

**Town of Bluefield
Town Council
Minutes
April 13, 2021**

The Bluefield, Virginia Town Council held a regularly scheduled Town Council Meeting on Tuesday, April 13, 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
Chuck Presley, Councilmember
Jarrod Bailey, Councilmember
Rick Holman, Councilmember
Cathy Payne, Councilmember
Anglis Trigg, Jr. Councilmember

ALSO PRESENT

Trent Crewe, Manager/Town Attorney
Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk
Kris Williams, Zoning Administrator
James Hampton, Treasurer/Transit Dir.
Shane Gunter, Police Chief
Tara White, Receptionist
3 Members of Public

ABSENT

Ron Holt, Vice-Mayor

CALL TO ORDER

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

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE

Philip White, Bluefield Church of God the Invocation. Mayor Linkous led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA & CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor Linkous asked for a motion to approve the agenda and consent agenda.

Councilmember Trigg made a motion to approve the agenda & consent agenda. Councilmember Presley seconded the motion.

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

ROLL CALL VOTE

Councilmember Bailey:	Yes
Councilmember Holman:	Yes
Vice-Mayor Holt:	Absent
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 REQUESTS & SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

None.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

None.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS AND REPORTS

None.

NEW BUSINESS AND REPORTS

Budget Amendments, ROLL CALL VOTE – Kim Hernandez

Mrs. Hernandez went over the following Budget Amendments:

PURPOSE: Security Services (Aramark)

Revenue

Line Item		Original Budget	Amended Budget	Change
0400-0413	Misc Law	<u>\$288,147.52</u>	<u>\$289,647.52</u>	<u>\$1,500.00</u>
	Enforcement	<u>\$288,147.52</u>	<u>\$289,647.52</u>	<u>\$1,500.00</u>

Expenditure

Line Item		Original Budget	Amended Budget	Change
3110-1600	Investigative	<u>\$30,387.92</u>	<u>\$31,887.92</u>	<u>\$1,500.00</u>
	OT/Police	<u>\$30,387.92</u>	<u>\$31,887.92</u>	<u>\$1,500.00</u>

Mayor Linkous asked for a motion to approve the Budget Amendments.

Mr. Trigg made a motion to approve the Budget Amendments. Mr. Presley seconded the motion.

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

ROLL CALL VOTE

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

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

Modular Code Amendment, ROLL CALL VOTE – Kris Williams

Mr. Williams stated during a recent Planning Commission meeting, that Planning Commission voted to remove section five of the definition of Modular Homes found in the current Town Code which stated any modular home must be free from axels and frames. He stated that based upon the Planning Commission's decision that it was his recommendation to remove section five of the definition of Modular Homes.

Mr. Bailey made a motion to approve the Modular Code Amendment. Mr. Presley seconded the motion.

Mr. Bailey asked with this being such a large item of information for the town if they could get it out to the news.

Mayor Linkous asked Mr. Crewe if they could work on that.

Mr. Crewe stated yes.

Mr. Bailey stated he thought it would be a good idea to get word out sooner than later before the public emails or messages started.

Mayor Linkous agreed and stated that it would be good to contact WVVA about it as well.

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

ROLL CALL VOTE

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

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

CITIZEN COMMENTS

None.

POLICE CHIEF'S REPORT

Chief Gunter stated that it had been business as usual and there were two students that were mid-way through the academy. He stated this week was National Telecommunication Week and they would be recognizing their dispatchers. He stated if anyone was by there to let them know they were appreciated.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT AND ATTORNEYS REPORT

Town Aerial Photos

Mr. Crewe stated that Mr. Greg Cromer was there to show a great photo he had taken. He stated that he was an aerial photographer and let him tell them more about it.

Mr. Cromer stated he had several aerial photos of the two Bluefield's and showed council the one he had brought with him. He stated that it was taken last fall of downtown Bluefield Virginia.

Mr. Crewe stated the photos were taken from an airplane and not a drone and that Mr. Cromer went up in the plane and took the pictures from the air.

Mr. Bailey asked if Mr. Cromer took shots of other towns.

Mr. Cromer stated he had covered 3,000 acres in 32 states.

Mr. Crewe stated that the cost of the photo that he was showing them was \$195 framed and \$100 unframed for a 20x28. He stated the largest he had available was 26x40 at \$295 framed and \$200 unframed and there was also digital imaging available for \$50.

Mayor Linkous stated he thought they should purchase the largest photo for the foyer coming in.

Mrs. Payne stated that she did not see any photos of Fincastle or Bluefield College and would like for him to include those as well.

Mr. Cromer stated he could take pictures of whatever they would like.

Mayor Linkous stated they could use some of those photos for the website.

Mr. Bailey asked if there was a catalog or a website where they could view and purchase photos.

Mr. Cromer stated yes and gave council his business card.

Mr. Crewe stated after they viewed and liked what they saw they could order different photos.

Mr. Cromer stated he could do wide ranges and would take any requests they had.

Mayor Linkous stated they needed Fincastle, Bluefield College and various locations downtown.

Mr. Crewe stated that any size they would want could be done and that he could get pics of Fincastle, Bluefield College, etc. and put them in those locations.

Mayor Linkous asked if he used local pilots and if so who he used.

Mr. Cromer stated he used a gentleman from Beckley and his son previously before he moved.

Mayor Linkous stated he knew some local pilots and the Coles were all pilots and had their own planes.

Mr. Holman stated that Jay Belts was also a local pilot.

Mayor Linkous thanked Mr. Cromer for coming and sharing his photo.

Town Staff

Mr. Crewe stated that Mr. Holt would not be with them due to a COVID exposure and was awaiting test results but had decided to quarantine. He stated that the Town was having a difficult time hiring and keeping part time help and there was a person hired for part time grass help that only worked a couple of hours and laid the weed eater down and stated that it was not the job for him and quit. He stated that it was important for council and those watching the videos to know what all of the employees did to go above and beyond for the town. He stated that even though he had already left he wanted to mention Kris Williams who had recently received a new certification for zoning which he did not have to do but did. He stated that he had leaned on Mr. Hampton a lot for the budget and that he was dumping more things on him and would continue to do so. He stated that he was in negotiations and finalizing with him to be the assistant town manager and that he was already doing a lot of the work. He stated Tara White would soon be off her probation period and was given more responsibilities and had done a great job. He stated that she with Mrs. Hernandez's help had designed and sent out her first newsletter and did a wonderful job. He stated that he was also giving Mrs. Hernandez more work as well. He stated that Anthony Phillips saved the town several thousand dollars when they had noticed a large leak in the pond and that he went into very cold water that was 45 degrees to find the pipe that was leaking so that the water could be shut off and repairs done. He stated the company that was contracted to do the repairs was packing up to leave and Mr. Phillips took matters into his own hands and did a phenomenal job. He stated that Chief Gunter had shared a story with him regarding a gentleman in his late 80's that

was confused and somehow left his residence and got lost. He stated that the wife had put a cell phone in his car before he had left and they were able to ping it to get his location. He stated that Officer Martha Shewey was able to locate him and kept him safe while feeding and talking to him until someone arrived to pick him up. He stated that this was the type of service that people got from this town and it was great. He stated that council had received the spring cleanup schedule and that it had been posted. He stated that the transportation board was scheduled to meet virtually on April 27th concerning projects and the 5 year plan that he would attend. He stated that he had a couple of discussions with Mr. Bailey about computer systems and spoke to Chief Gunter about a new camera system and did not know the cost of those yet but there were several cameras that needed replaced and new ones were available that were much better and could see and read license plates from across the street.

Town Recycling

Mr. Crewe stated that he would like to restructure the recycling with doing cardboard and newspaper on the same day by moving it to separate days due to there being such a large quantity of it. He stated that they thought about not doing plastic at all but there were several federal grant programs that the town could miss out on by not doing all recycling and they sometimes depended on that.

Flag Memorial

Mr. Crewe stated that he had spoken with Mike Lampert who was interested in volunteering to work with a company that made flags that could be purchased by the public and could fill a field in honor of loved ones on Memorial Day or July 4th that could potentially make money for the town. He stated that Mr. Lampert was willing to take on this project.

2021/2022 Budget – June 8th Council Meeting

Mr. Crewe stated that the time schedule for the budget was that it had to be approved by June 30th which was state law. He stated that in the past they had approved the budget in May which gave them some lead way. He stated that June 22nd was the last day that they could meet to approve it and felt that was too late and the June 8th council meeting would have to be rescheduled due to elections that was scheduled on that day. He stated that was why it was on the agenda to discuss. He stated that May 25th would allow time for staff to advertise and that he would have a work session to discuss the budget on May 11th.

Mr. Bailey asked if they were required to have a first and second reading.

Mr. Crewe stated no.

Mr. Presley asked when the work session would be.

Mr. Crewe stated May 11th. He stated that he did not want to rush it but that it had to be advertised.

Mr. Holman asked if it could be done on June 7th.

Mrs. Hernandez stated they would be setting up for the election.

Mr. Holman asked what election it was.

Mr. Crewe stated it was the Republican Primary and Democratic Primary and they would be here the 7th through the 9th.

Mr. Presley stated that they should approve it by the last week of May.

Mr. Crewe stated that May 25th was the last week before June and recommended it be done then.

Mr. Bailey asked if they had to have a first and second reading then the public hearing.

Mr. Crewe stated they could wave the readings which would give them time.

Mr. Bailey asked if they had to advertise for the readings.

Mr. Crewe stated they could but were not required to and what was done in the past was a motion was made to wave the readings and only do the first and final reading which would save them time.

Mr. Bailey stated that was his next question.

Mayor Linkous stated they could have the June 8th meeting upstairs.

Mr. Crewe stated with having it open to the public and the budget being approved that it would not allow for social distancing which could be a problem and suggested they do it on a different day like the week before or the week after.

Mayor Linkous asked about June 10th.

Mr. Crewe stated they could do it that day or any day they wanted to.

Mr. Presley stated he was good with June 1st.

Mr. Trigg suggested that the town manager pick a date and tell them.

Mr. Crewe stated that if they did it on the 25th they would have a budget hearing and vote on the budget the same night. He stated that the next meeting would be nonconsequential if they adopted the budget. He stated that if there were any questions and they did not get it done on the 25th then the next meeting would be crucial so for that reason he would suggest doing it the week before to have more time.

Mayor Linkous stated that they could have a vote on it.

Mr. Presley asked if they could have a work session on the 25th.

Mr. Crewe stated that he had suggested to have a work session on May 11th and they could answer any questions later that they did not want to rush things. He stated that it had to be advertised and put in the newspaper which all took time.

Mr. Holman asked when they could expect the final draft.

Mr. Crewe stated he would give them the preliminary tonight and would explain it. He stated that he had a packet like he gave them last time with the remaining 6-20 pages of the general fund which was 5 years' worth of the budget and what was listed was the current budget amount used since December, amount used in December and the projected amount to be used for the coming year. He stated that when they looked at pages 6-20 they were listed by departments and the departments were tricky and with Mr. Hamptons help he finally figured out the departments. He stated for example there was a lady that worked in the Treasurer's Office who did water bills so she would be listed under the Water Department and another example was the Town Managers salary which was split between the Street Department and part was in the Police Department. He stated that some of the departments did not look like what they actually were because one person may do many different jobs that were for different departments. He stated that he had went through and took every employee they had and looked through to see what they were making and put a 3% increase for everyone except the Police Department. He stated that the Police Department did not get a 3% raise this time because they got a substantial raise previously and he would make it up later on. He stated that these budgets would not stay the same because the Fire Department needed new air packs that would cost around \$153,000 and the reason it was not in there was they anticipated getting grant money and money from COVID relief to pay for some of these items. He stated that pages 6-20 were allocated by departments and were broken down into four numbers that were salaries regular, over time regular, part time salaries, and part time over time. He stated that after wage compressions he had to bump up about a dozen to \$9.50 and some of the supervisors were bumped up so that it kept a gap in pay. He stated behind those pages they would see 4 more budgets which were separate. He stated that the first one was the water fund which differed from the water plant. He stated that there were some transfers to the general fund numbers and that line items could not be taken out which is why there were a bunch of zeros on it. He stated that the next one was cemetery which was in the general fund but there was a perpetual care fund, the next one was transit which the town was very fortunate to have Mr. Hampton's expertise to not ever had to pay full price for a bus because most was federal money used. He stated that the buses had to have 100,000 miles and 4 years of service before they could be replaced and there were a couple coming up next year for 2022. He stated that they built in wage increases and was trying to take care of bus drivers because they did not receive any extra COVID money and was trying to factor that in. He stated that the next one was the most complicated and was the Fincastle budget. He stated that it would not have a 5 year comparison because they did not own it 5 years ago and there was nothing to compare it to other than 2019. He stated that there were going in the right direction and that the buffet they had on Easter Sunday fed over 250 people. He stated that the first 9 days of April of which 2 they were closed because of weather they took in \$30,000 and continued to do as well.

Mr. Bailey asked if the budget should state that it was for 2020-2021 and not 2019-2020.

Mr. Crewe stated yes that it should go from July 1, 2020 through December 2020. He stated that some of the changes on the budget included them projecting a little over half million dollars in business and that golf had been very busy. He stated they had 30 parties, meetings, and dinners planned and would be making money if regulations did not tighten back up. He stated the most important thing that they did not mention was that they did not have to raise taxes at all for this budget and the projection that Fincastle would make money this year helped with that. He stated that Fincastle received \$84,000 in paycheck protection funds that would be in this year's budget.

Mr. Bailey stated that he had noticed that employee healthcare was up on some and down on some.

Mr. Crewe stated it was 4% and several employees had dropped or added insurance. He stated that there were 6 to 8 couples that were employees who were married and were paying for dual policies which we did not need to be paid that way and some who had family plans that dropped back to single coverage.

Mr. Bailey stated that is was about a 4% increase.

Mr. Crewe stated approximately. He stated that he knew he had done a lot on the budget and did not expect them to comprehend it all but it had been a very educational process and if it had not been for Mr. Hampton he would not have been able to get it done.

Mr. Presley asked about the pool situation.

Mr. Crewe stated that they were asked by National Pools if they could use the existing pipes and pump which all along we thought we were going to have to use it this year and replace next but then they came back asking if it could all be replaced upfront and still make that deadline. He stated they had the deck cleaned and that cost was \$1,000 which had to be done before National Pools came in which should be the first of May. He stated that the new golf carts were on hold and were stuck in a canal somewhere and that the current golf carts were falling apart which made them shorthanded. He stated that they would have to completely re-plaster the inside of the pool and had found an architect to tell them what they needed to do along with our building inspector who had also been out there. He stated that the kitchen and deck were mostly cosmetic and could be done in-house. He stated that they had a couple of guys that removed and cleaned up the restrooms but they had two neighbors who offered to pay to have the restrooms put back and also had some donations coming in. He stated that the way he did the budget was careful and he did not cheat on anything that they may see some contingencies in there but they would continue to move forward and look at different parts. He stated that they were in good financial shape and he thought the numbers were conservative but did not guarantee that numbers would not have to be moved around when situations arose. He stated on the right hand side of the budget that it showed comments and that he tried to keep it with what they had and told them that if they had any questions to let him or Mr. Hampton know.

Mrs. Payne asked if they decided on when the meeting was going to be.

Mr. Crewe stated he did not think so and if they did it on May 25th that the following week would be nonconsequential but doing it the next week after could make it tricky because of time. He stated that from what he had heard was the work session would be good to have on May 11th and felt like they still need to analyze the budget more and then make the dates for these meetings and work session next meeting.

Mrs. Payne stated she was good with anything.

Mr. Presley stated he thought what Mr. Crewe said would be better than June 15th.

Mr. Bailey stated he would like to have it earlier.

Mr. Holman made a motion to reschedule the June 8th meeting to June 1st. Mr. Presley seconded the motion.

Mayor Linkous asked the Clerk for a roll call and report.

ROLL CALL VOTE

Councilmember Bailey:	Yes
Councilmember Holman:	Yes
Vice-Mayor Holt:	Absent
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

Mayor Linkous stated they had gone through the meeting very quickly and when asked for citizens comments there was no one there and now there was. He asked if there were any citizen comments.

Mr. Wohlford stated he just had one item and would stay at his seat to comment. He stated that Easter Sunday when he went to Fincastle that he was highly impressed that there were a lot of people there and they were very busy. He stated another thing that had him very bothered was the ballfields where they put up the lights that the parking was terrible and just a mess. He stated concerning the pool and the contractors that he did not know what type of system that was being used to heat the pool, but a gas system was the most inefficient and expensive system that could be used to heat a pool. He stated that the heat pump system was the most efficient and was able to run heat off of the air and did not burn anywhere near what gas would. He stated that he would be willing to go and take look at it for them.

Mayor Linkous asked the town manager to look into it.

Mr. Crewe stated that it was an electric heat pump and they were redoing it.

Mayor Linkous thanked him for his comments and for coming.

Mr. Crewe stated Mrs. Hernandez brought to his attention that he had forgotten to mention the street closings which started April 19th for the bridge construction and April 26th for the High Street Project.

Mr. Presley asked Mrs. Hernandez to email him a copy of the spring cleanup schedule.

Mrs. Hernandez that she would.

Mr. Crewe stated that they have had a problem with something getting in the trash cans at the ballfields and would like to purchase bear proof lids to put on those garbage cans.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Mr. Bailey stated that he had two comments and had received a compliment that he did not even realize the gentleman was giving but had someone related to his job that was from Ohio that was staying in Beckley who had found out that he had some ancestors from this area and drove to Maple Hill Cemetery looking around. He stated that no one was there because it was Good Friday but that he had found a phone number to call. He stated he called and started talking about the person he was looking for and our staff led him to a specific section and sure enough he had a picture of the grave site and there was a tree in the photo and he found that tree and found several graves of his ancestors that he was looking for. He stated he could not speak highly enough of the town and how the cemetery was maintained and how the employee helped him on a holiday when they were off work. He stated that he did not know the connection he had with the town but it was such good feedback and was so nice to hear. He stated the other thing was on Saturday that he was able to go to the BVLL field for opening day and it was amazing to watch so many young kids and parents come together for this event and great to see it being used in such a positive way.

Mr. Holman had none.

Mr. Trigg stated he enjoyed Mr. Crewe's presentation and that he did a good job.

Mrs. Payne thanked the town employees for how pretty the outside of Town Hall looked with the new mulch which reminded her of her mom and her time on the beautification committee and thanked them also for all the work they did at the Sanders House and how nice everything looked. She stated that on a sad note they had lost 3 people from the town, Kimberly Miller, Kathy McCann, and Mark Johnson. She stated they had all passed away this past week and asked that these families be kept in prayer. She stated that she thanked the town of Bluefield employees and Fincastle and that she ate lunch there 2 to 4 times per week and saw a group of 12 coaches from Bluefield State College there. She stated that business was really booming and the Easter buffet was really good and it was very busy.

Mr. Presley stated that he was glad Mr. Wohlford was there and was worried about him last meeting when he wasn't there. He stated that he really appreciated Mr. Crewe on explaining the budget. He stated to the soon to be assistant town manager congratulations to James Hampton and thanked Mr. White for coming out to pray and everyone at the town and as always that we had the best Police Department around. He stated that he was like Mr. Bailey and enjoyed the BVLL opening day and was really excited about the budget and would like to be shown a breakdown in the water budget and to see those numbers.

Mr. Crewe stated that was in the works and he had been working with Mr. Miller on that and would have that as quickly as possible.

Mayor Linkous stated that he appreciated all of the hard work on the budget and would like to include the Police Department on the 3% raise and not leave them out of it that everyone that worked for the Town deserved a raise and we did not want them to keep getting behind but to continue forward. He stated that he would like for them to take a closer look and see if they could do at least a little something for them.

Mr. Crewe stated that he and Chief Gunter have had some very frank conversations concerning this.

Mayor Linkous stated that even though they got a good raise a while ago that they risked their lives every day and had lost the respect that they deserved. He stated that he would like to see our Police Department be the highest paid in the area and he felt that this was something people looked at first about our town. He stated he was looking at how they could get more money for the town and that he had recently bought a couple cemetery plots and when they were bought you still had to purchase a vault. He stated that he had spoken to Mr. Shrewsbury about it and a friend from a funeral home and the cost was an additional \$1,250.00 which was the general price range if not more. He stated that there were around 50 funerals a year and if you doubled the money on the cost it was still cheaper than purchasing them somewhere else and would make the town \$22,000 to \$23,000 per year. He stated that he felt we should do this as soon as possible instead of paying outside sources and have them stored at the cemetery to make money instead of paying someone else.

Mr. Wohlford stated they made them in Princeton.

Mayor Linkous stated that he felt they really needed to do that to support the cemetery and was something people had to purchase regardless.

Mr. Crewe stated that he had been talking to Mr. Shrewsbury concerning this and were looking into suppliers and found three within 25 miles to see if they could store them onsite or have them delivered. He stated that what he was being told was certain vaults needed a specific machine that lowered it down which we would need to purchase.

Mayor Linkous talked about Public Works and how they did everything from road work, to water leaks, to snow removal and did not get paid hardly anything. He stated that he would rather have two higher paid hard working employees than have 4 lower paid that did not work as

hard which we would have better quality by doing so. He stated concerning the pool company that they had known 6 months to a year and had come up with excuses and we needed to make them accountable and tell them our deadline is June 1st and if they did not meet that deadline then they would be fined that waiting till the middle of June was unacceptable.

Mr. Crewe stated that with all due respect that he did not think that could be done since they did not have a signed contract that long. He stated that they were also doing work for Harmony Acres and that was the card he was using that they had two of our pools and with giving them that much business that it needed to get done. He stated that he was trying not to offend them but to hold their feet to the fire to get the work done.

Mayor Linkous thanked Mr. Hampton for everything and for considering being our assistant town manager and that he could see we were a great town with a great group of employees. He asked once again for them to look into giving our Police Department a raise and that something was better than nothing. He asked if anyone had anything else.

There was nothing.

ADJOURN

Mayor Linkous asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. Bailey made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:49 p.m. Mr. Presley seconded the motion.

Mayor Linkous asked the Clerk for a roll call and report.

ROLL CALL VOTE

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

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

D.S. Linkous, Mayor

Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk

