

**Town of Bluefield
Town Council
Minutes
May 25, 2021**

The Bluefield, Virginia Town Council held a regularly scheduled Town Council Meeting on Tuesday, May 25, 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
Jarrod Bailey, Councilmember
Chuck Presley, Councilmember
Cathy Payne, Councilmember
Anglis Trigg, Councilmember
Rick Holman, Councilmember

ALSO PRESENT

Trent Crewe, Manager/Town Attorney
Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk
Shane Gunter, Police Chief
James Hampton, Treasurer/Transit Dir.
12 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

Jim Drake, Parkview Baptist Church led 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 and consent agenda. Councilmember Presley seconded the motion.

Mayor Linkous asked 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.

NEW BUSINESS AND REPORTS

Resolution for Katie Benson – Mayor Linkous

Mayor Linkous asked for a motion to approve the Resolution for Katie Benson.

Mr. Presley made a motion to approve the Resolution for Katie Benson. Mrs. Payne seconded the motion.

Mayor Linkous asked 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

Special Presentation: Katie Benson Resolution – Mayor Linkous

Mayor Linkous asked Ms. Benson to come forward and read the following resolution:

TOWN OF BLUEFIELD

RESOLUTION

GRAHAM HIGH SCHOOL KATIE BENSON

WHEREAS, Graham High School Cross Country Runner/Swimmer/Track & Field Athlete, Katie Benson began competitive swim with the Tazewell Torpedoes in 2010 and began competitive running in 2013 at the age of 11 and was the winner of the 5k Autumn Jamboree in the girls division; and

WHEREAS, during her freshman year (2017-2018) she was District Runner-Up in Cross Country, was a part of the girl's team winning District & Region Championships and was a State Qualifier placing 25th in State. She was also a State Qualifier in Swim, was the Region Runner-Up in the 1600M, State Qualifier in the 1600M and the 4x400 relay and was 10th in State for the 1600M for Track & Field; and

WHEREAS, during her sophomore year (2018-2019) she was a State Qualifier and placed 32nd in State for Cross Country, was Region Champion in the 100 Breaststroke and was a State Qualifier in Swim, was the District Runner-Up in the 1600M & 3200M, Region Runner-Up in the 1600M and was the Region Champion in the 3200M in Track & Field and was also a State Qualifier in the 1600M placing 9th in the State with a GHS school record time of 5:41.69. She also placed 4th in State and was All-State in the 3200M with a GHS school record time of 12:22.81; and

WHEREAS, during her junior year (2019-2020) she was a State Qualifier and placed 17th in State for Cross Country, was a State Qualifier in the 100 Breaststroke placing 8th in State and was All-State in Swim. She was unable to compete in Track & Field during her junior year due to COVID; and

WHEREAS, during her senior year (2020-2021) she was District & Region Champion and was Runner of the Year as well as a State Qualifier and All-State placing 2nd in State with a GHS school record time of 19:16.60, was District & Region Champion in the 100 Breaststroke, State Qualifier in the 100 Breaststroke and placed 8th in State and was All-State in Swim. She will compete in this year's upcoming season for Track & Field; and

WHEREAS, Katie is a 10 time State Qualifier, a 4 time All-State and a 4 time Region Champion;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, THAT THE TOWN COUNCIL OF BLUEFIELD, VIRGINIA, hereby recognizes Graham High School Athlete Katie Benson on her successful high school career in Cross Country, Swim and Track & Field.

Adopted and presented this 25th day of May 2021.

D.S. Linkous, Mayor

Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk

Mayor Linkous asked council if they had any comments.

Mr. Trigg congratulated her and told her to always do right.

Mrs. Payne congratulated her on a job well done.

Mr. Presley stated that she had done awesome.

Mr. Holman stated that she had a sheet of accomplishments.

Mr. Bailey congratulated her.

Mayor Linkous stated that she was also a hero and had saved a little girls life. He thanked her for what she had done.

Bluefield College Update – Josh Cline/ Dr. Olive

Mr. Cline stated that Bluefield College had their upcoming centennial year this year (100 years). He stated that they would have another book coming out at the end of it. He stated that the college originally had planned to be in Wytheville but due to the donation of land and the hard efforts of the citizens of Bluefield along with the Chamber who took out pledge cards for donations that the college was located here. He stated that the college had a \$20 million impact on this area

and was community minded. He stated that they were thankful for the relationship they had with the Town and that we would be receiving an invitation in August for the centennial. He stated that they had sent a letter to council and Trent for the possibility of a project (handed out copies) that was the vision of Dr. Olive and others who had come up with the ideas.

Dr. Olive thanked council for 100 years of serving the community. He stated that the title of the project was "Centennial Entrance Way". He stated that 14 years ago he had worked with an architect on this project/entryway. He stated that the current sign sit parallel to College Avenue and the new project would showcase two signs, one on each side of the entryway that was perpendicular and in the roundabout they had talked about putting a fountain there but noted the issues that the Town had with its water fountain and with things such as someone accidentally falling in, getting hurt, etc. and went away from that idea and chose to bring the flags down that were currently at Lansdale to the center of the circle adding the state flag as well. He stated that it would be a raised bed that was landscaped and would be something of a commemorative nature. He stated that the drawing gave the topography and showed the hills and they were also looking at closing the Van Dyke entry sending all traffic through the main entrance. He stated that they would maintain the entrance on Stadium Drive and that they were asked by the trustees if an extension with Cumberland Road would tie into this as well. He stated that it would have to be widened and would require work on the hillside/rock ledge but that there was room there to do so. He stated that Phase 1 was signage, Phase 2 was the roundabout and Phase 3 depending upon fundraising would be the connector with Van Dyke and the roundabout circle. He stated that if they could not do Phase 3 then they would not have the connector coming across. He stated that they would have to have the elevation adjusted as well on that section. He stated that Philip Bailey designed this to where the Town's Fire Department ladder truck could go around the roundabout and some smaller shortened trucks but not a full size semi-truck.

Mr. Holman asked what their timeline for the phases were and if they were trying to coincide with the centennial.

Dr. Olive stated yes that the work would start in the summer.

Mr. Holman asked if Phase 3 was easier.

Dr. Olive stated that it added more time for grading, etc.

Mr. Holman asked if they would do Phase 3.

Dr. Olive stated if money allowed. He went over the following numbers:

- \$25,000 East-facing sign
- \$25,000 West-facing sign
- \$30,000 Center section with new flag poles
- \$150,000 Parking lot extension and elimination of Van Dyke Circle entrance
- \$250,000 Asphalt

Mr. Bailey asked if the \$150k and the \$250k was combined in Phase 3.

Dr. Olive stated that it could be and the total project cost was \$480,000.

Mr. Presley stated that it was a great project and he was glad they were in Town.

Dr. Olive stated that this project would also help with community events held on campus and at the Chapel.

Mayor Linkous stated that the presentation was fabulous and that this was a fundraiser and asked if they were asking the Town to be a part of it.

Dr. Olive stated that he would love to have the Town's involvement and work together.

Mayor Linkous stated that he had lunch with them months ago and talked about this. He asked where they currently were on fundraising and asked if they could get it all within the next 90 days could they get it done or one area to focus on to get done for the 100 year celebration such as the flags and signs.

Dr. Olive stated that they had \$125k in gifts and pledges as of today.

Mayor Linkous asked that they talk to Trent and stated that there could be a 1-3 year commitment with the Town which would be easier to do. He stated that personally he would like to see us do something on this project that it was the heartbeat of the Town of Bluefield and we reaped the benefits with the restaurants, etc. He stated that this was something we could be proud of and would entice the Bluefield area making the entrance to our Town look better.

Mr. Bailey asked if the Town could do a commitment over a number of years would they be willing to finance the entire project.

Dr. Olive stated yes and that they had one donor who had pledged over a time frame.

Mr. Bailey suggested over 5 years to complete.

Dr. Olive stated that was the way they did the Science Center with the help from the IDA front funding some resources.

Mr. Holman stated that there was a long history of the college and economic development.

Mayor Linkous suggested grant funding.

Mr. Crewe stated there were some possibilities of funding such as for the sidewalks which would benefit the general population and stretching the entrance way. He stated that the IDA had access to other local and state grants along with matching grants. He stated that he had received an email from VML earlier for non-competitive funding around \$500k which was based on population and there were also other pots of money available for competitive infrastructure such as moving water/sewer lines.

Mr. Holman asked if widening roads would be state money.

Mr. Crewe stated that it would depend on which piece of the money applied for that there were multiple funding sources and that the IDA had access to state funding.

Mayor Linkous asked that staff look into this soon and come up with a plan/goal. He suggested the Cumberland Plateau, etc. and to ask for all the free money they could get.

Mr. Crewe stated that they had already started some inquiries with local foundations, etc.

Citizen Requests – Rajeev Chopra

Mr. Chopra stated that it was grass mowing season and he would like to see some reform taken in the current code regarding this. He stated concerning vacant lots that they should be considered on a different schedule vs. houses in neighborhoods. He stated to mow his vacant lot that he had to take his bobcat from a jobsite in order to mow it. He stated that he understood if there was a home on both sides that it needed to be mowed but if someone lived near a vacant lot then they should know it would not get mowed regularly and asked that it be considered on a different schedule. He stated that the next thing he would like for council to consider was pertaining to his sign he had at First Sentinel Bank. He stated that he had been approached by Aarons and Southwest Virginia Community College asking to rent a space on it. He stated that he would like to be able to rent spaces on it to help cover the costs of maintenance but in the past it was not allowed because it was off premises and he would like to see that changed. He stated that he was closing on the Horwitz property located behind Subway that he had bought it because it was such an eyesore and would be revamping it and had a major corporation with a letter of intent moving into that location. He stated that the Gabe's and Goodwill store went over well in Bluefield, WV and he would like to see that in Bluefield, VA. He stated that he offered to buy the retention ponds to maintain them but they would not sell and that there was a national drug chain that wanted to located across from Corner Mart but with the wetlands you had to put back two to one.

Mr. Holman asked what the current code was on grass.

Mr. Crewe stated that anything measuring 10 ½ inches and above was in violation.

Mayor Linkous stated that he had talked with other landowners and a lot of them received letters as well. He stated that he would like to have a Work Session and tweak some changes. He stated that in years past Mr. Chopra had come to them and had to fight rules that got in the way and he hoped they could change them.

Mr. Chopra stated that it was worth discussing and he would also like for them to consider allowing him to rent spaces on his sign.

Mr. Crewe stated that by first calling the owner usually took care of the problem and after that a letter was sent to them with a process that followed. He stated that there were 3 large entities that this affected with Mr. Chopra being one of them.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

None.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS AND REPORTS

None.

NEW BUSINESS AND REPORTS

2021/2022 Budget, ROLL CALL VOTE

Mayor Linkous asked for a motion to approve the 2021/2022 budget as presented.

Mr. Presley made a motion to approve the 2021/2022 Budget. Mrs. Payne seconded the motion.

Mayor Linkous 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 COMMENTS

Gail Cook thanked the Town for their help at the Sanders House. She stated that they recently revamped the Historical Society Board with Eva Saunders, 97 years old stepping down. She stated that she had recently been sick but came last night and had been a great asset to the Historical Society along with Norma Davis, 93 years old who stepped down as well. She stated that some others included Barbara Bates and Cis Barrett. She introduced the new Historical Society board president Lee Riffe and went over the other officers:

Vice-President: Omi Oakes
Treasurer: Tammy Little
Secretary: Peg Scott

She stated that they were looking for new members to work with them and that new signs would be going up at the Railroad Museum and at the front entrance. She stated that they were

working on deep cleaning the floors and fireplaces along with the curtains being professionally cleaned and were attempting to wash the sheers. She invited everyone to come and visit them and stated that summer tours would begin June 2nd.

Mayor Linkous congratulated Mr. Riffe.

Mrs. Payne asked that those who had stepped down be honored.

Mayor Linkous asked council to brain storm and come up with some ideas.

Mr. Bailey asked how long Eva had been with the Historical Society.

Ms. Cook stated that she was one of the first on the Historical Society and that was early 2000 and had been the president for several years.

POLICE CHIEF'S REPORT

Chief Gunter stated that his two newest recruits had graduated the academy, Ashley Lusk and Jared Barger. He stated that the department was once again fully staffed.

TOWN MANAGER'S/ATTORNEY'S REPORT

Mr. Crewe stated that the project and activity sheets told a lot of what he had been doing. He stated that Town Offices would be closed on May 31st for Memorial Day. He reminded council that the June 8th meeting had been rescheduled to June 1st. He stated that he and James had been working on the budget and according to VML the amount of money the Town should receive was around \$518,468 but had a few strings attached such as Virginia had to ask for it and as of now they had not yet requested it. He stated that there were a couple of other pots of money as well. He stated that The Grind was now properly opened and operating with a 60 day permit. He stated that there was some teeth gnashing and pointing of fingers but they now had a checklist of things to finish within 60 days. He stated that his top priority was to get them properly opened. He stated that the Governor had moved up the date on restrictions to May 28th which included outdoor events and that the carnival would be in Town beginning June 4-13 and would set up on the Virginia side as they had done in the past as long as the number restrictions were released and if not then they would set up on the WV side. He stated that they had 3 rides less than usual but had not lost their vendors/food trucks. He stated that a reception for Brittne would be held tomorrow from 12-1:30 p.m. and invited everyone to stop by that she was a dear employee who was relocating to Lynchburg. He stated regarding the resolution for Mike Goins that we were supposed to have had the information needed this morning but had not gotten anything so far and regarding Mr. Harris and his water line issues he discussed during the last meeting that he did in fact have one of the new meters and that James could have looked up at the last meeting when his water was running but that Mr. Harris was not happy because the issue was not on our side. He stated regarding Dave Wohlford and the lime deposit that we did not add anything to our water. He stated that the golf walk through happened late today and went well and that National Pools also started today and it would take two weeks to one month to complete. He stated that the car wash was cleaned up by making a few phone calls. He stated that with the Police Chief's help that the senior class would have a parade tomorrow at 1 p.m. starting at Virginia Avenue United Methodist Church and would be led by a police officer and ending at GHS. He stated that the Circuit Court Special Elections

would be held on November 2nd and we were waiting on the Department of Elections to tell us when petitions needed to be turned in, etc. which we hoped to have in the next few weeks. He stated that he had granted permission for pickle ball to be played at Fincastle on the tennis courts. He stated that it would consist of 6 pickle ball courts and the group which consisted of middle age and above would be investing \$10k into the courts for this. He stated that Chief Gunter did not mention but during the Police Walk that all of the officers were called out for an overdose at the Shell and that Jonathan Phillips was one of those officers. He read the following quote from a letter of recognition given to Officer Phillips by the shift supervisor that stated: "Chief, Earlier today officers were dispatched to Shell in reference to a male passed out in the bathroom. Officer Phillips was the first officer on scene and Officer Byrd along with myself arrived a short time later. Prior to my arrival Officer Phillips had already administered one dose of Narcan and had begun CPR. Upon my arrival I entered and observed Officer Phillips exhaustingly continue to render aid (CPR & another Narcan dose). Officer Phillips was calm, very helpful to rescue and professional through the duration of this call. I felt as if this was worthy of acknowledgement and was a good representation of our department". He stated that his quick action and application of training most likely saved this individuals life and that he was just doing his job and people recognized that.

Mayor Linkous asked if he lived.

Mr. Crewe stated yes. He also mentioned that Ashley Lusk was the #1 marksman at the academy.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Mr. Bailey had none.

Mr. Holman stated that recognitions were far and few in between and it meant a lot when you had a servants heart and that it should be extended to all employees. He stated that they did not want to be taken for granted and thanked all of the officers for what they did.

Mr. Trigg asked that portable bathrooms be placed at the Depot Street playground and for them to also look at building some there as well. He stated that all of staff did a good job and that Trent had been busy.

Mrs. Payne stated that she was at The Grind last night and it was very busy. She stated that as she was leaving that she walked through the gazebo and it needed some help that pavers were either missing or broken and it needed some new paint. She asked Chief if they could patrol a little extra at the Colonial Garden apartments that she had almost been hit twice pulling out there and that you could also not see up the hill because of the trees.

Chief Gunter stated that they would pay extra attention to that area.

Mr. Presley thanked everyone for coming out and thanked Trent for reminding them of the great employees they had. He asked about people leaving their trash cans out all week.

Mr. Crewe stated that if they were on their side of the yard then there was nothing prohibiting it unless they did an ordinance for such. He stated that another thing he forgot to mention was a house where there were eight people living in with several pets that anytime anyone went into it that they had to wear hazmat suits to be able to go inside. He stated that it was a rented property and that the owners who lived in North Carolina did not know was happening but was working to get it fixed.

Mayor Linkous stated the hill going up to Rick's house on the right hand side needed to be fixed where it had been destroyed from trucks and asked that it be addressed with Public Works to fix.

Mr. Crewe stated that they had fixed halfway and were aware that they needed to fix the remainder of it. He stated that we were now fully staffed and had hired two mechanics as well. He stated that we had a lady doing community service who was helping at Town Hall and that we were gradually catching up on things.

Mayor Linkous asked if we had received the census report yet that he thought we fell below now only requiring 50 signatures instead of 125.

Mr. Crewe stated nothing yet.

Mayor Linkous stated that they also needed to talk about people mowing grass and leaving it in the street, changing the modular home ordinance that he thought when it changed that it allowed for doublewides to be put in Town if they were on a permanent foundation but that was not true because they were inspected by two different groups. He stated that he would like to see us allow doublewides under that code because an individual out by Dudley wanted to put one in that cost \$140k but was unable to do so. He stated that he would also like for them to look at the sign ordinance and the ordinance for billboards that if they wanted people to come here then they needed to attract people including ATV groups. He stated that he knew Kim did not want him to mention this but that her daughters were on a competition cheer team that had won two national championships and that there were around 5 on this team from Bluefield, VA. He asked that she convey their congratulations to the team. He thanked everyone for coming to the meetings and stated one other thing was he had some complaining that they had put out their recycling and no one got it.

Mr. Crewe stated that he would address it.

A citizen thanked the Police Department for informing him one night that his garage doors were open and advised him to close them due to recent break-ins in the area.

Mr. Presley asked if grass being in the roadways was a misdemeanor in the County.

Chief Gunter stated that it was a State Statue and applied locally as well.

Mayor Linkous suggested that they get the word out in the next newsletter.

ADJOURN

Mayor Linkous asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. Presley made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:58 p.m. Mr. Bailey seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

D.S. Linkous, Mayor

Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk