

**Town of Bluefield
Town Council
Minutes
April 26, 2022**

The Bluefield, Virginia Town Council held a regularly scheduled Town Council Meeting on Tuesday, April 26, 2022 at 6:00 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
Greg DeGray, Councilmember
Anglis Trigg, Councilmember
Ron Holt, Vice-Mayor

ALSO PRESENT

Trent Crewe, Manager/Town Attorney
Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk
Shane Gunter, Chief of Police
James Hampton, Asst. Mgr./Treasurer/Transit Dir.
Don Scott, Planning Commission Secretary
Kris Williams, Zoning & Property Maint. Official
8 members of public
2 members of staff

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Linkous called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Mr. Crewe stated that the federal government had changed their rules again and less than \$10 million had easier guidelines for reporting. He stated that they could reimburse themselves for supervisory personnel. He stated that overall local taxes were increased by \$220k including meals tax which had increase \$130k from Macados and all the restaurants doing well.

Mr. Holman asked what the estimated bump in personal property tax would be.

Mr. Crewe stated that county wide was 22% so he would comfortably think 10-15%. He stated that it would then depend on if we rolled our rate back or not.

Mr. Hampton stated if we received the full 22% that would be a \$54k increase in revenue.

Mr. Holt stated that our rates were low.

Mayor Linkous stated that Dave Anderson was asking his board to go revenue neutral.

Mr. Crewe stated that Fincastle was helping with the increase in meals tax. He stated that we would not have a state budget until June and may be losing Police Officers to the Sheriff's Department.

Mr. Holt stated that the starting salary would be going from \$35k/year to \$42k/year and those certified with over a year's service would receive a compression increase.

Mr. Crewe stated on the expenditure side that we would see an 8.5% increase in our health insurance this year which was \$58,120/year.

Mr. Hampton stated that there was a \$52k increase in cigarette tax.

Mrs. Hernandez stated that the towns overall insurance policy would be going down this year.

Mr. Crewe stated that the next change was \$131,500 in transfers.

Mr. Presley asked about new equipment.

Mr. Crewe stated that he would present a way to make that happen.

Mr. Holman asked if there were any projects ready to go.

Mr. Crewe stated that staff would meet with Thompson & Litton tomorrow and had met with VDH last week and learned that there was another pot of money coming.

Mr. Holman asked for a detailed listing of the new water projects.

Mr. Crewe stated that it was given out a few meetings back. He stated that supervisory salaries could be reimbursed back to March 3, 2021 and that \$1 ARPA money put into the regular budget freed up that money to buy a lawnmower, etc. He stated our supervisory positions (not including Police Dept) run \$674,291.08/yr. and \$56,190.92/month, Police Supervisors earned \$362,928.56/yr. and \$30,244.05/month which meant going back to 3/2021 we could reimburse 20 months of supervisors' wages up to \$1,728,709.97 ($\$56,190.92 + 30,244.05 = 86,434.97 \times 20 \text{ months} = \$1,728,699.97$) with no real qualification nor explanation on the form to be submitted 4/30/22. He stated that we did not need that much to pay for the list of needed items and suggested putting \$655k ARPA funds into the 2021-2022 budget to reimburse wages already in the budget. He stated that he would then take money that was budgeted for wages and add expenditures in this year's budget to pay the needed items:

- \$30k-garage lift (but we may be able to limp along until the February grant cycle and apply for part of that cost)
- \$60k-2 new or used pickups
- \$75k-mowers
- \$8k-tire changer repair
- \$20k-gazebo repairs

- \$8k-debt service on new garbage truck (Hope we can get it before 7/1 and finance a \$165K truck for 4 years, guessing at the installment payment.)
- \$20k-tools
- \$20k-paving a section of Maple Hill
- \$10k-tree removal at Fincastle
- \$15k-server in Treasurer's office
- \$10k-flooring in Municipal Building
- \$1k-copier lease (48 months lease not purchase)
- \$27k-electric sign replacement
- \$36k-replace Police Body Cameras
- \$100k-surveillance cameras (paid in 2 budgets if we can do them)
- \$25k-Bluefield University Construction donation (assuming it comes before 6/30)
- \$15k-repairs to gazebo
- \$85k-Christmas Decorations
- \$20k-unexpected expenses
- \$40k-water projects (some engineering already paid and more expected before 6/30)
625k total

Mr. Holman asked about the \$40k engineering.

Mr. Crewe stated that some had been done and we had already received bills for them. He went over the donation request list next.

- \$1,503 basketball trophies
- \$500 GHS Project graduation (line 10.8130.5640)
- \$175 Robert Duff art work
- \$500 SWVA Community College Educational Foundation (line 10.48.8130.5700)
- \$1,500 (or less) Tazewell County Library (line 10.8130.5658/we've paid \$500 in the past)
- \$500 Brain injury Services (line 10.8131.5610)
- \$2,500 Historic Crab Orchard Museum (line 10.8130.5661)
\$7,178 total

He stated that our total wages (including Police), Town's share of medical insurance, (but not retirement), ran \$3,724,874.66/year. He stated that ARPA could not cover retirement so it was excluded in these calculations, health insurance was set by Anthem each year and we knew that next year would include an 8.5 % increase so it would be based on wages only. He stated that a 2% increase on wages (only) now would be \$60,822.12/year, \$5,068.51/month. He suggested adding \$10,137.02 to this year's budget to pay a 2% increase across the board for the 2 months left in this fiscal year which would help with the inflation and let the employees know that they matter. He stated that it could be done by calling it ARPA funds wage reimbursement but this increase would affect future budgets. He stated that if all of these recommendations were accepted by Council, we would need to transfer \$655k into this year's budget ($\$625k + 7,178 + 10,137.02 = \$642,315.02$).

Mr. Holman asked if there were no intentions to raise rates, could we sustain what we had.

Mr. Crewe stated after the ARPA money and the minimum wage increase that we could not.

Mr. Holt stated that they were putting the brakes on the minimum wage increase and asked how they would be able to sustain this.

Mr. Crewe stated with the reassessment on Real Estate, increase on Personal Property Taxes and Revenue items bringing in more money along with the cuts on the expenditure side.

Mr. Holt stated that he would like to be comfortable beyond the 2024 budget.

Mr. Holman asked if the ARPA money would be used to boost salaries.

Mr. Crewe stated they would have to and it would be supervisors only.

Mr. Holman asked what it would look like post COVID.

Mr. Crewe stated zero because of the structure. He stated that \$655k ARPA money would be in this year's budget to reimburse wages and they would have to account for \$10k for the next two months.

Mr. Holman stated that he felt a lot better about the budget now.

Mr. Crewe stated that this did not include the bridge in Town Square, the contribution to the Sanitary Board, the 2 tourism information requests (\$7,500 Friends of SWVA and \$2,500 Heart of Appalachia Tourism Authority) nor any other project or donation. He stated that Council may decide to include something else and if so then we would have to transfer more ARPA money as wage reimbursement to cover the additional expense but the limit would be \$1,728,699.97. He stated that there would have to be several budget amendments in this year's budget for the ARPA money.

Mr. Holt asked if we should be spending money for tourism.

Mr. Crewe stated yes but we did not have a lot to offer right now.

Mr. Presley asked about the \$400k for Harmony Acres.

Mr. Crewe stated it was dropped to \$100k.

Mr. Holt stated that the donation for the Sanitary Board had already been discussed.

Mr. Holman stated that this was on our side and we should not worry about what the City contributed. He stated that it would not start until 2023 but the board would like to know now and that this would cover the engineering/soft cost.

Mr. Crewe continued and suggested putting \$4,368,463 ARPA into next year's budget to fund:

- \$175k-Fire Dept Air Packs

- \$100k-Fincastle tennis courts repair/painting
- \$100k-Harmony Acres repairs
- \$100k-Depot St Bathrooms, sidewalks, recreation area
- \$1.5 million wages–some supervisor’s reimbursements and some premium pay so everyone (including Police) received more money
- \$ 20k-to complete gazebo repairs
- \$2,368,468-water projects. He stated that he was sure we would get some additional funding for and may not be able to do them all.
\$4,363,468 total

Mr. Holman asked why there was a \$20k increase in the air packs.

Mr. Crewe stated that the quote we had was old plus two more were needed.

Mr. Holman asked about the Police Department salaries.

Mr. Crewe stated \$362,928.56 in supervisory pay per year which would total \$1.8 million year wage increase (not including social security/Medicare/retirement).

Mr. Holman asked if the \$60k going forward included the Police Department.

Mr. Crewe stated yes. He stated that in the long run it would double or triple because of the 2% increase on top of a 2% increase.

Mr. Holt asked if the increase in meals tax, personal property tax and real estate tax would offset it.

Mr. Crewe stated yes.

Mr. Holt asked with the increase in revenue coming in, could they offset the health insurance increase and not have any additional cost to the employees.

Mr. Crewe stated yes but it would mean less to pay towards something else.

Mr. Holt stated that he was okay with trimming their wish list to help the employees.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE

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

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Vice-Mayor Holt added a vote to pay the invoice for the Youth Basketball trophies to the agenda.

Vice-Mayor Holt made a motion to approve the amended agenda. Councilmember Holman 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

None.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

None.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS AND REPORTS

Town Properties, ROLL CALL VOTE – Trent Crewe (attached at end of minutes)

Mr. Crewe stated that the pump station and the old school had been taken off of the list given. He asked for a motion to declare the properties surplus to be auctioned.

Mr. Presley made a motion to declare the properties surplus. Mr. Holt 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 declaring the properties surplus.

Mayor Linkous asked that staff get the list to Eddie Pauley soon.

NEW BUSINESS AND REPORTS

Budget Amendment, ROLL CALL VOTE – Kim Hernandez

PURPOSE: Restitution Payment (Tammy Reeves)

| Revenue | | | |
|------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| Line Item | Original Budget | Amended Budget | Change |

| | | | | |
|-----------|-----------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 0400-0413 | Misc. State | <u>\$203,530.12</u> | <u>\$206,030.12</u> | <u>\$2,500.00</u> |
| | Law Enforcement | <u>\$203,530.12</u> | <u>\$206,030.12</u> | <u>\$2,500.00</u> |

Expenditure

| Line Item | | Original Budget | Amended Budget | Change |
|------------------|----------|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 3110-1620 | Court | <u>\$9,000.00</u> | <u>\$11,500.00</u> | <u>\$2,500.00</u> |
| | Overtime | <u>\$9,000.00</u> | <u>\$11,500.00</u> | <u>\$2,500.00</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 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 the budget amendment.

Youth Basketball Trophies, ROLL CALL VOTE

Mr. Holt made a motion to approve paying the invoice for the youth basketball trophies. Mr. Presley 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 paying the Youth Basketball Trophies invoice.

CITIZENS COMMENTS

Dave Wohlford stated that a couple of weeks ago his granddaughters had a game at the Rec Park and the game was bumped from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. by Bluefield College. He stated that the park was for the kids and not the college. He asked that they fix it because this was unacceptable. He talked about the ATV/4wheelers trail and asked that council talk to the public to see if it was something they wanted in the town. He asked how they could justify \$100k to paint pickle ball courts when they could build one for that amount. He stated that if they voted to approve this expenditure then they all needed to turn in their resignations.

Lee Riffe, Historical Society stated that they would be feeding the Town Employees again at the Sanders House on June 14th. He stated that he would send the invite to Kim for the employees. He stated that a few of them would be meeting with the VFW on Thursday at 10 a.m. to discuss ideas for a Veteran's Day program. He stated that the Historical Society would like to work with our tourism person here and that they would be scheduling a meeting with Mike Pulice, Virginia Department of Historic Resources to come and do a short walk through followed by a presentation to council.

POLICE CHIEF'S REPORT

None.

TOWN MANAGER'S/ATTORNEY'S REPORT

Little League Opening Day

Mr. Crewe stated that the Little League Opening Day and Golf Tournament all went well.

VCC Letter of Support

Mr. Crewe stated that a letter of support was asked to be sent to Virginia Coalfield Coalition's Regional Cell Coverage Project and had been done.

Shott Foundation

Mr. Crewe state that the Shott Foundation had tabled the donation request they received until he could come and give a presentation to the board on June 17th.

Brownfield Grant

Mr. Crewe stated that the kickoff meeting for revitalizing the downtown area would be on May 3rd at 7 p.m. He stated that anyone would be able to attend and ask questions.

VACORP Renewal

Mr. Crewe stated that the town's insurance renewal proposal did go down this year but he would need to look at increasing our cyber security coverage. He stated that something else he wanted to look into was our Fire Department being covered on the way to calls.

Gas Company

Mr. Crewe stated that staff had met with the Gas Company at Harmony Acres regarding putting in a new line. He stated that they would be tearing up part of the parking but would repave and restripe it.

Police Appreciation Walk

Mr. Crewe stated that the Police Appreciation Walk would be held on May 17th at 5:30 p.m. at Town Hall.

Mike Pulice Visit

Mr. Crewe stated that they were working on a date for Mike Pulice to come back and do his presentation.

City of Bluefield Discussion

Mr. Crewe stated that staff had been in discussions with the City regarding a state line marker. He stated that there would be something shaped like a diamond that would look like coal during the day and a diamond at night.

Fincastle Tennis Courts

Mr. Crewe clarified that the \$100k would be to revamp all 4 of the tennis courts, fencing, pickle ball, etc.

Tazewell County BOS Reallocation of Funds, ROLL CALL VOTE

Mrs. Hernandez stated that a few years ago Charlie Stacy had agreed to give money to the downtown group working on putting up a mural. She stated that nothing ever happened with that and that if council approved, he would reallocate those funds to the new Christmas decorations.

Mr. Holt approved the reallocation of funds from Tazewell County BOS. Mr. Presley 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 the reallocation of funds from Tazewell County BOS.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Mr. DeGray stated that it was a good meeting and he was more comfortable with the budget.

Mr. Holman agreed and asked if they would be locked into the list for the ARPA funding.

Mr. Crewe stated that it had to be reported by April 30th but could change.

Mr. Holman stated that he was getting some complaints about the trash at Ridgeview apartments.

Mr. Crewe stated that we had an ordinance and could address it.

Mr. Holt asked that this year's budget be sent to him. He thanked Public Works for helping with opening day and stated that they did a great job. He thanked the Recreation Department for the Easter Event and although he wanted to respond to the ugly comments on Facebook, he chose not to. He stated that they had asked that more things be held at the Rec Park and he appreciated their effort in doing so. He stated that he was not sure where Mr. Wohlford heard that the Town was in support of the ATV's in the town that it would be something that they had to discuss. He stated that he saw some pictures on Facebook of some being in the town.

Chief Gunter stated that they were coming out of Pocahontas.

Mr. Holt stated that the Sheriff's Department was struggling with this issue as well and that this was something that Bluefield, WV was discussing.

Mr. Wohlford asked who agreed to give the college kids the priority on using the fields. He stated that he had called the Rec Director 3 times and had finally left a message but had not received a return call.

Mr. Holt stated that it was leased to the Little League.

Mr. Wohlford stated that it needed to come from the town and be addressed.

Mr. Holt stated that they had their own board members and suggested he talk to Jarried McFarland.

Mr. Trigg stated that there was a pole leaning on the basketball courts at the Depot Street playground and asked that staff look at it. He stated that there was also some issues when it rained across the railroad tracks and asked that they look at it as well. He thanked staff for putting a chain on the gate that it had helped.

Mrs. Payne agreed that it was a good meeting and also felt better about the budget.

Mr. Presley reminded everyone about the Patchwork Quilters show on June 24-25. He stated that the grant writing event he attended would help the small business owners in the downtown to write grants. He asked about the road to Falls Mills being fixed, invited Collin O'Donnell, The Grind to meet with Eric Workman about putting in something at the Love's Gas Station. He stated that he felt good about the budget and asked about the water in Aramark's parking lot.

Mr. Crewe stated that Public Works had met with them and given them some options which they did not like.

Mr. Presley stated that he was the Wade Center President and they had missionaries coming in to help with things.

Mrs. Hernandez suggested the Community Clean-up Day in May.

Gail Cook asked if there were any areas for some 5th graders to clean up.

Mrs. Hernandez stated that she would check and let her know.

Mr. Presley reminded everyone about the post-it note project and to Remember God and do great things. He gave a shout out to Chief and his staff and stated that all of our staff was great.

Mayor Linkous asked if the ATV's were licensed and had state inspection stickers, etc. how we could stop them.

Chief Gunter stated that it was illegal by our Town Code Ordinance.

Mr. Presley suggested giving them the rules for WV and VA.

Mr. Crewe stated that the law applied differently in the Town and that VA State Law was different than WV State Law.

Mr. Holt suggested sending a letter to the Trail Authority letting them know the Town's ordinance.

Mayor Linkous stated that he was at the Easter Event and was overwhelmed by the amount of people. He stated that Public Works did a great job parking cars. He stated that even though they ran out of eggs, the kids had a good time. He stated that there was only one play area for the kids to play on and asked that it be expanded.

Heather, Recreation Department stated that they had talked about adding something next to the soccer field, etc.

Mayor Linkous stated that when his grandkids got to the Easter Event that it was already over but they had fun. He asked about hiring a pool company to fix the pool and stated that the Town of Tazewell had events planned from now through September and we had nothing. He stated that all of staff did a great job and they needed to take care of the needs before the wants.

Betty Kuppusami asked that Lee Riffe promote their Quilt Show with all of his groups.

Jay Ferguson, FUMC stated that he met Levi Turner who he had not met until that evening. He stated that they were working with Bluefield, WV on May 13th on an event at the Church of Nazarene. He stated that they were also working on networking and efficiency and that it was hard to schedule things around Easter to allow the churches to participate. He stated that they needed time to plan to help with events.

Heather stated that they had reached out to Amy in March.

Mr. Ferguson stated that was too late for them to participate.

ADJOURN

Mayor Linkous adjourned the meeting at 8:46 p.m.

D.S. Linkous, Mayor

Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk