thanked them for their support.

POLICE CHIEF'S REPORT

Chief Gunter asked Officer Ryan Davis to come forward and stated that he was finishing up college at Bluefield State while working full time and had been on the presidents and dean's list 4 times each and had a 3.81 GPA. He congratulated Mrs. Payne on her council seat win.

TOWN MANAGER'S/ATTORNEY'S REPORT

Mr. Crewe stated that Kim blew through it but she on her own after asking for permission applied for the first grant and did not get 100% so applied for a second grant and received nearly \$34k just by filling out forms and knocking on the right doors. He asked that they did not miss the fact that she did this.

Cancel November 23rd and December 28th Council Meetings, ROLL CALL VOTE

Mr. Crewe stated in years past council had approved to cancel the last meeting in November and the last meeting in December due to the holidays.

Mr. Holt made a motion to approve canceling the November 23rd and December 28th Council Meetings. 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:	Yes
Mayor Linkous:	No Vote Permitted

Mrs. Hernandez stated that it was 5-0 in favor.

Paving Update

Mr. Crewe stated that they were behind on paving due to the weather but looked to start later this week and thought that they could get it done.

Revamping Public Works Employees

Mr. Crewe stated that Tim and Danny were the Public Works Co-Directors and had done well so far. He stated that they were working to move people around.

Resumption of Random Employee Drug Testing

Mr. Crewe stated that we have not had random drug testing for employees in over 3 years unless it was for CDL's. He stated that he would be reinstating it for all employees and it would be drawn through a program based on the employee number. He stated that if drawn the employee would be given a paper and would have a time frame to have it done.

Unveiling Ceremony

Mr. Crewe stated that the unveiling ceremony for the Historical Marker would be held on November 26th at 2 p.m. at the cemetery. He stated that the fence at the cemetery had been installed.

He stated that the final forgiveness paperwork for the PPE loan in the amount of \$84,120 had been forgiven. He stated that they had been working hard on the property located at 110 Hillcrest that had been declared uninhabitable and last week a walk through was done by the Building and Zoning Departments, Police Department and the Health Department and it was now deemed habitable once again. He stated that there had been several employees out with COVID and that no one besides Sgt. Rogers had been really sick and all were back at work. He stated that he had received a compliment regarding the newsletters from an elderly citizen who did not get out much that it was a wonderful newsletter full of lots of information. He stated that a luncheon would be held on November 29th in the Council Chambers to honor Pete. He stated that there were still issues between the Gas Company and Cleco regarding High Street that were being worked on.

Mr. Holt asked if there was anything legally that we could do.

Mr. Crewe stated that they were finishing it up this week and had a deadline of October 27th to meet or it would cost \$500 per day. He stated that Cleco was blaming the gas company for not meeting the deadline. He stated that the gas company reported all of their gas lines at 3ft deep when some were only 7 inches. He stated that they would hold the payment but not the completion. He stated that he had received notice that our Building Official would be leaving to work with the State of Virginia making twice as much. He stated that his last day was December 1st so he would be looking at options to address that vacancy. He stated that the Town had not held a Veteran's Day Ceremony in a number of years so staff had put one together and Jeff Disibbio had recommended Cecil Marson as the speaker and we were looking into someone from the high school playing TAPS. He stated that he had reached out to Sr. Trooper Scott to participate but he was off duty because of a shoulder injury but would pencil us in for next year. He stated that it would be on Thursday, November 11th at 10 a.m.

Mr. Holt stated that he had mentioned a couple years back about the Veteran's banners in Tazewell and asked that we look at them in the future. He stated that he appreciated staff for putting something together.

Mr. Crewe stated that he did an interview with WVVA for the ceremony.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Mr. Holman went over the franchise agreement between the Town and the Sanitary Board dated December 13, 2016. He stated that he wanted to get it in front of them so that they were aware of the agreement and that the second part of the handout was the West Side Plant land/lease agreement. He stated that the Director of the Sanitary Board would be coming in the next month or so with the City Manager and Attorney to discuss a number of different ongoing projects on both sides. He stated that projects they were looking at were on Mountain Lane and would be talking about a 36" sewer main that was years old.

Mayor Linkous asked if the extra money we were receiving could be used for this.

Mr. Holman stated that they were looking at grant money, DEQ money and funding from Virginia and West Virginia and would secure a bond if needed. He stated that they had followed through on the proposed rate increases that started in 2019 which was to upgrade the West Side Plant and would expand the life expectancy 20-25 years. He stated that their goal was to take care of our citizens and that something was constantly happening on both sides. He stated that the Authorities from both sides were subject to audit reviews that did occur. He stated that they had \$53 million in assets and 480 miles of lines that they maintained and a lot was going on that they were not aware of. He stated that a couple of other projects was Valley Dale, Church Street, Fawn and Calloway which were on the 3-5 year plan if funding was available. He stated that when citizens asked what had been done for them he liked to give a list of the projects/pictures of things done on our side which was extensive. He stated that the latest half million dollar project was line replacement near the Comcast building. He stated that Shannon would talk about the partnership with the Town, responsibilities and the future. He stated that there was a lot of concern on South College Drive with 650,000 gallons per day. He stated that if that line were to break it would be a major issue.

Mr. Holt asked what the smell came from.

Mr. Holman stated that it occurred from restaurant grease getting into the main line.

Mr. Holt asked if it was preventive.

Mr. Holman stated yes that there was a particular product/enzymes that could put in it and asked if we were checking the lines.

Mr. Crewe stated yes but obviously some was going into the drain and they had to hire someone to come in and clean them and turn in what was done.

Mr. Holman stated that El Patio was participating by using the special product.

Mayor Linkous stated the problem was they had a 1500 gallon grease trap outdoors.

Mr. Holman stated that some had both.

Mayor Linkous stated that the majority had a small one under their sink.

Mr. Holt suggested giving incentives for them to buy into this product.

Mr. Crewe stated that we had tried to educate but no one took it.

Mr. Holman suggested reduced rates.

Mr. Crewe stated that downsized traps in town were permitted but now the laws had changed.

Mr. Holt stated that we needed to pay our share on this project and give incentives once again.

Mr. Holman stated that the rate increase was over 5 years and started with the front load in 2019. He stated that they had a \$14 million bond for West Side, College Ave and the pump station and that the next increase would be in 2022 at 2.3% with the final increase of 1.5% in 2023. He stated that the minimum bill was \$26 and would increase to \$26.60 in 2022 and to \$27 in 2023. He stated that the minimum bill in Princeton was \$29 and we were still under most municipalities. He stated that they would be asking for cooperation through engineering or on the back end and he would like to schedule a Work Session after the New Year to talk about Capital Projects on the Virginia side. He stated that he had talked to Cecil and the City of Bluefield intends to participate if needed.

Mr. Crewe stated that the Sanitary Board was quick to respond to issues and were at Fincastle within 30 minutes of being called.

Mr. Trigg stated that he has had several citizens come to him regarding our local TV station and how they talk about West Virginia news and nothing on the Virginia side. He stated that 4, 5 and 13 were all West Virginia Channels and we had no control. He stated that there was a lot of square footage at the rescue squad building and would be good to fix up.

Mayor Linkous stated that we did not own it.

Mr. Trigg suggested that the Town invest and own that building.

Mayor Linkous stated that it was auctioned and bought but the bank reneged because they had vehicles in the building that they thought cost a lot of money. He stated that it would become available again.

Mr. Trigg stated that he told the citizens he would bring it up but also told them that the TV station could put whatever they wanted on there. He stated that we had 2 stations in Beckley and 1 in Bluefield.

Mrs. Payne thanked Kim and Trent for pulling together a Veteran's Day Service.

Mr. Presley stated that they had talked about making the road to have a straight shot through.

Mr. Crewe stated that nothing had been done on that.

Mr. Trigg asked what straight shot.

Mr. Presley stated a future project making part of downtown one way. He asked what was going on with Macados that he thought they were opening the 1st.

Mr. Crewe stated that he had talked to Richard and he told him they were hoping on the 18th. He stated that the Health Inspector had not been there and they were two weeks behind.

Mr. Presley gave a shout out to Chief, Kim, James and thanked all for coming out. He thanked Rick for the update and agreed that a Work Session was needed soon.

Mr. Holt thanked staff for the Veteran's Day Ceremony and stated that it was long overdue. He said regarding property maintenance issues that he would like to get with Trent and Chief on some ideas he had to better serve the public. He stated that they had two Veterans on Council, Trigg and Rick and he thanked them both. He thanked Chief on making great hires and stated that he was jealous for the Sheriff's Office. He stated that they had good leadership and the board worked to get more pay for officers so that we were more competitive. He thanked Rick for his presentation.

Mr. Holman congratulated the two new officers and their level of dedication. He stated that we needed qualified people who were invested in the community and that made a huge difference and the citizens were appreciated and had peace of mine. He congratulated Cathy on her re-election. He thanked the town staff on the fantastic job they were doing with leaf removal and that all employees were doing a good job. He stated regarding WVVA that there were 9 counties with the majority in West Virginia and when we wanted coverage that we had to tell them.

Mayor Linkous stated that Kathy Lambert was still waiting to get the trees cut hanging over her building.

Mr. Crewe stated that he did not believe it was on Town property.

Mayor Linkous stated that it was on Fincastle property.

Mr. Crewe stated that he remembered the property that they were talking about now.

Mayor Linkous encouraged everyone to come out and support the G-Men on Friday at 7 p.m. when they take on Lee High. He also encouraged everyone to come to the Veteran's Day Ceremony as well. He stated that Ron had messaged a local veteran Lonnie Johnson about coming to speak.

Mr. Crewe stated that Fincastle would be waiving the green fees for all Veteran's the next two days.

Mayor Linkous stated that it had been talked about during the Starbucks ribbon cutting and Bluefield, WV being named the Christmas City. He stated that he would like to see us do the large candy canes from the fountain to the Shell Station and for West Virginia to do the same thing on College both leading into the park. He asked that they think about it for next year that the City Manager wanted to work with the Town and suggested getting funding from the two governors.

Mr. Holt invited all to come out to the Graham Youth League Midget Championship on Sunday vs. Bluefield Beavers at Mitchell Stadium. He stated that these were our future players.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

Betty Kuppusami agreed that there was nothing Virginia on the news. She stated that she called the two channels here and both said the same thing that we had to ask for it and send in information.

Mr. Crewe stated that we had reached out to all and that WDBJ7 had also been bought out and raised prices but had been negotiating. He stated that the Town had nothing to do with it.

Mr. Holman stated that there was a retransmission with the local and satellite.

Mr. Trigg stated that the Town had an agreement with Comcast that they would keep their local office open which they did not.

Mr. Holt stated that they always covered things for the Sheriff's Department if they asked.

Mrs. Kuppusami stated that they also had the Veteran's Banners in Welch.

Gail Cook stated that she had talked to Mike two years ago about doing this and he suggested that she talk to the VFW. She stated that it was not costly.

Chief Gunter stated that the GHS Competition Cheer team had placed 4th in the State. He stated that they had not been to state in 3 years.

Mayor Linkous stated that there was a list a mile long of accomplishments. He stated that it had been discussed to do something at the schools during their awards.

Mr. Crewe stated that we could not get the information needed from the schools.

Mayor Linkous stated that Brody Meadows would be going to UVA and leaving in January to work with their football team.

Dave Wohlford asked if Calloway had sewer issues that it was still under development and they should be responsible for any upgrades. He asked if it was sent to engineering firms.

Mr. Holman stated yes.

Mr. Wohlford stated that it was the developer's responsibility for this.

Mr. Holman stated that he did not know the exacts but the estimated cost was \$80k.

Mr. Wohlford stated that it was not all finished.

Mr. Holman stated that they may bring it on to the existing but would find out.

Mr. Riffe stated that these were all great ideas that had been talked about. He stated that the Town needed to do something since the City of Bluefield had been named Christmas City. He suggested Holiday Town of Virginia but having something for all of the holidays. He recommended a committee that had Charlie Stacy, AJ Robinson and some younger people who could come up with some ideas. He stated that the Sanders House dropped the hat on doing something for Veteran's Day. He stated that we were in between Tazewell and the City who both were known for things.

Mr. Holt asked that the meetings be scheduled for later in the evenings to allow for more people to be involved.

Mr. Riffe stated that a new committee needed to be formed.

Mayor Linkous stated that Chuck knew someone.

ADJOURN

Mayor Linkous asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:12 p.m.

D.S. Linkous, Mayor

Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk