

**Town of Bluefield
Town Council
Minutes
September 27, 2022**

The Bluefield, Virginia Town Council held a regularly scheduled Town Council Meeting on Tuesday, September 27, 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
Cathy Payne, Councilmember
Chuck Presley, Councilmember
Rick Holman, Councilmember
Anglis Trigg, Councilmember
Greg DeGray, Councilmember
Ron Holt, Vice-Mayor

ALSO PRESENT

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

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Linkous called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Mayor Linkous asked the Clerk to read the Executive Session.

MOTION FOR CLOSED MEETING

It is hereby moved that the Council of the Town of Bluefield, Virginia enter into a closed meeting pursuant to Section 2.2-3711 (A) (1) of the Code of Virginia as amended, The specific purpose for this motion is to discuss the following matter(s):

Discussion, consideration, or interviews of prospective candidates for employment; assignment, appointment, promotion, performance, demotion, salaries, disciplining, or resignation of specific public officers, appointees, or employees of any public body with such closed meeting being confined to the following subject (s): Town Manager.

Mayor Linkous asked for a motion to enter into Executive Session.

Councilmember Presley made a motion to enter into Executive Session as described above. Councilmember 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: Entered into the meeting after the roll call
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 going into Executive Session.

Mayor Linkous asked for a motion to resume open meeting.

Vice-Mayor Holt made a motion to enter back into regular session. Councilmember Presley seconded the motion.

Mayor Linkous stated that they would be recessing the Executive Session and would be returning after the regular meeting if needed.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE

Lee Riffe led the Invocation. Mayor Linkous led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mayor Linkous added April Christian regarding tents, Art Mead regarding trees and a donation to the GHS Pep Club under Citizen Requests & Special Presentations.

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 Payne seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

CITIZEN REQUESTS & SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

Citizen Request – April Christian

Ms. Christian stated that she was there on behalf of Project Graduation and fundraising. She stated that this year they had been approved by Tazewell County and the school to host a Fall Festival at Graham High School which would include a car show, poker run, Battle of the bands, games, bouncy houses, food vendors, etc. She stated that it was a community event and had called and talked to Kim Hernandez about the tents, tables and chairs. She stated that she was told no

because of gas, labor, etc. and took that back to her parents who were very upset so she called the mayor. She asked if council could approve this for them.

Mayor Linkous stated that she did call and he asked her to come before council to ask for this usage. He stated that he had received calls and people were upset but that he did not have a vote.

Mr. Crewe stated that it was his decision he made about 3 months ago and not Mrs. Hernandez. He stated that the policy was for town sponsored events only because we have been losing tables, chairs, tents and the last event one of the poles flew up injuring someone. He stated that it took 4 men two hours to set up and tear down which was overtime and we did not have the manpower. He stated that he had made the decision and not Kim after we continued to receive multiple request which he had denied. He stated that it was a good event but the town should not be in business of doing this with the manpower and equipment it required and was the reason he decided to only use for town sponsored events.

Mr. Holt stated that it was a simple fix and it benefited the kids in the Town of Bluefield and asked that we help sponsor by allowing them to use. He agreed that we did not need to let everyone use them but that this followed our guidelines.

Mrs. Payne suggested a form detailing the quantity of each they would be using.

Mr. Holt made a motion to approve allowing Project Graduation to use the items. 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 allowing Project Graduation to use the items above.

Citizen Request – Art Mead

Mr. Mead stated that the Graham Historical Society met last night and unanimously voted to authorize \$2,500 in matching dollar for dollar to purchase trees/large shrubs costing \$210 each to be planted on the side closest to the carwash to shield/screen that area. He stated that there would be 22 plants and they were seeking out gifts to match having 5 donations so far. He asked if the Town would make a \$1k contribution to the Graham Historical Society so that they could get the trees planted in October.

Mrs. Payne asked if the \$210 covered everything.

Mr. Mead stated yes with a 2 year warranty.

Mr. Riffe stated that he believed it was a 1-2 year warranty. He stated that they would be 6-7ft. when planted and would grow to 20ft.

Mr. Holt made a motion to approve donating \$1k to the Graham Historical Society. 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 donating \$1k to the Graham Historical Society.

Mr. Mead thanked council and stated that for what it was worth that the cemetery used to loan out their tent and had to stop.

Citizen Request – GHS Pep Club

Mayor Linkous stated that the GHS Pep Club president started a project to raise money for students who could not afford to get into sporting events. He stated that the principal received a letter from the school board in agreement to allow this because a student was the one who started this and it paid for those students to get into the events. He asked that council donate \$1k towards this.

Mr. Holt made a motion to approve donating \$1k for this cause. Mr. Presley seconded the motion.

Mr. Holman asked if this money would carry over if not all were used.

Mayor Linkous stated yes. He 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 donating \$1k to this cause.

Mr. Crewe cautioned them on the donations and stated that he had received 4 requests that day.

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: Trade in old Taser devices

Revenue		Original Budget	Amended Budget	Change
Line Item				
0400-0413	Misc. Law	<u>\$155,803.34</u>	<u>\$160,103.34</u>	<u>\$4,300.00</u>
	Enforcement	<u>\$155,803.34</u>	<u>\$160,103.34</u>	<u>\$4,300.00</u>

Expenditure		Original Budget	Amended Budget	Change
Line Item				
3110-8106	Grants	<u>\$18,750.00</u>	<u>\$23,050.00</u>	<u>\$4,300.00</u>
		<u>\$18,750.00</u>	<u>\$23,050.00</u>	<u>\$4,300.00</u>

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

ARPA Budget Amendments, ROLL CALL VOTE – Trent Crewe

Mr. Crewe asked that council approve moving an additional \$105,618.28 out of the ARPA line item and putting into the individual departments as shown.

Line Item	Department	Original Budget	Amended Budget	Change
10.1200.1100 Salaries -Regular	Manager	\$182,499	\$185,078.40	\$2,579.20
10.1241.1100 Salaries -Regular	Treasurer	\$90,360	\$94,847.90	\$4,488.32
10.1243.1100 Salaries -Regular	Bookkeeping	\$84,223	\$87,051.20	\$2,828.20
10.1252.1100 Salaries -Regular	Vehicle Maint.	\$65,970	\$77,659.50	\$11,690.00
10.4230.1100 Salaries -Regular	Refuse	\$183,902	\$187,200.00	\$3,297.60
10.4320.1100 Salaries -Regular	Town Hall	\$25,126	\$27,560.00	\$2,433.60
10.7140.1100 Salaries -Regular	Cemetery	\$54,846	\$81,582.40	\$26,736.00
34.4816.1100 Salaries -Regular	Transit	\$191,800	\$211,952.00	\$20,152.48
40.1230.1100 Salaries -Regular	Fincastle Building	\$201,419	\$232,833.08	\$31,412.88
Total Increase				\$105,618.28

10.9100.5860 American Rescue Plan Act(ARPA)	\$4,038,766	\$3,933,147.90	\$105,618.28
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Mayor Linkous stated that it was hard to discuss wages in an open session.

Mr. Crewe stated that this was changed based of what council had asked him to do at the last meeting.

Mayor Linkous asked if Public Works was \$15 across the board.

Mr. Crewe stated those who had been here longer.

Mr. Holman asked if there was contingency to build these into the budget.

Mr. Hampton stated yes.

Mr. Crewe stated that the increase in personal property would be enough to cover it.

Council asked how much the total was last time.

Mrs. Hernandez stated \$264,701.92.

Mr. Crewe stated that by adding this it should get all up where they needed to be.

Mr. Holman asked how long these numbers were good through.

Mr. Crewe stated June 30th.

Mr. Holman asked what they needed to do to get towards the \$15/hour without creating a deficit.

Mr. Crewe stated that it would take care of itself and would not cause a hole in the budget.

Mr. Holt stated that the meals tax and personal property tax should cover it.

Mrs. Payne stated that she did not remember seeing the Cemetery on the last one.

Mr. Crewe stated it was because of a Public Works person there.

Mr. Presley made a motion to approve the ARPA Budget Amendments. 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 approving the ARPA Budget Amendments.

Mayor Linkous asked about the bridge and what was going on with it.

Mr. Crewe stated that it was forthcoming.

Mayor Linkous asked if council was ready to instruct the Town Manager to purchase this bridge.

Mr. Crewe cautioned them about piece milling things and that he was bringing it all back for a vote.

Mr. Holman asked if we still had a valid quote.

Mr. Crewe stated that he would have to check.

Mr. Holman asked how much it was.

Mayor Linkous stated over \$100k and it needed to be ordered.

Mr. Holman stated that he would like to get an up to date quote first.

CITIZENS COMMENTS

Collin O'Donnell stated that he was there to give an update on the conditions of the Envision Center. He thanked Brad Ayers for being a great point of contact and stated that a full time position was needed through the town. He stated that his Wytheville location was 1/5 of what he was paying for electricity in Bluefield, they gave him 3 years meals tax back, paid for the sewer and water and right now he was paying for everyone's AEP at Bluefield, was giving up his lounge and his rent was going up which he was told the reason was he was gaining a bathroom because theirs was being turned into a mop station. He stated that the HVAC air intake was in the wrong place which created a high maintenance cost, the kitchen had issues since the building was built and the lease agreements had not been met. He stated that he could only pay half of the last AEP bill, it was listed as residential and that AEP was not helping to fix the situation. He stated that he cannot plug into the left side in the kitchen and could not pay \$1 more to the IDA. He stated that he had spent time talking to the other businesses downtown and he did not know how many of them could last much longer that the businesses were hurting and asked that the town talk to these business owners one on one. He stated that his lease was now on a month to month basis and was giving his 60 day notice to the Town and the IDA that if all of the issues were not fully resolved and he was not fully reimbursed for all that was owed to him that he would vacate the property. He stated that this was the last time he would talk about this issue and that his stress on a personal level was unbelievable.

Joe, The Grind stated that he was 22 years old in college playing football, weightlifting, etc. and could handle that but there was no reason why this should be like this. He stated that it was difficult for him to work with employees because he could not focus that they had invested a lot and this was ridiculous.

Another person with The Grind stated that this was wrong and they came to those who could right the wrong.

Mayor Linkous asked how long he had been paying for the entire building.

Mr. O'Donnell stated 16 months.

Mayor Linkous stated that there were a lot of issues when the building was built. He asked how much money they had in the bank when they opened this business.

Mr. O'Donnell stated a negative \$250.

Mayor Linkous stated that they had done all that they could do and that the community really liked them. He stated that he would not be paying someone else's AEP bill.

Mr. O'Donnell stated that AEP could not give them the information needed and they would end up having to sue AEP which would take forever. He stated that Angela had apologize and stated that her accountant paid all of her expenses but that the money had been approved to fix this.

Mr. Holman asked if they were all sharing the same utilities.

Mayor Linkous stated that he knew the AEP guy who came onsite and he said that it would not work.

Mr. Presley stated that he and Trent had talked about these issues and that they were failing them. He stated that he had talked to Collin a lot and would like to take care of them.

Mr. O'Donnell stated that he was paying \$2,135/month in meals tax.

Mr. Holt stated that he appreciated their business and they needed to get with the IDA that he did not want to see a business fail.

Mr. Crewe asked that they hear the IDA's side that they had met earlier.

Mr. Holt asked that he let him finish and agreed that they needed to talk to the IDA.

Mayor Linkous stated that he felt for sure that the Town Manager and the IDA were very much aware but that council was not. He stated that he did not know the solution but the Town Manager and the IDA would work on it.

Mr. Crewe stated that he understood it was upsetting and that communication was a problem but the IDA had met earlier and the majority of what was discussed was about fixing these issues and they had employed Brad to work on it. He stated that his lease was not a month to month and that the IDA had merged the space from 3 to 2 to accommodate everyone. He stated that they may have to sue Ax to Grind to recover what was owed but that the IDA was aware of

everything he had brought up. He stated that Brad had asked him for a copy of last year's bill to work on getting it fixed.

Mr. O'Donnell stated that it had been there for 45 days.

Mr. Crewe stated that there were some miscommunication issues. He stated that the new leases which would start on October 1st left with Brad after the meeting today.

Mayor Linkous stated that a certified electrician was needed so that they could find where the meters went. He stated that Eddie Anderson could do this.

Mr. Crewe asked where the bills were now and if he could get them.

Mr. O'Donnell stated at The Grind.

Mayor Linkous stated that they all wanted to see them succeed.

Mr. Holt suggested sending a couple members of council to meet with the IDA.

Mr. Crewe asked what council thought they could do over the IDA.

Mayor Linkous stated that he knew it was aggravating and that Trent did not have the answers but they were trying to get them. He stated that it was not council's problem because they gave it to the IDA who were good people. He stated that Brad was trying his best and no one wanted to see them leave.

Lee Riffe invited council to the Employee Luncheon on October 4th, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. at the Sanders House.

POLICE CHIEF'S REPORT

Chief Gunter stated on behalf of his men and women that the salary adjustments were greatly appreciated and that all sent their thanks.

TOWN MANAGER'S/ATTORNEY'S REPORT

Mr. Crewe asked for those who still planned to attend VML to let Kim know and also for any that would be attending the Community Foundation Dinner on October 4th. He stated that he would be making a video presentation along with some of the other managers. He stated that the auditors had been there and were asking for more things than they had previously asked for, the new fire truck was back in the shop for a chip, showed the before and after of the diesel once

polishing was complete. He stated that they used between 11-12 filters and pumped it through which contained bacteria, mold, algae that was growing in the bottom and some rust. He stated that there were fallen trees that had to be cut up, that the Hugh Shott Foundation had declined our grant request, that paving would start anytime depending on the weather, invited council to Todd & Michelle's luncheon at Fincastle on September 30th at 11:30 a.m., that Comcast had reopened their local office, the Envision Center was a big topic and they were trying to fix it, the Bank of Graham roof had come in under budget and the IDA would like to do some other things with the remainder of the money and the gazebo would be installed on Thursday. He stated that the personal property assessment for the Town would be \$10,713,000 which was a 20% overall increase on 4,321 vehicles which average out to about \$14.88 each. He stated that next year there would be a reassessment on Real Estate as well and asked council to think about what they would like to do.

Mayor Linkous stated that James would need to know what to do before the tickets went out that the county did 90% of that figure and David Anderson had asked all municipalities and the county to do the same.

Mr. Holman asked if it would be the assessed value minus 10%.

Mayor Linkous stated if it were \$100 ticket then they would pay on \$90.

Mr. Holman asked if there had been analysis done.

Mr. Hampton stated no that he had just gotten the numbers.

Mr. Holt stated by reducing it they would still see an increase.

Mr. Hampton stated that it would be \$64k on the full increase.

Mr. Crewe stated that they could follow along with the others but this would be a one year deal.

Mayor Linkous stated that they would need to make a motion tonight so that James could start working on them.

Mr. Crewe stated that the motion would be adopting the methodology of Tazewell County.

Mr. Presley made a motion to approve using the methodology of Tazewell County for the personal property taxes. Mr. Trigg seconded the motion.

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

ROLL CALL VOTE

Councilmember DeGray:	Yes
Councilmember Holman:	No
Vice-Mayor Holt:	Yes
Councilmember Presley:	Yes

Councilmember Payne: Yes
Councilmember Trigg: Yes
Mayor Linkous: No Vote Permitted

Motion carried 5-1 in favor of using the methodology of Tazewell County for the personal property taxes.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Mr. DeGray thanked staff, Chief and the Police Department for keeping everything in order.

Mr. Holman stated that he appreciated all employees and the volunteers. He asked if anything would be done regarding the sidewalks this year.

Mr. Crewe stated that it would be two years that we were waiting on VDOT. He stated that another thing he forgot to mention...there will be a flashing sign that is activated by the students to cross at the high school crossing.

Mr. Holman stated that he had received several comments regarding the downtown and they owed it to the Town to take care of the infrastructure and the downtown. He asked if the sign coming off Exit 3 could be fixed.

Mr. Crewe stated that VDOT say they could not replace it.

Mr. Holman congratulated Mr. Holt.

Mr. Holt thanked everyone for their comments and stated that in the future he would be coming off of this board and other boards associated with council. He stated that he would work over the next few meetings and give a date that it was a labor of love to work on the board and that he cared about the town and the people who came to the meetings. He stated that he appreciated all of his colleagues that he worked with over the past 5-6 years.

Mr. Trigg thanked Ron for his time on the board and wished him the best. He thanked staff for what they had done on Vencil Street with the speeding, stated that all were doing a good job even though we did not have enough employees.

Mrs. Payne agreed with all the comments that had been made regarding our employees and congratulated Ron as well. She stated that they were still having issues with speeders at Fincastle and asked when Bluestone Medical would be open.

Mr. Presley said he had heard in November.

Mr. Crewe stated that they had a soft opening but were still working on finishing the inspections.

Mr. Presley thanked all of the employees and stated that he would be in St. Paul on the 12th meeting with their Town Manager. He stated that he had talked to Kim and would be meeting with the downtown businesses on the 27th here, that he was working with the VOTECH to raffle cars and they keep the money to send kids to competitions, etc. and that the guy in charge was Robert Steele and they could help the town if needed.

Mayor Linkous stated that the Homecoming Parade was Thursday. He asked if a gift was purchased for the Miller's.

Mr. Crewe stated yes.

Mayor Linkous stated that there was some misconception when council talked with the citizens and that they could not promise them anything but were always welcome to come before council for anything. He stated that council had recessed to go back into Executive Session but it was late and he did not think they needed to go back in so they were exercising the right not to go back into Executive Session.

Mr. Presley made that motion. 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 to not return to Executive Session.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Mayor Linkous asked the clerk to read the certification.

CERTIFICATION OF EXECUTIVE SESSION

WHEREAS, the Town Council of Bluefield, Virginia convened a closed meeting on September 27, 2022, pursuant to a duly adopted motion, attached hereto, and such closed meeting was convened in accordance with the provisions of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act; and

WHEREAS, the Town Council of Bluefield, Virginia returned to its open meeting held on September 27, 2022.

NOW, THEREFORE, THE COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF BLUEFIELD, VIRGINIA HEREBY CERTIFIES that to the best of each member's knowledge (i) only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act were discussed in the closed meeting held on September 27, 2022, to which this certification applies and (ii) only such public business matters as were identified in the motion convening such closed meeting were heard, discussed, or considered by the Council of the Town of Bluefield, Virginia in such closed meeting.

Mayor Linkous asked for a motion to approve the certification.

Councilmember Presley made a motion to approve the certification. Councilmember 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:	Yes

Motion carried 7-0 approving the certification.

ADJOURN

Mayor Linkous asked for a motion and a second to adjourn.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:16 p.m.

D.S. Linkous, Mayor

Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk