

**MINUTES – WORKSHOP/RETREAT
BOONE TOWN COUNCIL
February 22, 2021**

CALL TO ORDER

A special meeting of the Boone Town Council was called to order electronically at 9:00 a.m. on Monday, February 22, 2021. Mayor Rennie Brantz presided. Council members present included Mayor Pro-Tem Connie Ulmer, Sam Furgiuele, Dustin Hicks, Nancy LaPlaca and Virginia Roseman. Staff present included Town Manager John Ward, Finance Director Amy Davis and Town Clerk Nicole Harmon. Department Directors were available to speak as needed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No one signed up to speak during the public comment period.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Human Resources Director Dale Presnell presented a memo which may be viewed online at <http://boonenc.iqm2.com/Citizens/Default.aspx> . Mr. Furgiuele asked in terms of the screening of medical claims by Human Resources staff, whether employees had raised any privacy concerns, or if they were aware of this practice. Mr. Presnell answered that there were ways to view health insurance information without viewing specific information that violated employees' privacy. Mr. Furgiuele then asked whether employees were aware of the Employee Assistance Program and whether there had been any change in the usage of the program. Mr. Presnell responded that the numbers remained consistent and that employees were aware of the program. Ms. Davis noted that the program was paid out of the Administration budget. Mr. Ward noted that Mr. Presnell and Ms. Davis had figured out a more streamlined process to be able to continue insurance services without utilizing a broker, which saved approximately \$52,000 per year. Mr. Furgiuele asked if staff knew what the national cost of living increase was for 2021 and how much it would cost the Town to apply that in across the board salary adjustments. Mr. Ward responded that staff had not yet looked into that but would as the budget process progressed.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Cultural Resources Director Mark Freed updated members on accomplishments from the past year including improvements and repairs made to the Jones House, as well as landscaping on the grounds. He also informed members of repairs and improvements that had been made to the Horn in the West property, and applauded the current SAHA staff for their help. Mr. Freed stated that Cultural Resources staff had worked hard in the past year to hold virtual music lessons and concerts due to Covid-19, and had gotten great public response. He indicated that staff had continued to work on the historic downtown walking tour and free app to encourage people to learn more about the history of downtown Boone. He explained that the arbor vitae which had been growing too close to the house had been removed and there had been no damage to the house. In terms of budgetary items, Mr. Freed asked for new sewage lines to be installed from the administration building at Daniel Boone Park down the edge of the parking lot and up to the main bathroom at the amphitheatre. He also asked for funding in the amount of \$20,000 for next year's sesquicentennial celebration.

Mayor Brantz called for a break at 10:13 a.m. Council reconvened at 10:23 a.m.

POLICE

Police Chief Andy Le Beau presented a Power Point presentation which may be viewed online at <http://boonenc.iqm2.com/Citizens/Default.aspx> . Mr. Furgiuele asked whether Town staff had attempted a meeting with District Attorney Seth Banks to see if there was a way to avoid having officers wasting time sitting in court. Chief Le Beau indicated that this problem had gotten better over the years, and noted that the new Assistant District Attorney was much better in getting officers in and out of court quickly. Mr. Furgiuele then stated that he was completely on board with the new cameras requested for police officers to carry on their persons and asked whether there was any opportunity to surplus out the old ones. Chief Le Beau answered that the old cameras were breaking and that there was not much value left in them. Mr. Furgiuele indicated that he did not understand the advantages in

the new tasers which were proposed and whether they had a different level of sensitivity that would reduce the chance of injury. Chief Le Beau responded that the sensitivity level was the same as the current tasers used, and noted that body cameras could be purchased without tasers. Major Shane Robbins explained that it would be more cost effective to order the cameras and tasers as a package. In reference to the Lexipole training platform, Mr. Furgiuele asked whether any claims had been made against the Town in the last couple years. Chief Le Beau responded that the last claim that involved a payout took place approximate six-seven years ago. Mr. Furgiuele then asked if when in-house police operational policies were revised, staff would share that information with Council since they often received questions regarding police practices. At the request of Ms. Roseman, the cloud-based storage system for body camera videos was explained. Ms. LaPlaca asked about the changes the department had seen due to Covid-19 in the past year. Chief Le Beau responded that the biggest issue was turnover, and noted that the department was six officers short, which put a strain on staff when others had to be out due to quarantine. Discussion turned to downtown surveillance cameras, with Mr. Furgiuele expressing great displeasure with them due to their cost and the invasion of privacy they represented. He indicated that the cameras had been advertised as a way to catch shoplifters, but believed that merchants could install their own security systems for this purpose. He believed that the Town was wasting a lot of money on these cameras and should be using that money on some of the things requested by the department. Mr. Furgiuele also encouraged staff to consider building into the Town's salary structure incentives for people to live in town, and incentives for employees to replace their personal vehicles with hybrids or electric cars. In terms of the downtown surveillance cameras, Mr. Ward stated that they were paid for out of the DBDA budget which was approved by Council. Mr. Furgiuele indicated that he would prefer that the money be used to hire an additional law enforcement officer to be stationed downtown.

Mayor Brantz called for a break at 12:08 p.m. Council reconvened at 1:03 p.m.

FIRE, GIS & WIDE AREA NETWORK

Fire Chief Jimmy Isaacs stated that he did not foresee any big projects in GIS next fiscal year other than staff would continue looking into an automated data system that could process things such as partial data and things of that nature. He indicated that staff would continue working on mapping issues with Next Generation which would require a good deal of work and time to complete. From a network perspective, Chief Isaacs indicated that the pandemic had necessitated several changes, but noted that most had been seamless. With the new Public Information Officer position coming on board, Chief Isaacs recommended Council keep in mind that funding would be needed for an archival system for social media platforms. Regarding fire, Chief Isaacs indicated that incidents were down, coming in at 19,144. He noted that inspections were in line with the normal at 1,485 fire inspections and 240 construction inspections. Ms. LaPlaca was logged out of the meeting at 1:09 p.m. She logged back in at 1:12 p.m. Chief Isaacs announced that staff had been working extensively on an Emergency Operations Plan for the Town of Boone and were nearing completion on the document. He reminded members of the improved insurance rating achieved by the Town, which was accompanied by savings to members of the community on their insurance bills. In the upcoming fiscal year, Chief Isaacs indicated that an equipment replacement program would be needed for six portable radios, two pick-up trucks, and personal protective equipment. He noted that the only item that would see some increase next year would be the communication service line item due to the way the department software functioned. Lastly, Chief Isaacs stated that the pandemic had brought to the forefront areas that the town could improve on in terms of emergency preparedness, and believed that having a position dedicated to these issues would be a tremendous asset to the community and would reduce the damage that the community experienced. Mr. Ward clarified that the position would work with all departments and would work in collaboration with the emergency operations plan and the resiliency plan. Mr. Furgiuele asked whether staff had received any feedback from the change in fee structure. Chief Isaacs answered that there were questions early on, but not a tremendous amount.

PLANNING & INSPECTIONS

On behalf of the Historic Preservation Commission, Ms. Shook requested \$5,000 per year to support Digital Watauga, and stated that there had been discussion of making this an ongoing donation so that they did not have to

come back every year to make the request. She indicated that staff did frequently utilize images from the program for different projects. Ms. Shook also noted that the commission had requested funding for next year's sesquicentennial celebration. Lastly, Ms. Shook stated that she and Mr. Miller evaluated department policies and practices to ensure that the department workload was evenly distributed, that any redundancies were eliminated or reduced to the greatest extent possible, and that the department was meeting overall goals related to permitting and other Council assignments. She indicated that it had been noticeable over the last several years that the department had struggled to complete assigned tasks on time, and had not been able to manage the workload. Ms. Shook pointed out that over the last 20 years, the planning department had decreased from six positions to four positions, and that since she had started working with the Town, the complexity of reviews and the need for professional planning project output had only increased and was expected to increase in the future, especially when considering the proposed downtown planning projects that Council was currently discussing. Mr. Furgiuele asked whether Ms. Shook or her staff had experienced any feedback to the enhanced fee schedule. Ms. Shook noted only slight feedback at first

FINANCE

Ms. Davis noted a 5% increase in valuation over the last year in the Town, a 4.16% increase in the MSD, and a 4.32% increase in the rural fire district. She indicated a capture rate of 85% of the value of the Rivers Walk property, which was a little over 22 million, and noted that after this year, 100% would be captured. Ms. Davis stated that the Standard property tax rate was captured at 30% for their brownfield exemption. She added that, despite the pandemic, the Town had collected almost \$18,000 more in sales tax than last year for the same time period and despite receiving a lesser percentage of the distribution. Mr. Furgiuele asked what percentage of sales tax the Town received back, and Ms. Davis said that it was less than 12% despite the Town collecting most of the sales tax. Ms. Davis stated that staff in Utility Billing were always looking at ways to streamline operations, and reminded members that there had been two employees working in that department since 1999. She noted that the department had seen a 74% increase in accounts since 2000. Mr. Furgiuele asked whether the Town still had a high tax collection rate for property taxes. Ms. Davis answered that the Town had over a 99% property tax collection rate.

PUBLIC WORKS

Mr. Miller and Mr. Moody presented information from a memo which can be viewed at <http://boonenc.iqm2.com/Citizens/Default.aspx>. Mr. Furgiuele was logged out at 2:08 p.m. He logged back in at 2:08 p.m. Mr. Miller indicated that an additional fleet mechanic was needed, and announced some potential restructuring in utility and administration operations. He asked members to be aware of the solid waste contract, and noted that the new fees would be implemented at the beginning of the fiscal year. Mr. Miller noted that there were funds set aside to pay for the increase in fees, but he did not believe it would be enough. Mr. Miller then listed other needs for the department which included funds for repairing the Hunting Hills Lane slope failure; signalized pedestrian crossings at State Farm Road/Shadowline Drive, State Farm Road/Boone Heights Drive, Deerfield Road/Doctors Drive, and Greenway Road/Meadowview Drive intersections; sidewalk replacement and roadway resurfacing on East Howard Street; additional funds for LED streetlights; Winkler's Creek reservoir replacement; AMI metering infrastructure; 30-inch sanitary sewer outfall replacement project; Church Street 2.0 million gallon water storage tank rehabilitation project; Grove Street connector path; Highway 194, Queen Street, Grove Street, Perkinsville Drive and Meadowview Drive sidewalks; Shadowline Drive resurfacing project; maintain resurfacing schedule; Howard Street Improvements; Daniel Boone Drive culvert repairs; Meadowview Drive bridge repairs; Street sweeper; Vac truck; 2-1/2 ton pickup truck; paint machine; 1 ton snow plow truck; tire changing machine; additional funding for manhole rehabilitation; AMI meter supplies; Horn in the West parking lot resurfacing; North Street parking lot resurfacing and various other vehicles.

ADMINISTRATION

Mr. Ward highlighted some goals he had for the upcoming year, which included working with staff to identify and expand grant applications to at least one per department, upgrades to a town of Boone website and increased intern

opportunities. Additional sustainability goals were discussed by Mr. Santucci, which included additional electric vehicle chargers, LED streetlights reusable grocery bags for use at the Farmer's Market and a Trash Trout device for cleaning waterways. Mr. Furgiuele suggested the following: at least a 5% increase to outside agency funding; \$10,000 relief fund for water/sewer customers; pay increases to staff of no less than 2%; \$30,000 fund to provide stipends of \$100/month for employees living in town or purchased a hybrid or electric vehicle; at least three flashing speed limit signs; at least \$50,000 for stormwater system engineering; continued development of a plan for downtown restrooms; and a neighborhood advocate position. Mayor Pro-Tem felt that retaining staff should be the highest priority, and also felt that money should be spent to replace infrastructure. Mr. Hicks agreed with the suggestions of increasing funding to outside agencies and creating incentives for employees to live in town. He added that he believed body cameras were important to fund for the police department, as was the emergency manager position. Mr. Hicks stated that a new planner position would be nice to have due to the increase in workload on the department, and agreed that the website and the social work position at the police department should be prioritized as well. After brief discussion, a special budget meeting was scheduled for June 4 beginning at 9:00 a.m. to be held electronically.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon a motion by Ms. LaPlaca, seconded by Ms. Roseman, Council voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 3:33 p.m.

Nicole Harmon, Town Clerk

Rennie Brantz, Mayor