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Boone hires Santucci as new sustainability and special projects manager

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BOONE – The Boone Town Council is creating a slate of environmental issues – such as electrifying town vehicles – for the town’s new sustainability and special projects manager.



Boone Town Manager John Ward said that George Santucci was hired into the role in November, and he will officially begin with the town on Jan. 1. Santucci has been serving as the president at New River Conservancy, and will be transitioning into the full-time role with the town. The Boone Town Council has already been delving into topics they want Santucci to explore.

During the council's Dec. 15 and 17 meetings, discussions were had about the possibility of electrification of town vehicles. The council heard presentations from N.C. Sierra Club as well as Stan Cross, the electric transportation policy director for Southern Alliance for Clean Energy. Cross has served as a consultant in both Raleigh and Charlotte to assist in municipalities' transportation electrification plans.



According to Cross, municipalities across the country are transitioning to electric vehicles, which has created a number of case studies for other local governments to draw from to assess issues such as economic feasibility.

While most electric transportation has started out with the use of passenger vehicles, Cross said that vehicles such as school buses, transit buses and garbage trucks are coming online. Cross discussed different types of electric vehicles — such as a gas/electric hybrid vehicle or a battery electric vehicle that uses no gasoline. He also mentioned the need for electric vehicle charging stations, and the different ranges that each vehicle can drive.



Mayor Rennie Brantz asked if there were other towns the size of Boone that could be a model for town officials. Cross said there are towns similar to Boone that are transitioning to electric vehicles. He also mentioned the N.C. Cities Initiative operated by the Department of Environmental Quality and Environmental Defense Fund. The initiative involves about 25 cities with commitments to climate change that are collaborating in how to achieve climate reductions. Ward said he's already been involved in the initiative's meetings.

Ward added that the plan is to get Santucci involved with other sustainability managers in the region to discuss the best way to transition to electric, how to pay for it and how to move forward. The town council continued the discussion about vehicle electrification at its Dec. 17 meeting, when Council Member Sam Furgiuele said Cross and Santucci would work together to discuss the possibility of the town going electric.

“This all started out with the question of availability, but we've moved from availability to the question of feasibility to regards of the town's revenue stream,” Furgiuele said.

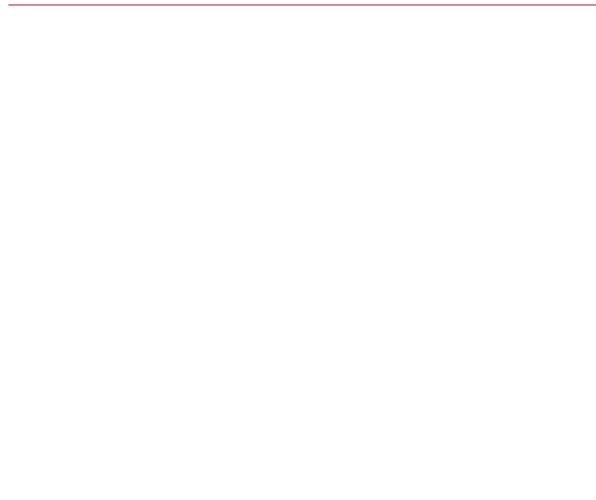
Ward said the idea of bringing on a staff member for sustainability and special projects management has been discussed at multiple town council retreats as the town council has previously adopted resolutions with moving forward to being carbon neutral and toward renewable energy. At that time, the town started out with internal projects in working with the sustainability committee. As the target dates toward carbon neutrality and the use of renewable energy grew closer, Ward said the town council chose sustainability as a top priority.



Ward said that the town realizes that as it gets further along with implementing the council’s sustainability goals, town staff will need to seek grants and additional funding to be able to make those goals a reality. He added that it will be helpful to have a staff person dedicated to working with the sustainability committee and town departments to make a step by step approach of implementing the town’s ideas across the town facilities and departments. Additionally, Santucci would help the town seek out grant funding opportunities.

The special projects part of the job will mean that Santucci will also help the town focus on flooding and storm water issues, partnering with the county on compositing efforts as well as expanding its tree planting program, Ward said.

“George is the right person to help us bring those projects forward and make some great strides in our sustainability efforts for our area,” Ward said.



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