

**Town of Bluefield
Town Council
Work Session
February 13, 2018**

The Bluefield, Virginia Town Council held a Work Session on Tuesday, February 13, 2018 at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Town Hall located at 112 Huffard Drive, Bluefield, Virginia.

TOWN COUNCIL PRESENT

Don Harris, Mayor
Anglis Trigg, Councilmember
Chuck Presley, Councilmember
Jimmy Jones, Councilmember
Ron Holt, Councilmember

ALSO PRESENT

Mike Watson, Town Manager
Matt Freedman, Town Attorney
Shane Gunter, Chief of Police
Lesley Catron, Town Clerk
Kim Hernandez, Executive Assistant
Billie Roberts, Comm. Dev. Coordinator
3 Members of Public

ABSENT

Lee Riffe, Vice-Mayor

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Harris opened the Work Session at 6:04 p.m.

Budget-General Fund

Mr. Watson stated that this was a preliminary copy of the budget and there had not been a lot of changes in the General Fund.

Pg. 3: he stated showed a bond that would be paid off and rolled over into a new piece of equipment. He stated that staff was looking for a new street sweeper and the cost for a new one was \$170k-\$250k.

Mr. Holt asked what the life span was on one.

Mr. Watson stated that the one currently being used was purchased 15 years ago and it also picked up leaves but it was not made to do both. He stated that they purchased a pull behind vacuum to chop up the leaves and the past 2 years they have spent time working on it. He stated that staff was looking to purchase a smaller one that did not require a CDL. He stated that he would be attending a Public Works conference in

Fredericksburg in May and they would have Public Works vehicles there for sale. He stated that he checked with the Town of Tazewell and they rented one for \$1,500 per day and had to go to Richmond to pick it up. He stated that he would like to have one at all times and run the sweeper once a month at least. He stated that the debt payment was already a budgeted item and would not affect the new budget.

Pg. 4: he stated showed paving and where we doubled up this year because we did not do any paving last year. He stated that if there was not a lot to do this year that we could do \$160k.

Mr. Watson stated that there were no raises in the budget other than the Police Department carryover.

Pg. 8: he stated showed that vehicle maintenance never used all of their salary because the full time people that were hired did not stay because of the low pay.

Pg. 9: he stated showed the Police Department salary increases.

Pg. 13: he stated showed the \$160k paving last year which was down from \$170k and the \$10k decrease in the Concrete Work moving it to \$40k.

Pg. 14: he stated showed where two employees retired from Town Hall. He stated that they moved over a part time from the grass crew to custodian and just recently made him full time. He stated that the Town still covered a portion of the retired employees insurance.

Mr. Holt asked what the requirements were for that.

Mr. Watson stated that they had to qualify for retirement thru VRS. He stated that he pulled money from one to the other to balance out salaries. He stated that the Recreation Department was looking at several programs and had requested a bus for the summer park program. He stated that they were working with the attorney to see what needed to be done for that. He stated that the movies this year would be themed movies such as winter in July and they would decorate and have more things going on. He stated that they had received a grant from a local foundation for \$3,500 to help the last couple of years and this year it had been increased to \$5,000. He stated that they would also be approaching the downtown businesses for help in advertising for them for the Famer's Market and had recently had an employee who became a certified lifeguard and would be doing lifeguard lessons. He stated that we would train lifeguards for free but the employee would have to sign an agreement to stay for that summer. He stated that the Wednesday night swims were so popular that they were going to start a second night on Fridays and would cut back on the hours for Sunday for pool parties.

Pg. 18: he stated showed where the local match went down on the Transit. He stated that to qualify it required 100k miles and that the last match on new buses was 3% so it cost the Town \$2,200 to purchase a new bus.

Pg. 19: he stated showed the purchase of the new sweeper.

Pg. 20: he stated showed the changes in the payment. He stated that was it for the General Fund.

Mr. Presley asked if the leaks had been found yet.

Mr. Watson stated that the plant was still running 24 hours and that while it stayed wet that leaks were harder to find. He stated that staff had purchased a line locator to help.

Water Fund

Mr. Watson stated that the water sales were down and he was hoping to come back with a rate increase. He stated that he was looking to put in \$600k in new meters for drive by readings. He stated that we had 30 year old meters and some were not reading which helped the customer out. He stated that the newer ones used magnetic to pick up the flow. He stated that Mrs. Hernandez was helping a lot with the project and was working with Abingdon and Richmond to see the project through.

Mr. Jones asked if Blue Wolf was a big water user.

Mr. Watson stated no. He stated that he would bring the Water Fund back.

Cemetery Fund

Mr. Watson stated there were no changes to the Cemetery Fund. He stated that salaries were paid out of the General Fund.

Insurance Increase

Mayor Harris asked Mr. Watson to discuss the insurance and its effects.

Mr. Watson stated that on Friday he learned that our insurance would be going up 15%. He stated to keep the deductible at \$250, the Town would have to pay an \$86k increase. He stated that co-pays would stay the same but ER visits and maximum out of pocket expense would both go up. He stated that last year there was over a million dollar in claims turned in.

Mr. Jones asked about joining in with the county.

Mr. Watson stated that he had checked on that and it would be of no benefit to the Town. He stated that it would be a \$26k increase to the Town if the deductible went to \$500.

Mr. Holt asked how much the employee paid now for an employee plan.

Mrs. Hernandez stated that it was around \$350 or so per month.

Mr. Holt stated that high ER visits were literally killing people because they could not afford to go to the ER.

Mr. Watson stated that the Town covered 80% and it would be a \$26k vs. \$84k increase.

Mr. Holt stated that they had talked about raising revenue and asked about a cigarette tax.

Mr. Watson stated that the Town already had a tax on cigarettes.

Mr. Holt asked what the rate was.

Mr. Watson stated that it was \$0.10 per pack.

Mr. Holt asked if there was a cap on it.

Mr. Freedman stated that he would check.

Mr. Watson stated that when you raised the cigarette tax that the revenues would go down for a while and people would go out of the Town limits to purchase them.

Mr. Holt asked him to check on raising it to offset the \$84k increase on the insurance.

Mr. Watson stated that current year to date on \$0.10 per pack was \$132k. He stated that we bought stamps and when it was sold to the individuals was when we got the money. He stated that they had a Bluefield, VA tax stamp on them.

Mr. Holt asked what it would be if they increased it 5% with the current sales.

Mr. Watson stated that if it stayed at the current sales it would be \$114k on \$0.05.

Mr. Presley asked if the million dollars spent on claims was ER visits or doctor visits.

Mr. Watson stated that it would be someone who had a continuing illness and not ER visits.

Mr. Holt asked if they raised it 3% - 3 ½% would that offset the insurance increase.

Mr. Watson stated that it would need to be 3.77% or \$0.04 per pack but they would see a decline in the beginning. He stated that it would be better at 5% to cover the drop in sales.

Mr. Holt asked if \$0.05 would do it.

Mr. Watson stated that it would be per pack.

Mayor Harris stated that the Town would still be cheaper than WV. He stated that Mr. Hampton went out periodically to check for tax stamps.

Mr. Watson stated that the Treasurer could confiscate them on the spot.

Mayor Harris asked staff to look at the WV tax to compare.

Town Vehicle Decals

Mr. Watson stated that Town Decals used to be a way to collect a fee. He stated that now they were included on the personal property tax bill and not really used for a fee. He stated that the reason to have them was to be able to use the landfill for free and that the Town received \$1k - \$1,200 on decals. He stated that the language on the bills could be changed to say vehicle registration fee and asked council if they would like to do away with Town decals.

Mayor Harris stated that he had talked to Lang Hurley and the state police had told him that a lot of Towns were doing away with decals.

Mr. Holt asked if they would be voting to get rid of them.

Mr. Watson stated that they could during the meeting.

Mr. Freedman stated that if they were imposed by an ordinance then he would need to look before council voted.

Mr. Watson asked that they vote to allow no new sticker fees while Mr. Freedman looked into it.

Term Limits

Mr. Presley asked that term limits be pushed to the next time since they were running close on time and since Mr. Riffe was not present.

Agenda

Mr. Watson went over the agenda. He stated that Mr. Holt was approached by a citizen who was willing to pay to have In God We Trust put on the police vehicles. He stated that Tazewell County had it on theirs. He stated that he had talked to staff and that they should wait.

Mr. Holt asked what they were waiting on.

Mr. Watson stated that Richlands had a hard time passing it and the vote was 3-2. He stated if they put it on one vehicle then they would put it on all of them to show unity. He stated that it did not change the job that was being done.

Mr. Holt stated that there was no need to put it all over the media because that is what caused a big stir.

Mr. Watson stated that he was not a big fan of having the stickers and it should be optional if the officers wanted to have or not.

Mr. Holt stated that he respected his and the Chief's opinion. He stated that he was approached by a citizen to do this and that he was ok with it as long as it was not made mandatory.

Mr. Presley agreed.

Mr. Trigg stated that he did not know enough about it to give his opinion.

Mr. Jones agreed that it should not be forced.

Chief Gunter stated that he would not want it on one vehicle and not the others. He stated that it needed to be uniformed and asked why it would only be on police vehicles and not all Town vehicles.

Mr. Holt stated that the police vehicles were the most visible ambassador of the Town. He stated that he was proud of the Police Officers and what they were doing.

Chief Gunter stated that for the past few years, he had people come forward offering to pay to do this but as right now he did not have an issue with not having it on the vehicles.

Mr. Watson asked if they would like to keep discussing it or what they would like to do.

Mr. Holt asked that it be tabled until staff could bring back an example of what a sticker would look like.

Mr. Watson stated that he would bring something back.

ADJOURN

Mayor Harris adjourned the Work Session at 7:21 p.m.

Don Harris, Mayor

Lesley Catron, Town Clerk