

**Town of Bluefield
Town Council
Minutes
March 22, 2022**

The Bluefield, Virginia Town Council held a regularly scheduled Town Council Meeting on Tuesday, March 22, 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
Anglis Trigg, Councilmember
Greg DeGray, Councilmember

ALSO PRESENT

Trent Crewe, Manager/Town Attorney
Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk
Lt. Rex Bradshaw, Police Department
15 members of public
3 members of staff

ABSENT

Shane Gunter, Chief of Police
James Hampton, Asst. Mgr./Treasurer/Transit Dir.

CALL TO ORDER

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

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE

Jim Drake, Parkview Baptist Church led the Invocation. Mayor Linkous led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

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

Sheriff Hieatt, Tazewell County Sheriff's Department/ Charlie Stacy, Tazewell County Board of Supervisors

Mr. Hieatt introduced Randi Davis the 911 Director and stated that next month would be 25 years that the 911 center would be in service. He stated that they had a dispatcher who worked night shift and had been there all 25 years. He invited everyone to come out on April 13th from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. to tour the 911 center and eat some cake. He stated that Chief and Lt. Bradshaw had worked well with them throughout the years. He stated that they had received over 100k emergency and non-emergency calls, had a full time dispatcher for the School Resource Officers and that the school buses were getting radios with direct communication. He thanked the town for its support.

Mr. Holt stated that they were blessed to have Randi who was an unsung hero.

Mr. Hieatt stated that he had some deputies who were trained as EMT's including Corp. Mitchell who was there with them along with Charlie Stacy. He stated that they were able to help and work with the civilians before the EMT's were there. He stated that some of the School Resource Officers were also trained EMT's.

Mr. Presley asked if there would be any more training.

Mr. Hieatt stated during the summer.

Mrs. Payne asked how long the training took.

Mr. Hieatt stated 10 weeks (8 hour days) condensed.

Mr. Stacy stated that there were retention issues and discussed a pay scale bump for those certified to help. He stated that it was a good program and he hoped to have more success stories.

Mr. Holman asked what the impact was.

Mr. Stacy stated that by having additional people helped the two crews working.

Mrs. Payne asked the cost.

Mr. Stacy stated \$500 which included the medical kit. He stated that it had been budgeted to continue this program for at least two more years and had been opened up to the Fire Department then citizens. He stated that the turnover was higher for first responders because they were burnt out from the past two years. He stated within 10-15 years that Fire and EMS would be combined entities and right now we had 4 on the Fire Department either certified or in training. He stated that they had a skeleton crew which was making them look bad not getting to calls in a timely manner but were building towards having multiple crews. He stated that he had talked with the Chief about a program allowing the officers to participate with council's blessing and would be at

the county's expense. He stated that Project Jonah was a \$150 million private project that was moving along and that the ground had been moved. He stated that he, Trent and the mayor had met with the Fire and Rescue Services and would continue to work together to provide services along with 945 in Pocahontas. He stated that the county had taken steps 3 years ago to create Rescue Services on the East End if we provided fire. He stated that there was never an agreement but they were trying to memorialize in an MOU with the same recommendation that EMS would provide 24/7 services to our citizens while the Town gave the equivalent in Fire Services and stated that there may be additional fire services added in other areas.

Mr. Holt stated that he appreciated the ideas of EMS and what had been brought to the table. He stated that it was innovated ideas to bring in deputies, citizens, etc.

Mr. Stacy stated that he had asked Erik Robinson to be there because he had received a lot of questions concerning the Athletic Field/Stadium (whatever the correct term was). He stated that he knew some information but that people were confused as to what it was going to be.

Mr. Robinson clarified that it was an Outdoor Learning Facility.

Mr. Stacy stated that when he was first asked about it that he did not know and had to ask Erik. He stated that it was a wonderful opportunity with federal tax money, would be a very good use and was on board if all of the logistics worked out. He stated that Chuck had asked him if there were funding sources available and handed out some papers to council for a potential funding source. He stated that the School Board was the owner and would decide but he fully supported it, it was paid for and would be a great opportunity for our citizens. He stated that their job was to remove the fears and be there to help. He congratulated Greg on his appointment and thanked council for all that they did.

Mr. Holman stated that the response time for EMS was better and it showed a lot of progress and professionalism from where we were.

Mr. Stacy stated that they were also working on more crews to offer transport services which were around \$2,500 each transport.

Mr. Robinson thanked Charlie for his words and reiterated that the School Board had not asked for money from anyone. He stated that it was important to know that it was an Outdoor Learning facility with turf, a 6-8 lane VHSL approved track that would include long jump pits, etc. and that it was paid for. He stated that he hoped the community would get excited about it.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

None.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS AND REPORTS

None.

NEW BUSINESS AND REPORTS

None.

CITIZENS COMMENTS

None.

POLICE CHIEF'S REPORT

None.

TOWN MANAGER'S/ATTORNEY'S REPORT

EMS Program

Mr. Crewe stated that the EMS program was a nightmare in the beginning and we had some taking the class and some doing it the next time because they had a servant's heart. He stated that the county had asked the town to ratify the MOU which they were working on and if the county were to build something in the industrial park that the Town would staff it with one fire truck. He stated that we had 5 who lived in that area and had to pass it to get to our fire station. He stated that it would be a cooperation between the county and the town.

Employee Recognition

Mr. Crewe stated that many employees went unnoticed and he liked to recognize them for good things. He stated that Tara had been out sick last week but came in at 8 a.m. the next morning to fill out a permit that had been promised to a citizen. He stated this was typical of town employees.

Downtown Parking

Mr. Crewe stated that new signage and parking was being discussed downtown for the new medical clinic.

Council Invitations/Upcoming Dates

Mr. Crewe stated that council had received a couple of invitations to some things including Business after Hours on March 31st and April 5th-SWVA Workforce Board in Lebanon from 10 a.m. to noon. He stated that the auditors would be here June 15th – 16th and that AEP had sent out mailings regarding the Hockman Pike substation that would take one year to complete. He stated that they would be at the next council meeting to discuss enlarging the existing substation, adding new poles, 1400ft. of new line, etc.

Good Friday, ROLL CALL VOTE

Mr. Crewe stated as in the past, council had voted to give employees Good Friday off. He asked if that was something they would like to do again.

Mr. Holt made a motion to approve giving staff Good Friday off. Mr. Holman seconded the motion.

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

ROLL CALL VOTE

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

Motion carried 6-0 in favor of being closed Good Friday.

High Street Project

Mr. Crewe stated that CLECO was still working on things and would start planting grass soon. He stated that Thompson & Litton had been going back and forth with them on their overages regarding the time off with COVID. He stated that two weeks shut down for that was justifiable but the 35 days of no work after hitting a gas line was 100% on CLECO.

Community Engagement

Mr. Crewe stated that Calvary Hill Church was planning a community engagement on Saturday from 11 a.m. – 2 p.m. He stated that nothing was needed and they would have signage indicating to pull into their parking lot for more information and would also be hosting a lunch.

Public Works Dedication

Mr. Crewe stated that Public Works held a dedication/sign unveiling for Pete Sleeman and it was a really nice event.

Non Budgeted Expenses

Mr. Crewe asked for guidance on several requests that he had received for donations. He stated that James was attending a conference and the reason there was no big discussion regarding the budget. He stated that there was \$447k expenses not included in the budget: up to \$25k promised to the black section of Maple Hill Cemetery (raised \$5k towards the expense), \$25k for four years to Bluefield University to help with their new entrance way (had not applied for permits

yet), \$200k towards the purchase of a new garbage truck financed over 4-5 years, \$57k towards the purchase of a new garage lift after the existing one failed inspection and was needed for maintenance on the transit buses. He stated that they were looking to see if transit money could be used for this purchase, \$10k for new flooring at Town Hall, \$10k-\$12k for a new copier in the manager's office, \$27k with half being paid upfront on a new digital sign (contract had been signed), \$15k for a new server at the Treasurer's Office, \$36k for new body cameras for the police officers, \$40k to purchase a new police car where an engine had blown in an older one, a request to pay \$1,503 for trophies for the youth basketball league (not budgeted) but had been paid in the past to Amanda Crews, \$7,500 to Friends of SWVA (not budgeted), \$500 to project graduation (budgeted item), \$175 to Robert Duff for pencil drawings (not budgeted), flags purchased from Sam Mustaine who was going out of business (Virginia, American and POW flags-not budgeted), contribution (no amount specified) to SWVA Educational Foundation (\$500 budgeted past), library donation (budgeted item), Sanders House (budgeted item), \$2,500 Heart of Appalachia Tourism to advertise small town businesses (not budgeted), \$500 (budgeted) for Brain Injury Services, \$2,500 (budgeted) for Crab Orchard and they were coming in weekly. He asked councils thoughts that if they were budgeted then pay but if not then no.

Mr. Holt asked if they could be discussed in a Work Session before the next meeting.

Mr. Crewe stated yes.

Mrs. Payne agreed if none were pressing.

Mr. Crewe stated that he did not think any were critical to wait.

Mayor Linkous asked if staff should move forward with the copier and digital sign.

Mr. Crewe stated that he had already signed the contract for the digital sign and staff was looking to lease or purchase a new copier.

Mayor Linkous stated that the garage lift was something that was also needed now.

Mr. Crewe stated that James was asking if transit grant money could be used for it.

Mayor Linkous asked if a contractor had looked at the flooring.

Mr. Crewe stated that we have had 3 come in to give quotes.

Mayor Linkous asked about carpet being put in.

Mr. Crewe stated that carpet was not recommended in a heavy traffic area and the intent would be to have them install on a Saturday and Sunday along with replacing the flooring in the bathrooms down stairs.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Mr. DeGray stated that he was learning a lot of new things and thanked them for the EMS program and the effort being put into it.

Mr. Holman agreed with Greg and stated that it was beneficial.

Mr. Holt thanked Charlie and stated that it was a labor of love and a lot of work. He stated that they had a good meeting.

Mr. Presley encouraged everyone to go to the Patchwork Quilters show. He gave a shout out to the Recreation Department who was in attendance, Rex and the best Police Department, the White's and all of staff. He asked that we reach out to Appalachian Agency for Senior Citizens and have them come to a meeting to discuss all of their programs. He stated that he would be attending a meeting for grants in Lebanon on Friday that he hoped would help small businesses. He stated that he was ready to start EMS training.

Mrs. Payne thanked Charlie for the update and stated that it was an interesting program.

Mr. Trigg thanked Charlie. He stated that the playground on Depot Street needed to have the gate closed and locked to prevent people from driving inside. He asked if there were any updates regarding Dominion going across the mountain.

Mr. Crewe stated that was part of what would be discussed on April 5th at the Workforce meeting but his understanding was they had not been able to hire the people needed. He stated that it was moving slowly and was still going to happen.

Mr. Holt asked about the crosswalks at GHS and beside the store.

Mr. Crewe stated that it was on Public Works list but he would ask again.

Mr. Holt asked that the properties needing to be discussed be included on the next Work Session as well.

Mr. Stacy stated that he was on the budget committee this year and the final rules on the ARPA money was totally different now that anyone receiving less than \$10 million would not be audited. He stated that it allowed for them to go back and cover payroll expenses reimbursed the last two years.

Mr. Crewe stated that they had changed the rules but the town was not included in the 10% of reduction due to the fact that they we did not lose money and meals tax actually went up during the pandemic. He stated that the receipts on the town side were not less than the previous year but he was continuing to look into the new rules.

Mayor Linkous stated that they had been asked for a representative to be on the Tazewell County board for Bluefield and no one had been appointed.

Mrs. Hernandez stated that she had talked to Gail Cook who was willing to do it.

Mr. Holt suggested that they take letters of anyone wishing to do it.

Mayor Linkous asked about the smell at Fincastle.

Mr. Crewe stated that they were on their 5th remedy and still working on it.

Mayor Linkous stated that it needed to be fixed ASAP that it smelled like sewer at the front door, in the bar area and last weekend downstairs in the golf area.

Dave Wohlford suggested it was the vent stacks or the grease traps stopped up.

Mr. Crewe stated that all the sewer lines have been cleaned out, grease traps pulled and cleaned and had a machine injecting into the system. He stated that the rain seemed to make it worse.

Mr. Wohlford asked if it were public sewer.

Mr. Holman asked if a camera had been run.

Mr. Crewe stated nothing recently that they had bought chemicals and put in which sometimes worked.

Mr. Holman suggested running the camera again to check for leaks that it could be on the outside.

Mr. Crewe stated that they were looking at everything.

ADJOURN

Mayor Linkous adjourned the meeting at 9:19 p.m.

D.S. Linkous, Mayor

Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk